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SUMMER TRADITIONS IN JAPAN

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THEME FOR JULY:

Summer Traditions in Japan

In Japan, summer corresponds to the months of June, July, and August in terms of weather conditions. While summer in Japan is an important season for growing crops, the extremely high heat and humidity can make it uncomfortable as well. Many different summer traditions, or *fubutsushi*, have developed as forms of wisdom or inventive means of coping with the intense heat. In this month's issue of Highlighting Japan, we explore a range of different typical Japanese summertime *fubutsushi*, from summer festivals and fireworks displays to summer-style confectionery, fireflies, wind chimes, and more.



ON THE COVER: The grand finale of the festival.

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FEATURES

Summer Traditions in Japan



Photo: Yosakoi Festival Promotion Association



Photo: Kyogashi Tsukasa Suetomi



Photo: Aomori Tourism and Convention Association

Above: Teams also come from outside Japan to participate, like this team from Poland in 2019.

Middle: *Ajisai* ("Hydrangea") made of sweet potato mash colored in refreshing color tone and decorated with agar drops that resemble sparkling rain.

Below: The Nebuta Grand Prize of the 2022 festival went to the Ryuoh (Dragon King) *nebuta* featuring the Hachidai Ryuoh (eight deities that protect the Dharma) that are enshrined in the Asamushi district of the city of Aomori.

In Japan, summer corresponds to the months of June, July, and August in terms of weather conditions. While summer in Japan is an important season for growing crops, the extremely high heat and humidity can make it uncomfortable as well. Many different summer traditions, or *fubutsushi*, have developed as forms of wisdom or inventive means of coping with the intense heat. In this month's issue of Highlighting Japan, we explore a range of different typical Japanese summertime *fubutsushi*, from summer festivals and fireworks displays to summer-style confectionery, fireflies, wind chimes, and more.



Various Seasonal Traditions Symbolizing Summer in Japan

As a country that has cherished the four seasons since ancient times, Japan has some unique seasonal traditions that can be enjoyed only during that specific time of year. We interviewed Miura Yasuko, a Japanese culture researcher, about the unique and diverse summer traditions of Japan, from vibrant events such as festivals and fireworks, to cool summer kimono and refreshing shaved ice.

What is the period of time defined in Japan as “summer”?

According to the calendar, summer in Japan begins on a day in early May called *rikka* (literally “start of summer”), and ends on the day before *risshu* (“start of fall”) in early August. The Japanese use a system that breaks the four seasons into 24 solar terms,¹ and this system

did not change when Japan made the transition from the old calendar to the new calendar.² However, as a season that we actually experience, in meteorological terms summer spans the months of June, July, and August. This is the period with which we associate the variety of summer traditions in Japan.



Miura Yasuko,
Japanese culture researcher

The expression *fubutsu-shi* (seasonal traditions) is used quite often, but what does it mean and how has it recognized?

If we examine the literally means in Japanese *fubutsu-shi*, which is usually translated as “seasonal traditions,” it can also mean poems (*shi*) that describe scenery, seasons, and other natural features (*fubutsu*) in an emotional manner. However, we usually use it as a generic term for a variety of seasonal characteristics. In Japan, there are four sea-



Mt. Fuji shows its summer silhouette behind hydrangea in full bloom

sons—spring, summer, fall, and winter—and the term “seasonal traditions” refers to the unique culture, customs, natural phenomena, food, and products that symbolize each of these seasons.

Since objects and events that evoke the ambience of summer are described as “seasonal traditions,” I think that the understanding of what constitutes such a tradition may differ depending on the region, the people, or the time period. On the other hand, I also find it interesting that there are events and customs, such as festivals and fireworks, which evoke a shared awareness among Japanese people as typical summer traditions.

What do you think is the traditional Japanese perception of summer as a season?

Summer is a vibrant and active season when the sun is at its most powerful. While it is an important time for the crops to grow, the Japanese summer is also very hot and humid, which makes it quite uncomfortable in terms of lifestyle. I think summer could be defined as the season when Japanese people find ways to overcome the stifling heat with wisdom and original ideas.

Please tell us again about the customs, events, and traditions unique to this hot and humid Japanese summer.

The first step in preparation for summer is *koromogae*, or the seasonal changing of clothing. It is conducted around June 1, by replacing the contents of chests and closets with clothing appropriate for the hot season. June is also the time when fireflies can be observed in various regions around Japan, so there is also the prac-



Shochu-mimai greeting cards are sent during the period that starts around July 7 (also known as *shosho*, lit. “small heat”), which is the beginning of one of the 24 solar terms, and ends around August 7, the day before *risshu* (“beginning of fall”)

tice of firefly-viewing (see page 20), in which people can admire the blinking glow of fireflies while cooling off in the night air. At the end of June, an event called “*Nagoshi-no-harae* (literally “a ritual to purify the mind and body for overcoming the summer”)” is held. This is the event where people pass through rings called *chinowa*³ set up at Shinto shrines in various regions. The aim of that is to purify the *kegare* (impurity, defilement) of the first half of the year and praying for sound health in the second half.

In July, the heat becomes even more intense. To express their sympathy and concern for friends and relatives during the height of this very hot season, the Japanese send summer greetings called *shochu-mimai* and *zansho-mimai*, usually in the form of postcards. It is an important cultural practice that shows kindness and inform the current situation each other. July is also the time of regional summer festivals. These festivals, such as *Tanabata* (the Star Festival), symbolize various summer events (see page 14), and also express the wishes of the common people for a bountiful harvest and good health.

Under the traditional Japanese calendar, the period of 18 days leading up to the day before the first day of autumn is known as midsummer (“*natsu no doyo*” in Japanese) and the Day of the Ox that falls during this period is called the Midsummer Day of the Ox (“*doyo no ushi no hi*”) (July 30 this year). On this day, it is customary to eat foods that begin with the sound “u” such as *unagi* (eel), different types of *uri* (gourds) like cucumbers and bitter melons, and *udon* noodles, as people believe such foods will give them stamina to beat the summer fatigue and get through this hot and



Nagoshi-no-harae, a summer ritual of purification by passing through a ring of bundled grass



Photo: PIXTA

The period of approximately 18 days leading up to August 7 is known as midsummer, and there is saying that on the Midsummer Day of the Ox (July 30 this year) it is good for the health to eat *unaju* (a dish of grilled eel fillets served over white rice in a rectangular lacquered box).

humid period. This is an example of the way Japanese take care of their health by choosing a nutritious diet.

The major event in August is Obon. In most regions, Obon is typically observed around August 15, although there are some areas, where it is celebrated in mid-July. Obon is a summer festival of honoring the ancestors, so during the period of Obon people welcome back the spirits of their ancestors. It is also an important event for families to gather, not only to make offerings to their ancestors, but also to express gratitude to parents and grandparents who are still alive, and to deepen family bonds. That is why there is a longer break called the “Obon holiday” in Japan during this time of the year. Also during the Obon period, Bon festivals and firework events (see page 12) are held throughout Japan, providing cool and refreshing evening entertainment to many people.

Can you tell us about some traditional practices that were born out of efforts to keep cool in the summer back in the times when there was no air conditioning?

Traditional Japanese houses are in fact designed for summer. According to *Tsurezuregusa* (“Essays in Idleness”), a collection of essays on wide-ranging topics written by Yoshida Kenko, a poet and essayist active in the first half of the 14th century, “Houses should be built with summer chiefly in mind.” Since ancient times, traditional Japanese houses have been designed

in quite an ingenious manner to utilize the flow of the wind and to release the heat that accumulates inside the house.

One way to achieve this is to attach *sudare* or *yoshizu*⁴ screens on the outside of the house. It is important to leave a gap between the screens and the house, because it creates shade which cools the air while also improving ventilation.

There is also the practice of *uchimizu*, or sprinkling water in front of one’s house and on the street to lower the ground surface temperature. This is a custom that has been part of the Japanese summer way of life for generations. It produces the effect of cooling the house because water takes heat when vaporizing and creates wind convection that brings cooled air into the house. I think this is a very smart way of keeping cool.

Another staple of the Japanese summer, which lets us know that the wind is blowing, is the wind chime (see page 22). I think it is an ingenious summer device that creates a refreshing breezy image through its beautiful ringing sound. Hand fans such as *sensu* (folding fan) and *uchiwa* (non-foldable fan) that are used indoors to move the air are also part of the Japanese summer traditions.

