

# CHIVO GAMI

Hand-printed Patterned Papers of Japan



by Ann Herring



# CHIYOGAMI

Hand-printed Patterned Papers of Japan

Ann Herring

KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL

Tokyo • New York • London

*The author dedicates this book to her family—especially to Albert and Margaret Fromherz, and to her aunts, both here and in eternity: Mary Herring Hudson, Lucy Herring, Laura Saunders, Ella Herring, Bertha King, Lucy Fromherz, Esther King, Winifred Hill, Margaret King, Florence van Etten Bolinger, Dorothy Young, Geraldine King, Gladys King, and Louise King.*

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Photographs by Eiji Kōri and Tamiko Tanaka

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The title page shows chiyogami with a design of peonies on yellow ground. *Kobōsho-ban*. 1862. Author's collection.



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“The Little Mother,” showing a girl making dolls with chiyogami paper. Magazine illustration by Yumeji Takehisa. 1917.



Pattern of stripes in red and green.  
Onishiki-ban. Ise-Tatsu Collection. ▶

## FOREWORD

In earlier eras, the word *chiyogami* was used as a name for paper decorated with patterns that were considered particularly auspicious. Combinations of cranes and tortoises were popular, because these animals have always served as emblems of long life and happiness. Pine and bamboo trees remain green throughout the coldest weather, while winter-flowering plum trees bloom even when their boughs are decked with snow, giving hope to mankind during the bleakest season of the year. Thus, these three plants were always prized as symbols of good fortune, and they have appeared in countless variations within chiyogami designs.

Chiyogami papers ornamented with these and other auspicious motifs were indispensable accessories for all sorts of happy occasions. This may have some relationship to the name of chiyogami, for the word *chiyo* ("thousand generations") occurs in congratulatory phrases used at such times. Others think that the word may be derived from the name of the Chiyoda Palace, the center of old Edo. Whatever the truth may be, it is at least certain that chiyogami was known in the Edo period (1603-1867). From Kyoto, where it first became popular, it spread to Edo (modern Tokyo) and Osaka. In all three of these cities, it is still being manufactured and sold by a handful of woodblock printers. I am proud to say that my firm, Ise-Tatsu, is one of them. I hope that this book will help to introduce the charm and beauty of chiyogami papers to an ever-widening audience, not only in Japan, but throughout the world.

TATSUGORŌ HIROSE



# Chiyogami: An Introduction

In everyday parlance today, the Japanese word *chiyogami* is customarily used to describe several related types of decorative paper intended for consumer use that is printed or otherwise mechanically ornamented with colorful all-over patterns. In many cases, though not necessarily in all, these patterns reflect a more or less “traditional” style, employing themes and color harmonies common to numerous forms of indigenous applied art. Chiyogami papers have formed a small but indispensable part of the daily scene in the urban centers of Japan for at least the past two centuries. They are closely linked to classic Japanese textile arts on the one hand and to traditional graphic design on the other, and it is these relationships, together with the unpretentiously attractive, versatile nature of chiyogami paper itself, to which we might best attribute the enduring popularity of the chiyogami genre.

This brightly colored and tastefully patterned paper is a living legacy of the early modern urban civilization that flourished first in the Kansai area (Kyoto and Osaka) and, somewhat later, in Edo (now Tokyo) during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. While its antecedents and many of its ultimate sources are to be found in the courtly culture of old Kyoto, chiyogami paper as we know it today is an essentially middle-class phenomenon, and may be regarded as a sort of workaday Cinderella sister of the ukiyo-e prints and book illustrations of mid- and late Edo times. Like the landscapes of Hiroshige, the genre prints of Toyokuni and Eisen, or the battle scenes and satires of Kuniyoshi, chiyogami papers were printed by one of the world’s first commercially viable forms of multicolor printing: the Japanese woodblock process that was in use as early as the 1760s. There is good reason to suppose that older standards of taste and modes of decoration lingered on in Kyoto and its environs for many years after the mass production of chiyogami hand-printed from woodblocks became commonplace in Edo. In nineteenth-century Edo, however, chiyogami was regularly designed

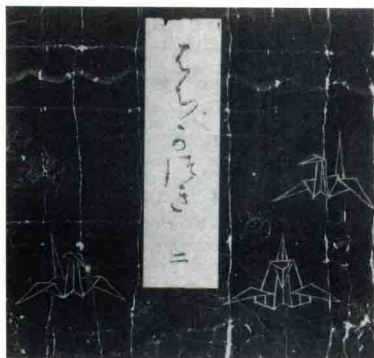


Fig. 1. Otogi-zoshi cover: fairy-tale book (title: Hachikatsugi) bound in paper decorated with hand-finished designs of origami cranes. Osaka, ca. 1720.

by artists of the ukiyo-e school, issued by their publishers, and purchased by the same relatively well-to-do town-dwelling public that patronized their more ambitious works in the form of prints or illustrated books.

