

# HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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THE EVOLUTION OF JAPONISM

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THEME FOR **JULY:**  
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**J**apanese arts and crafts, cinema, fashion, Zen practices and even gardening have shaped new art and craft styles in the West and influenced thinkers and thrilled audiences everywhere. Known broadly as Japonism, this cultural wave continues to rise.

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**ON THE COVER**  
The Evolution of Japonism

# G7 CHARLEVOIX SUMMIT



Prime Minister Abe participating in a working session

**O**N June 8 and June 9 Prime Minister Abe attended the G7 Charlevoix Summit held in Quebec, Canada.

In the context of the deepening interdependence of the global economy, anxiety and dissatisfaction with regards to globalization, etc. are giving rise to the temptation to protectionist movements, sometimes causing conflicts of interest between countries, but even in that context, at this G7 Summit the leaders confirmed the promotion of a rules-based international order, continuation of fighting protectionism, and the crucial role of a rules-based international trading system, and

also agreed to a variety of measures for fostering a truly level playing field.

Prime Minister Abe stated that nothing other than the universal values shared by the G7, namely freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law which guarantee the free thought and activities of individuals, will bring about peace and stability in the international community, and he strongly emphasized that the G7 should play a greater role than ever before as driving forces in the international community, while leading discussions regarding innovation and employment, trade, North Korea, gender, etc.



The leaders' commemorative photography session

Photographs and text courtesy of the Cabinet Public Relations Office of the Government of Japan.



# THE EVOLUTION OF *JAPONISM*

## *The Spread of Japan's Cultural Influence*

Even centuries ago while Japan was still in self-imposed isolation, the country's vibrant art and ceramics were leaving on ships bound for Europe—some as packing material—enthraling the continent's artists and nobles and giving rise to a phenomenon known as Japonism. Garden design, Zen principles, anime, fashion and other cultural offerings have followed, displaying the singular serenity, creativity and artistry of Japan to the world. In this issue, we explore how these disparate influences have energized and inspired people abroad and changed their lives.

Photo by Patricia Reynolds

# Japan and the Cross-Pollination of Art

*Cultures change depending on the era and politics. Sometimes they influence and even fuse with each other. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Western world started incorporating parts of Japanese culture, creating an artistic movement known as “Japonism” in Europe. We asked Akiko Mabuchi, director general of the National Museum of Western Art, about this phenomenon.*

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**YUKIKO ISHIKAWA**

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## Would you please give us an overview of “Japonism”?

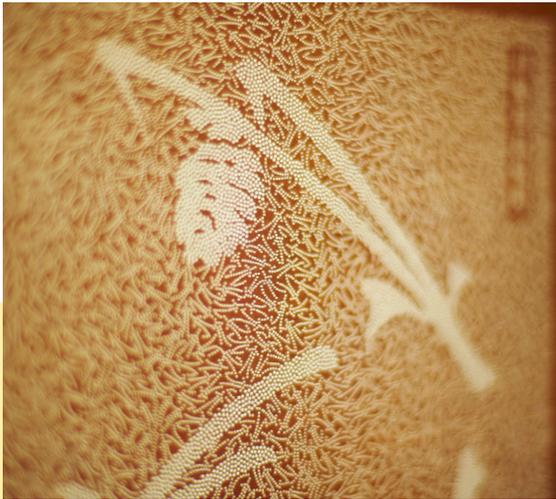
At international expositions around the world, including the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris, Japan introduced various traditional arts, crafts, and goods made of silk, with the aim of increasing exports. The exhibits also included *ukiyo-e* and other pieces that caught the attention of Westerners, and European artists began incorporating what they felt was the singular essence of these pieces in their creations. For instance, *ukiyo-e* were not seen as particularly significant back in their

country of origin, but were perceived in the West as unprecedented modes of expression and a glimpse into a new world. This gave birth to the art movement known as Japonism.

Europe had maintained its traditions since the Renaissance, and until that time European nations had never really seriously adopted foreign influences into their local cultures. However, the progress of industrialism and subsequent changes in society at the beginning of the nineteenth century made it clear that it was no longer possible to go on by simply holding on to tradition. There was a spreading

Akiko Mabuchi, director general of the National Museum of Western Art





Elegant patterned paper designs

sense of hopelessness and an understanding that something had to change.

It was at this moment that Japanese arts and crafts came on the scene. Japanese visitors who saw the heavily Japonism-influenced Art Nouveau\* designs at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris were reportedly surprised at how Japanese art was used in this new context.

**It is well known that *ukiyo-e* art by Hokusai Katsushika (1760–1849) was very influential then. Were there any other strong influences?**

In fact there were many pieces of art, including objects like folding screens and fans, picture books and patterned paper.