Other ways to create a cool and refreshing ambience indoors and around the house are to keep goldfish in special bowls, or hang a variety of evergreen climbing ferns (*tsuru-shinobu*) in baskets under the eaves.

In their daily lives, Japanese people often go out in the cool of the evening wearing a *yukata*.⁵ *Yukata* was



Photo: PIXTA

Sudare are Japanese-style blinds or screens that help people get through the heat and humidity of summer.



Yukata-clad women engage in the practice of uchimizu.

originally a type of kimono people wore as a bathrobe when they went to take a bath. Later, they started wearing it after taking a bath, and gradually *yukata* evolved into a kimono people wore when they relaxed at home and a type of casual street wear for an evening stroll. Nowadays, it has become a fashionable item that people purchase or have newly made to wear on summer outings.

When it comes to clothing, traditionally, Japanese people have placed great importance on choosing materials, colors, and patterns appropriate for each season. They do that not only for their own comfort, but also to convey a sense of the season to those around them.

Finally, do you have any recommendations for visitors from overseas about ways to spend the summer, or any summer traditions in Japan you would like them to experience?

I would recommend that they see some of Japan's major summer festivals (see pages 10 and 18), and, if a chance presents itself, try wearing a *yukata* at one of these festivals. I also hope that they will see the exquisitely beautiful fireworks that are unique to Japan (see page 12).

Visitors who travel to *satoyama* in the rural countryside should definitely experience firefly-viewing. Also, although it is somewhat trivial, I hope they get to see firsthand the wisdom of a lifestyle that uses the natural cooling power of wind.

As for traditional Japanese summer foods, I recommend that visitors experience the custom of keeping cool with refreshing foods that are unique to this time of year, such as *hiyamugi* and *somen*⁶ noodles, as well as *kakigori* (shaved ice) and *hiyayakko* (chilled tofu), which taste exceptionally cool and delicious in summer.

The purely Japanese culture of *mitate*, which entails visual ways of expression that produce freshness and elements of surprise, is another playful way to enjoy the cool appearance and exciting flavors of summer *kaiseki* cuisine⁷ and Kyoto-style confectionery (see page 16).

Hot and humid, summer in Japan is physically challenging, but it also provides the pleasure of encountering some unique seasonal traditions. I hope visitors from overseas can feel how finely attuned Japanese people are to the variety of ways to enjoy this season. ㊦



With ice on a glass plate, the ingenious visual representation of this *somen* dish creates a cool impression.

1. The year is divided into four seasons (spring, summer, fall, and winter), each of which is subdivided into six solar terms. Even today, the first day of each term has a name descriptive of the season, such as *risshun* (start of spring), *shunbun* (the vernal equinox), and *geshi* (the summer solstice).
 2. In 1872, Japan adopted the Gregorian (solar) calendar and called it "the new calendar." The lunisolar calendar that had been used since ancient times is called "the old calendar."
 3. A large ring made of bundled grass, cogongrass, and straw
 4. *Sudare* are traditional Japanese screens or blinds, made of thinly-split bamboo, reed, or other natural materials, woven together. *Yoshizu* are larger screens made of reed that are used by propping them up against the eaves of the house.
 5. A type of unlined long kimono made of printed cotton

6. A type of dried noodles made of wheat flour. According to the standards of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, noodles with diameter less than 1.3 mm are classified as *somen*, and noodles with diameter 1.3 mm or more but less than 1.7 mm are classified as *hiyamugi*.
 7. The term *kaiseki* originally referred to a simplified course meal version of *honzen ryori*, the most highly-ritualized style of preparing and serving food in traditional Japanese cuisine, which has been developed and refined since the 14th century. Nowadays, it is often used to describe a Japanese course meal served with sake.
 See "Japanese Cuisine Synchronized with the Seasons" in the June 2022 issue of Highlighting Japan https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202206/202206_03_en.html

The Nebuta Festival: Aomori's Summer Spectacle

The Nebuta Festival is held in Aomori Prefecture every year over the six days from August 2 to 7. Here we introduce the features of this leading Japanese summer festival, which attracts spectators from all over the country. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



The Nebuta Grand Prize of the 2022 festival went to the Ryuoh (Dragon King) *nebuta* featuring the Hachidai Ryuoh (eight deities that protect the Dharma) that are enshrined in the Asamushi district of the city of Aomori.

The Nebuta Festival is held during the height of summer every August 2-7 in Aomori Prefecture, the northernmost prefecture on Japan's main island of Honshu. Held chiefly in Aomori City and its surrounding areas, it is one of Japan's most famous summer festivals, attracting a total of 1.05 million tourists (in 2022) during its six-day duration.

The festival is most known for its enormous floats, called *nebuta*. According to the Aomori Nebuta Festival Executive Committee office, *nebuta* are built within size restrictions of up to 9 meters wide, 7 meters deep, and 5 meters high including the float support, and the actual floats will be about that size. Each *nebuta* weights 4 tons in total. In 1980, the Aomori Nebuta Festival was designated one of the Important Intangible Folk Cultural

Properties of Japan.

The spectacular parade of *nebuta* through the streets at night is one of the festival's highlights. The *nebuta* parade is joined by dancers called *haneto* (meaning "jumpers" in Japanese), who dance wildly to the beat of taiko drums, creating an extremely fascinating and enthusiastic atmosphere.

Some say the Nebuta Festival originated as a variation of the Toro Nagashi¹ lantern floating festival, but its origin is actually uncertain. It is believed that *nebuta* festivals like the present style based on kabuki and other themes first appeared in the 1800s. The size of the *nebuta* floats began to expand after the end of World War II in 1945, becoming revitalized and catching the big tourism wave, leading to its growth into the



A musical ensemble playing traditional Japanese instruments such as the *yokobue* (transverse flute) marches along with the *nebuta*.

giant it is today.

Nebuta are newly built every year, with production usually beginning around May. “*Nebuta* motifs are conceived by *nebuta* makers called *nebuta-shi*, who mostly use Japanese folk myths or historical stories from overseas as their subject matter. *Nebuta-shi* need to do a lot of background research, so they study a variety of documents and other materials. Once the subject matter is decided, they formulate a concept and put together a rough sketch.”

Once the rough sketch is finished, a tent is put up on the shore for actual production. Each participating group erects a huge tent-like structure around 12 meters wide, 12 meters deep, and 8 or 9 meters high.


“They build a framework of wood and wire in the tent, and paste Japanese *washi* paper on it to give shape to the *nebuta*. The sight of 40 to 50 people working together to put the *nebuta* onto the float support is quite a spectacle.”

It takes dozens of people to pull a completed *nebuta* through the streets. At night, the floats are lit up by as

many as 1,000 pieces of lighting equipment installed inside them. This sensational scenery makes the *Nebuta* Festival particularly powerful and spectacular among traditional Japanese festivals, and greatly inspires those who see it.

Last year, due to COVID-19 measures, advance applications were required for a chance to be selected as a *haneto*, but this year participation is open to everyone as before. So, the main attraction of this year’s festival is not only of course the fun of watching the *nebuta*, but is also attractive to participate freely as a *haneto*.

“Free participation means that you can join any team as long as you prepare a white *yukata* with decorations. They’ll be on sale at the festival site, or you can rent one in advance.”

We hope you’ll get a chance to enjoy the Aomori *Nebuta* Festival in person, whether only to watch it or also to take part in it. 

1. A Japanese custom observed in the summer on the last night of the Obon Festival, in which a series of memorial events are held for ancestral spirits. Small lanterns are lit and floated into rivers and into the sea to send off the ancestral spirits.



Left: Anyone can participate in the festival as a *haneto* as long as they wear a costume.

Above right: A *nebuta* decorated with the motif of Zhong Kui, a Taoist deity said to ward off evil spirits.

Below right: A *nebuta* based on Okinawan legends



Fireworks Displays Add Brilliant Color to the Summer Night Sky

Fireworks festivals are a very popular feature of summertime in Japan. The Omagari Fireworks Festival, held in the city of Daisen in Akita Prefecture, is one of Japan's most prestigious.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



Left: A No. 10 Shin-iri Warimono from 2016

Center: The winning entry in the No. 10 Ball Freestyle category in 2013

Right: A unique and noteworthy title: *Hisui o Chiribameta Pendanto* (“Jade-Studded Pendant”)

Photo: Daisen City, Akita Prefecture

This year’s Omagari Fireworks Festival will be held on Saturday, August 26 in the Omagari district of the city of Daisen in Akita Prefecture. Twenty-eight fireworks companies from all over Japan will participate in the event, with an estimated 18,000 fireworks to be launched.

