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**SEA BREAM:
JAPAN'S AUSPICIOUS FISH**

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The sea bream has been a very familiar presence in the Japanese people's diet since ancient times. As an auspicious fish, in particular, it is often served at festive occasions such as New Year's Day and wedding receptions. In this month's issue of *Highlighting Japan*, we introduce this fish that is so special to the Japanese people. You find the examples included its fishing grounds, how it is served in cuisine, traditional events featuring sea bream, and sweets shaped like one.



On the cover: Akashi sea bream is the highest grade of sea bream.

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FEATURES

Sea Bream: Japan's Auspicious Fish



Photo:PIXTA

A whole grilled sea bream prepared for an *okuizome* ceremony

The sea bream has been a very familiar presence in the Japanese people's diet since ancient times. As an auspicious fish, in particular, it is often served at festive occasions such as New Year's Day and wedding receptions. In this month's issue of *Highlighting Japan*, we introduce this fish that is so special to the Japanese people. You find the examples included its fishing grounds, how it is served in cuisine, traditional events featuring sea bream, and sweets shaped like one.



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Sea Bream—A Special Fish for the Japanese People

In Japan, sea bream (*tai*) is a favorite fish thought to bring good luck and one that is essential to traditional events and special occasions. Why is this fish so special? Dr. Yoshida Munehiro, professor emeritus at Kansai University and an authority on nutrition and an expert on Japanese food, explains.

What types of sea bream are found in Japan?

The biological classification for this family of fish is called *Tai* (Sparidae). Four species live in the seas around Japan: *madai* (red sea bream), *chidai* (crimson sea bream), *kidai* (yellowback sea bream), and *kurodai* (black porgie). Other than the *kurodai*, all of the other three have red bodies, making it difficult for the ordinary person to distinguish between them. The *madai* grows to be about a meter long, the *chidai* and the *kidai* grow to be about 30 centimeters. Most of the *tai* that is

typically available to consumers is *madai*, though *chidai* and *kidai* are also sometimes served at festive banquets because 30 centimeters is a good length for grilled fish served whole with head and tail.

The Japanese names for other fish outside of the *Tai* family can also include the “*tai*” element such as *amadai* (tilefish), *ishidai* (parrot fish), and *kinmedai* (splendid alfoncino). These are referred to *ayakari-dai*, and their names are thought to be based on the popularity (*ayakari* in Japanese) of *tai*.

What are the characteristics of sea bream?

All species in the *Tai* family are found close to land and do not migrate like bonito and other fish.

Because they do not have to swim long distances, they have less myoglobin, the red-colored protein that carries oxygen, in their muscles, so their flesh is white. *Tai* feed on small fish and crustaceans. Having relatively



Dr. Yoshida Munehiro
Special contract professor and
professor emeritus, Kansai University



MADAI

The most well-known of the *tai* fish

Photo: PIXTA

sharp teeth, *kurodai* and other species can even eat shellfish. The red hue on the body of the *madai* and other types of *tai* comes from the accumulation of red pigment from eating crustaceans.

Much more *madai* is raised on fish farms than caught in the wild. For this reason, *madai* is readily available on the market.

When did Japanese people start eating sea bream?

Madai and *kurodai* bones have been excavated from ruins dating back to the Jomon period (about 10,000 years ago), so we think that they have been eaten here for a very long time. The bones at the Sannai-Maruyama Site¹ in Aomori Prefecture were excavated intact and indicated that the fish was cut with a sharp blade using the technique we today call *sanmai oro-shi*.² The name *tai* appears in the anthology of Japanese poetry, *Manyoshu* ("Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves"),³ which was compiled some 1,300 years ago. There is also a description of *tai* in the *Kojiki* ("Records of Ancient Matters")⁴ from the same period, all of which suggests that Japanese people have been familiar with sea bream since ancient times.

Could you explain the reasons and history of how sea bream came to be such an ingrained symbol of good luck in Japanese culture?

The belief that sea bream is an auspicious fish seems to date back to antiquity, as far back as some 1,300 years

ago. The *Engi-Shiki*, a set of ancient Japanese governmental regulations, records the type of offerings made at shrines then. According to these records, sea bream and carp were presented at the shrine as a ritual offering to the gods at that time. In ancient times, *kurodai* was easier to catch than *madai*, so I imagine catching *madai*, which is much larger than *kurodai*, would have been extremely gratifying. In Japan, the color red has been believed since ancient times to ward off evil. This is another reason, I think, that *madai*, a large red fish with few small bones, came to be valued as a symbol of good luck.

Moreover, as the saying "It's still a sea bream even if it's rotted" suggests, sea bream is a fish with low levels of protein-degrading enzymes. This means it is less susceptible to spoiling than other fish, making it suitable as an offering at Shinto rituals and other special occasions. Even today, grilled sea bream is served whole with head and tail at traditional events such as New Year's, wedding receptions, and *okuizome* ceremony (see p14-15.) This is due in part to the fact that it is suitable for festive occasions since it stays fresh longer than other fish. In fact, it stays fresh so long that it has been customary to take sea bream served at a reception home as a wedding favor without eating it during the banquet.

Sea bream also has an extremely nice shape and a beautiful appearance, and this in itself makes a nice motif at celebrations, doesn't it? In some mountain-



CHIDAI

Also called *kodai* ("little *tai*") for its charming appearance



KURODAI

With darker scales than other *tai* species



KIDAI

Also known as *renko-dai* in certain regions of Japan

Photo: PIXTA



Grilled sea bream served whole with head and tail, called *iwaidai*, served at celebratory occasions

Photo:PXTA

ous areas where fishing for sea bream is not possible, people weave rice straw or other material into a sea bream shape to symbolize good luck. A more modern example is the sea bream -shaped *kamaboko*⁵ in Toyama. I've also seen sugar confections in the shape of sea bream given out as wedding favors.

Sea bream was a fish so special that was presented as an offering in Shinto rituals. When do you think the common people in Japan began to eat it? And is sea bream a favorite in regular households in Japan today?

It seems that it was not until about 300 years ago, when the political authority at that time, the Edo Shogunate, established distribution routes across the whole of Japan, that the general public had a taste of sea bream. To begin with, sea bream is caught mostly in western Japan along the coast of the Seto Inland Sea, for example, and even today western Japan dominates eastern Japan in the consumption of sea bream. This is partly due to tuna's rising popularity in eastern Japan since around the 1960s, with its consumption there greatly increasing ever since. Today, sea bream is consumed mostly in western Japan, which includes Kyushu, Kyoto, and Osaka, where it is cooked in a variety of different ways.

Can you tell us about sea bream-related culture, such as dishes or festivals and customs?

Sea bream has white flesh without a strong fishy taste, so it works well in many different types of dishes. Sashimi and grilled are the most well-known examples, but there is also *tai-meshi* and *tai-somen* (whole sea bream served on noodles). The traditional *tai-meshi* is usually made with grilled sea bream and rice cooked in *konbu dashi* stock. In Uwajima in Ehime Prefecture, though, *tai-meshi* refers to sea bream sashimi marinated in beaten egg, seasoned with sauce, and served



Photo:PXTA

Toyama Prefecture's sea bream-shaped *kamaboko*, given as a gift on celebratory occasions



Kodai suzumezushi, a dish developed to preserve fish. The name comes from the fact that the fish belly filled with sushi rice resembles a sparrow.

on rice.

