A 25-meter-long kite shaped like an octopus soars against the backdrop of Mount Fuji at the Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji.

Photo: PIXTA

Giant Kites Soar at the Foot of Mount Fuji at New Year

Kite flying, a traditional custom of the New Year, is considered a symbol of good fortune in various regions of Japan. We spoke with the organizer of a kite flying event held in the highlands at the foot of Mount Fuji to learn more about the tradition. **(Text: TANAKA Nozomi)**

Kite flying is a pastime where a kite, made by stretching paper or cloth over a frame, is lifted and controlled by the power of the wind. Kites have been a part of Japanese culture for centuries, with references to them found in a dictionary[1] from the 10th century. Around the 16th century, kite flying became widely popular among the general public. Although the timing of the activity varied by region and season at that time, it gradually became a cherished New Year tradition from the 19th century onward.

The Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji, where kites are flown with the towering Mount Fuji in the background, is an annual event held every January during the New Year period at the foot of Mount Fuji, specifically at the Asagiri Highlands[2] in Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture. We spoke with SHINKAI Takashi from the

Photo: ColBase

A depiction of kite flying in Edo (modern-day Tokyo) around the early 19th century. From "Illustrated Book of Both Sides of the Sumida River" by Katsushika Hokusai, Part of the Classic Book illustrated by Hokusai.

event's organizing committee.

"Fujinomiya City, located at the foot of Mount Fuji, enjoys good sunlight and favorable wind conditions due to the influence of the westerlies and its south-facing slopes, which create a natural environment ideal for mild winds and updrafts. As a result, it is a famous location for sky sports, including the annual national paragliding competition. Taking advantage of these natural conditions, a kite flying competition was started about 20 years ago to offer a fun festival experience for a wider audience."

SHINKAI points out that the highlight of the event is the giant kite flying performed by children, which takes place once in the morning and once in the afternoon. "Close to 100 children work together, holding the ropes of a giant 25-meter kite to lift it into the sky. The sight of the kite soaring with Mount Fuji in the background is stunning, and the joy on the children's faces is incredibly moving."

In recent years, kite flying locations have become limited due to issues like kites getting tangled in power lines, so the opportunity to fly kites in such a spacious area is especially appreciated by families. The event also features a kite-making experience corner and kite sales.

"The event is mainly attended by families, who account for around 70% of the participants, though in recent years, the number of international tourists has been steadily growing. Many people say they are deeply moved by the moment the kite lifts into the sky. What brings me the most joy is contributing to this traditional experience, where children delight in flying kites under the vast sky, powered by the wind. We hope to continue this event as a New Year tradition for many years to come," says SHINKAI.

1. The *Wamyo Ruijusho*, an encyclopedia and Japanese-language dictionary compiled around 931 to 938.
2. A vast grassland area located in the northern part of Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture, on the western slopes of Mount Fuji. It lies at an elevation of 500 to 1,000 meters.

Left: Kites of various shapes fly in the sky at the Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji. This photo shows a kite shaped like a stingray.

Right: The giant kite flying event, where about 100 children lift a giant kite into the sky. This photo captures a giant octopus-shaped kite.

Photo: Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji Organizing Committee

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