The history of fireworks in Daisen dates back to the 1800s. Back then, people used to dedicate fireworks at shrine ceremonies to pray for a good harvest, a prosperous business, or family safety. It is said that the first historical appearance of Omagari fireworks was around this time, when they appeared in an illustration in *Tsuki no Dewaji*, a travelogue by the travel writer Sugae Masumi, who visited the area in 1826.

The event eventually evolved into a skills competition among pyrotechnicians (fireworks manufacturers) from all over the country. They gather to show off their technical refinements. The festival has grown into one of Japan’s most prestigious fireworks competitions. It is here that the Prime Minister’s Award, the highest honor in the fireworks industry, is given. Festival executive committee member Motegi Toshihiro shared some of the competition’s highlights with us.

“The four competitive categories are: Daytime Fireworks, a competition of contrasts in smoke and color; Chrysanthemum Fireworks, where contestants launch No. 10 balls called Shin-iri Warimono¹ (about 30 cm in diameter) in a contest of designs using chrysanthemum-shaped fireworks; Freestyle Fireworks, in which each technician uses their ingenuity and skill with No. 10 balls; and Creative Fireworks, where they compete for the best themes and expressive displays

within a 2.5 minute time limit. Judging methods differ for each division, and fireworks are judged from multiple perspectives, including color, rhythm, 3D effect, and composition. I’m sure you’ll thoroughly enjoy the expert skill and attention to detail that goes into each one of these fireworks.”

Both the competition and the Taikai Teikyo Hanabi at the end of the event are very worth seeing.

“The Taikai Teikyo Hanabi (Fireworks Provided by the Event Hosts), jointly produced by four local companies in Omagari, is a massive starmine that lasts about six minutes. These fireworks stretch about 900 meters wide, which is even beyond the field of vision from the venue. Another highlight of the festival is the exchange of yells, in which spectators wave lights to express their appreciation of the pyrotechnicians at the end of the event,” says Motegi.

Motegi especially wants visitors from overseas to experience the uniquely Japanese artistry that combines delicacy with precision.

“I think that Japanese delicacy and aesthetics are unique and differ from those of fireworks in other countries. Also, since this is a competition, each firework ball is launched with excellent precision, and shows its beautiful ball shape when shot up into the sky. Bouncing back from Covid-19 cancellations, this year the festival will be held normally for the first time in four years. I hope you get to experience the amazing fireworks that can only be seen at the Omagari Fireworks Festival. 🎆



A scene from the Taikai Teikyo Hanabi, which is also known for its innovative presentation.

Left page
Above: The grand finale of the festival.

Below: The highlight is a flurry of fireworks called “Taikai Teikyo Hanabi” (“Fireworks Provided by the Event Hosts”).

1. Shin-iri Warimono is a chrysanthemum-shaped firework that forms a concentric perfect circle. The core is the petal that is placed inside the outer petal, which is called *oyaboshi* parent star. By placing the core, the fireworks open double. This year’s competition is open to Warimono fireworks with 30 or more cores that form a circle with four or more layers.

Textile Thanksgiving — The Ichinomiya Tanabata Festival



Photo: PKYTA

The Tanabata legend came from the Milky Way Galaxy that hangs in the summer sky.

In Japan, the Tanabata festival, which originated as a star festival, is held around the country during summer. The Textile Thanksgiving — Ichinomiya Tanabata Festival held in the city of Ichinomiya in Aichi Prefecture is especially popular. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

Since ancient times, a star festival called Tanabata Matsuri has been celebrated in Japan, based on a legend from ancient China that tells of the stars *Kengyusei* (Altair in the constellation Alpha Aquila) and *Shokujosei* (Vega in the constellation Alpha Lyra), which are on opposite sides of the Milky Way and only meet once a year, on the evening of the 7th day of the 7th month of the Japanese Lunisolar Calendar. In Japan, Altair is called Hikoboshi and Vega is called Orihime.

According to the legend, Hikoboshi, a heavenly cowherd, and Orihime, a heavenly weaver, fell in love and then neglected their respective jobs. Since the Orihime stopped weaving, the loom filled up with dust, and the heavens no longer received new fabrics.

This angered the heavenly emperor Tentei, who separated the two lovers and only allowed them to cross the Milky Way and meet once a year, on the night of July 7. Based on this legend, in Japan on July 7 (Tanabata day), the day when the two stars meet, the cus-



The magnificent Tanabata decorations at Masumida Shrine are a highlight of the festival.



One of Japan's most famous Tanabata festivals

Photo: Ichinomiya Tanabata Matsuri Promotion Council

tom of people praying to the stars by hanging strips of paper on bamboo trees or bamboo grasses to pray for their children's academic and artistic improvement is said to have caught on, and developed into the Tanabata festival.

Even today, a variety of Tanabata festivals are held in summer throughout Japan. One of the most famous ones, which is very closely associated with Orihime, is the Textile Thanksgiving – Ichinomiya Tanabata Festival held in the city of Ichinomiya in Aichi Prefecture.

We asked a person at the Ichinomiya Tanabata Matsuri Promotion Council Secretariat about the history of the festival.

“The Textile Thanksgiving – Ichinomiya Tanabata Festival began about 70 years ago, in 1956, in honor of Orihime, who was in charge of weaving in heaven. It is said that the textile industry in the region grew thanks to the blessing of the goddess of textiles, the mother goddess of the deity enshrined at Masumida Shrine in Ichinomiya. At first, the festival was held mainly at shrines, but today it also includes dance contests, Bon Odori dancing, and other events for both children and adults. However, the traditional Onzohoken Daigyoretsu parade, a custom since the beginning of the festival, continues to be held today.”

Onzohoken Daigyoretsu (Grand Procession of Woolen Offerings) is a 120-meter procession of 120 people dressed in an array of traditional costumes, including Shinto priests and warriors, to thank the

god of textiles and to dedicate woolen items to the shrine. At this event, you can see many different kinds of traditional Japanese garment. Highlights including parades such as the Wasshoi Ichinomiya, where people dance along the route in freely choreographed

and costumed with an original theme song accompaniment, as well as the Tanabata decorations that lavishly and colorfully decorate the venues. The event drew about 715,000 visitors last year (2022).

According to the secretariat, “This year 2023, the festival held from July 27 to July 30, and one event that was so popular is the unique cosplay parade, in which people marched through the shopping district dressed as manga and anime characters. The general public was welcome to participate in the cosplay. One very popular activity for onlookers was to enjoy taking photos and interacting with their favorite cosplayers.” In addition to the

Cosplay Parade, people were also free to join in the Bon Odori dancing. If you have a chance, we recommend you enjoy not only seeing the gorgeous Tanabata decorations, but also experience a Japanese Tanabata Festival firsthand. 📷



Above: Onzohoken Daigyoretsu, a traditional procession that has been held since the beginning of the festival.

Below: The Cosplay Parade — a festival highlight

1. Before it adopted the solar calendar, Japan used a lunisolar calendar, which was based on the phases of the moon along with the movement of the sun, which indicates the seasons. However, Japan's lunisolar calendar was created using merely one of many calendar calculation methods that have been used throughout history. The so-called Tenpo calendar that was in use just before the change to the solar calendar is generally referred to as the Japanese Lunar Calendar.
2. According to shrine legend, Masumida Shrine was established in the 33rd year of Emperor Jinmu (circa 630 B.C.). Its deity is AmenoHoakari-no-mikoto and its mother goddess is Yorozuhatatoyo Akitsushihime-no-mikoto.

Refreshing Kyoto-style Summer Confectionery

In Kyoto, where the summer heat and humidity are particularly severe, a style of *wagashi* (Japanese confectionery) that conveys a sense of coolness has become a seasonal tradition. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



Ajisai (“Hydrangea”) made of sweet potato mash colored in refreshing color tone and decorated with agar drops that resemble sparkling rain.

Kyo-gashi is a traditional style of Japanese sweets that originates in Kyoto. Each variety is characterized by a name, called “*mei*,” which is very important according to Yamaguchi Shoji of Kyogashi Tsukasa Suetomi, a famous confectionary shop in Kyoto. The names, which are based on *kigo* (seasonal words)¹ and *utamakura* (lit. “poem pillows”)², connect the sweets to ancient Japanese traditions and culture.

