



Spring 2015 / Autumn 2015 Japanese Indigo Textile Workshop in Fujino, Japan

I have run these workshops for three years now and have to humbly admit they have been very successful. People have travelled from all corners of the planet and made humans look good with their creativity, good will, enthusiasm, laughter and sharing. The time I've spent with the participants individually and as a group has been precious. Something tells me I should call it quits while I am ahead with a slate of good memories (and good reviews). The structure is still spontaneous and alive. I still have something to share so I will continue them into 2015. I suspect in 2016 I will reduce the number of times I do the general Japanese Textile Course with a focus on indigo and from then I will focus on having longer-term live in apprentices and hold courses that concentrate on specific skills.

Originally from the West Coast of Canada, I have been living in Japan for 25 years, farming and processing indigo for 20 years, and rearing silkworms for 16 years. The silk cocoons are reeled

into thread, dyed with natural dyes and woven into Japanese textiles using traditional tools.

I run a small textile school at my 150-year-old farmhouse that focuses on indigo dyeing, natural dyes, *shibori*, stencil dyeing (*katazome*), thread making from silk cocoons, and weaving on traditional Japanese looms. The farmhouse is situated in a serene tea-growing mountain village just outside of Tokyo. The village was designated as one of 'The Most Scenic One Hundred Mountain Villages in Japan'. Spring and autumn are beautiful times of the year here. The rainy season in June and July and sweltering August and freezing winters limits the months I can have guests at the farmhouse comfortably.

For 2015 I have spaces available in the following workshops:

March 23rd to April 2nd. Early Mountain Cherry Blossoms

May 18th to May 28th. Wisteria and Green

Autumn is cool with (almost certain) clear skies and perfect temperatures with the sweltering summer heat behind and the frigid cold in January still distant. I am offering three autumn workshops in 2015:

September 21st to October 1st. Early Autumn.

October 5th to October 15th. Middle Autumn.

October 19th to 28th. Late Autumn.

Savoring and appreciating old Japanese textiles that were made by anonymous craftsmen gives you a glimpse into a distant, rich and unique cultural heritage. It is a refreshing break from our consumer lives to know that there are people who dedicate their lives to creating these unsigned masterpieces. There have been, and thankfully still are artisans to whom self-promotion is an unknown practice. It would be wonderful to run the workshop retreat with this spirit.

Leave the teacher out of the picture and focus on the magic of indigo and the old techniques and things Japanese.

The workshop is for ten days. Once unpacked at the farmhouse, you will dive in and swim in the deep purple indigo. You'll be splashing around in the vats until it is time to re-pack your bags. Hands-on, or in this case 'hands-in,' is the best way to know what indigo is about.

This workshop is a great introduction to indigo dyeing and Japanese textiles in general. For those individuals considering setting up an indigo vat at home, this is an excellent opportunity to learn the basics.

The material covered in the workshop is also a hands-on introduction into Japanese culture in general. The ideas and technical approaches to textile work share the same ethics and standards as Japanese artistic disciplines. I'll share my insights into Japanese culture and history and other wonderful things that have kept me in this country.

I am looking forward to hearing from you,
Bryan



The farmhouse on the right side on the edge of the shadow seen from tea fields in mid -October.

Itinerary:

The past workshop participants came from all over the world and each came with their own personal interest in indigo and the Japanese textiles in general. Designers who want to set up an indigo production facility in their studios. There were quilters and stitchers and textile graduate students and Japanophiles. In our small group I want to treat each member as an individual and help make their visit to Japan memorable and worthwhile. A basic outline of the itinerary is below. As each participant signs up I can adjust and focus the activities accordingly, striking a balance between the shibori, stencil dyeing, indigo processing and dyeing, weaving, textile history in Japan and silk processing.

Day One: Monday

You can arrange your own accommodations in Tokyo before and after the workshops or I can suggest or make reservations for rooms at a reasonably priced hotel or guesthouse. I will send you specific instructions on how to get there from the Tokyo Narita airport.

We will meet at the the lobby of the Century Southern Terrace Hotel in Shinjuku at 10:00 and from there we will drive to the quietness of the mountain village only an hour and a half away.

After unpacking you will be welcomed by a hand-made sushi lunch prepared by my neighbors and friends.



Typical farmhouse meals.

Not wasting any time we head straight for the indigo. The first step will be to set up an indigo vat and get a clear idea of the variety of processes involved. We will dye Japanese *tenugui* towels and cotton thread to familiarize you with the dyeing properties of indigo.



