



# Shibori

for Textile Artists

Janice Gunner





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KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL  
New York • Tokyo • London

## *Dedication*

To my husband David, together with my sons David, Nicolas and James for putting up with textiles all over the house, late meals and senior moments!

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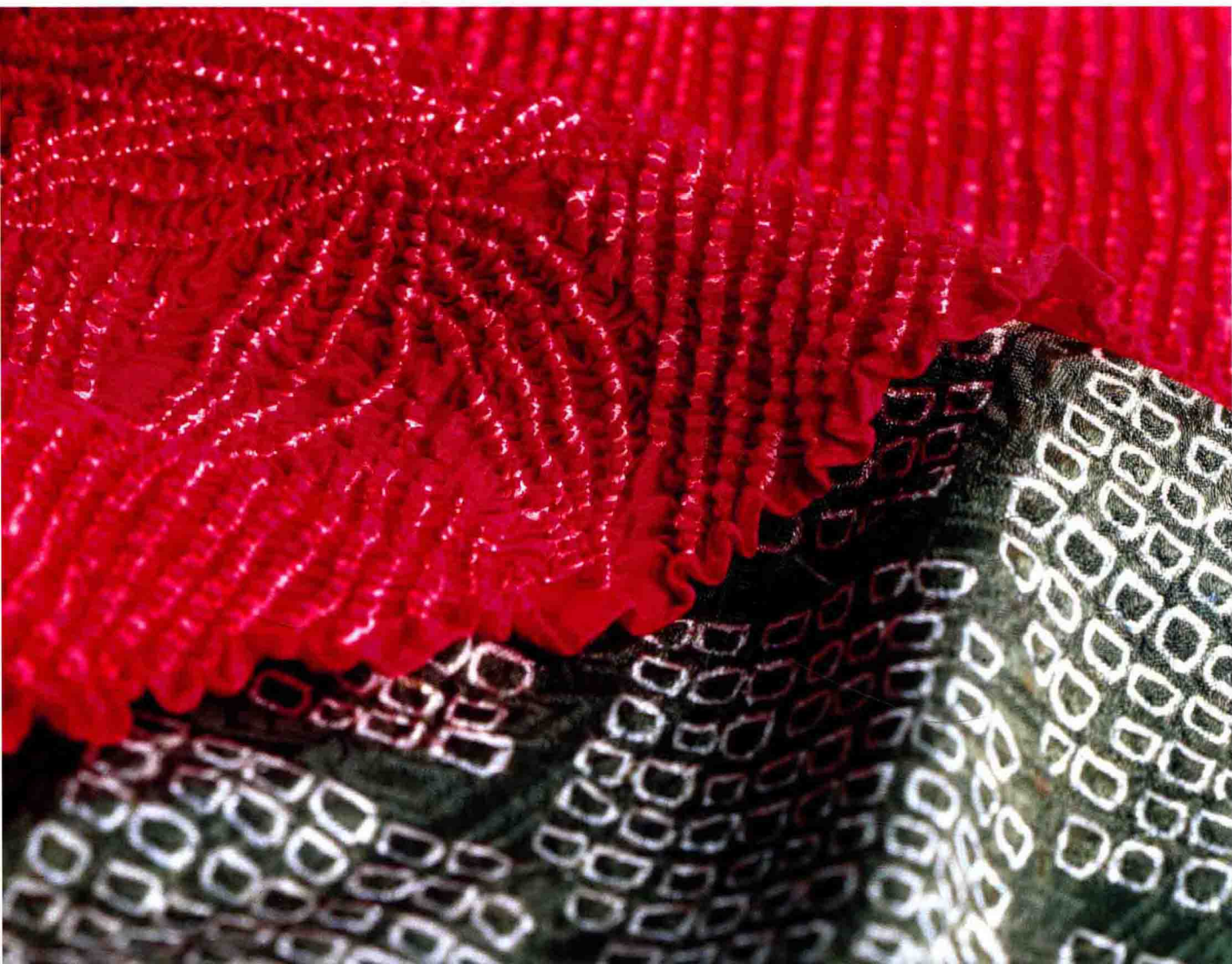
# Introduction

As a teenager, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I experimented with tie-dyeing T-shirts and fabrics. Many a happy hour was spent tying stones and pebbles into fabric and then immersing the whole bundle into cold water dye. The resulting effects intrigued me! Little did I realize it then, but those experiments were just the beginning of my fascination with patterning and coloring textiles.