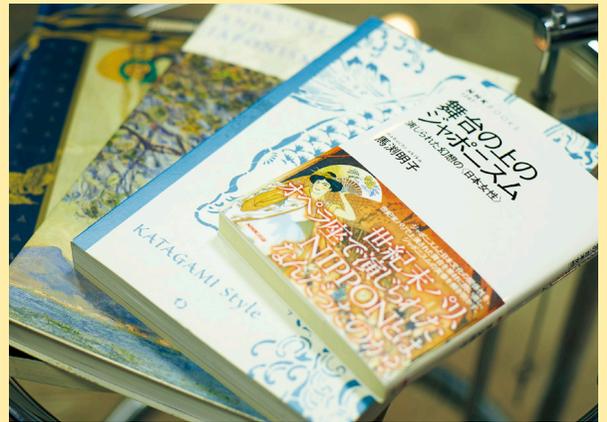
Patterned paper, made by binding layers of Japanese *washi* paper using persimmon juice and carving it with a small knife, was traditionally used to dye various patterns onto cloth. The resulting designs are intricate and exquisite. As Western clothing replaced Japanese clothing, however, many of these patterns were destroyed. The Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna has over ten thousand such artifacts, and even more were exported to other countries and used as design samples for wallpaper, textiles and crafts. The artist Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) even used them to inspire his work.

Such a phenomenon was closely linked to economic strength and political power. As such, the Louvre, Berlin and Metropolitan art museums, which had a lot of wealth at the time, feature large

collections of Japanese arts and crafts. It seems inevitable that culture flows in this way to those who have power. Art pieces from Japan of that era, which at the time were not thought of highly within Japan, still exist because Westerners saw them as having value and collected them. I think it was an amazing act of preservation and care on their part.

**Do you have any more examples of art that have influenced other countries?**

Of course. The three-dimensional effect and techniques of Western art were considered astonishing in Japan, and by incorporating them *yoga*—Japanese Western-style art—was born. In the Edo era (1603–1867), Chinese culture and Dutch culture entered via the island of Dejima in Nagasaki Prefecture, and as such Edo art became more cosmopolitan.

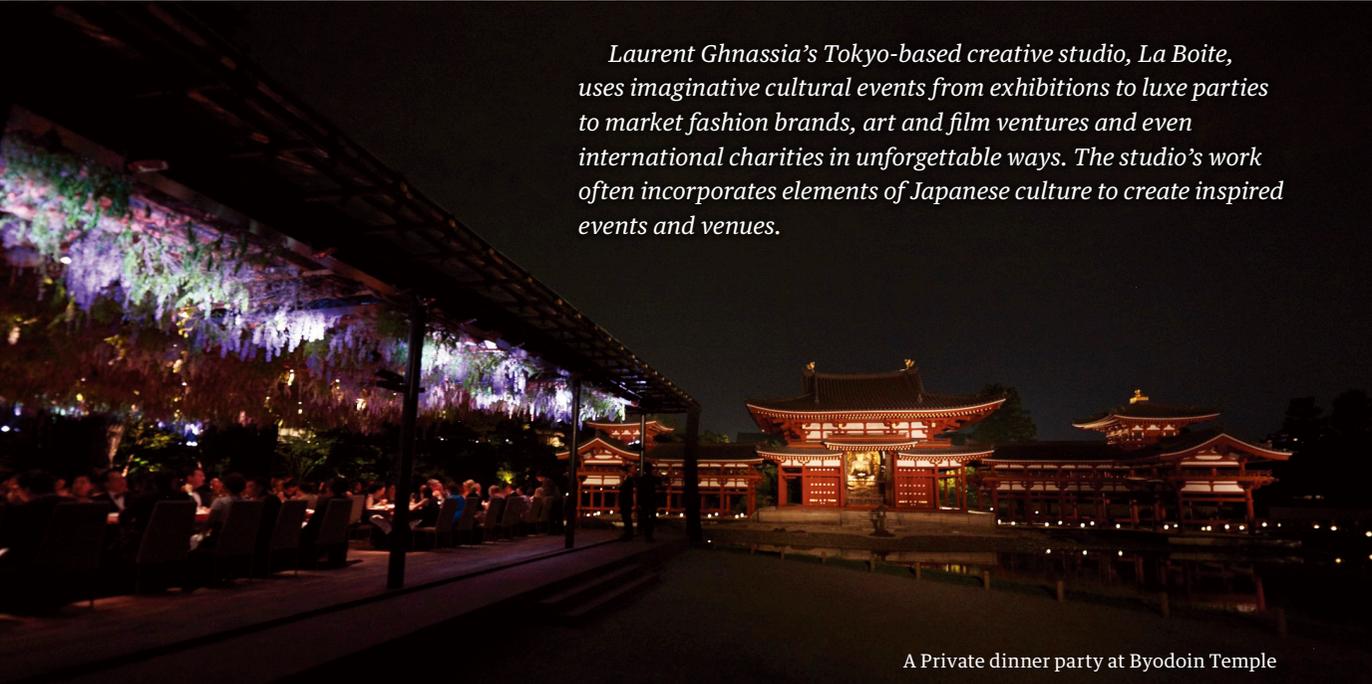


Books about Japonism

Now that crossing international borders has become much less of a hurdle—compared to the nineteenth century—the flow of people and things has grown much more intense, and that of course strengthens the influence of art from other countries. It is completely possible that Japanese art will cross over to other countries and lead to new art being created. It's hard to tell how much Japanese art will evolve, but I hope to keep an eye on these changes. 📖

