

History of Nishijin-ori

西陣織の歴史



The techniques of silk woven goods were introduced to Japan from the continent between the 4th and 5th centuries, and developed with Kyoto at the center. Nishijin-ori is the general name given to patterned textiles made in the Nishijin area of Kyoto, located northwest of Kyoto Imperial Palace. The name “Nishijin” (“nishi” means west, and “jin” means territory) comes from the district being established as a camp on the west side of Kyoto by a military commander during the war of the middle ages.

At that time, Kyoto craftsmen had evacuated to Sakai city in Osaka Prefecture, which was prospering with trade and a variety of textiles were transported there from the continent. Their spirit of inquiry and creative urge were excited by coming into contact with such rare and precious fabrics. The techniques they learned there were put to good use when they returned to work in Kyoto. In the 16th century, Nishijin, which produced excellent textiles, was designated as a textile production area to directly serve the shogun. Craftsmen during the Meiji period also visited France and learned the techniques of the Jacquard loom, and with an eye to the world, they have continued to improve their skills and the beauty of their products for over 550 years.

With Nishijin-ori textiles, the threads are dyed first and a special loom is used. There are twelve varieties, all classified as Traditional Crafts of Japan, including “Tsuzure” (woven with the fingernails), “Tatenishiki” (warp-patterned), “Yokonishiki” (weft-patterned) and “Donsu” (damask). While the Nishijin-ori fabrics that make full use of these techniques produce admirable luxury items, they are also familiar to a wide range of people in casual goods such as bags and small accessories.