I have always stitched in some form or another; embroidery, dressmaking, and patchwork mostly. I love the tactile nature of fabric and this eventually led me to the world of quilting. Once my youngest son started school full time, I decided it was time to launch myself on a series of patchwork and quilting courses. It was during these courses that I was re-

## *Below and below right*

Traditional *kanoko* shibori cloths using tied resist. The two kimono wraps (*obi age*) are “linked dot” shibori, the brown and blue cloths are “square ring dots”; silk, Japan.

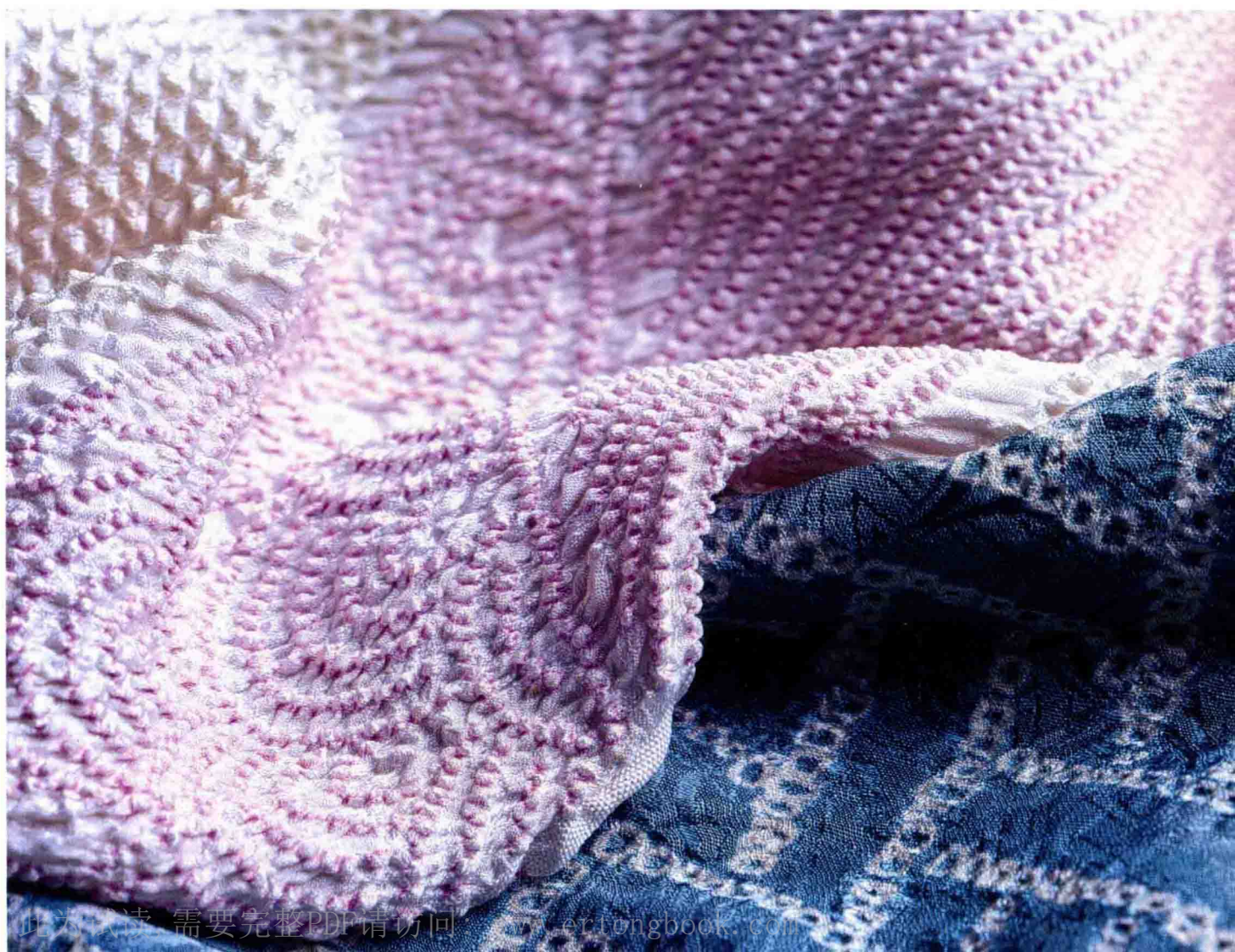




introduced to various methods of dyeing my own fabric and where, as part of my diploma in stitched textiles, I studied shibori in greater depth. My final pieces for exhibition were all made using *arashi* shibori (see page 66).

The effects that can be achieved from stitching, folding, pleating, tying and clamping designs and patterns into fabric are quite magical. The excitement of releasing the fabric from these techniques after the dyeing process is addictive. Each piece is a surprise, a unique piece of cloth that sets the creative juices flowing—in my case, as a quilter, constantly calling “Quilt me, quilt me!”

Shibori is the wonderful world of stitched and tied-resist-dyed textiles. Let me introduce you to some of these techniques, dyeing methods and ways of using the resulting fabrics. Let the journey begin.