Young *madai*, *chidai*, and *kidai* about 10 centimeters long are caught in large numbers off the coast. In many places in Japan, these are eaten dressed with vinegar. *Kodai no sasa-zuke* (pickled small sea bream flavored with bamboo) from Obama City in Fukui Prefecture is made with young *kidai*, while the fish used for *kasugo*, an Edomae-style sushi dish, is mainly young *chidai*. In Osaka, young *madai* is called *chariko* and is served as *kodai suzumezushi* (“small sea bream sparrow sushi”) after being dressed in vinegar. Another dish that uses *chariko* is the *suzumezushi* from Wakayama Prefecture.

In regions where people eat a lot of sea bream, the fish is something of a star player at festivals. During the Karatsu Kunchi Festival in Saga Prefecture, an array of floats⁶ are pulled through the street to purify the way before the *mikoshi* (sacred religious palan-



A vividly colored sea bream float makes an appearance at the Karatsu Kunchi Festival.

quin) proceed. Among these is the *tai-guruma*, a float featuring a sea bream motif. *Tai-guruma* like this were likely found in many places in the past, like Shimane and Niigata Prefectures. In Minamichita-cho in Aichi Prefecture, there is also a festival featuring only large sea bream floats (see p20-21). Interestingly, in Niigata, *hiki-chochin* paper lanterns in the shape of sea bream are wheeled through the streets during O-bon, an annual event for commemorating one's ancestors.

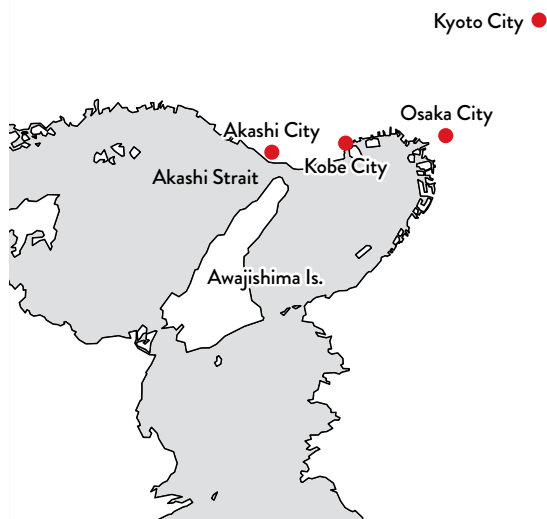
Sea bream has been considered a special fish in Japan since ancient times. Although the Japanese character for *tai* means “flat fish,” a different theory holds that the word originates from the Japanese compound *tai'i*, meaning “the king of fish,” while the word *koi* for carp comes from the compound *koi'i*, meaning “king of river fish.” Sea bream has been a highly prized fish of a distinct class, eaten on such important occasions as the Hochoshiki Ceremonial Carving held in front of the gods⁷ (a Shinto ritual to pray for good harvests and peace), as part of Imperial palace cuisine, and at celebrations including weddings. It is truly a Japanese fish of world-class status. [7]

1. The most well-known Jomon period settlement in Japan, it is a registered UNESCO World Heritage Site.
2. A knife is used to cut the fish along either side of the center bones, creating three sections—two fillets and the spine.
3. Japan's oldest extant collection of classic Japanese waka poems, dating from the late 8th century and containing approximately 4,500 *waka*
4. Japan's oldest history book, recorded in 712
5. A food made from fish paste that is seasoned with salt and other seasonings, then shaped and steamed or baked
6. Decorative carts brought out for festivals
7. See “Carrying on 1,200 Years of Japanese Culinary Tradition” in the June 2022 issue of *Highlighting Japan*

Japanese version
https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202206/202206_02_jp.html
 English version
https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202206/202206_02_en.html



A popular souvenir as a good-luck charm, this familiar local toy still retains the name *tai-guruma*.



Akashi Sea Bream: Japan's Most Prized Sea Bream

The Akashi sea bream, which is caught in the sea off Akashi City in Hyogo Prefecture, is one of Japan's most prized fish. Doi Yusuke, a member of the Akashi-ura Fisheries Cooperative told us about the appeal of this local delicacy. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

The Akashi sea bream is a red variety of sea bream caught in the sea off Akashi City, Hyogo Prefecture. The popularity of Akashi sea bream as a high-end fish is said to be due to the location of the Akashi Strait, which is right off Akashi.

The Akashi Strait has rapid tidal currents, which cause a particular ocean flow that brings nutrients from the depths of the sea up to the surface. These nutrients allow crustaceans, such as shrimp and crabs, which serve as sea bream feed, to breed in abundance, while the shallow areas form natural fish ponds rich with seafood.

The Akashi sea bream's reputation for great taste is said to be thanks to this diet and to the fast currents. These factors tone the flesh and give it a strong

umami.

Sea bream brought in at the Akashi port, in particular, are carefully handled one by one. They are processed in a special way that ensures that the fish is delivered to the consumer still fresh.

Because of its superb flavor and texture, Akashi sea bream is often served at first-class *ryotei* (traditional Japanese-style restaurants) and other luxurious restaurants. It is used in a variety of dishes, including sashimi and sushi.

Another reason for the popularity of Akashi sea bream is its beautiful appearance. It is often described as the "Queen of the Seashore" because of the blue makeup-like pattern over its eyes, called eye shadow, and its light-pink body spattered with dots of blue.



Akashi Port, where large numbers of Akashi sea bream are brought in

Photo: Akashi-ura Fisheries Cooperative

Photo: PIXTA



View of the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, which spans the Akashi Strait. The sea surrounding the Akashi Strait offers an expanse of rich fishing grounds.



Akashi sea bream at the Akashi Port, freshly caught in the nutrient-rich waters of the Akashi Straits

Photo: Akashi-ura Fisheries Cooperative

Akashi sea bream caught in spring is also called sakura-dai (cherry blossom sea bream), because of its beautiful pink tinge, which resembles the color of Japanese cherry blossoms in spring. The cherry blossom sea bream is prized as a good-luck charm.

The City of Akashi is famous not only for its sea bream but also for the Akashi octopus. Another local

attraction is the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, one of the world's longest bridges (3,911m). If you have a chance, visit Akashi and enjoy its selection of local seafood delicacies, including the famous Akashi sea bream, and its beautiful scenes overlooking the ocean. **7**

1. An approximately 4km-wide channel between Akashi City, Hyogo Prefecture, and Awaji Island



Sashimi prepared from fresh Akashi sea bream, arranged in its original shape

Photo: PIXTA



One of the characteristics of the Akashi sea bream is the vibrant blue pattern over its eyes

Photo: PIXTA

Right: Sea bream *otsukuri* (sashimi) presented like a work of art

Left: Sea bream *otsukuri* (sashimi) cut using the *hegi-zukuri* method, served around the year at Hyotei



Sea Bream Hegi-zukuri Style: Capturing the Spirit of Kyoto Cuisine

The 15th head of one of Kyoto's most famous traditional Japanese restaurants – which has been in business for more than 450 years – reveals the deep connection between Kyoto cuisine and sea bream.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

Akashi sea bream is the highest grade of sea bream.

