

## Following the birth of the Tatsugo pattern

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Most people would answer “Tatsugo pattern” to the question, “What is the representative pattern of Oshima Tsumugi?” A part of the Tatsugo pattern has been symbolically used for T-shirts and wrapping paper in recent years, so it seems that it is becoming popular as one of the icons representing Amami.

How would people answer the question, “What kind of pattern is the Tatsugo pattern?” I could answer, “This is the Tasugo pattern” if actually shown it, but if asked to describe the pattern verbally, I would struggle to answer. Recently, there have been hypotheses that it is a design of Habu, cycads, or hibiscus.

About ten years ago, Mr. NAKATA Kazuo (1934–2019), a member of the Tatsugo Town Cultural Properties Protection Council, told me that the “origin of the Tatsugo pattern was a pinwheel pattern made from pandanus leaves,” which triggered my developing an interest in the Tatsugo pattern. I have been blessed with the position of a visiting researcher at the International Center for Island Studies, Kagoshima University, giving me the opportunity to consider this in depth.

Mr. NAKATA wrote about clothing in general, including Oshima Tsumugi, in publications such as “*Tatsugo Town Magazine: History*,” “*Cultural Properties of Tatsugo Town*,” and “*Tatsugo History Society Bulletin / Eternal*.” The section on Amami Oshima Tsumugi, particularly in *Tatsugo Town Magazine: History* (1988), described in detail the origin of the Tatsugo pattern. He considered 13 Tsumugi samples and two designs that were woven around 1900. The design was described as a *Gajimosha* (pinwheel), “The design at the center was a *Gajimosha* (pinwheel) made of pandanus leaves. Two of these were stacked on top of each other to produce a cycad leaf motif, which was then called a cycad pattern.”

The pinwheel made from pandanus leaves was a familiar toy for children in the past. Growing up in the middle of the Showa era, I did not have many toys around me, so I made this pinwheel on the beach and ran toward the wind. It is easy to imagine that a pinwheel was a more familiar toy to children of the Meiji era than those of my generation.

The Kasuri motif or pattern, named a pinwheel, is listed as a sample of old patterns in *Wadamari Town Magazine* and *Yoron Town Magazine*. In addition to the “*Oshima District Textile Summary*” made by SASAMORI Gisuke, the island official in 1895, which was written to promote the distribution of Tsumugi on the mainland. The name of the pattern originated in this old era and has nothing in common with the motif except this pinwheel pattern. It is the same as the name indicated by Mr. NAKATA.

At the time, the Kasuri motif with the pinwheel pattern was woven by hand-tied kasuri threads. Around 1907 a shimebata loom was invented that could weave patterns with even greater detail. Additionally, the cycad leaf motif was born to complement these patterns and

played an auxiliary role in filling that space. The cycad leaf motif differed from the space-filling patterns to date, and the new space-filling design was actively adopted in each *Shima* (village community) of Tatsugo. The name was different depending on each village and producer, but merchants and middlemen from the mainland unified the name as the “Tatsugo pattern.”

In the Taisho era, a Tatsugo pattern with four *Tama* (the four *Tama* involved two different patterns as a single set, with four sets arranged on the sides), called the “Sumi-chiyo pattern,” was developed. It was from this time onwards that the image of the current general Tatsugo pattern was established.

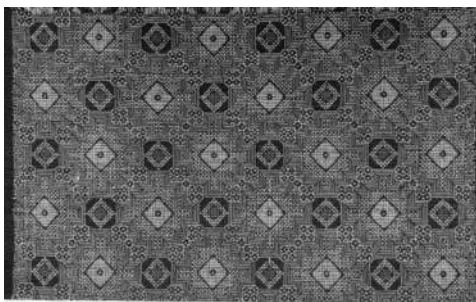
Large patterns, such as with one or two *Tama*, were born with the development of the shimebata loom, and the early Showa era was the heyday of the Tatsugo pattern. There were requests from wholesalers on the mainland after the war. Oshima Tsumugi in various patterns began, but the Tatsugo pattern had an enduring popularity regardless of the era and is now a representative classic pattern.

I have looked at various Tatsugo patterns and re-consider the question, “What is the Tatsugo pattern?” asked in the beginning of this story.

What these have in common are that (1) two different patterns are developed as a set, and (2) a cycad leaf motif is included. The shape of the motif is often the shape of a rhombus, and though relatively few, there are some combinations with circles. These patterns are combined with large and small variations. A cycad leaf motif is used to connect them, in turn generating the many Tatsugo patterns seen, which people from the late Meiji era have been untiringly loved by to the present. The Tatsugo pattern made of the pinwheel and the surrounding cycad leaf motif is truly a wonderful pattern born from the nature of Amami. As I think about the ancestors who created this design, I hope that the Tatsugo pattern will remain forever.



*Gajimosha* pattern, which is said to have been the origin of the Tatsugo pattern



Tatsugo pattern with four *Tama*