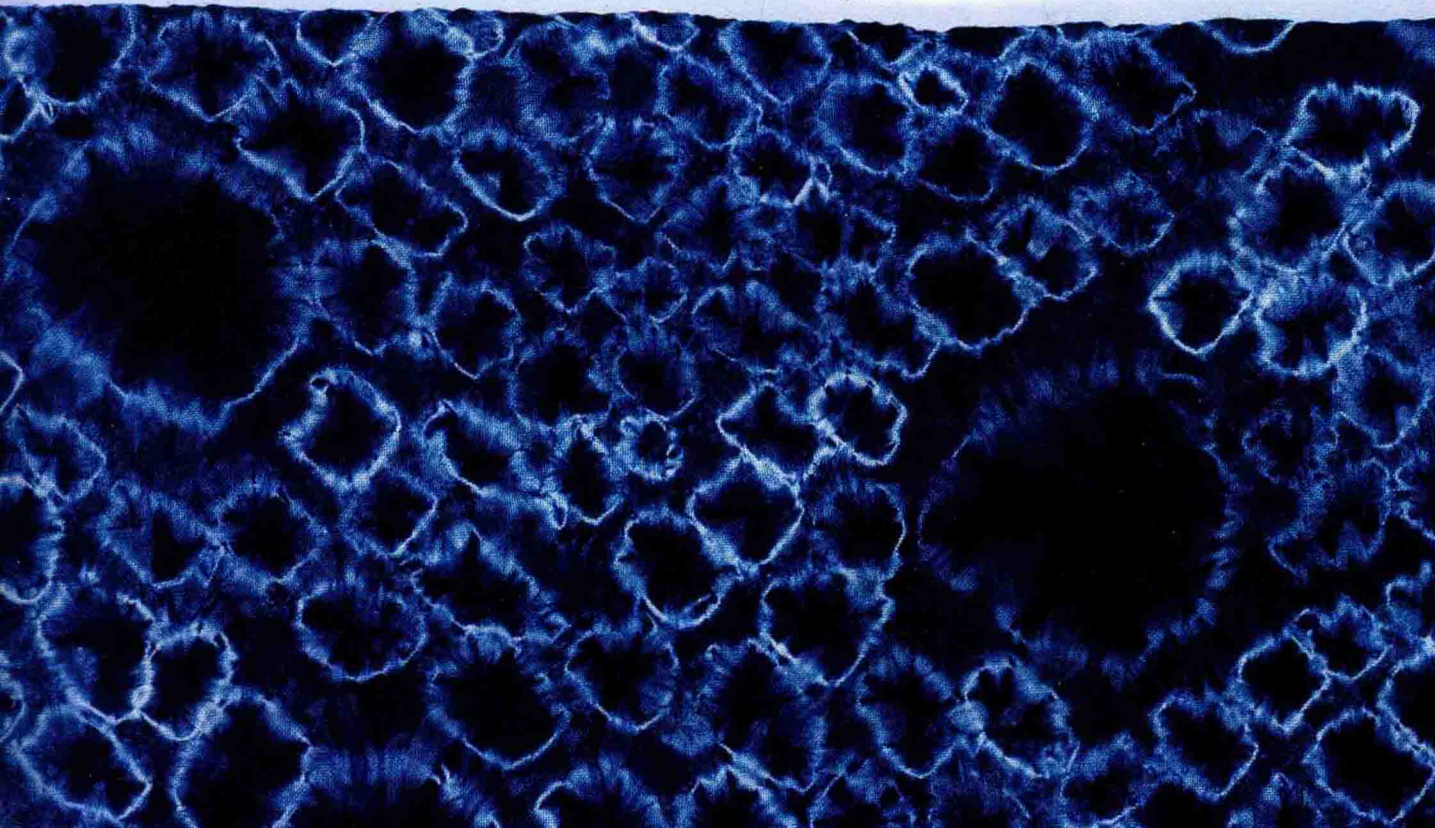
