

Dyeing Methods in Tokamachi

Because of its heavy snowfalls, this region of Niigata has abundant soft water, which is ideal for dyeing. As snowmelt permeates the ground, mineral content that might interfere with color fixing is filtered out, leaving chemically inert water perfect for steaming and rinsing fabrics. Whether they make plant-fiber fabrics or silk, textile workshops in Tokamachi generally do their own dyeing.

For plant-based textiles like Echigo *jofu*, the threads are usually dyed *before* they are woven. Weavers then create patterns by crosshatching threads of different colors on the loom in a manner similar to the way plaids are created. Another approach particularly associated with Tokamachi is a resist-dyeing technique called *kasuri* (blurred patterns). Dyers knot separate cotton strings around the main thread in accordance with a pattern. The cotton threads prevent the dye from penetrating, keeping sections of the main thread white. On the loom, the white sections line up to create an image or pattern.

With silks, image creation is usually done *after* the weaving with a resist-dyeing technique called *yuzen*. First, a resist paste is applied to white silk in places where the artisan does not want dye to sink in. Dye is then brushed on, either freehand or with the use of a sequence of stencils, similar to screen printing. In the final stage, the completed image is covered in paste to protect it as the background is dyed.

A tie-dyeing technique called *shibori* is also used on silk. Before the fabric is soaked in dye, small areas are knotted up or stitched with thread, preventing the dye from completely penetrating and creating spotted, wavy gradations of color. In recent years, some local workshops have begun combining *yuzen* and *shibori* to make highly innovative patterns.