

## ITAJIME PAPER DECORATION METHOD



*Itajime* is a traditional method of decorating paper by applying tie-dye techniques. It is an adaptation of the methods of *shibori*, the Japanese process of tie-dye decoration on cloth. Peter Ford was introduced to *itajime* at the International Association of Papermakers Annual Congress in Banff, Alberta, Canada, August 2005.

Materials required are thin waterleaf paper (many types of Japanese paper are suitable) light-fast waterproof inks, water and an absorption enhancer which may be ox-gall or a product called *Isopropanol* (contains alcohol) which can be obtained from a chemist. The paper is folded many times, usually symmetrically – until a small tight square or triangle remains. This may be tied between pieces of wood (see illustration above) (*ita* = board) and then dipped alternately in neat or diluted inks, oxgall, isopropanol and water. The spreading and mixing of colours in the final result is affected by the folding and binding of the paper 'parcel'.

After a period of dipping, the most difficult part is removal of the string or rubber bands without damage to the wet paper. At this stage the paper is very soggy and tightly compressed, so separating the folds is delicate work. But it must be done immediately. The ink becomes adhesive as it dries out to its waterproof condition. The design is always a surprise as only part of the process can be under the designer's control.

Since his introduction to this process Peter has experimented with pigments, acrylic ink, metallic ink, watercolour etc. He has also tried non-symmetrical folding - for example wrapping the paper round a tube - and the use of coloured Korean paper dipped in bleach and then in the inks.

The best book on *Shibori* is –  
*SHIBORI – The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing*  
by Yoshiko Wada, Mary Kellog Rice and Jane Barton.  
Kodansha International Ltd 1999