“*Kyo-gashi* do not only taste delicious,” says



Natsukodachi (lit. “a grove of trees growing in summer”), a summer-themed sweet made with *kuzu* agar that reflects the lush green vitality of trees.

Yamaguchi, “but also express a sense of the season through their name, color, and shape. When served as part of a tea ceremony, sweets convey the welcoming spirit of the host. Kyoto is located in a basin surrounded by mountains, so in summer hot air is easily trapped over the city, bringing particularly warm and humid weather. In order to relieve the heat as much as possible, it is customary to serve sweets that evoke a cooling sensation. For instance, *natsukodachi* (see photo), a type of *jo-namagashi*³ (elegant soft sweets freshly made with high-quality ingredients) derives its name from a summer seasonal word. First, the name of the sweet invites imagination of a grove that casts a cool shade even in summer. Next, the sweet’s own color and shape freely expand the visual image. The *natsukodachi* confectionery is made with green bean



The exterior of the main store of Suetomi, a venerable Kyoto confectionery maker that cherishes the sense of season and the traditions of Kyoto-style sweets.

Photo: Kyogashi Tsukasa Suetomi



Tanabata fresh confectionery sprinkled with Tanabata paper strips and stars, typically served in July (for Tanabata decorations, see page 14).



Sawabe no Hotaru (lit. "Fireflies near a water stream"). The jade-colored bean jam resembles a water plant, while the black azuki beans are made to look like fireflies.



Kuzu yaki (baked *kuzu* sweets). The use of *kuzu* agar evokes a cooling sensation.

paste, which represents the lush vitality of tree leaves. The paste is further wrapped in jelly-like *kuzu* agar⁴, creating the image of sunlight streaming through the trees and a gentle wind. The act of slowly savoring the sweet invokes the sensation of strolling through a verdant forest under a cooling wind."

"The best way to enjoy *kyogashi* sweets is to serve them in a ware that matches their name, color, and shape, and to enjoy them with the eyes first," Yamaguchi says. "In summer, glassware creates a cooling impression. After enjoying the sweets visually, taste them, and savor their aroma and gentle sweetness. Served with powdered green tea, the sweets taste even lighter and more refreshing, and will make you forget the summer heat for a while."


According to Yamaguchi, the appeal of *kyogashi* lies in the fact that they embody the essence of the four seasons of Kyoto.

"The change of designs and names depending on the season is a unique feature of Kyoto-style confectionery. Designs are inspired by the beauty of nature embodied in seasonal flowers, birds, winds, and the moon, as well as by the combination of colors created through the layering of garments⁵ in the costumes of court ladies in the Heian period (794 - the end of the 12th century), when the dynasty culture was in full bloom. Furthermore, the act of naming the sweets in a manner that matches the designs adds a playful sense of seasonal changes and literary elements that were highly-valued by the refined court nobility, thus creating a deep and complex world view."

The summer *kyogashi* sweets created by Suetomi are truly an embodiment of the ancient Kyoto traditions that can be traced back to the dynasty culture.

"Making sweets with *kuzu* agar in the summer is an old tradition at Suetomi. The translucency, elasticity, and surprisingly soft texture and refreshing sensation of *kuzu* agar in the mouth make such sweets particularly delicious during the hot season."

Summer *kyogashi* overflow with delightful creativity that is unique to Kyoto. Yamaguchi hopes that visitors from overseas, too, will enjoy the experience of cooling off with these sweets.

"Just as Japanese people eat sweets with Japanese tea, visitors to Kyoto from overseas should feel free to enjoy the delectable variety of *kyogashi* with a cup of coffee or black tea." 



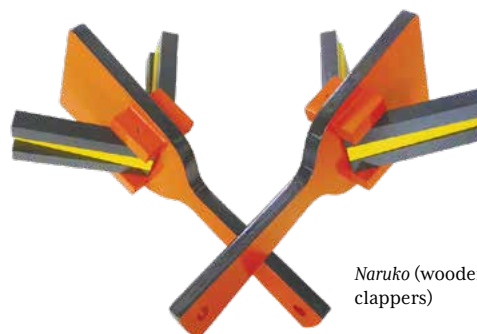
Yamaguchi Shoji explained for us the essence of *kyogashi*

1. Words or phrases associated with a particular season, used in traditional forms of Japanese poetry, such as *renga* (linked verse), *haikai* (an informal type of linked verse), and *haiku*.
2. Names of places, with which specific images have been traditionally associated with *waka*, an ancient Japanese fixed form poetry. In a broad sense, *utamakura* could also refer to words and themes used in *waka* poetry.
3. Also called *omogashi* ("main sweets") in tea ceremony. *Namagashi* are a category of moist and soft freshly-made Japanese sweets that do not keep long. The type of *namagashi*, in which master confectioners apply extraordinary craftsmanship to recreate a seasonal feeling, are called *jo-namagashi* (lit. "superior soft sweets").
4. A perennial vine that belongs to the genus *Pueraria* of Leguminosae. In Japan, its roots are used to make *kuzu* powder and oriental herbal medicines.
5. See "Kimono Combinations: The Seasons in Layers of Silk" in the October 2020 issue of *Highlighting Japan*

Reference: https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hji/html/202010/202010_06_en.html

Yosakoi

— A Captivating, High-Energy Dance



Naruko (wooden clappers)

The four-day Yosakoi Festival, which is held each year in Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture, kicks off on Festival Eve, August 9. We interviewed Kenichi Takeishi of the Yosakoi Festival Promotion Association about the festival, which draws about one million visitors each time it is held. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

The Yosakoi Festival is a spectacular and large-scale summer festival in Kochi Prefecture, with a total of more than 18,000 dancers from roughly 160 teams who dance wildly while beating small wooden clappers called *naruko*. It begins on August 9 with a Festival Eve celebration and a fireworks show, followed by the main events on August 10-11, then the national competition and closing celebration on August 12. Every one of these events is

action-packed, like a huge carnival.

The Yosakoi Festival got its start in 1954 as a proposal from the Kochi Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The first festival featured dances based on a traditional Japanese dance to the tune of “Yosakoi Naruko Odori” (which is based on the folk song “Yosakoi Bushi,” and still the designated song of the festival), but the dances and the music have evolved and diversified over the years. The music has developed



After a four-year interval, the Yosakoi Festival is coming back in 2023, and the locals are getting excited about it.

from the traditional sound, with more rock and other styles emerging today, and hairstyles and costumes also became flashier. Choreography has also become more creative, with each team borrowing elements from samba, rock, etc., to create its own style.

We asked about the origin of the words “Yosakoi” and “Yosakoi Bushi.”

“The word ‘Yosakoi’ itself is said to have come from ‘yoi-sho-koi,’ a Japanese shout of encouragement. There are also various theories, including one that the song “Yosakoi Bushi” is a variation of “Kiyari Bushi,” a melody that was sung at the time the Tosa Clan built Kochi Castle in the early 17th century.”

The song “Yosakoi Bushi” is marked by the sound of the *naruko*, a musical instrument. The *naruko* is a tool used to drive away wild birds during the harvest season to protect grains from being eaten by them. The creator of the Yosakoi Naruko Odori dance incorporated the sound of the *naruko* into it, and the dance eventually developed into the rhythmical dances of today.

During the festival, visitors can watch the dances at 17 venues around Kochi City. If you want to get a better look at the dances, we recommend going to see them

at the Otesuji Headquarters Performance Hall (there is a fee). Here you can enjoy these powerful dances up close. Since most of the venues are free of charge, it’s also a good idea to stroll around the city and enjoy various dances on stage or in the streets while taking in the atmosphere.

“This summer marks the 70th Yosakoi Festival. Spectators will find it exciting to compare each team’s elaborate *jikatasha*,¹ and the passion and power the dancers put into their Yosakoi dances, including the original songs, glittering costumes, and choreography enhanced with *naruko*, says Takeishi. He adds, “Kochi Prefecture has a Yosakoi Ambassador certification system for representatives of teams dancing Yosakoi outside Japan, and 65 ambassadors from 23 teams in 19 countries are scheduled to participate in this year’s festival.” The organizers hope as many people as possible will have the chance to experience the charm of this hugely popular festival, which also includes international highlights from many different countries. 📷

1. A vehicle that leads the way for the dancers and plays music with onboard sound equipment to guide the team. Each team decorates their vehicle elaborately in their own unique way.



Above left: Teams also come from outside Japan to participate, like this team from Poland in 2019.