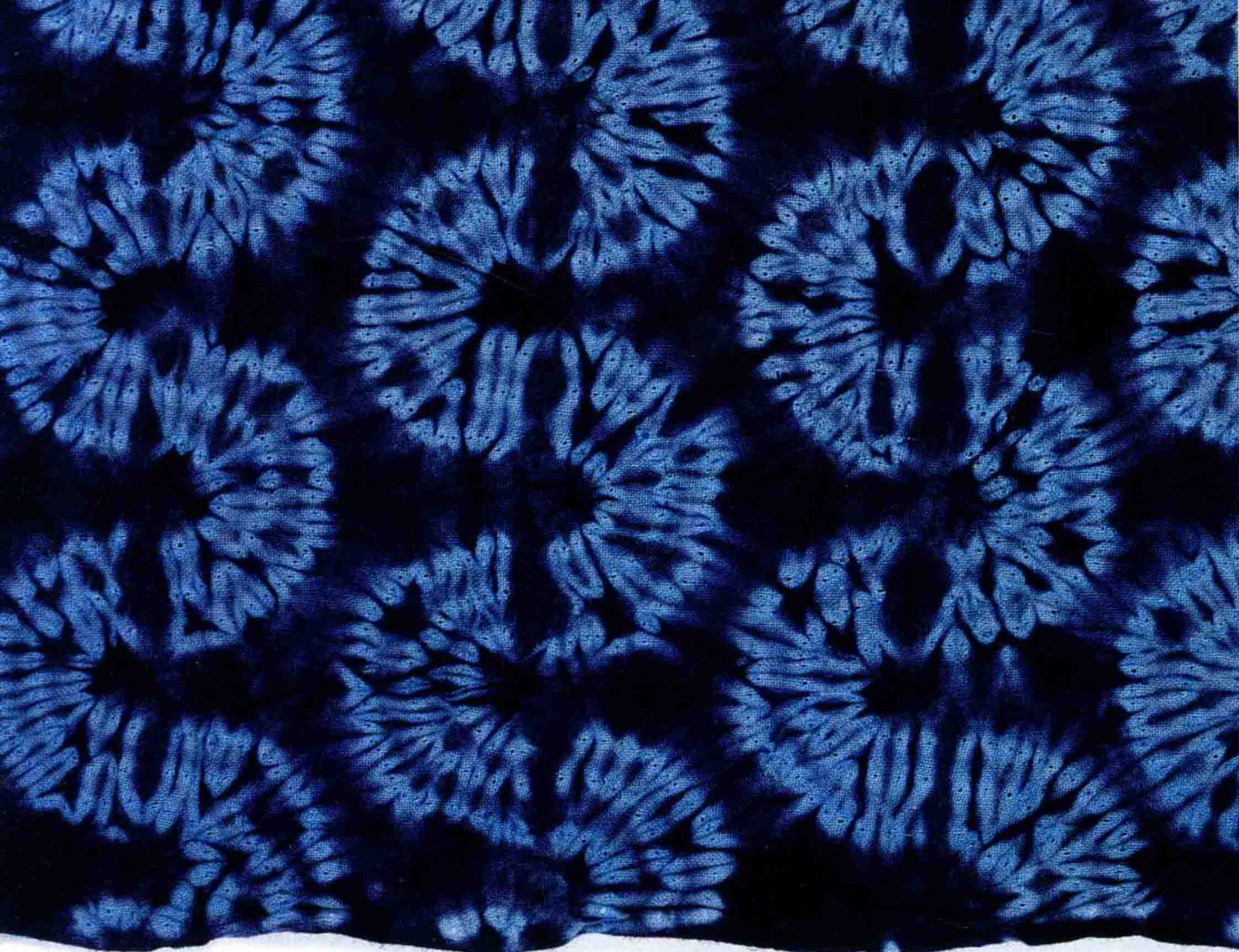