\* An art style that spread through various European countries from the late nineteenth century until the early twentieth century. Taking inspiration from plants and forms found in nature, it is distinguished by its use of organic curves and decorative surfaces.

*Laurent Ghnassia's Tokyo-based creative studio, La Boite, uses imaginative cultural events from exhibitions to luxe parties to market fashion brands, art and film ventures and even international charities in unforgettable ways. The studio's work often incorporates elements of Japanese culture to create inspired events and venues.*



A Private dinner party at Byodoin Temple

# LAURENT GHNASSIA PURVEYOR OF EXTRAORDINARY MOMENTS

**SELENA HOY**

**L**AURENT Ghnassia wasn't always in the art and culture business. He was once an economic researcher working in the banking industry, but the work left him cold. Interested in culture, he became a producer on a feature film that went to Cannes. "That was the only decision I made in my life—the only real chaotic decision that has had a lasting influence," says Ghnassia. "The rest is a domino effect from that moment."

After directing the Marseilles Film Festival and three years as

art director for the fashion brand agnès b., Ghnassia met his future wife, actress Shinobu Terajima. In 2007 he decided to strike out on his own, and founded his Tokyo-based agency La Boite. Creating events for major brands, Ghnassia says they zoom out to the "eagle's-eye view" to capture the macro elements they want to convey, and generate ideas from there. For a press event for the fashion brand Kenzo to welcome Italian designer Antonio Marras to Japan, for example, the company created an ethereal program inspired by the designer's work, combining traditional Japanese elements such as a kabuki *hanamichi* runway, butoh dance

and Japanese cuisine with more contemporary aspects.

Ghnassia says that having fresh eyes is an advantage. "I have a European background, de facto. Those are my roots. And I also have the influence of the Japanese philosophy and way of life." He says he is privileged to be part of the Terajima family\*, which in addition to his actress wife includes her actress mother as well as her father and brother, both kabuki actors. This connects him to a wealth of Japanese cultural heritage.

"Japan has the richness of immaterial heritage, and this immateriality makes it eternal,"



A gala party with a special performance by Cirque du Soleil



Laurent Ghnassia, founder of La Boite

he says, noting that although earthquakes, typhoons and other natural disasters have often decimated structures, traditions such as kabuki are kept alive by being passed down through generations.

“Inside me, of course, there is this mutation,” he adds, explaining that he perhaps notices the country’s charms more than someone long immersed in the culture, since the information is new. And an appreciation for that culture helps La Boite harness it. At an event

held at beautiful Byodoin Temple in Kyoto, for example, they built on the history of the temple and the region, taking cues from *The Tale of Genji*, a court novel set in the area dating from the Heian period (794-1185), when Byodoin was established. The decor reflected elements from the text, and the kabuki actor Ebizo performed a scene from “Ujjujyo,” one of the last chapters of the novel.

“When we work on a venue, we need to pay respect to the place that’s welcoming us, and to be

organic,” Ghnassia notes.

Ghnassia sees his work as “creating extra-ordinary moments thorough cultural elements to convey a story, to convey an identity.” By combining a deep respect and understanding for Japan with his innovative concepts, he hopes guests will leave somehow changed by those ephemeral episodes that transcend borders. **17**

\* Terajima family: currently represented by Ghnassia’s father-in-law, whose kabuki name is Onoe Kikugoro VII. The Terajima’s kabuki lineage can be traced back to the 1700s.



String curtain installation



A sculpture made out of pearls

# The World of *Hokusai Manga*



Depictions of daily life in *Hokusai Manga*

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## TAMAKI KAWASAKI

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*Hokusai Katsushika's sketches of woodblock prints depicting people, animals, spirits, insects, landscapes and other subjects—collected in his Hokusai Manga series—created shock waves in the European art world. The world's top collector of Hokusai Manga, art dealer Mitsuru Uragami, speaks about the profound influence Hokusai's work had on the French Impressionists.*

**H**OKUSAI Katsushika (1760-1849) was an ukiyo-e artist during the late Edo period (1603-1867) who first gained global recognition through his masterpiece woodblock print series “Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji.” *Hokusai Manga* is a collection of his drawings depicting models of everyday life, animals, plants, monsters and landscapes, originally done for his two hundred disciples around the nation. The series of fifteen volumes, which featured a limited color palette and were bound in traditional Japanese style, was later sold to the general public for sixty-five years, from 1814, when Hokusai was fifty-five, until 1879. The series was read by everyone, from the highest ranks of society to common people, and all fifteen volumes became huge bestsellers.

