

Ohiyo gozaimas, tomodachi [[*o-hi-yo go-zah-ee-mahs, to-mo-dah-chee](#)] (remember what that means?) and, our new word, gakusei [[gah-koo-say-ee](#)], or student. Blessings on you and on your stitching.

Callaway is past and we look to the near future with rejuvenated spirits and invigorated fingers. With needle in hand, we take a few deep breaths, smell the cherry blossoms, and clear our minds to stitch. It is with this thought, we take on the Shishu [[shee-shoo](#)], or spirit of Japanese embroidery.

When this column last appeared in August, I promised a little history of how our art came to us.* Whether directly or indirectly, over time (6th – 8th centuries) Japan took on many of the symbols and customs of the Chinese. Some of these include animals, plants, religious and cultural rituals. Animals were used because of their traits, some courageous and bold, some shy and submitting. Then there are plants, some strong through the winter and difficult climates and some delicate with blooms that are fragrant and lovely. Add to those religion and culture and a set of symbols is created to join us all in a common bond. When we see a symbol, no matter what our language, we become united in spirit, or shishu.

“The Japanese took from China not only a host of symbols, but also conventions that Chinese artists and artisans used to handle motifs. These include the representation of certain plants and animals as fixed pairs, such as the tiger and bamboo, the Japanese nightingale and plum, and the gallinaceous birds (cocks, pheasants, and peacocks) and the peony. Another significant convention is the fixed grouping of trios or quartets of objects, plants, animals or pastimes. The trio of the pine, bamboo, and plum, known in China as the Three Friends in Winter, remains a significant symbolic motif in Japan.”

One of the things that led me to this path for this issue is Jennifer's rich presentation about our dear [Maxine Brandt](#). I had the privilege of watching her stitch one of her Tiger pieces. I don't think it was just another piece for her, because, you see, she was stitching these in the last years of her life. From early Japanese history, the tiger has been regarded as the metaphor for strength, courage, and dominance. Thank you, Max, for sharing this difficult, but courageous time with us through your beautiful stitching.

To be continued. . .

Until then, I wish you *heiwa* [[hay-ee-wah](#)], or peace, in your stitching

Robin C. Wilks

*For this issue, I use the following for reference: [Symbols of Japan: Thematic motifs in Art and Design](#), Merrily Baird, 2001.