Above Right: Here is one of the *jikatasha*, vehicles with original decorations that add a touch of color to the festival.

Below: At the Yosakoi Festival, you will enjoy each team’s creative ideas for costumes and dancing.

Mystical photographic work capturing the glowing lights produced by Hime fireflies, which inhabit bamboo thickets.

Fireflies Glowing Faintly in Nighttime Satoyama Scenes

Nomiyama Kei, a photographer who captures wondrous scenes of countless fireflies floating through summertime *satoyama*¹ environments, spoke with us about the charms of these luminescent insects.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

Nomiyama Kei photographs fireflies, mainly in Shikoku.² While researching environmental pollution as an associate professor at the Ehime University Center for Marine Environmental Studies, he is also a talented, award-winning photographer with a history of many accomplishments. Among these, he was named a Photographer of the Year in the Sony World Photography Awards, the largest competition of its kind in the world, and a first for a Japanese photographer.

Nomiyama Kei began photographing fireflies around 2016, a practice he took up after first shooting photos of fireflies at a site famous for seeing them, located near a diving spot where he went to enjoy his hobby of scuba diving.

“Photographing fireflies involves using techniques to incorporate elements that may be difficult to see with the naked eye into the image. I felt that the finished work by using these techniques had the chance

to more powerfully present the appeal of nature as found in the familiar *satoyama* environments all around us. After that, I started visiting a wide range of locations, mainly around Shikoku.”

In late May on Shikoku, the luminescent glows of Genji fireflies³ can be seen all around the clear-flowing streams and rivers, including the Shimanto River, that they inhabit.

“To capture the luminescence of fireflies in a night scene, I will take a series of shots of 15 to 20 seconds each, with a total exposure time of around 20 minutes, and use a brightness-comparison image-overlaying method⁴ to create a single composite image from them. Fireflies synchronize their flashing with others next to



Nomiyama Kei in a recent portrait.



Above: Beautiful light of fireflies reflected on the water's surface. Photographed along the Nakasuji River in Kochi Prefecture.

Below left: Genji fireflies emitting light as they mate.

Below right: Photographic work shot near a bridge designed to be underwater during a flood, spanning the Shimanto River basin, a famous firefly-viewing spot.



them, so their light tends to exhibit slow, wave-like motion. The photographic image makes it look as if they have all been illuminated at once, presenting a different scene than the impression you get seeing them in person with the naked eye.”

Nomiyama's photos always show the *satoyama* environments that the fireflies inhabit.


“It feels extremely important to me to incorporate into the work a sense of the environmental conditions in which the fireflies act, for instance by including the look of the forests, rivers, ground surfaces, and so on that the fireflies need for their habitat, for example.”

The environments in which they develop hold particularly vital significance, he says, for forest-dwelling Hime fireflies.⁵

“Since female Hime fireflies have degenerate wings and can't fly, they never move from the forests where they have hatched and developed. Ordinarily, individual species will adopt survival strategies according to the environmental changes—ways to spread their genes further away—but Hime fireflies lack that ability. They could be at risk of extinction in certain scenarios because of that, so it's particularly vital to protect the forests that these fireflies make their homes.”

Nomiyama hopes that his work might convey a sense of the rich abundance of nature in Shikoku, and even the history of *satoyama* environments, which involves both people and fireflies. He also has something he would like everyone to be sure to try out, he says, when they actually go firefly-viewing.

“When you go out to appreciate the sight of fire-

flies, I would hope that you take in the fragrance of the forest there, as well. If you experience the fragrance of the trees, of the grasses, and get a feel for the type of natural environments where the fireflies live, I am sure you will get a real sense of the importance the forests have. Also, I would like to ask that you try as much as possible to keep the use of flashlights and other intense light sources to a minimum during the hours when fireflies are glowing in the night., Actually, such actions will lead to help protect them.” 



A female Hime firefly that cannot fly due to its degenerate hind wings.

1. Also known as *satochi-satoyama*. Areas located between tracts of wilderness and urban buildup that consist of human settlements and secondary forests surrounding them, along with farmland, irrigation ponds, grasslands, etc. Such environments are formed and maintained through human interventions associated with agriculture, forestry, etc. (Ref.: <https://www.env.go.jp/nature/satoyama/top.html>)
2. One of the four main islands that make up the Japanese archipelago, along with Honshu, Hokkaido, and Kyushu. Home to four prefectures: Tokushima, Kagawa, Ehime, and Kochi.
3. *Genji-botaru* (*Nipponoluciola cruciata*), an insect found in Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Adults are 12–15 mm long, characterized by red thoraxes and posteriors that emit light at nighttime. Aquatic by nature, they typically glow during night hours around streams in *satoyama*-type environments from May to June.
4. An image processing method that involves making single composite images by layering multiple images, comparing the relative brightness of each pixel and selecting the brighter pixels for each. Often used in photographing star trails, fireflies, etc.
5. *Hime-botaru* (*Luciola parvula*), a terrestrial insect, a bit smaller than Genji and Heike (*Aquatica lateralis*) fireflies, which produces a flashing, golden light. Females are flightless, with degenerate hind wings.
6. Flashlights and other intense lights inhibit the reproductive behavior of fireflies.

A Summer Festival for Enjoying the Sound of Furin Wind Chimes

In Japan, when the season turns to summer, people hang small bells called *furin* from the edges of eaves, providing pleasant, charmingly refreshing sounds when the breeze makes them sway. Every summer, Okawachiyama, an area surrounded by mountains on three sides located in Imari City, Saga Prefecture, holds a festival to provide visitors and participants with the enjoyable tones of traditional porcelain¹ *furin*.
(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



Left: A Nabeshima ware wind chime, offering the high-pitched clarity characteristic of porcelain chimes

Center: Wind chime made of white porcelain with a clear or transparent look, featuring hand-painted designs with base colors of red, blue, yellow, and so on.

Right: A wind chime with openwork

Ceramics currently made mainly with porcelain produced in Imari City, Saga Prefecture are called Imari-yaki (Imari ware). Located in the southern part of Imari City, Okawachiyama is a center of Imari ware production, home to 30 potteries. Each summer, the village holds the *Furin Matsuri* (Wind Chime Festival). To learn more about the festival, we spoke with Hara Takanobu of the Imari and Nabeshima Ware Cooperative Association.

“During the festival, more than 1,000 wind chimes hang from the edges of eaves of residents’ houses, shops selling porcelain wares, and other places. The event gives people a chance to experience the cool, refreshing clarity of the chimes’ sounds. When we first held the festival in 2004, there were only a few types of chimes in use, but the number has increased year by year to where now more than 500 types are used.

While Japanese *furin* wind chimes can be made with a variety of materials, including metal, ceram-

ics², and glass, the chimes appearing in this festival are made with porcelain, a material using stones as its raw ingredient. A colorful variety of narrow *tanzaku* strips of paper hang from the chimes, and when the breeze causes them to sway, porcelain bell clappers called *zetsu* will make contact with the chimes, producing tones of high-pitched clarity.

“An interesting thing about ceramic wind chimes is the way each one produces a different sort of tone. Smaller chimes will make high-pitched sounds, and the tone of the chimes with openwork is much higher-pitched,” he explains.



Left: Okawachiyama area, surrounded by mountains on three sides

Right: Painting designs on porcelain wind chimes by hand

As porcelain has glassy base materials, it produces metallic sounds when struck. Accordingly, when made into wind chimes, it is said to yield tones with more of a cool, refreshing clarity. Many people attend the Wind Chime Festival with the aim of hearing such sounds.

The City of Imari is known as one of Japan's representative centers of porcelain production, and within the city, the area of Okawachiyama boasts a particularly special history.

The Nabeshima Clan that once governed what is now Saga Prefecture established a new kiln in Okawachiyama in 1675. Thereupon, they began to produce what was the finest quality porcelain of the time, making gifts for the Tokugawa shogunate, and producing wares for the daily use of the feudal lords. For this reason, among types of Imari ware, porcelain produced in Okawachiyama came to be known as Nabeshima-yaki³ (Nabeshima ware) after the clan name of the ruling feudal lords.

Even today, Okawachiyama is home to many potteries, applying new techniques as well as the traditional skills of Nabeshima-yaki, making it the center of Imari ware production. We asked Mr. Hara about the wind chimes that appear in the Wind Chime Festival here in Okawachiyama, a location with such a prestigious history.