First try tenugui.

We will make these small indigo bucket vats everyday to understand the proccess and give you confidence to try it on your own when you are back in your home countries. The small bucket vats are then added to the large ceramic vats.



For your welcome dinner we will eat out at a local Japanese grilled-chicken restaurant.

Day Two: Tuesday

Everyone is excited about being in Japan and their projects. Breakfast seems to be the only time that everyone will sit still for any length of time. So every morning we will take a half an hour after breakfast to discuss aspects of Japanese textiles and indigo.

Today the talk will be about Japanese shape-resist dyeing, *shibori*. Then you will be soon back at the indigo vats to try your hand at *shibori*. For each step of the dying process I will share 20 years of experience of working with indigo. By the end of ten days you will have a clear understanding of how indigo works with the various additives of different kinds of dye vats and the reaction of indigo with different kinds of fabric.

Lunch will be hand-made (with your hands) udon noodles and seasonal vegetables.



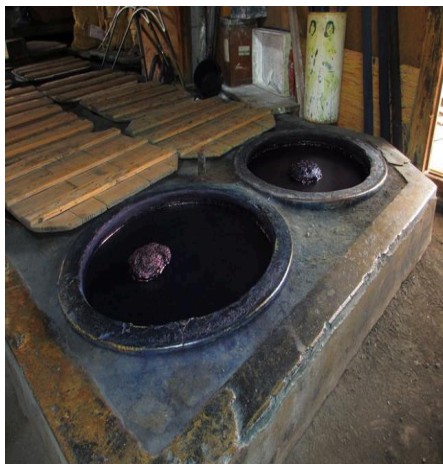
Ogata san will come and show us how to make noodles.

Most *shibori* techniques take many hours of preparatory stitching and binding. Our time is limited so I will send each member of the workshop a small box with several *shibori* homework pieces to prepare five weeks before your arrival in Japan. The homework box will also contain some persimmon tannin paper and a special cutter-knife for you to cut *katazome* stencils. Today, you will complete the binding of your homework to prepare it for dyeing.

In the afternoon you will be introduced to *katazome* stencil dyeing in preparation for tomorrow's outing. Before dinner we will go to a local hot spring for a relaxing outdoor bath. Dinner at a local restaurant.

Day Three: Wednesday

The after-breakfast-table-talk will be about stencil dyeing in Japan. We will visit my *katazome* teacher at his working studio. You will not only witness the astounding techniques and skills but the values and aesthetics that make Japanese textiles so interesting. This will also be an opportunity to learn more about and use (and smell) naturally fermenting indigo. Dinner will be *nabe* (traditional Japanese soup/stew) at home.



Day Four: Thursday

The after-breakfast talk will be about the local silk producing history and silk in general. We will have a silk thread making (both spun and reeled) demonstration.

We will make two natural dye baths from gardenia pods and madder to under dye yellow and red to combine with indigo to get greens and purples. If you decide to use indigo at home this is a useful skill to expand your color palette. We will dye silk scarves with these dyes.

Lunch will be a simple Japanese hot *tofu* dish. Dinner will be a simple traditional Japanese salmon and rice, *ochatsuke*. You will have time at the indigo to dye scarves and stencil patterns.

Day Five: Friday

The after-breakfast talk will be on the subject of the Japanese Crafts Movement.

We will visit the Japanese Folkcraft Museum in Tokyo (<http://www.mingeikan.or.jp/english/>). This is the place to get back to the source of where everything Japanese derives. Understanding the origins of Japanese crafts, feeling and absorbing the subtle seasonal nuances will give you further insight into things Japanese. We will also visit several antique Japanese Textile shops in Tokyo.



The view from the top of the village.

Day Six: Saturday

The weekend activities are weaving, stencil dyeing and shibori.

We will weave on traditional Japanese looms with a pre-set indigo warp. It will take approximately three hours for a beginner to weave 50 centimeters. If you are a weaver and or really enjoy weaving there will be plenty of warp left to weave as much as you please.

I prepare a selection of linen and cotton fabric that you will be free to dye as you please. You are encouraged to bring undyed textiles from your home country to dye with indigo.



Dinner will be a Japanese style barbeque at the farmhouse.
The indigo vats will be in good condition for you to slip outside and dye to your heart's content.