In view of the fact that many orthodox critics of ukiyo-e art have preferred to ignore the existence of applied-art ukiyo-e forms such as chiyogami, it is interesting to note that nineteenth-century chiyogami designs are believed to have been produced not only by nameless commercial artists but also by representative masters of the day, such as Eisen, Hiroshige I, Gyōsai, and Zeshin (Pl. 58). An aura of ambiguity also surrounds the purchasers, for some writers have persisted in stressing the “plebian” nature of chiyogami. This represents a rather excessively romanticized view, for chiyogami was never a product of folk art as such, nor was it meant for the urban poor or others living at the bare subsistence level. Like the handsomely patterned silk fabrics with which it had so much in common stylistically, and like the illustrated books and novels that were its near kindred, chiyogami was created by capable professionals who thoroughly understood their business, and sold as a frankly commercial product. It was bought by consumers of reasonable cultivation and economic substance, who knew what they wanted, and were both willing and able to pay for it—the city dwellers of middle ranks, and especially the wives, children, and elders of the petite bourgeoisie in Edo and other major centers of population.

In addition to these and other areas of similarity between the more ambitious genres of ukiyo-e art on the one hand and chiyogami on the other, there were also significant points of difference. For one thing, unlike its grander kindred among the single-sheet prints, print series, and book illustrations, chiyogami was never intended to point a moral, to adorn a tale, nor even to serve as a focal point for aesthetic appreciation in its own right. From the beginning, it was consciously designed to fulfill a variety of practical purposes, which almost invariably involved transformation into other forms. This

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#### PAPER SIZES:

*Ōbōsho-ban* (double-size): approximately 54 × 39 cm

*Kobōsho-ban* (medium-size): approximately 47 × 33 cm

*Ōnishiki-ban* (half-size): approximately 39 × 27 cm

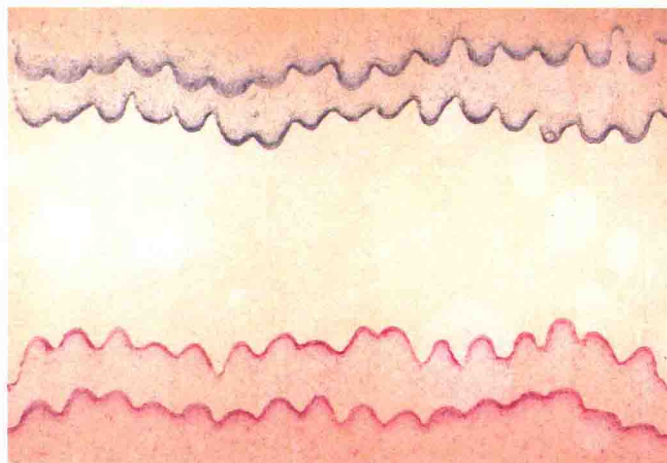


Fig. 2. Decorative book binding with design in chiyogami style by the artist Kiyokata Kaburagi. Tokyo, 1911.