In May of this year, the Akashi-ura Fisheries Cooperative awarded Takahashi and his father with the title “Sustainability Ambassadors” for their efforts in promoting the taste of Akashi sea bream around the world.

In 2022, the Japanese government designated Kyoto cuisine an Intangible Cultural Property, citing its role as a culinary tradition that conveys the significance of Japanese culture and its high artistic value as a form of cooking, presentation, hospitality, and food developed in the Kyoto area.

One of the most renowned traditional Japanese restaurants where visitors can experience the essence of Kyoto cuisine is Hyotei. In a serene atmosphere that evokes the long history of the restaurant, each dish is presented in a way that allows customers to enjoy not only the refined taste but also the beauty of the ingredients. Takahashi Yoshihiro, the 15th head of the family that runs Hyotei, spoke with us about the sea bream, an essential ingredient in the restaurant's menu.

“We use sea bream in the *otsukuri* served in our restaurant. In certain seasons, we also serve sea bream in grilled dishes and *takiawase*.¹ In spring, when they carry eggs, we use sea bream milt and sea bream roe in our dishes.”

For its sea bream *otsukuri* dishes, the restaurant uses only female Akashi sea bream (see pages 10-11) weighing between 1.8kg and 2.5kg.

“Until the generation before my father's, the restaurant used various types of fish to prepare *otsukuri*,





Left: A whole grilled sea bream. It is grilled over charcoal, but apparently it is extremely difficult to ensure that the fillets, bones, and head are all grilled evenly.

Right: The front entrance of Hyotei, a renowned traditional Japanese restaurant with a history of over 450 years

but since the years of my father, Eiichi, we decided that the fish for *otsukuri* would always use sea bream. This happened after an encounter with a *katsugi-ya*, or ‘carrier,’ who purchases Akashi sea bream from various fishing ports in the Seto Inland Sea in the middle of the night and transports it to Kyoto. Now, the best and freshest Akashi sea bream is available in a stable supply throughout the year.”

Hyotei also offers whole grilled sea bream served *okashira-tsuki* style (with the head and tail attached) for special festive occasions, such as *kanreki* (60th birthday) celebrations and wedding receptions.

“First, we carve out only the fillet of the sea bream and grill the remaining fish with the head and tail connected by the backbone. Then we grill a portion of the fillet with a sprinkling of dried mullet roe powder² and another portion with red perilla powder to create a grilled fish in red and white (a color combination used in celebratory occasions in Japan). Finally, we place the grilled fillet on the *okashira-tsuki* sea bream and serve it on a platter with red rice.”

Takahashi attributes the development of Kyoto's elaborate, sophisticated cuisine, which makes the most of the original flavor of ingredients while also providing aesthetic delight, to the natural environment surrounding the city. “Located in an inland basin, Kyoto was not blessed with ideal conditions to obtain fresh seafood,” says Takahashi. “However, due to its historical background as the capital where the Imperial Family resided for more than 1,000 years, Kyoto became the recipient of abundant food offerings from all over the country. This played a significant role in the development of Kyoto cuisine. Research on cooking methods to efficiently use the dried foods and *kobujime*³ delivered by ship, and knife techniques to cut the bones of *hamo* (conger pike)⁴ and other fish also flourished. Kyoto cuisine is a comprehensive culture born from the combination of various culinary styles, such as the cuisine of the aristocracy, Buddhist vegetarian cuisine, and *kaiseki* cuisine, which has its roots in the tea ceremony.”

Takahashi uses the metaphor of classical music, where even the same piece of music can sound different depending on the conductor's interpretation, to describe his hopes. He wishes his restaurant not only to preserve the traditional flavors that have been passed down through the generations, but also to provide customers with unique opportunities to enjoy culinary transformations born from the restaurant's own interpretation of ingredients, preparation methods, and the changing seasons. “Many customers are surprised to find that the sea bream they eat at our restaurant is completely different from the sea bream dishes they have had before. It is a special fish for the Japanese people, and I hope that visitors will try our Kyoto cuisine version of the sea bream, which is known as the king of *otsukuri*.” 



Takahashi Yoshihiro, the 15th head of Hyotei



Preparing sea bream *otsukuri*. The chef slices the fillet at an angle rather than perpendicularly, using a sashimi cutting technique known as *hegi-zukuri*. This technique preserves the texture of the sea bream in just the right condition: firm and pleasantly-chewy.

1. Fish, vegetables, meat, and other ingredients, each cooked separately, and served together in one dish
2. Mullet roe that is salted, then dried, and finally powdered
3. A traditional method of preparing food by curing it between layers of *konbu*, which infuses it with umami (savory flavor). Dishes prepared using this method are also called *kobujime*.
4. A species of eel that belongs to the *Muraenesocidae* family. It is elongated and cylindrical in shape, with most reaching about one meter in length. The fish has many fine and hard bones, so it must be treated using a technique called *hone-giri*, in which a knife is used to crush the tiny bones in advance.

A dish of a whole sea bream, *okashira-tsuki*¹ style, is an indispensable part of the Japanese traditional ceremony *okuizome* (literally “first meal”), which is performed on the 100th day after a child’s birth. Ido Rieko, a researcher in the field of folk information technology, explains the origin and meaning of this custom.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

Ido explains that *okuizome* is a ceremony in which the baby is imitatively fed for the first time. Performed with the hope that the child will grow up healthy and benefit from a rich diet, it is in prin-



Parents pretend to be feeding a baby, who has not even grown teeth yet, using chopsticks in an *okuizome* ceremony

Whole Sea Bream: An Indispensable Food in Japan’s Traditional *Okuizome* Ceremony



A whole sea bream (the grilled fish on the left) is an indispensable part of the meal, in addition to the staple *sekihan* (rice boiled with red beans) and the side dishes.



A whole grilled sea bream prepared for an *okuizome* ceremony



Preparing the *okuizome* tray (the fish-shaped object in the bottom center part of the photo is the so-called *hagatame-no-ishi*, or "tooth-hardening stone," which symbolizes a wish for the baby to grow strong teeth)



A family performs an *okuizome* ceremony to pray for their baby's health and happiness.

ciple a family ceremony, in which the baby plays the main part, surrounded by the parents and grandparents. The origin of this custom dates back to the Heian period (late 8th century to the end of 12th century). Since ancient times, Japanese people have considered food extremely precious, as expressed in the belief that "to eat is to sustain life." The ceremony has been passed down for more than 1,000 years to teach children the importance of eating with chopsticks through the *okuizome* ceremony.

According to Ido, it has also been called *hashi-hajime* ("chopstick initiation"), because parents use chopsticks to put food up to the baby's mouth.