Day Seven: Sunday

The day will be spent on the same activities as Saturday: weaving, stencilling and shibori and indigo dying. In the afternoon we will have a special Japanese flower arrangement lesson. First we will go for a walk around the village and collect branches and mossy rocks. Then Hiro sensei will guide you through the elementary principles of design. It is always a great time. We will have dinner at home.



Day Eight: Monday

We used to go to Mt Fuji on this day and this may still be an option. I've found that most of the students want to spend more time at the indigo vat. There are some local artisans studios to visit. Potters and glass blowers, basket makers etc. in Fujino. We can make decisions about where to visit together. For the last three days of the workshop I've learned to play it a bit by ear, according to the members wishes. I really try to pack as much in as possible.

Day Nine: Tuesday

Now that you are comfortable with indigo dyeing I will give you individual guidance on your projects. You will have time to cut more sophisticated katazome stencils and try a more elaborate shibori technique. In the past I have taught kumihimo silk braiding techniques and small Japanese bag making. Time has been tight and only a few workshop members managed to finish this part of the program. I don't want to remove this part of the program and if we do have time it will be this day that we work on these.

Day Ten: Wednesday

This is a free day to finish projects, pack, catch up on your emails and blogging. The luggage delivery service will come to the farmhouse to pick up your bags and take them to the airport terminal for your departure. In the afternoon a friend will come to the farmhouse and perform a tea ceremony.



Tea Ceremony with Ota sensei.

After ten busy days, dinner will be a quiet Japanese affair at home.



Front entrance to the farmhouse

Last Day: Thursday

According to the participants flight and further travel plans, I'll take you to the appropriate train station and with clear directions, see you off.

Farmhouse Details:

The house sits on a relatively steep hill. It is not exactly ramshackle but it was originally a barn...The guest rooms on the third floor were completed two years ago. The rooms are comfortable and cozy. There are two bathrooms on the first floor and a two showers/bath on the first floor as well. There is WiFi at the farmhouse. The staircases are not long but relatively steep. There are healthy snacks and drinks and fruit in the kitchen at all times. If given notice in advance I can try to accommodate some diet restrictions, vegetarians ok. Breakfasts are simple: eggs, toast, cereals, fruits and yoghurts, good coffee and tea. Food is an important part of the workshop. Simple with almost no processed foods is policy. No smoking in the house itself. Washing machine runs everyday. It is cool in spring and autumn so a warm sweater and your favorite warm socks are necessary.



Payment of Fee and Registration Details

The cost of the ten day workshop is 300 000 Japanese Yen. I stopped taking deposits of 50,000 Japanese Yen. If someone cancelled, it was always for a good reason and I returned the deposit. I usually have a waiting list and can place someone in up until a month before the workshop starts. (Please don't cancel on me at the last minute.)

I would prefer to have the payments in full before the end of 2014 for the spring workshops. I will send out invoices in the autumn. I try to get away from the cold in January and I can't be doing accounting work on an iPad and reconfirming payments while away. I apologize but can only accept paypal payments. Bank transfers are troublesome and difficult to Japan. The autumn workshop payments are due by July first. I'm flexible with the payments if necessary. If you are coming on some kind of grant I can write you the letters you will need.

In case of cancellation on the Japan side, the fee will be promptly refunded. I regret to say that I can't take responsibility of refunding the cost of airfares and travel insurance in case of cancellation.

If the workshop is fully booked you can be placed on a waiting list.

For more information please contact:

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***Note to Potential Workshop Organizers:**

It is possible to reserve the entire workshop for your own private group or reserve and customize a workshop for you and friends. If you have seven participants I will invite the eighth participant (you) to participate for free and pay your airfare from your home country. You would need to help me with the logistics including gathering fees and participants flight details etc. This offer does not extend to those who will advertise for participants but to those who have their own close personal network of friends and fellow craftspeople who would be the participants.

Spring 2015 Japanese Textile Workshop in Japan
300 000 Japanese Yen
Roughly (2800 US Dollars) (2200 Euro) (3000 Australian) (1700 British Pounds)

Fee includes:

*All fees for the workshops include materials. You are more than welcome to bring cloth and pre-tied *shibori* from your home country to dye. All cloth should be 100% free of oil and starches and sizings. Silk does not take indigo well. Synthetics do not take indigo at all.

*ten nights accommodation at the farmhouse, double occupancy.)

*All breakfasts.

*All transportation in Japan. From the time we meet on Monday morning until and including the return train tickets back to Tokyo station on day ten. Including excursions Tokyo.