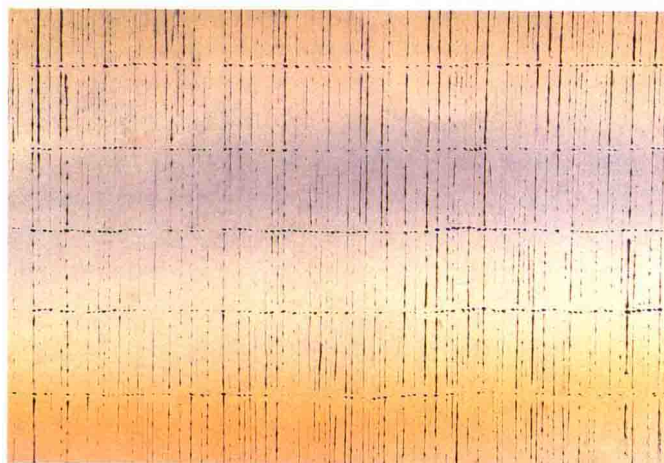


## Chiyogami Predecessors

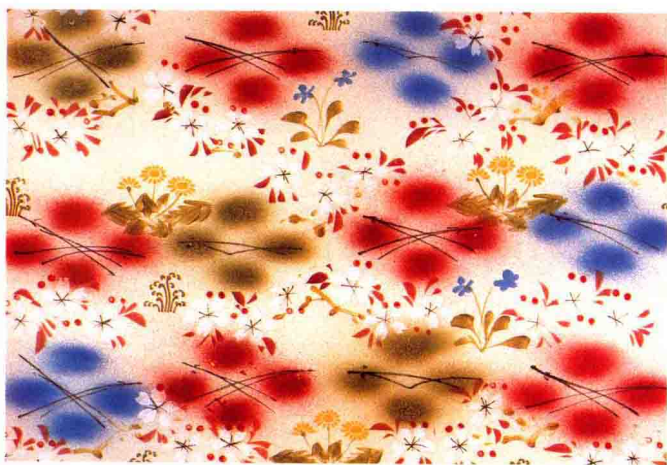
Note: Items with a plate number preceded by an asterisk belong to the Ise-Tatsu Collection; the remainder belong to the author.



1



2



3

\*1. Hand-made paper with wavy design. *Kobōsho-ban*. Mid-Edo period.

\*2. Paper with design printed with *sudare* blind. *Kobōsho-ban*. Mid-Edo period.

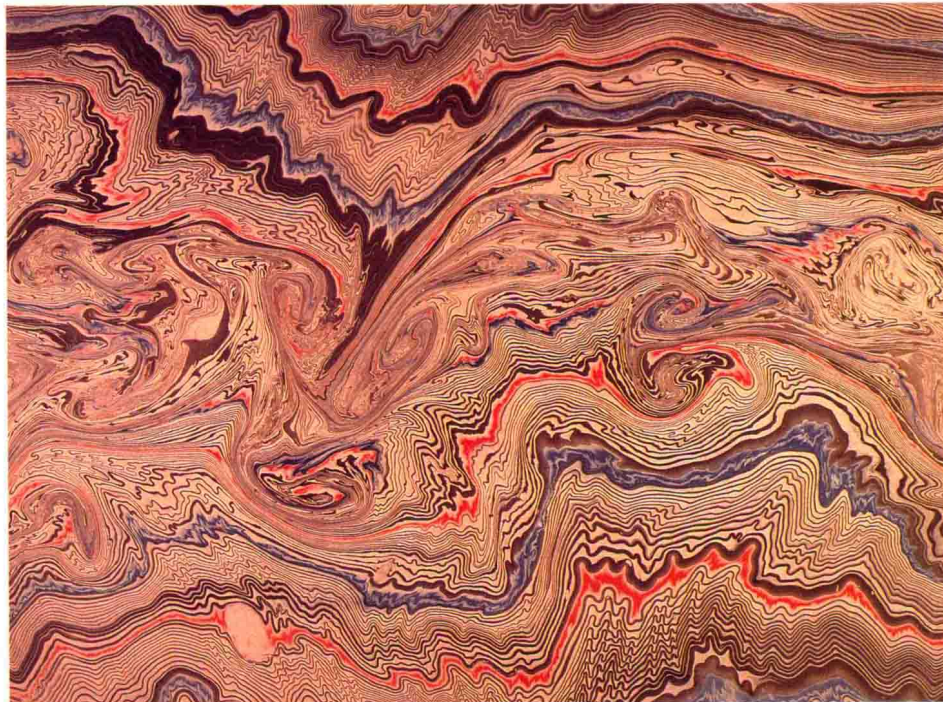


4

\*3. *Fuki-bokashi* paper: spatter-print design with spring flowers and plants in hand-coloring and stencil printing. *Kobōsho-ban*. Mid-Edo period.

4. *Fuki-bokashi* paper; pine trees and flying cranes. *Kobōsho-ban*. Mid-Edo period.





5



6

\*5. *Sumi-nagashi* paper; marbled pattern in ink and colors. *Kobōsho-ban*. Mid-Edo period.