The selection of tableware and food ingredients used in the *okuizome* ceremony also expresses a wish for the baby's healthy growth. Food is served in festive lacquerware in vermilion, the color of good luck and protection from evil. *Seki-han* (literally "red rice," rice boiled with red beans) or a bowl heaping-full of white rice, and a whole grilled sea bream, called "celebratory sea bream," are indispensable.

"Since ancient times, a fish grilled whole, with the head and tail attached, has been considered an auspi-

cious dish, based on the concept of 'accomplishing one thing from beginning to end.' The sea bream also embodies a wish for longevity, since they are known to live longer than other fish. Some live up for as long as 40 years. Furthermore, this dish also expresses a wish that, just like the omnivorous sea bream, the child will be able to eat anything," explains Ido.

In the traditional *okuizome* ceremony, a pebble or a substitute for a pebble is prepared along with the food. After the parents place food up to the baby's mouth, pretending to feed it, at the end they touch the pebble with the tip of the chopsticks, and then place the tip on the baby's gums several times. This is an expression of the wish for the baby to have strong teeth.

The *okuizome* ceremony is often celebrated by relatives and friends, in addition to the baby's parents and grandparents. The modern *okuizome* is an occasion for directly introducing the baby to people outside the home, and it is an opportunity to strengthen family ties. As an auspicious fish, the sea bream is a much valued symbol of this tradition. ㊦

1. A whole fish, served with the head and tail attached. A whole grilled sea bream, in particular, is a favorite celebratory dish in Japan.

A traditional wedding ceremony at Hotel Gajoen Tokyo, an integrated wedding hall venue pioneer.



A Delicate Sea Bream Dish Enhances a Japanese Wedding Reception

We asked the long-established hotel, which is famous as Japan's first integrated wedding hall venue, about sea bream dishes that are served at wedding receptions.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

Until the 19th century, Japanese weddings were typically held at home. The form of wedding ceremony where the couple's wedding is wedded with Shinto rites, then followed by a wedding banquet (called *hiroen*), began in 1900 with the marriage ceremony of Emperor Taisho, who was then Crown Prince of Japan, and Empress Teimei.¹



Tai-meshi is a particularly popular dish on the wedding banquet menu: a sumptuous offering of rice cooked with natural sea bream.



The hotel is situated in the heart of Tokyo, but its lush greenery delights guests.

Photo: Hotel Gajoen Tokyo

The *hiroen* is a festive banquet held after a wedding, and relatives, friends and other acquaintances are invited. The *kaiseki* cuisine served at such banquets is a simplified version of *honzen-ryori*,² the most prestigious of Japan's traditional culinary styles, which has been developed and refined since the 14th century. Like some other types of Japanese cuisine, *honzen-ryori* evolved from ancient court cuisine. Including sea bream on the menu as an auspicious fish is considered a long-standing tradition. In the formal arrangement of *honzen-ryori*, the main *zen* (a small dining table) is called the *honzen*, and rice, miso soup, and other dishes are placed on it. Festive banquets at Hotel Gajoen Tokyo feature *tai-meshi*, a rice dish with sea bream, which is equivalent to a *honzen-ryori* main dish.

Hotel Gajoen Tokyo was established as a *ryotei* (Japanese-style restaurant) more than 90 years ago, and it is said that its predecessor and roots lie in Meguro Gajoen, which is said to be the pioneer of comprehensive wedding halls in Japan. The *ryotei* tradition is still carried on in the hotel's wedding *hiroen* banquet menu, which now offers course meals with 8 to 10 dishes.

We asked Hotel Gajoen Tokyo's Public Relations Department about the hotel's cuisine.

"We painstakingly select the choicest ingredients from all over Japan with our guests in mind. We prepare everything by hand, from the *dashi* (soup stock) to the *tare* (sauce). In particular, our supervising head chef always checks the amount of salt, which is crucial to the taste of Japanese food, even on days when we hold many weddings, to ensure that high quality is maintained."

In addition to the food, careful attention is also given to the tableware and how the food is presented.

"For tableware and presentation, we keep in mind the color schemes and gorgeous touches that are unique to wedding ceremonies. We are especially intent on creating a memorable experience for the bride, the groom, and their guests."

The most popular and delicately flavored dish on the *hiroen* menu is the *tai-meshi*.

"The sea bream used for *tai-meshi* is completely natural. The day before the fish is used, we prepare it with

strong salt to remove odor and moisture. On the same day, we bake the slightly salted sea bream in the oven at 155 °C for about 15 minutes to lock in the flavor, and then cook it with the rice."

This venerable hotel's culinary spirit inherited from the *ryotei* (traditional Japanese restaurants) shows that the legacy of Japan's age-old food culture is being carried on to this day. This spirit is evident in *tai-meshi*. ■



A gorgeous shrine where the bride and groom, along with relatives, hold a Shinto ceremony.



A sumptuous Japanese course featuring such delicacies as *tai-meshi* (rice with sea bream). The second dish from the left in the lower left corner is *tai-meshi*.

1. In 1900, for the first time in the Imperial Household, a marriage ceremony was held in front of the *kashikadokoro*, which enshrines the Imperial Ancestor worshipped as a deity, for the wedding of Taisho, the 123rd Emperor (who was then Crown Prince) and Empress Teimei (posthumous title), and a banquet was then held separately.
2. The most formal style of Japanese cuisine, established in the Muromachi period (mid-first half of the 14th century to mid-late 16th century). The food is served on a *zen*, a small dining table on which several dishes, usually lacquered, are placed. The dishes are presented separately—from the *honzen* (the main *zen*), to *ninozen* (the second *zen*), *sannozen* (the third *zen*) etc., and are served to each person one by one.



Photo: Japan Sumo Association

Sumo Wrestlers and “*Tai-mochi*”

Sumo is said to be a Japan’s national sport. In one custom of the sumo, when a professional sumo wrestler wins a tournament, or is promoted in rank to Yokozuna,¹ he poses for a commemorative photograph holding a sea bream (*tai*). (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



Photo: Japan Sumo Association



The January, May, and September Grand Sumo Tournaments are held at the Kokugikan National Sumo Arena in Ryogoku, Tokyo. During a tournament, festive banners line the area outside.

Sumo is one of Japan's traditional martial arts, a sport with a long history whose origins are said to date back over 1,500 years. In ancient times, sumo was held as a festival ritual to foretell the crop harvest. In the Nara period (from 710 to the end of the 8th century), it was held at the Imperial Court in front of the Emperor. Thereafter, in the Heian period (end of the 8th century to the end of the 12th century), it became an annual event. Later, sumo was encouraged as training for battle by the samurai class, and the early modern period saw the emergence of professional wrestlers, as sumo became a spectator sport for the general public.

Athletic organizations for sumo wrestlers gradually formed along with modernization, and in 1925 a group that would become the foundation of the current Japan Sumo Association was established.

Today, the most prestigious sumo competitions held by the Japan Sumo Association are called by the special name "ozumo" (grand sumo).

Sometimes, sea bream plays an important role in *ozumo*. In Japan, it is considered an auspicious fish, and since olden times it has been given as a gift and used in celebrations to bring good luck. Because of this, there is a custom for special celebrations, for example, when a sumo wrestler wins a tournament

or gets promoted to Yokozuna, for one or two large sea bream to be prepared for him to hold while posing for a commemorative photograph.