*Left* Antique shibori, tied-resist dyed using two or three dye colors for space-dyed effect; silk, Japan.

*Top right* Stitched-resist shibori; indigo-dyed cotton, purchased at the Arimatsu Shibori Museum, Japan.

*Bottom right* Tied shibori; indigo-dyed cotton *yukata* cloth by Ken-ichi Utsuki, Kyoto, Japan.











# Shibori—history and meaning

Shibori, now a universal term, is the Japanese word for manipulating fabric before dyeing (the word is derived from the Japanese root verb *shiboru*, which means to “wring, squeeze, press”), and it has become synonymous with many forms of resist-dyed fabric. I find the best way to describe shibori to the uninitiated is as “sophisticated tie-dyed or stitched-resist fabrics”. I will begin with a short history of shibori in Japan but, as you will soon find out, the technique is not unique to Japan. Similar techniques have been found in many cultures around the world, including Africa, China, Europe, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaya, and both North and South America. It is known by many other names, some of which I have detailed in this chapter to whet your appetite.

## Japan

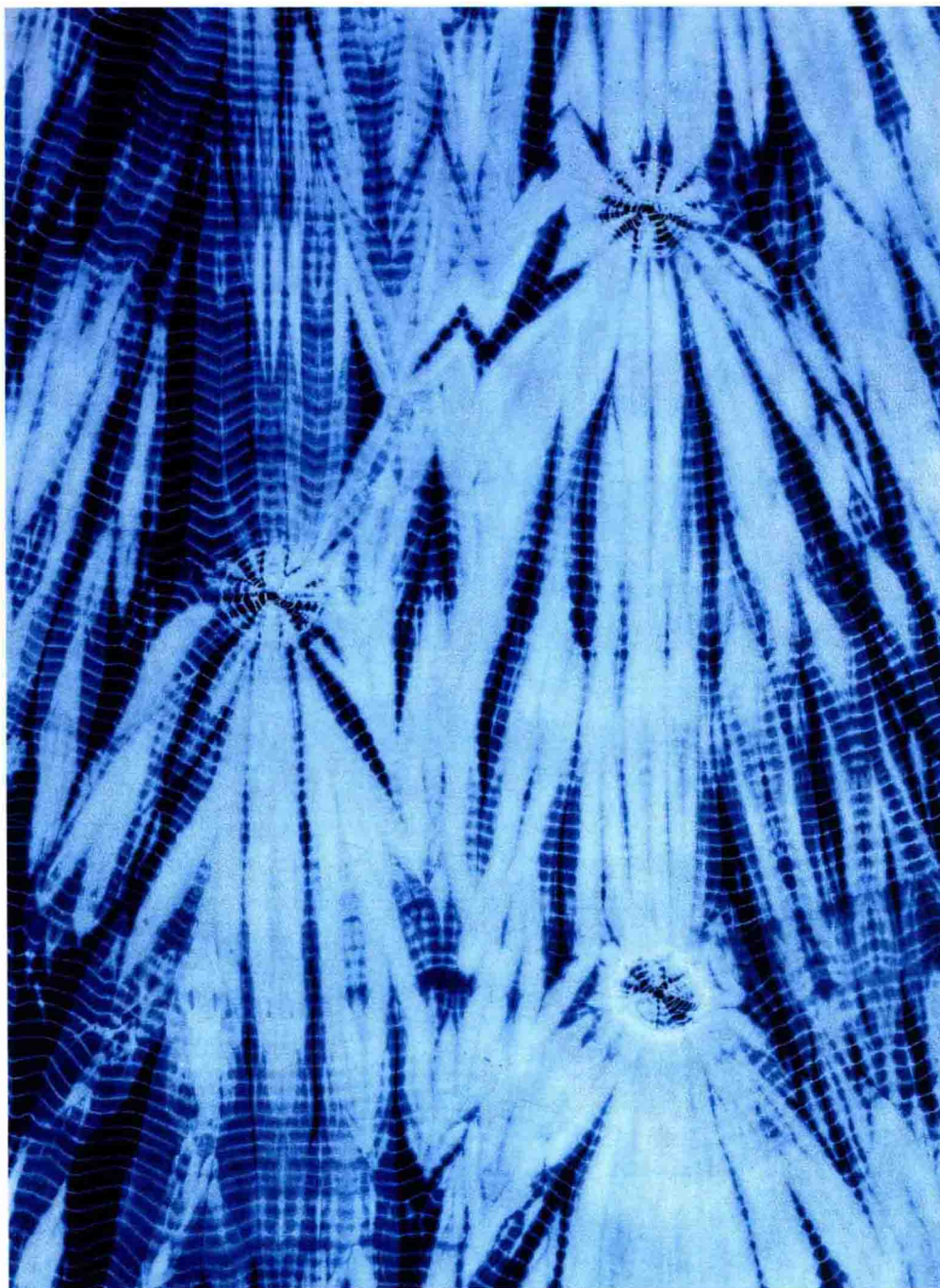
The technique of shibori in Japan dates back to between the 6th and 8th centuries, where it was probably learned from the Chinese. Early examples of tied-and-bound resist (*kokechi*), were found preserved in the wooden store house of the great Buddhist temple Todaiji. Possessions of the former Emperor Shōmu were donated by the Empress after his death in AD756 and remain there today. Having been protected from Japan’s humid climate, they are among the earliest existing samples of resist-dyed cloth.

