



The Weaving Princess in the Night Sky

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Design Mentor Statement:

Mentoring design students involves unique challenges; it consists of delivering technical knowledge and skills and providing emotional support through developing trustworthy relationships. While the student encountered technical challenges and emotional pressures, I supported her with a private consultation. She desired to explore her cultural roots to create her senior design collection for the annual fashion show. I guided her to explore visual sources to create her cultural mood board during the initial phase. My pedagogical approach showed the students how to integrate initial ideas with additional elements — in her case, after synthesizing the final cultural representation analysis, including her childhood memories, she combined her ethnic identity and positionality to create her intersectionality into the dress. During live-model fittings, I provided constructive feedback on the overall fit and silhouette. Moreover, I suggested the motif layout and lacing placement to match the garment with her cultural inspiration. I accomplished my mentorship goal of supporting the student successfully; she developed her innovative design and pushed her boundaries to showcase her design ability. I selected this student's outfit because it represents excellent craftsmanship, and she achieved her conceptual goal of expanding her original imagination and creativity to show her refined final look.

Design Statement:

The Weaving Princess in the Night Sky was a part of my senior collection at the annual fashion show. This look has its design inspired by Princess *Orihime*, a character from the bittersweet Japanese childhood origin story of the *Tanabata* festival from Japan. Once a year, she crosses the river reuniting with her lover, *Hikoboshi*, a cow herder. This project aimed to utilize unconventional stitching techniques to portray how the princess would weave luxurious clothes next to the milky way river. The gold motifs represent the weaving of shimmering threads and abstract star constellations against the deep indigo of the night sky. I chose a dark, navy faux dupioni silk fabric to represent the night sky and contrast the gold abstract stitching. The goal for the silhouette was to incorporate gothic Lolita elements to differentiate from the traditional boxy silhouette seen in kimonos and other Japanese attire.

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact:

The fitted and strapless corset bodice, as well as an hourglass silhouette, embodies Victorian-era trends. According to Younker (2012), many Lolita aesthetics revolve around the desire to look like an anachronistic living doll, which is reflective of Victorian childhood. The gothic Lolita, in particular, is known to wear corsets. Furthermore, the traditional gold patterns and motifs that I

chose had symbolic meaning to Japanese artwork. For example, *kawa* stands for river and is shown through multiple wavy lines running next to each other, *kumo* stands for clouds, and *yama* stands for mountains (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>). Although all the cultural motifs were included in the garment, I added my own interpretation using my free-motion stitching technique, which integrated my drawing style into the design. The gold thread used within the free-motion stitches also reflects Japan's history of goldwork, originally from Asia, to represent status and wealth (Geminiani, Campione, Corti, Motella, Rampazzi, Recchia, & Luraschi, 2021). Before, techniques such as *sashiko* held cultural significance in Japan. According to Singh (2022), *sashiko* was a common practice originally used for reinforcing an area of poor weaving, thereby prolonging the life of the garment.

Process, Technique, and Execution:

Once moods and inspirations were proposed, I took reference pictures of koi fish and uploaded those images into Adobe Photoshop. I outlined the fish to capture its natural movements and filled the fins with lines that matched the fluidity of its body under the water. A dark blue dupioni-like polyester weave was chosen to act as a clean base representing the night sky, perfect for abstract, gold, free-motion stitching. The garment had no waist seam for a fluid transition from the fitted bodice to the flared skirt and emphasized the boundlessness of the night sky. As for the thirteen-paneled corset construction, I utilized draping techniques to get a fitted bodice with an asymmetrical lace-up opening on the front running diagonally down the bodice to the hip. The modesty panel, placed underneath the lace-up closure, was sculpted to the body with draped pleats as it also acted as a decorative panel. An asymmetrical pin-tucked shoulder panel was added to depict a milky way river. I kept the concept of traditional *sashiko* while being assisted by a domestic sewing machine with a free-motion stitching setting and gold thread. Before going to the machine, the general layout of the patterns was drawn on the fabric in a water-soluble marker. Motifs such as koi fish, rivers, mountains, and clouds were carefully stitched to the side front and back of the dress to represent fish swimming in the milky way river. Two live-model fittings were conducted to determine a snug fit on the bodice and to ensure the modesty panel was the right length and molded to the curves of the model. Koi fish and other motif placements were also confirmed as they will swim downwards.

Cohesion:

The dress was made of a navy-blue dupioni-like polyester weave to best emulate a classic design through its elegant luster and unique texture and weave. The simplistic fabric choice helped the gold, free-motion stitching stand out and look like golden koi fish swimming through the milky way river. Although various motifs are organized on the dress, they follow the same aesthetic and artistic style. The many lines running through the outlines of the koi fish or the mountains are to show its fluidity and elegance. The eyelets are gold to match the gold, free-motion stitching, while the lacing is a black grosgrain ribbon to match the navy hue. The fitted bodice, sculpted by multiple panels, emphasizes an hourglass silhouette reminiscent of the gothic Lolita subculture.

Originality and Innovation:

The main design element, the free-motion stitching with the koi fish art motif, is original. I have created my own print using various motifs and unconventional fashion construction techniques. Free-motion stitching is usually seen with quilters to create fluid patterns with the help of batting between the layers of fabric. However, with a few tweaks to the process, I was able to stitch my own designs on the faux dupioni silk fabric with the help of non-woven interfacing. Although the corset has a place in Victorian history, I created an original asymmetrical design with a front and lace-up opening while also taking inspiration from a childhood Japanese tale.

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