In today's *ozumo*, six *honbasho* (grand sumo tournaments) hosted publicly by the Japan Sumo Association are regularly held. It is said that when the champion wrestler is decided, the sea bream is prepared by that winning wrestler's *heya* (training stable). It is also said that large fish the size of the ones that the wrestlers hold rarely appear among the ones sold as food on the market. Most of these are products of nature, and the large ones that look so splendid are thought to be especially auspicious.

It is said that this *ozumo* custom was established about 200 years ago. It is no wonder that in this sport that esteems style and formality, each custom is passed down with great care.

Mongolian-born Yokozuna Terunofuji is currently very successful. After the July tournament in 2021, he was promoted to become the 73rd Yokozuna, he posed for

his commemorative photograph holding two large sea bream. When he first began wrestling, he had smooth sailing up to the rank of Ozeki,² but suffered from a knee injury and went through a long period of setbacks. Terunofuji came through this and made a brilliant comeback, culminating in his ascension to Yokozuna. There is no doubt that the huge fish he held in each hand conveyed the desire for more and more success and health into the future. **U**



The champion of the 2017 New Year's Grand Sumo Tournament (held in January) was decided in the final day's bout. The winner was Kisenosato, who was promoted to Yokozuna (72nd).

Left page

Above: Mongolia-born Terunofuji holds two *tai* on the occasion of his promotion as the first Reiwa era Yokozuna (73rd overall).

Below left : Terunofuji receives the Prime Minister's Cup.

Below right : The bout that prompted Terunofuji to be promoted to Yokozuna

1. The highest rank for a wrestler. The currently active Terunofuji is the 73rd wrestler to reach this rank. Through history, not only Japanese, but also American-born (Hawaiian) and Mongolian-born wrestlers have held the rank.
2. The second highest rank, after Yokozuna.

Massive Sea Bream Floats on Parade: The Tai Matsuri Festival in Toyohama Harbor

The Tai Matsuri, or Sea Bream Festival, takes place every July in Toyohama harbor in Minamichita Town, Aichi Prefecture. Serving to pray for bountiful catches of fish and seafaring safety, the lively festival features processions of massive hariko (papier-mache) Tai Mikoshi (float or sacred palanquin), over 10 meters in length, along the seaside and through the town.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

Near the center of the Japanese archipelago sits Aichi Prefecture, which borders the Pacific Ocean at its south. Toward the western part of the prefecture, where its central city of Nagoya is located, the Chita Peninsula extends to the south (see map). At the southernmost tip of the peninsula is Minamichita Town, with a flourishing fishing industry, with catches of whitebait, Japanese sea bass, black sea bream, and gold-lined seabream that rank in the top class in all of Japan.² The town has seven fishing harbors, the largest of which is Toyohama.

The five districts neighboring the Toyohama fishing port work in cooperation to hold an eccentric festival called the Tai Matsuri, or Sea Bream Festival, every year. The festival is said to have begun about 150 years ago with a papier-mache mouse. Subsequently, a variety of different papier-mache shapes were added, from elephants to shrimp. At the dawn of the 20th century, the large sea bream

papier-mache *mikoshi* seen today came into prominence. Eventually, the style shifted to its present form, with huge sea bream papier-machemikoshi that travel around the town in processions, and even into the sea. The reason the *mikoshi* are shaped like a sea bream is that this festival is held to pray for large catches of fish. There is also a theory that the custom originated from the sea bream which depictions of *Ebisu*, the guardian deity of fishermen, often include.

Currently, the five districts neighboring Toyohama hold the two-day festival, competing to create large sea bream floats measuring from 10 to 18 m in length.

The festival is held at two locations in the town: the Susa district, which encompasses four wards,³ and the Nakasu district. Presently, the Susa festival takes place as the event for the local Tsushima Shrine. On the first day, they hold a ceremony that involves housing the *kami* deity in a temporary shrine called an *okariya* constructed near the seaside. A



Massive papier-mache sea bream created with bleached cotton wrapped all around frames built of bamboo or wood and decorated.



Along with the sea bream floats and portable shrines, young people perform with *taiko* drums.



The locals call this sea bream-shaped dashi float "Omoitsuki."

mikoshi portable shrine from the Susa district heads out to receive the *kami*, escorted by *tai mikoshi* sea bream portable shrine, and together they go parading about the town. The floats are heavy, weighing over a ton, and the sight of around 60 young people carrying them is inspiring. A fireworks display held in dedication presents a lively end to the first day.

On the second day, starting at 7am, boats tow the Susa district's four floats into the sea for a while. After that, the floats go parading around the town. Meanwhile, the Nakasu district's sea bream festival lasts for only one day until late at night, but it includes the procession of a sea bream *mikoshi* 14 meters in length. One of the festival's highlights occurs when locals pull the float into the sea with their own strength where it floats for about an hour. And an illumination of it at night presents a different appearance than during the day.

Taiko drummers who join the sea bream floats in the procession through the town contribute to the

festive atmosphere. While in the past it was children from distinguished families in the district who participated, today there is a lottery system in place. Another highlight is the extravagant costumes—some people say each one used to cost as much as building a house.

The Tai Matsuri, or Sea Bream Festival, draws large crowds of people who turn out for the lively spectacle of the sea bream floats. For the three years from 2020 through 2022, it was suspended due to Covid-19 concerns. While the festival is scheduled to take place on July 23 this year, 2023, apparently there will unfortunately be no procession of sea bream *mikoshi*. The day when the spectacle of their spirited procession can safely be viewed once again will hopefully return as quickly as possible. 📖

1. Decorative floats that appear in festival processions. They are made by applying many layers of paper and other materials to frames made of wood, bamboo, or similar materials.
2. According to 2014–2018 records from *Chita-gun Minamichita-cho Gyogyo no Gaiyo* ("Overview of the Fishing Industry in Minamichita Town, Chita District," 2020).
3. The four districts are: Nakamura, Torii, Hantsuki, and Tobu



An energetic dedication of a sea bream float at an *okariya* (a provisional shrine built to temporarily house a *kami* deity) of Tsushima Shrine.



A massive sea bream *mikoshi* from the Nakasu district seen floating in the sea in the 2014 festival.



Taiyaki

—Fish-Shaped Sweets Baked by a Venerable Old Shop

Taiyaki is a traditional Japanese sweets baked in the shape of a sea bream (*tai*). We talked about *taiyaki* with Kanbe Masamori, owner of an old *taiyaki* shop in Tokyo that attracts many customers from outside Japan.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)





“**T**aiyaki is made by pouring a batter made from flour dissolved in ice water into a special mold and baking it with a filling of sweetened red bean paste. The crust is crispy, with a texture that may be familiar to those from countries where crispy crepes are served.”

So says Kanbe Masamori, owner of Naniwaya Sohonten, a shop that has been in the Azabu Juban district of Tokyo for many years. Kanbe tells us that this traditional delight has been around for more than 110 years. On a busy day, he sells 2,000 of them.