*Folkcraft Museum Entrance fee.

*Cost of Indigo workshop in Hachioji.

*Hot Spring entrance Fees.

Excludes:

*International airfare

*Hotel or Guesthouse in Tokyo

*Travel Insurance

*Restaurant meals except welcome dinner. Some dinners will be decided on that particular day according to how we feel. Dinners *in* are covered. Dinners *out* are not covered. All restaurants will be reasonably priced.



Farmhouse made indigo balls.

If you would like some references from past participants please feel free to ask. Their experiences are often blogged and Facebooked.

物作りと話題

Summary of Workshop

Our time is short but we will cover a lot of material in our time together. Below is a brief summary



Indigo is central to these workshops. Indigo has been used in Japan since the sixth century. There are over 25 different plants around the world that have the indigo pigment in their leaves. Every culture developed it's own processes of extracting and utilising the pigment from indigo (indigoferin) As the essential pigment properties are the same, in each plant the processes follow similar steps.

Although indigo has limitations, dyers have developed techniques that have allowed them to utilise the pigment to its fullest potential. Historically, the Japanese have used of indigo dyed thread in concert with woven patterns, stencil dyeing techniques (*katazome*) and shape resist dyeing (*shibori*). These methods reached their most sophisticated heights in the top-end *samurai* and merchant class textiles as well as in the domestic and local crafts traditions of the Edo period.

The best way to expose students to the use of indigo is simply use it.

*You will learn to make and maintain a non-fermented indigo vat.

*You will receive printed material on how to grow indigo and process it in several ways.

*You will look at many examples of Japanese indigo-dyed cloth and discuss how they were made.

*You will look at several contemporary Japanese indigo dyer's work and see how indigo dyeing

traditions continue in contemporary Japan.

* You will learn how indigo is combined with other vegetable dyes to obtain shades of greens and purples.

絞り

Although **shibori**, often categorized and translated as ‘Japanese tie-dye,’ is actually much more sophisticated than just the term ‘tie-dyed’ cloth. Shibori has a 1300 year history in Japan of being a dignified, poetic, and even humorous textile surface-design family of techniques. Highly addictive.... We will look at the ingenious techniques and try a few out. (Not necessarily the techniques pictured below!) The play of the resist with the mercurial properties of indigo will make you smile. And, the potential combinations of techniques will keep you awake at night, wanting to sneak out for a midnight tryst with the indigo vat.

We will use several techniques to make a dozen *tenugui* Japanese towels and one large indigo cotton shawl. You are welcome to use the indigo with your own experiments with *shibori* in the evenings and mornings. I can supply cloth or you can bring it from your home countries. I prepare a reasonable sized mountain of cotton material for the participants to use.



Shibori work from students.

型染め

Katazome is a paste resist family of stencil techniques. *Kakishibugami* is a layered persimmon tannin soaked paper that was developed to use as stencil paper in Japan. When wet it is like a soft leather, flexible and strong. The pattern is cut out with a razor-like knife or punched out with a variety of tools. Single pattern stencils are common. Patterns using up to 40 overlapping stencils are also used. The variety of patterns on these stencils is mind-boggling. We will cut out some simple stencils and use them for this resist dyeing technique. This will expose you to the

huge genre of surface design methods used since ancient times in Japan. I will send you several sheets of the paper for you to sketch and cut out before you arrive in Japan.



織物

Weaving at a handloom may seem daunting for those with no experience. However, in order to have a holistic understanding of Japanese textiles, any textile enthusiast should have some idea of what it is like to weave. I will set up two stripe warps on Japanese looms for participants to experience weaving. A couple of hours at a hand loom will allow you to appreciate the endless potential expressions and variety of textiles designed with a few simple shades of blue contrasted with white.

日本の布

Japanese Textiles are fascinating in their precise structures, complex techniques and aesthetic sophistication. At the farmhouse you will have access to hundreds of textile-related books and examples of traditional Japanese textiles. In addition, we will explore the art of textile recycling techniques in old rural Japan, *sashiko* and *sakiori*, ('reinforced stitches' and 'rag weave,' respectively). Of particular interest is the Zen Japanese aesthetic of *refined poverty* (*wabi sabi*) apparent in every stitch and shuttle pass of these textiles.

I will communicate via e-mail with participants before arriving in Japan so I can get an idea of who you are and what I can share with you to make your visit memorable and worthwhile.

Yoroshiku,
Bryan