\*6. Paper with *sumi-nagashi* ink-marbling pattern imitated in woodblock printing. *Kobōsho-ban*. Mid-Edo period.

functional nature of chiyogami doubtless contributed to its longevity as a genre. At the same time, it has also made it difficult for us to reconstruct its history and development, for the number of extant specimens surviving from earlier ages is not large. It could almost be set up as axiomatic that grandmothers, mothers, and small girls armed with scissors were at once the blessing and the bane of chiyogami: the blessing, because it was their unswerving loyalty through many generations that helped the chiyogami genre to survive to the present day; and the bane, because they left so few intact sheets behind for us to study and observe.

Further, although ukiyo-e prints and paintings are accepted, albeit at times somewhat grudgingly, among Japanese art authorities as suitable for research and museum display, the same respect is not accorded to chiyogami. Despite its obvious visual beauty and sophisticated levels of design, its primary uses were decorative, functional, and commercial, rather than consciously “artistic,” and the majority of its consumers were women and children. These circumstances almost automatically put chiyogami (and related forms such as printed games or children’s book illustrations) beyond the pale of serious academic consideration, even though many scholars, as well as artists and other persons active in cultural fields, have maintained a fondness for chiyogami from childhood on. Its ephemeral nature has made it very difficult for people to appreciate its long history, while its continuing availability has caused the public at large to take it for granted. In combination, these factors have caused chiyogami to be relegated to a peripheral status among applied art forms dating from the Edo period. It is known, loved, and appreciated by many people in Japan today, but taken seriously only by a minority.

At this point, several specific and concrete questions arise. Just what is chiyogami and how can it be defined? How are we to distinguish it from other types of mechanically decorated paper? There are, after all, countless varieties of such paper being manufactured or sold in Japan today: elegantly designed poem-cards and other calligraphic papers with a history of many centuries, large-format patterned papers of importance in Japanese-style interior decoration, lavish wallpaper after the European manner, and stylish modern wrapping paper to meet all tastes in the preparation of parcels and gifts. What, if any, are the qualities that give chiyogami a distinct character of its own

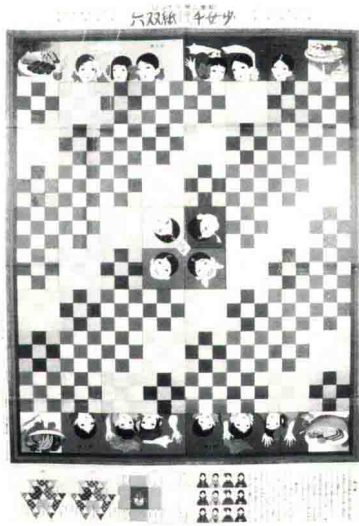


Fig. 3. Supplement to *Shōjo-notomo* (“The Girl’s Companion”), vol. 15, no. 1; lithographed board game incorporating chiyogami patterns. Tokyo 1922.



and allow it the status of an independent category among the myriad types of decorative paper currently in use? Many factors are involved, and purists holding particularly rigid views as to what is orthodox, authentic chiyogami and what is not might wish to confine the definition of the word within stricter limits than those suggested here. At the very least, however, and speaking in general terms, it seems safe to say that most specimens of chiyogami share certain common and persistent characteristics, to be found in such aspects as the quality of the paper used, its dimensions, the methods of printing employed; and the uses to which the finished product is put, as well, of course, as in the nature of layout and pictorial content. An examination of some of these areas of similarity may be more useful than a simple definition in understanding chiyogami and the role that it has played in Japanese life.

## I. Practical Aspects: Paper Quality, Size, and Printing Techniques

One of the most obvious differences between chiyogami papers and modern patterned products designed for use in packaging is the quality of the paper stock on which they are printed. Even the handsomest and most fancifully designed contemporary gift-wrapping papers are generally meant to be used once and then thrown away. Thus, strength, fineness, and durability are of less importance than immediate visual appeal. By contrast, chiyogami was generally intended for objects for daily use. This meant that it had to be not only attractive, but also supple and durable enough to endure being cut, folded, and pasted. Several types of hand-made Japanese paper were and are traditionally used in quality chiyogami manufacture, but even when modern machine-made papers are used, most manufacturers try to make sure that the resulting chiyogami will still be fine enough for precision folding, and strong enough not to disintegrate when paste is applied to it.

Almost as a matter of course, the dimensions of chiyogami were determined by the sizes of the paper stock used. There is no set rule fixing the measurements of chiyogami, and slight differences may be found even in papers printed at the same time by the same manufacturer. In general, however, there are two accepted formats, of which one is approximately twice