“Most of the designs on the porcelain are hand-painted, a manual task that requires careful attention to detail. Wind chimes with openwork are also created” he says.

He also recommends paying attention to the timbral qualities of the chimes' tones to get the most out of the Wind Chime Festival experience.

“The tone of each individual porcelain chime is different, so it can be fun to try to find the chime that

makes you feel comfortable. Visitors also have the option of trying hand-painting chimes to make their own original wind chime. I hope people will make the trip here and experience the charms not only of Imari ware, but also of the scenery of this area surrounded



The 18th annual Wind Chime Festival (*Furin Matsuri*) will be held in 2023

on three sides by mountains and the cool, refreshing clarity of the chiming tones of *furin*,” he concludes.

Wind chimes created at over 30 potteries where the old traditions of the Nabeshima Clan's pottery are still carefully maintained, resounding with tones of cool, refreshing clarity in Okawachiyama, an area surrounded by deeply verdant mountains — a rich summer tradition that one would hope to experience to their heart's content. **▼**

1. Porcelain vessels are made with raw materials including powdered stone rather than clay and are then glazed and fired. The base material is generally white, and vividly colored overglaze enamels are applied that make effective use of this white base color. Ceramics, meanwhile, are fired using colored clay as the base material. The color tone of the clay then comes through in the fired pottery.
2. Pottery fired using colored clay as the base material. It is characterized by the way the color of the clay comes through in the fired pottery, the overall thickness it has.
3. A particular form of Imari ware, also known as *Nabeshima yoshiki* (Nabeshima style).

“Justice Affairs Diplomacy” Ministerial Forum
 司法外交関係閣僚フォーラム 6-7 July 2023, TOKYO



Japan Hosts the ASEAN-Japan Special Youth Forum for Promoting the Rule of Law

Recommendations presented at the ASEAN-Japan Special Meeting of Justice Ministers

The Ministry of Justice of Japan (MOJ) and the Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ) co-hosted the ASEAN-Japan Special Youth Forum for Promoting the Rule of Law (Special Youth Forum) to facilitate discussion on the rule of law among the youth in Japan and ASEAN countries. The two-day Forum was held on July 5 and 6, 2023, at the Hotel New Otani (Tokyo).

Overview of the ASEAN-Japan Special Youth Forum for Promoting the Rule of Law

This year (2023) marks the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. The MOJ and TIJ co-hosted the Special Youth Forum in conjunction with the ASEAN-Japan Special Meeting of Justice Ministers (AJSMJ). At the Forum, more than 60 youths (aged 18 to 25) from Japan, ASEAN countries, and Timor-Leste* gathered for a lively discussion in English on the theme of “Building Justice Literacy for Enhanced Access to Justice: the key to the rule of law in the digital era.” The outcomes of their discussions were submitted as recommendations to the AJSMJ.

Significance and Achievement of the Forum

The Forum brought together young people with diverse backgrounds and values from each country for a proactive discussion on “the rule of law.” Encouraging interest in and understanding of the rule of law among the youth in Japan and ASEAN countries is essential for sustainably strengthening and promoting the rule of law in both regions. This presented a significant opportunity to foster solidarity, dialogue, and mutual understanding, as well as to build partnerships for the future of both regions. In addition, as the Special Youth Forum was held concurrently at the same venue as the AJSMJ, the outcomes of the Forum were submitted to the AJSMJ as recommendations. This



ASEAN-Japan Special Youth Forum for Promoting the Rule of Law logo



The ASEAN-Japan Special Youth Forum for Promoting the Rule of Law is supported by the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF).



Presentation by the Co-Chairs of the Special Youth Forum at the “Justice Affairs Diplomacy Ministerial Forum“



Group sessions

encouraged youths to build not only friendly relationships with other youth participants, but also intergenerational relationships with the political leaders in Japan and from ASEAN member states, and thereby fresh perspectives of the youths were delivered to the international community. Providing these opportunities will help promote youth empowerment.

Future Prospects

The MOJ has been committed to promoting youth empowerment through the Global Youth Forum for a Culture of Lawfulness and plans to continue to host the Global Youth Forum in coming years. As part of its focus on the next generation, the MOJ has also proposed the creation of a framework for regular dialogue among young officials

who are the torch-bearers of our future in the legal and judicial fields from the G7 and ASEAN countries, which is called the “Next Leaders’ Forum”, at the ASEAN-G7 Justice Ministers’ Interface, and obtained support from each participating country. The idea is to strengthen solidarity between the G7 and ASEAN by providing periodical opportunities for dialogue among young officials of those countries. The MOJ will continue to work actively to ensure that members of coming generations share fundamental values such as the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights.

* Timor-Leste’s membership in ASEAN was approved in principle at the ASEAN Summit held in November 2022. The country is permitted observer status in ASEAN-related meetings pending full membership.



Participants at the Special Youth Forum



k o m e - k a m i

Paper Made with Discarded Rice Reduces Food Waste

As the staple food of the Japanese people, rice is produced throughout Japan, and many local governments and business corporations stockpile it for emergency use in times of disaster. After a certain period of time, however, the quality and flavor of the stockpiled rice deteriorate, making it unsuitable for human consumption, so in the past there was no other option but to discard it. Recently, however, a venerable paper wholesaler developed a technology that uses this unconsumable rice to make paper, a product of value.

Fukuda Mitsuhiro

The company that developed “kome-kami,” the paper made with discarded rice as part of the ingredients, is Papal Co., Ltd., a venerable paper wholesaler established in 1890 in Nara Prefecture. It used rice stockpiled for disasters that corporations and municipalities were planning to discard and rice that could not be sold due to unavoidable circumstances such as packaging damage in transit. Papal added this rice to pulp, creating a paper product that was launched on the market in March 2021.

One of the reasons for the development of this product was an aspiration to cooperate with the activities of food banks. A food bank is an entity that accepts from companies and other entities donations of food products that are safe to eat but cannot be put into circulation due to damaged

packaging, overstocking, misprinting, or other reasons, and provides them free of charge to facilities, organizations, and households in need. Food banks are active in various countries around the world. In Japan, several organizations launched activities at the beginning of this century.

In these circumstances, Yamashita Yu, Associate Professor at Shiga University and food bank advisor, and Yada Kazuya, a director of Papal, met in 2020. Through Professor Yamashita, Yada learned about the current situation of food waste and the activities of food banks, and began thinking whether his company could develop products that would help resolve this issue. Eventually, he came up with the idea of using rice that would otherwise be discarded to make paper. In Japan, rice has been used as an ingredient in paper making since ancient times because it could improve the coloring and elimi-



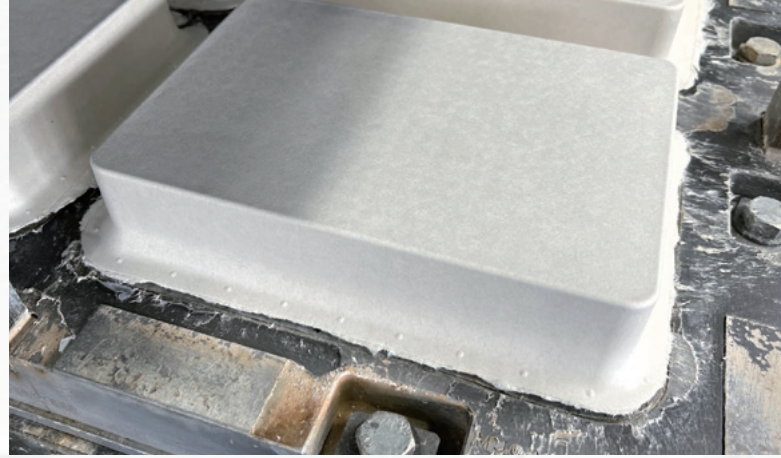
Foil stamping emphasizes the natural texture and luxurious feel of kome-kami BOX.



Foil stamped kome-kami BOX



Mixing pulp, an intermediate material for paper, with discarded rice



The smooth curves and surfaces of kome-kami BOX are finished by applying pressure at high temperatures,

nate blotches in *ukiyo-e*¹ woodblock prints. As time passed, however, rice was replaced by chemicals that performed the same function, and the technology died out. Therefore, the company had to approach the development of paper made using rice as a new challenge, starting work from scratch. It was a continuous process of trial and error. Starchy rice is highly viscous, so the pulp stuck to the paper machine, making it difficult to handle as intended. It was also difficult to achieve uniform thickness, and the paper sometimes had holes in it.