Eventually Kyoto became the focus for development in Japanese style and art. Court dress involved many-layered robes of silk, each one dyed in a different shade or color, references to which can be seen in paintings from the period, and Shibori flourished.

As the centuries progressed stitched-resist began to be used as a method of creating stylized motifs and the use of shibori on clothing spanned all classes. Country people used the techniques to pattern fabrics such as hemp and cotton, dyed with indigo, while silk was still the preserve of the higher classes.

In the early 17th century, the settlement of Arimatsu was established on the eastern coastal route known as the Tokaido, connecting the capitals of Edo and Kyoto. Settlers began producing *tenugui* (small, all-purpose towels) in a bound shibori design. This was the beginning of a thriving village industry that survives to this day. That first pattern was a variation of a design called *kumo* (“spider web”) that has been used for centuries and has been made famous by the Arimatsu shibori artists. A special hook was devised that holds the fabric while the thread is wrapped around to make the resist patterning. It is thought that the *yukata* (a light cotton kimono) originated from Arimatsu, as did enlarged designs placed at one shoulder on *kosode*, a jacket robe with small sleeves.

*Left* Spiral (*rasen* or shell) shibori has been used to pattern this antique silk kimono *obi* age cloth; Japan.



By the 19th century the production of shibori began to decline. In 1868 Edo was renamed Tokyo and momentous changes were taking place in Japan. Arimatsu was to lose the market for its shibori, having to compete with other areas producing fabrics using the technique. The fortune of Arimatsu was saved by a man from their own village. Kanezō Suzuki had already originated the shibori method called *shirokage* ("white shadow"), and, on seeing the problems the village faced, devised a new method of wrapping cloth around long poles, pushing it tightly into folds and immersing it into a vat of indigo dye. The method, known as *arashi* ("storm") shibori, was less labor intensive than the others and the production of cloth was dramatically increased. The pattern proved to be popular.

*Above left* *Yanagi* (willow) shibori, indigo-dyed for a summer *yukata* kimono by Ken-ichi Utsuki, Kyoto, Japan.

*Right* Japanese larch (*karamatsu*) shibori; indigo-dyed cotton, stitched-resist; Japan.



