

KUMIHIMO

The Art of
Japanese
Silk Braiding
by

DOMYO

KUMIHIMO THROUGHOUT JAPANESE HISTORY

How have the structures and designs of *kumihimo* developed in Japan over time? Domyo has conducted detailed surveys of historical *kumihimo* that remain in temples and shrines, including the Hōryūji temple and the Shōsōin repository in Nara, as well as in museums throughout Japan. Replicas of these *kumihimo* made by Domyo are exhibited here.

Early Jōmon period (4000–3500 BCE)

During this time, simple, primitive *kumihimo* existed, made by braiding three to four strands of tree bark or plant fiber.

Asuka–Nara periods (592–784)

Numerous early Japanese *kumihimo* modeled on continental Asian cords remain in the Hōryūji temple and the Shōsōin repository in Nara. Several *karakumi* and *sasanamigumi* braides composed of wool have been excavated from sites in Central Asia dating to 500–300BCE, tracing the origins of these types of flat cords (or *hiragumi*) to the Silk Road. These examples demonstrate that works that served as the foundation for more complicated braids of later periods all entered Japan at the same time. Techniques of simple, elegant color schemes with alternating light and dark tones were widely employed.

Flat cord types (*hiragumi*): *karakumi*, *sasanamigumi* (*nijōjiku ikkengumi*), *Andagumi* (*ikkengumi*),
Kōraigumi (*nikengumi*), *sangengumi*, *yonkengumi*
Square cord types (*kakugumi*): *kakuyatsugumi*, *Naragumi*
Round cord types (*marugumi*): None

Heian–Kamakura periods (794–1333)

During the Heian period (794–1185), *kumihimo* were no longer modeled on Chinese examples, but were devised to suit Japanese sensibilities. More complicated braiding techniques appeared, and refined, uniquely Japanese *kumihimo* were produced in what could be called the golden age of *kumihimo*. *Kumihimo* were used in a variety of contexts, such as the clothing of court nobles, decorative interior furnishings, musical instruments, and religious implements for temples and shrines. From the mid-Heian period, as members of the warrior class attained aristocratic status and prominence, *kumihimo* also came to be widely used in arms and armor. Few of these cords remain, however, and it is primarily the items dedicated to temples and shrines that provide a glimpse of the forms and techniques of the time.

Flat cord types (*hiragumi*): *Itsukushimagumi*, *tobaraigumi*, *ichimai Kōraigumi danzome*
Square cord types (*kakugumi*): two-part *kakugumi* (*Mitakegumi*), four-part *kakugumi* (*Saidaijigumi*, *Chūsonjigumi*),
six-part *kakugumi* (*Shitennōjigumi*), horizontal four-part *kakugumi* (*kikkōgumi*), eight-part *kakugumi* (double-faced *kikkōgumi*)
Round cord types (*marugumi*): *Chion-ingumi*

Muromachi period (1336–1573)

The demand for *kumihimo* extended from aristocrats and warriors to the common people, and technical progress stagnated. Vast quantities of arms and armor were required as civil unrest and war spread, resulting in the increased need for practical, robust *kumihimo* that could be braided quickly and easily.

Flat cord types (*hiragumi*): no new designs

Square cord types (*kakugumi*): *kanmurigumi*

Round cord types (*marugumi*): *maru Genjigumi*

Momoyama–Edo periods (1573–1868)

In the Edo period, a new type of *takadai* stand for braiding was invented, leading to the development of a rich variety of *kumihimo*. This advance was brought about by lower-ranking members of the warrior class, who, during this time of peace, did not need to engage in battle and were drawn to the techniques of *kumihimo* as supplementary sources of income. During the Edo period, *kumihimo* used in sword fittings, such as cords to mount scabbards, were in great demand.

Flat cord types (*hiragumi*): *ji-naikigumi*, *hon kainokuchigumi*

Square cord types (*kakugumi*): None

Round cord types (*marugumi*): None

Meiji period and beyond (1868–present)

After the newly founded Meiji government issued a prohibition on swords, the demand for *kumihimo* sword fittings all but disappeared. As a result, *kumihimo* were used in traditional Japanese dress as *obijime* to secure kimono sashes and as cords to close the open-chested *haori* jacket. However, as the shift toward Western clothing continued after World War II, the market for *kumihimo* diminished further.

Flat cord types (*hiragumi*): *kawari kainokuchigumi*

Square cord types (*kakugumi*): None

Round cord types (*marugumi*): None

Domyo conscientiously strives to transmit the techniques of the past, while searching for new possibilities for *kumihimo* that suit the modern world.



JAPAN HOUSE

LOS ANGELES