

The Beauty of *Tsujigahana*

with John Marshall, copyright May 2017

Sometimes I'm asked, "So what's the big deal about *tsujigahana*? It's just glorified tie-dye isn't it?" Well, yes and no...

First let's take a look at two of my favorite shibori pieces in my collection. The first is all tie-dye, no embellishing details or techniques to augment its beauty.



a beautiful and nuanced landscape created through repeated tying, capping, re-dyeing (collection of the author)

I selected the above example to focus on the sophistication of image and not so much on the colors involved.

Next let's take a look at a very colorful piece. It is still done in the same manner as the kimono above – wrap, stitch, and cap areas to prevent dye from getting where you don't want, building up areas of color while repeating the process over and over again.



furisode of compound kanoko-shibori dyeing (collection of the author)

There is another, softer approach that may be taken in shobori in which the dyes are allowed to wick into other areas, overlaying them, combining with them, and just generally allowing them to fraternize. This can create a blurry image, much like looking out at a garden through a heavily rain speckled window, or putting on your spouse's eye glasses by accident.



Add to this a few crisp, clear lines and the result is no longer “blurry and ill-defined” but subtle and understated. The difference? The crisp lines give a point of reference stating clearly that the artist is capable of well-defined imagery, and has deliberately chosen muted for the background. It gives the brain something to focus on.



a fine example of how the painted details of tsujigahana can perk up a piece out of proportion to the volume of dye added (collection of the author)



An analogy that comes to mind is a tip given to me when I was young and working in Tokyo. It was expensive to have my suit dry-cleaned on a regular basis, and having only one, it was also a matter of timing. To prolong the “fresh” look of a dark suit, I was told to simply make sure that the handkerchief in my breast pocket was always immaculately clean, well starched, and ironed. The pristine handkerchief gave the employer/client something to focus on in judging the rest of my attire, distracting them from the fact that the suit itself was looking a bit tired. The crisp lines in *tsujigahana* can have the same effect on the viewer – emphasizing that the blurry lines are indeed a subtle, deliberate effect, not simply washed out or ill-set dyes.