According to Kanbe, the fourth-generation owner of the shop, *taiyaki* was invented by the first-generation owners in the early 20th century.

The first-generation owners were brothers from Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture. They started a business, and that became the foundation for the *taiyaki* shop. In 1909, each brother opened a shop in Tokyo, and Naniwaya's *taiyaki* became a big hit. At one time, they had as many as 150 franchise locations all over Tokyo.

Left page

Above left: The batter for the crust is quickly poured into a special baking tool (metal mold). (Each *taiyaki* is made one by one in this baking tool.)

Above right: The wooden molds used at Naniwaya Sohonten to make the metal baking molds used to make *taiyaki*. The molds that were used from the time of Kanbe's grandfather's generation were replaced by new ones made for Masamori's generation “to give it a vibrant, personalized look.”

This page

Left: Kanbe Masamori's grandfather, Genjiro Kanbe (back row, left), who founded the current Naniwaya Sohonten about 110 years ago

Right: Naniwaya Sohonten's sister shop opened about 100 years ago. At that time, the price of a single *taiyaki* was 1 sen.


“In those days, during the Meiji Era (1868-1912), wedding gifts included grilled sea bream, as well as sugared confections in the motif of sea bream, which was a luxury fish that people could rarely eat. I believe that Japanese people in olden times had more of a yearning for sea bream than they do today. I

think the first-generation owners, who had business smarts, invented these sweets in the shape of a sea bream based on the idea of offering sea bream that could be easily bought for 1 sen per piece. 1 sen from back then would feel like about 200 yen nowadays.”

These popular baked sweets with a sea bream shaped crust filled with *anko* (sweetened red bean paste) have been passed down for more than 110 years as a traditional sweets.

“At Naniwaya, we are particular about the red bean paste used to fill the crust. Since we care about the aroma, texture, and flavor unique to beans, we use our own homemade bean paste, which we cook in the shop every day,” Kanbe explains.

Another feature of Naniwaya's *taiyaki* is the crust, which is thinner and crispier than those of other shops.

“We use a thin crust to let you enjoy that bean paste flavor to the fullest.” When you visit Japan, we'd love to have you enjoy the taste of our special sweets.” 



A smiling Kanbe Masamori, owner of Naniwaya Sohonten, in front of his shop



Fukushima Institute For Research, Education and Innovation (F-REI) Established with the mission to become a world-class core center for creative reconstruction

Unveiling ceremony at the opening of F-REI (April 1, 2023; Prime Minister Kishida, third from right)

Photo: Courtesy of Cabinet Public Affairs Office

Today, over a decade after the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, the Fukushima Hamadori district¹ and other areas affected by the nuclear accident continue to face challenges, such as a shrinking population, lack of industrial leaders, and expansive areas of unused or underutilized land, caused by the prolonged evacuation. Working to resolve these issues, the Government of Japan established the Fukushima Institute for Research, Education and Innovation (F-REI) in April 2023 under the Act on Special Measures for the Reconstruction and Revitalization of Fukushima. This article presents the mission and future prospects of this newly-established special legal entity.

F-REI'S MISSION

F-REI has an important mission to fulfill: to become a world-class center for creative reconstruction that embodies dreams and hopes for the reconstruction of Fukushima and the entire Tohoku region; helps to raise Japan's industrial competitiveness to the highest level on the international stage; and contributes to economic growth and efforts to improve people's lives. F-REI's main focus is research and development; however, the institute's principal operations also include efforts for social implementation and industrialization of research outcomes and human resources development, as it looks to find solutions to challenges in Fukushima and the world. F-REI also plays a role as a cross-functional control tower coordinating the activities of research facilities and other existing organizations located in Fukushima.

F-REI'S ACTIVITIES

Under the leadership of Dr. Yamazaki Koetsu, F-REI President,² the institute will promote the following four areas of activities using an integrated approach: research and development, industrialization, human resources development, and control tower functions.

(1) Research & Development

F-REI will promote world-class R&D that will help solve problems in disaster-affected regions in the Tohoku region and around the world, and F-REI's second-to-none research will focus on the following five areas where Fukushima has a clear competitive advantage



F-REI Headquarters in Namie Town, Fukushima Prefecture

Photo: The Fukushima Institute for Research, Education and Innovation



Dr. Yamazaki Koetsu (left) pays a courtesy call on Prime Minister Kishida Fumio on July 22, 2022. (At the time, Yamazaki was a nominee for the position of F-REI president.)

Photo: Courtesy of Cabinet Public Affairs Office

Five Areas:

1. Robotics
2. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries
3. Energy
4. Radiation science, medicine and drug development, and industrial applications for radiation
5. Collection and dissemination of data and knowledge on nuclear disasters

(2) Industrialization

F-REI will establish a collaborative system between industry and academia to invest in F-REI ventures and conduct joint research with companies. The institute will promote participation of stakeholders from Japan and abroad by utilizing state-of-the-art facilities and demonstration fields, and fostering bold deregulation. F-REI will also engage in efforts to secure incentives for researchers through the strategic management of intellectual property, etc.

(3) Human resource development

F-REI will utilize joint graduate school programs to foster research personnel, and will collaborate with technical colleges. The institute will also provide important technical opportunities for students of elementary, junior and senior high schools to obtain first-hand experience in cutting-edge research and academic fields through implementation of visiting lectures in order to cultivate their interest. Furthermore, F-REI will aim to develop specialized technical skills for industrialization through professional education and recurrent education targeting corporate personnel and working students.

(4) Control tower

F-REI will organize a council and maximize its functions as a command post to coordinate activities implemented by existing facilities. In addition, the council will make strategic decisions on the allocation of research resources, execution of security measures, and on other critical topics from the perspective of economic security. F-REI will integrate existing facilities in Fukushima and consolidate budgets from the standpoint of accelerating research and streamlining redundancies.

ACTIVITIES TO BECOME A CORE CENTER FOR CREATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

F-REI will collaborate with local municipalities, residents, companies and organizations in a variety of different partnerships to ensure that the establishment of this institute will have an expansive ripple effect. As a wide-area campus for empirical research that encompasses activities within its facilities and beyond, F-REI is committed to becoming the “only place in the world for research, demonstrations, and social implementation,” and to disseminating information on a global scale.

These very important missions that F-REI undertakes cannot possibly be accomplished overnight. The institute will spare no effort to contribute to creative reconstruction by steadily accumulating positive results.

- Note:**
1. The Pacific Ocean coastal area on the east side of Fukushima Prefecture
 2. Yamazaki Koetsu, former president of Kanazawa University, was appointed the first president of F-REI on April 1, 2023. His specialty is mechanical engineering.

Fish Reefs Made of Reused Seashells Help Create a Rich and Healthy Ocean

A diver surveys the effects of a JF Shell Nurse facility installed underwater

A Japanese company has developed a technology to create rich, healthy fishing grounds by artificially building fish reefs from reused oyster and scallop shells, which until now have typically been discarded as waste. The use of shells allows the reefs to attract fish because of the abundance of microorganisms and seaweed that attach to the fish reefs and serve as food for the fish.