It took the developers of Papal more than a year to overcome these difficulties, and in March 2021 they successfully commercialized “kome-kami.” After further technological improvements, in May 2023, the company developed a new product with a seamless smooth surface called “kome-kami BOX.” It is distinguished by the rich feel inherent to paper itself and a soft, supple texture derived from rice. The natural white color of the box is reminiscent of glossy rice and provides a beautiful background that brings out the characteristics of the items placed inside it. The company calls these products “food-waste paper,” expressing its wish to eliminate food waste directly and also to support initiatives to eliminate food waste by converting the cost of disposal into value. One percent of all kome-kami sales are returned in the form of donations to food banks. Papal’s idea is to use kome-kami to promote the ancient Japanese spirit of “mottainai” (a term that conveys a sense of regret over waste), thereby encouraging people to change their

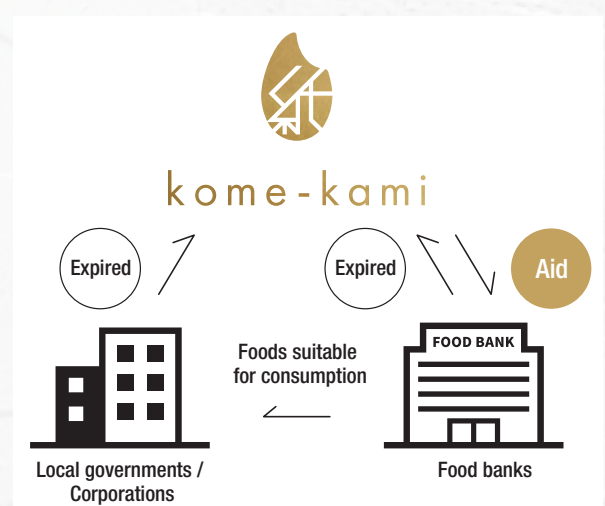
individual behavior, and aiming to further reduce food waste. Companies that share this mentality use kome-kami for packaging, business cards, pamphlets, etc. Through their efforts, the applications of kome-kami keep expanding.

This is a shift from recycling to upcycling. A material that otherwise would have been discarded is processed, has its design properties and practical applicability improved, and eventually is transformed into a new product. Another advantage of this process is that, by utilizing as much of the available material as possible and converting it into a new product, upcycling has lower energy consumption and lower environmental impact compared to conventional recycling.

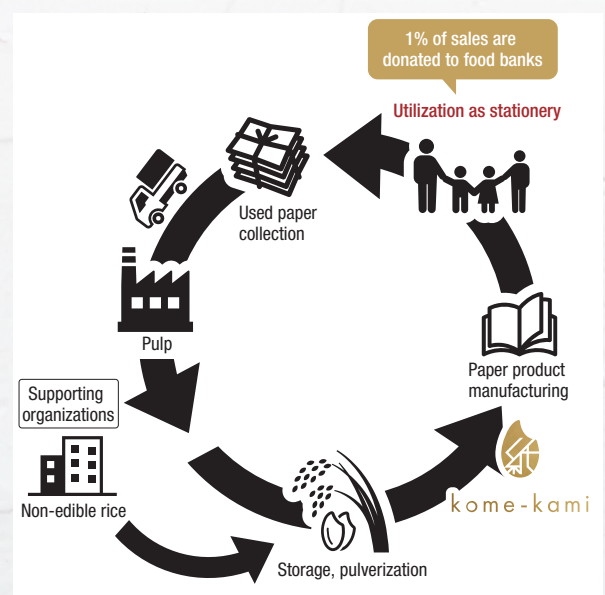
Papal’s challenging attempt with this paper has expanded to include ingredients other than rice, and the company has come up with new products such as “craft beer paper,” a type of craft paper made from malt lees discarded during the brewing of craft beer, and “vegi-kami car-

rot,” a paper material made using carrot peels. The company’s efforts continue under the concept of “converting all waste into products of value.”

¹ A style of Japanese picture art which flourished from the 17th through the 19th century. The main form of expression is woodprint.



Support for food banks provided by kome-kami



How kome-kami supports a recycling-oriented society



Massimiliano Sgai

An Italian Promotes the Appeal of Japanese Food

A street in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture

Massimiliano Sgai arrived in Japan in 2007. He has been active as a Japanese-Italian interpreter and entrepreneur engaged in coordinating business relations between Japanese and Italian companies. He is also popular for his social network posts and blog that promote the appeal of Japanese food culture in all its diversity: from traditional *washoku* cuisine to convenience store sweets.

Murakami Kayo

Massimiliano Sgai's popular social media posts feature ways to arrange the menu of a chain of Italian restaurants in Japan in an authentic Italian way. His nickname is "Massi." On his social media, Massimiliano talks about the appeal of fine food served at family-oriented casual restaurants and cafés that are familiar to Japanese people, while pointing out differences between Italy and Japan.

One of the features that Massimiliano finds most interesting about Japan is the ability of the Japanese to arrange and re-make existing things, for instance by modifying and improving foreign food to achieve something uniquely Japanese, or by adding seasonal touches to standard food to create a variety of limited-edition flavors.

"Take for instance the maritozzo,¹ which became very popular in Japan some time ago. Originally, it was a type of pastry found in Rome, Italy. Most maritozzi in Rome are simple, old-fashioned sweet buns filled with whipped cream, but the maritozzi I encountered in Japan were different. Various shops have added their own unique arrangements and developed novel and exciting maritozzi tailored to the Japanese taste, so in Japan people can enjoy a rich variety of this popular pastry. Moreover, they are all delicious. I think it is wonderful that Japanese people have the imagination to create new products by modifying the original maritozzo in ways that would not occur even to native Italians."

Massimiliano says that when he first came to Japan, he was amazed by kak-

igori² (shaved ice), a traditional Japanese summer treat.

"I was impressed by how delicious ice can be when it is simply shaved and drizzled with syrup. I was really amazed when I saw Japanese-style *kakigori* topped with red bean paste and *shiratama* (Japanese rice-flour dumplings)."

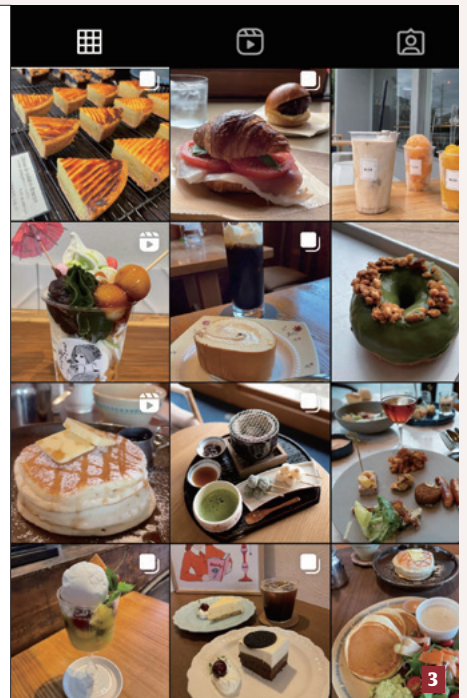
Massimiliano decided to specialize in Japanese language in university because he wanted to read Japanese literature in the original language. The company for which he worked transferred him to Japan in 2007. Later, he left the company and continued to work in Japan as an independent interpreter, supporting communication between Japanese and Italian companies. As interpretation work dwindled during the COVID-19 pandemic, he

1 A traditional Italian pastry with plenty of whipped cream sandwiched between bread. "Maritozzi" is its plural form.

2 A cold dessert made by shaving a block of ice with a special machinery and topping it with flavored syrup

3 <https://twitter.com/massi3112>

4 https://www.instagram.com/massimiliano_fashion/



- 1 In 2022, he published a book about the appeal of Japanese gourmet cuisine.
- 2 Massimiliano on Twitter³
- 3 Massimiliano on Instagram⁴
- 4 Maritzo, a traditional Italian pastry that has been given a unique remake in Japan with the addition of fruit and other fun ingredients.
- 5 Ujikintoki, a Japanese dessert made with shaved ice drizzled with sweet matcha syrup and topped with red bean paste

a second thought, such as sweets and snacks sold in convenience stores.

Ever since he was a child, Massimiliano has loved to eat. “Food is very essential part of enriching our lives,” he says. He continues to share information about food from his unique viewpoint, inspired by a desire to share with as many Japanese people as possible about his exciting experiences of encountering favorite foods in his favorite country, Japan.

