



Sashiko Bead Embroidery Dragonfly

with Nancy Eha

THE HISTORY OF SASHIKO

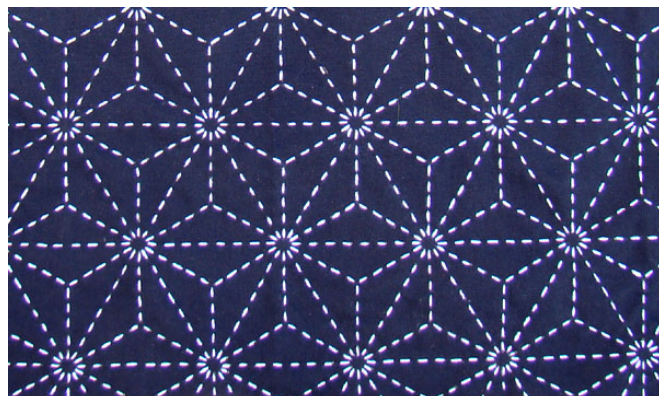
What is sashiko?

How do we say it? This term is pronounced *sash-i-ko* (the "i" is pronounced as in the word "it").

I have been teaching how to bead sashiko patterns for over 10 years. When I saw sashiko for the first time at a quilt show, my first thought was, "If only I could do that with beads!" In this course, I will share with you how to do just that.

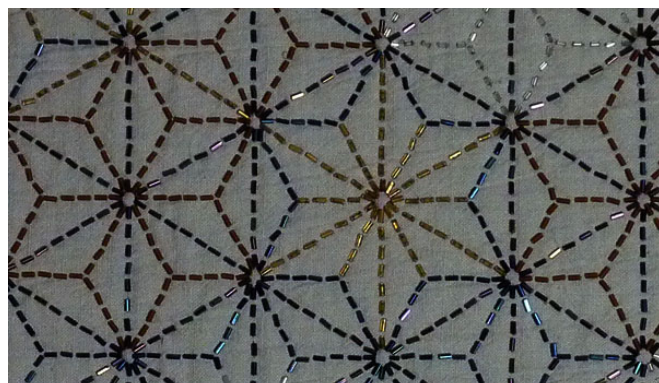
Sashiko began as a traditional art form in rural Japan in the 18th century. The long-running stitches were originally used to anchor layers of fabric firmly together for warmth and strength. If a garment had a hole or became worn, sashiko was used to decorate and apply the patch to make the garment whole again. The garments were so strong that they could be patched and mended many times before being so worn-out that they had to be recycled into futon covers, cushions or rags.

Sashiko was worn mainly in farming and fishing communities. Due to the low socioeconomic status of these communities, it was always stitched on cheap, locally-produced cloth – cotton in warmer areas, and hemp where it was too cold to grow cotton. It was generally worked in white thread on indigo blue, the only color available to most poor people. There were regional variations in patterns. Motifs were handed down in regions and in families, but every stitcher had her own way of working, varying the style to suit herself and her needs. Generally thought of as a Japanese technique, sashiko can be traced back to China as well.



Above: Traditional sashiko stitched with thread.

Below: Beaded sashiko.



For a time, sashiko was used for decorative purposes on ornate linings inside heavy firemen's coats in Japan. The firemen would wear their coats inside out for special festivities. These coats could be seen in every Japanese town until after World War II.

Even running stitches form the sashiko designs, which are usually geometric repeats. White is the dominant color of the thread, although other colors of thread can be used as well. Each pattern has a name and symbolism. The stitches on the right side of the fabric are about the size of a grain of rice; the running stitches on the wrong side of the fabric are 1/3 the size of those on the right side. This means the space left between the running stitches on the right side of the fabric is 1/3 the size of the stitch.