Fukuda Yasuhiro

The term “fish reefs” refers to rocky areas in the ocean where fish tend to gather. They are sometimes artificially constructed to attract fish, usually by sinking stones, concrete blocks, or abandoned ships. Katayama Masaki, President, Ocean Construction Co., Ltd., attributes the idea of using shells to create artificial fish reefs to his father and previous president of the company, Katayama Keiichi. When Keiichi was diving in the sea, he happened to peek under an oyster raft and saw that it was teeming with fish. Keiichi realized that shells attract fish, and came up with the idea of building a fish reef made of shells. This inspiration came to Keiichi in the 1970s, setting him on a long path of development.

When Keiichi visited university professors to seek advice on the

design and functional verification of shell fish reefs, initially he was not taken seriously at all. When he went to discuss his plan with the local government, he was rejected with the accusation that he intended to bring waste from other prefectures. Yet, even in this period fraught with difficulties, he gradually began to gain understanding by carefully persuading and explaining the plan to the concerned parties, and he made progress, step by step.

The first commercial product was not built until 1990, making for a long path indeed. It is called JF Shell Nurse. Its basic component is made by placing about 330 oyster and scallop shells into a mesh-like tube 15 cm in diameter and 98 cm in length, creating a case filled with shells. As an example, the standard fish reef model (6.0 model), these cases are attached to a shelf-like frame made of steel that is 7.7 m square in width and 6.9



JF Shell Nurse mesh-like tubes filled with shells



A shelf-like standard JF Shell Nurse installation (fish-breeding type (2.2 model))

m high,¹ just like the frame of a house. This size uses a total of approximately 1,040 kilograms, or 86,000 shells. Naturally, as a commercial product, JF Shell Nurse had to have a certain level of durability and be able to withstand 30 years in the sea. In order to verify the durability of the product, the company had to incorporate the opinions of experts in a range of fields, taking into consideration various factors, such as the corrosive impact of seawater. This is why it took such a long time to design and develop the product.

Although they took a long time to develop, shell fish reefs actually offer a number of advantages. One is that they enable the reuse of enormous amounts of shells that otherwise would have been thrown away, thereby contributing to waste reduction. Another is that the profits of fishermen increase because they can catch more high-value fish. A lot of high-end fish species, such as yellowtail, grouper, sea bream, flounder, and scorpionfish, gather around fish reefs made of shells, enabling fishermen to catch fish of greater market value. Furthermore, it has also been confirmed that 300 times more organisms that fish feed on gather on the shells of fish reefs, than on conventional artificial fish reefs, such as reefs made of blocks. In terms of fishing efficiency, results indicate that this technology enabled an approximately 150% increase in efficiency compared to conventional artificial fish reefs.

As these effects and benefits gradually took hold, the installation of JF Shell Nurse facilities became established as a public works project. Installation work has advanced with local governments placing orders for the facilities and the national government providing budgetary support. As of now, some 16,000 shell fish reef facilities have been installed in coastal areas throughout Japan. In addition, the company has expanded the JF Shell Nurse business into Mexico, where the disposal of shells was a problematic issue. This was the first business outside Japan for the company.



A school of Japanese rockfish swarming a shell fish reef



Large Ise lobsters living between shell shelves

Katayama Masaki, the current president, says he would like to further promote research and development of ocean-friendly fish reefs in the future. In Japan, the term *satoumi* refers to coastal areas where biological productivity and biodiversity have increased thanks to human interaction. Katayama says that he would like to expand this business in order to enhance *satoumi* and enrich the coastal areas of the world's oceans. He is convinced that the *satoumi* concept, which originated in Japan, a maritime nation surrounded by oceans on all sides, is an optimal solution for the world's oceans, which are facing the problems of declining fish catches and increasing pollution. This conviction



A compact JF Shell Nurse installation (Kaiso-kun)

is the foundation of his commitment to further promote the utilization of shell fish reefs.

¹ Dimensions of the standard 6.0 model. Other 6.0 models include the wide type (10 m square in width and 6 m high).



Katayama Masaki, President, Ocean Construction Co., Ltd.

Protecting Trees and Sharing the Joy of Living with Nature



Fujieda City, Shizuoka Prefecture

Photo: spyder / PIXTA

Joshua Calfo from the United Kingdom came to Japan in 2016 and began working in forestry in Fujieda City, Shizuoka Prefecture. He is now an independent arborist,¹ working in tree maintenance and landscaping, while striving to communicate the value of nature.

Murakami Kayo

“**E**ven though I grew up in the big city of London, I’ve loved nature and animals since I was a child. I’ve always wanted to live in the mountains someday,” says Joshua.

Joshua was working in London in the apparel industry, but decided to move to Japan when his Japanese partner had to return home. He arrived in Japan in 2016, and for a

while lived in Tokyo. Every time he made a weekend visit to the home of his partner’s parents in Shizuoka Prefecture, however, he was amazed by the rich natural environment, with the mountains and the sea so near. He spoke with his partner about his wish to live there, and, after getting married in 2017, they moved to Fujieda City in Shizuoka Prefecture.

After moving to the area, the cou-

ple set up an atelier in the forest and launched the apparel brand, Shizen Design, inspired by their hope to work in the fashion industry in a place surrounded by nature. They create shirts with motifs of flowers, trees, coral, etc., envisioning designs that will bring those who wear them closer to nature.

In the beginning, however, their income was low, so Joshua went to work for a local forestry company on the introduction of a friend.

“Once I started working in forestry, I realized that this was what I had always wanted to do. I get to spend every day in the mountains that I love so much, and I enjoy every aspect of my work: from seeing trees, rivers,

1. The term “arborist” refers to a professional tree expert, who has acquired tree climbing and tree aerial rescue skills, as well as knowledge of trees, and has passed certain certification exams.

2. Techniques for working in high places while supporting the body using ropes, anchors, and other devices



Joshua joined others presented a variety of landscaping techniques for *tsubo-niwa* (small Japanese-style courtyard gardens) at a gardening event for an area of 3.3 square meters held on the roof of the JR Shizuoka Station Building.



Shirts and everyday items with nature-inspired motifs



Joshua at work

and animals, to climbing tall trees and working on them. The views I get to see when I travel by truck along the mountain roads are amazing, too.”

In 2021, Joshua retired from the company he worked for, and launched his own business. He studied arboriculture, the technology for tree management developed in the US and Europe, which includes tree cultivation and diagnostics, as well as soil management. In 2022, became an International Certified Jugoshi Arborist®. Today, he runs an organization called Calfo Forestry, which cuts and prunes large trees using rope access² techniques in temple grounds, gardens and mountains. Parallel to this work, he also undertakes landscaping projects, inspired by the desire to be involved in caring for trees that are

close to people’s everyday lives.

“When I lived in London, I had to travel far to get in touch with nature. In Japan, however, you can reach the mountains on just a day-trip from Tokyo. I want to help Japanese people enjoy the nature that is so close to them even more, and to understand that each and every tree has value.”

The number of people working in forestry declines with each passing year. Appropriate mountain management, however, is crucial in order to build a sustainable society. Joshua says his goals for the future are to take on the challenge of qualifying as a certified tree doctor to further enhance his expertise, and to convey the value of nature and the joy of living in harmony with it.