Today, Massimiliano lives in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture. Historically, Kanazawa flourished as a castle town ruled by the powerful feudal lords of the Maeda clan. Nowadays, it is a large city with a population of 460,000 people (as of June 2023). The lords of the Maeda clan were patrons of arts and culture, and their impact is still felt today in the thriving traditional culture, the variety of delicious Japanese food, and the leisure flow of time despite the fact that Kanazawa has a vibrant urban atmosphere. Mas-

similiano is also engaged in efforts to promote these alluring aspects of Kanazawa together with the food and culture of Ishikawa Prefecture in general.

In 2022, he published *Italia-jin Massi ga Buttonda, Nihon no Kami-gurume* (“Japan’s Divine Culinary Treats That Astonished the Italian, Massi”), a book about the appeal of Japanese food. “I love writing as well as eating, so going forward I would like to continue to spread information that will help people rediscover the appeal of Japan,” he says, and, true to this words, his writing and ideas will surely continue to delight many people in the future.



Massimiliano (left) interpreting at a talk show with Italian guests

began posting on social media about his favorite foods in Japanese, which led to his current success. For instance, egg sandwiches, which are quite common in Japan, are a remarkable food for Massimiliano. He says that other countries, too, have sandwiches made using eggs, but sandwiches with eggs as the only filling are quite rare. “Egg sandwiches contain only eggs, yet they are so creamy and delightful! I hope Japanese people will rediscover their deliciousness.”

Massimiliano has a unique perspective from which he conveys his wonder and excitement about the delicious taste of foods that are so familiar to Japanese people that they do not give them



Nuihaku (Noh Costume)-Design of Lily and Court-Cow-Cartage Patterns of Brown Fabric

Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century (Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

Kosode of the Azuchi-Momoyama period differ from modern kimono in having narrower sleeves and greater widths. Those featuring patterns created with embroidery and gold leaf are called *nuihaku*, and these were worn by women from high-ranking samurai families of the period, as well as being used as *noh* costumes for female characters.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)

OYAMA YUZURUHA

Compared to the shape of the modern kimono, this *kosode* features narrower sleeves and a shorter length. This is a form of *kosode* characteristic of the late Muromachi to early Edo periods (c. 1467-1700). During this time, people wore kimono in a loose fashion with lengths matching their body heights, leaving arms bare from elbows to fingertips. Narrow obi sashes about 5 cm in width fastened their kimono, as is depicted in genre paintings of the time.

Lily blooms extend from the hem to the shoulders, making for a grand lateral expansion. Around the lilies appear a number of *Goshoguruma*, wheeled carriages for the use of court nobility, a quite unique design presenting a peculiar balance with such miniscule depictions of the carriages that they appear as if they might be suited for dwarves in contrast with the grand scale of the lilies. The *Goshoguruma* is a type of carriage that was used to transport members of the noble class during the Heian period (c. 794 to the late 12th century), originally drawn by oxen, and was known by the name *gishsha*, literally “oxcart.” By the final years of the Kamakura period (late 12th century-1333), however, it had fallen out of use, after which it took on the appellation *Goshoguruma*

Nuihaku (Noh Costume)-Design of Lily and Court-Cow-Cartage Patterns of Brown Fabric

The kimono is more than a garment; it is a symbol of traditional Japanese culture. The kimono of contemporary Japan originated with the *kosode* (a garment with small wrist openings) of the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century). Originally worn as an undergarment by the noble class before the advent of the Edo period, the *kosode* came to be worn as an outer layer of clothing in the latter half of the 16th century – from around the late Muromachi period into the Azuchi-Momoyama period.¹ The garments then came to be beautifully decorated with techniques including embroidery and *shibori*.² This article introduces a *kosode* from the Azuchi-Momoyama period decorated with a technique called *nuihaku*, which is used to create designs with embroidery and gold leaf.



Nuihaku (Noh Costume)-Design of Lily and Court-Cow-Cartage Patterns of Brown Fabric (detail)

Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century (Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

A section depicting courtly carriages features elaborate embroidery. The introduction of strong, twisted threads brings out textures with a greater sense of three-dimensionality in the carriages' *misu*⁵ blinds and cords fastened to them.



Iwasa Matabei's *Rakuchu Rakugai Zu (Funaki-bon)* ("The area in and around the Kyoto city," Funaki-version)

Edo period, 17th century (Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

Women walk through the streets of Kyoto wearing narrow-sleeved *kosode* fastened with slender *obi* sashes. Kimono with such forms were still worn in the early Edo period, around the early 17th century.

kimono are symbolic representations of the lives of elegant refinement led by such nobility of the imperial court.

The designs here have, in fact, all been produced with traditional Japanese embroidery techniques. Japanese embroidery is characterized by the way it highlights the luster of the silk threads, creating embroidered designs with virtually untwisted silk threads. The lily pattern here provides a shining example of these special characteristics of Japanese embroidery, with the white and yellow color tone of the lilies exhibiting a brilliant radiance. The carriage patterns, meanwhile, display a fairytale-like beauty, with each individual carriage depicted with a variety of different flora of the four seasons, embroidered with fine detail. At the same time, the realistic expression in which the cords fastened to the carriages are repre-

sented reveals another aspect of Japanese embroidery with the astonishing level of technical skill it entails.

In the background of the embroidery is a *tatewaku* pattern³ with delicate *katagami* (stencil-like "pattern paper") patterns expressed with gold leaf, though in its current state, this has been rubbed away so that only faint traces of it slip in and out of view on the garment. The method of using a small knife to carve intricate patterns and stencil-like *katagami* to express them in gold leaf is another unique Japanese technique developed during the Azuchi-Momoyama period. This superb example of a *nuihaku* garment, produced with masterful use of embroidery and *katagami* stenciling techniques of the time, was used by the Konparu School⁴ of Nara, the longest-established *noh* theater troupe, and has been handed down and preserved to the present day.

("imperial carriage") as its use was then restricted to transporting members of the imperial household who lived in the *Gosho* (Imperial Palace) on special occasions. The patterns on this

Honkan Room 9, Tokyo National Museum

"Highlights of Japanese Art: Noh and Kabuki – *Nuihaku* Robes: A Japanese Aesthetic of Silk and Gold"

Nuihaku (Noh Costume)-Design of Lily and Court-Cow-Cartage Patterns of Brown Fabric will be exhibited from August 8 through October 1, 2023.

1. The Muromachi period, broadly defined, corresponds to the years 1336 to 1573, when members of the Ashikaga clan served as shoguns at the highest level of the samurai government. Muromachi here is derived from a place name, the district in Kyoto where the mansion serving as the headquarters of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the third shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate, was located. Likewise, the Azuchi-Momoyama period was the period when Oda Nobunaga assumed control of the samurai government, followed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi; among various interpretations, one is that this indicates the years from 1573 to the beginning of the 17th century. Azuchi is derived from the name of Nobunaga's castle residence, and Momoyama from Hideyoshi's.
2. A tie-dyeing technique that involves methods like tying fabric with thread or securing it with implements and using resist-dyeing techniques to then color sections of it with dyes.
3. Patterns consisting of series of wavy, curvilinear stripes that resemble steam rising from boiling water, considered auspicious and representative of the way spiritual auras might rise. It was especially favored by court nobility.
4. The *noh* theater school with the longest history. *Noh* is a classical Japanese performing art consisting of *noh*—a theatrical form involving song and dance that reached its peak of development around the 14th century—and *kyogen*—a dialogue-based form of comic theater. *Noh* was designated an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2008.
5. Curtain-like blinds consisting of rows of thinly split bamboo or reeds woven together with string are ordinarily called *sudare*. These are commonly hung in places like the entrances to residences, providing shade from the sun and conceal house interiors from view while letting the breeze pass through. High-grade *sudare* with fabric hems are known as *misu*.

Komadori

Japanese Robin



All photos: PIXTA

The Japanese robin (*Luscinia akahige*) stands about 13–15 cm tall and has beautiful orange and blue feather. Its strong chirp is likened to the cries of a horse (*koma* in old Japanese), which explains the name, *komadori* (horse-bird). The *komadori* migrates across nearly all areas of Japan in the summer, preferring high-elevation mountain regions. Some of Japan's islands are also home to the *tane komadori* (*Luscinia akahige tanensis* / Izu robin), an endemic subspecies that does not migrate. The European robin, which is found across most of Europe is in the same family.

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