Joshua Calfo



Formal Outer Kimono ("Uchikake") with Bamboo Curtains, "Kusudama", and Cherry Blossoms

An *uchikake* likely worn by a young woman who had married into a wealthy merchant family. Embroidery and Japanese *shibori* tie-dyeing techniques create a gorgeous pattern representing the *Tango no Sekku* festivities associated with Japan's Imperial Court.

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

OYAMA YUZURUHA

What vibrant colors! Dyed with safflower, a luxury dye in the Edo period known as *benibana-zome*, this *uchikake* is a *kosode* robe that would have been worn over the kimono beneath. The robe features thick cotton padding at the edge to make it easier for the hem to drag. The glossy *rinzu* silk satin damask fabric features a woven ground pattern of a crane, a symbol of longevity and good fortune, flying across the sky. The design is further decorated with cherry blossoms in full bloom among the clouds and *misu* bamboo blinds swaying in the wind.

Fluttering in the wind alongside the *misu* are *kusudama*, ornamental scented balls made of musk, agarwood, and clove wrapped in silk. The ornaments are covered with stylized flowers made to look like *satsuki* azaleas and *tachibana* orange blossoms, with irises, *mugwort*, and five-colored tassels² hanging below. On May 5, the day of the *Tango no Sekku*³ ceremony, *kusudama* were hung on *misu* blinds throughout the Imperial Court to pray for peace and harmony, and left on display until *Choyo no Sekku* on September 9. Ornamental motifs like these, representing the situations from annual events at the Imperial Court, were in fashion among townswomen, who adored the courtly life. Incorporating seasonal motifs into a single painting-like design, as this *uchikake* does, is a unique characteristic of Japanese kimono.

A variety of traditional Japanese

Formal Outer Kimono ("Uchikake") with Bamboo Curtains, "Kusudama", and Cherry Blossoms

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). This issue introduces a selection from the Tokyo National Museum collection of *kosode*, the everyday dress of people of all classes during the Edo period.

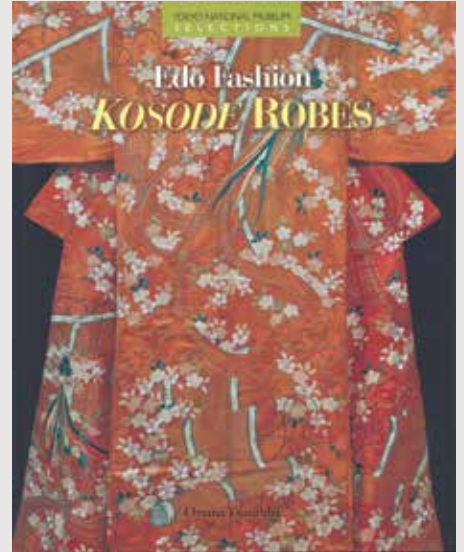


Safflower was used to create premium *benibana-zome* dye.

Photo: PIXTA

Formal Outer Kimono ("Uchikake") with Bamboo Curtains, "Kusudama", and Cherry Blossoms (Back)

Each small white dot is individually tied before the fabric is dyed in a process called *kanoko shibori*. This method, which became popular in the early Edo period, is known as *Kyo kanoko*. Embroidery in gold and silk thread add dimension to the pictorial pattern of the design.



Oyama Yuzuruha, *Tokyo National Museum Selections: Edo Fashion—Kosode Robes*, 2020, Tokyo National Museum

This book shows 54 of the over 300 Edo-period *kosode* robes in the Tokyo National Museum collection and introduces changing fashion trends from the times.

techniques were in fact used to decorate kimono in the Edo period. In addition to *kanoko shibori* tie-dyeing (see photo of back view), this *uchikake* also employs *washishu* Japanese embroidery, which saw dramatic advances in the Edo period. *Washishu* is most notable for its use of silk embroidery floss with very little twist, dyed in such colors as *hiwa-iro* (light olive yellow), *moegi-iro* (light green), and *beni-iro* (red).⁴ Stitches covering large areas of fabric are used to create patterns with dimension and texture. This technique gives the embroidery floss a jewel-like shimmer, highlighting the luster of the silk thread to great effect. Strands of gold embroidery floss—made by wrapping thinly cut strips of gilded *washi* Japanese paper around a core of silk thread to form a cord—are

individually stitched in place to create the pattern. This ingenious technique brings a golden glow to textiles that dyes cannot.

While the *uchikake* is very splendid in design, its short sleeve length indicates that it was worn by a married woman, as opposed to the *furisode* (long-sleeved kimono), which was

made for young, unmarried women. This robe was likely worn on formal occasions by the young wife of a prosperous city merchant. Having gained economic power in the Edo period, the merchant class proudly wore kimono that were more extravagant and lavish than those of high-ranking samurai or ladies of the court.

**The Art of Fashion
Japanese Gallery (Honkan), Room 10
Tokyo National Museum**

Formal Outer Kimono ("Uchikake") with Bamboo Curtains, "Kusudama", and Cherry Blossoms is on display until June 18, 2023. It has not been planned when this work will be exhibited next.

Ueno Park 13-9, Taito-ku, Tokyo

Opening Hours: 9:30 am - 5:00 pm

*Last admission 30 minutes before closing

Closed: Mondays (open on public holidays and closed the following day), New Year's holidays, intermittently as required

<https://www.tnm.jp/>

- Thin strips of split bamboo or reeds woven together with thread into a blind-like curtain called *sudare*, which are hung in front of house doors and windows. They function as sunshades or screens, while still allowing the wind to pass through. The high-end version of *sudare* edged in cloth is called a *misu*.
- Five tassel colors: blue, yellow, red, white, and black
- Sekku* refers to the day of the year on which the seasons change. The five *sekku* seasonal festivals that had been held since ancient times at the Imperial Court to ward off evil spirits have been taken up the general public, as well. *Tango no Sekku* is now generally marked as a day to pray for children to grow up healthy. *Choyo no Sekku* is also called *Kiku no Sekku* (Chrysanthemum Festival) and is marked by praying for good health and long life and a cup of sake topped with floating chrysanthemum petals.
- These are all traditional Japanese colors. *Moegi* is a bright green, the color of young leaves in early spring. *Hiwa-iro* is even brighter with stronger yellow tones, while *beni-iro* is a yellowish red.

Kiji

Pheasant



Pheasant (male)



Pheasant, upper body (male)



Pheasant (female)

All photos: PIXTA

Japan has its own native species of pheasant.* It inhabits plains, mountainous grasslands, and farmlands in various regions of the country. It can be seen throughout the year. The male is about 80 cm long and the female is about 60 cm long, and they are omnivorous. The brightly-colored male stands out even from a distance, while the female is subdued dark reddish-brown color. The pheasant has been familiar to the people of Japan since ancient times and appears in myths and stories. In 1947, The Ornithological Society of Japan declared the pheasant to be Japan's national bird, although this designation has never been legally recognized.

*Currently, both native and non-native species are present in Japan.

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