It is often said that *Hokusai Manga* was used as

cushioning for shipments of Japanese porcelain, which is how it found its way to Europe and produced shock waves in the late nineteenth-century Paris art scene, becoming the trigger for Japonism. You can see the influence of *Hokusai Manga* on the works of Impressionists such as Manet, Monet and Degas, artisans such as Émile Gallé, as well as Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin.

“It was not its exoticism but the prominent rendering, dynamic compositions and abundant creativity that shocked European artists,” says Mitsuru Uragami, president of Uragami Sokyudo, an antique shop in Tokyo’s Nihombashi district. Hokusai was a self-proclaimed “old man, crazy about painting” who dedicated his life of ninety years to art, and was on an endless search for

new methods of expression. He even incorporated Western art techniques such as tenebrism and perspective on his own. As Uragami notes, “There are no boundaries for art.”

Uragami showed a genuine Edo period copy of *Hokusai Manga*. “The more woodblock prints you make, the poorer the condition of the printing block becomes due to wear and tear, so the first print is the best,” he states. “After searching for earlier prints in better condition, I realized I had accumulated one thousand five hundred copies.”

Uragami has lent out his collection to leading museums and galleries, including the British Museum, Tokyo National Museum and the National Museum of Western Art.

The popularity and perceived value of *Hokusai Manga* were significantly higher outside of Japan, and many copies flowed out of the country in the late nineteenth century. A third of Uragami’s collection, in fact, are copies purchased from overseas. Uragami also pointed out the clear differences in the way the volumes were treated in Japan and overseas.

“Outside of Japan, copies of *Hokusai Manga* were treated as precious objects, carefully handled and stored, so the condition is excellent,” he explains. “In Japan, due to its commonness, copies were shared among many, and the condition is not as good.”

Hokusai’s many rambling sketches, use of paneling and double-page spreads made a huge impression on modern Japanese manga. His



Illustrations of insects and reptiles

dynamic narrative drawings of people, the way he drew a Japanese long-handled sword sticking out of the panel to show perspective, and how he expressed strong winds and rain using lines to convey the sounds of water splashing off the ground are all traits used in manga. The way Hokusai captured the force of the wind in his sketches with expressive lines mimicking its movement all show why he was truly an artist for the world and a pioneering guide for Japanese manga artists like Osamu Tezuka (1928-89) as well as creative people in other fields such as art, fashion and movies. Many people in the art world that love Japanese art are fans of Hokusai.

Starting in 2019, Japanese passports will have a new design incorporating twenty-four of his “Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji.” Hokusai will become the face of Japan everywhere its people travel in both name and reality. *Hokusai Manga*, which had a great impact on the art world, will continue to impress fans worldwide. 7



Art dealer Mitsuru Uragami



A small part of Uragami’s extensive collection



Imari ware decorating the streets of the town

# HOW IMARI WARE TOOK EUROPE BY STORM

**TOMOKO NAGATA**

*Imari ware began shipping from Japan to Europe in the late 17th century. The elegant porcelain thrilled royals and nobles, and was not only used as high-end crockery but also displayed as status symbols in royal palaces. The mountain village of Okawachiyama and its secret kilns is the best place to explore the history of Imari ware.*

THE origins of Japan's prized Imari ware can be traced back four centuries to Kyushu, when a potter discovered the white kaolin clay essential to producing porcelain in the town of Arita. Arita potters were soon making porcelain and shipping it from nearby Imari Port to other parts of Japan. Despite the source, their products became known as Imari ware—or Imari for short—and porcelain from the Edo period (1603-1867) is collectively referred to as Old Imari ware.

The Tokugawa shogunate's policy of isolation in the mid-17th century left Nagasaki as Japan's only point of contact with the outside world. Until that time a great deal of Chinese porcelain was exported to Europe, but during the chaos of China's transition from the Ming to the Qing Dynasty production virtually stopped. The Dutch East India Company, seeking an alternative to China's ceramics, began exporting Imari ware to Europe.

The white porcelain's exquisite beauty and gorgeous painted designs soon made Imari ware highly prized as interior decor in Europe. Aristocrats



In the summer there is an Imari ware windchime festival



competed amongst themselves to gain knowledge about the production process. In the 1670s August the Strong, the elector of Saxony and an avid collector of Imari, brought the production methods to his country, which ultimately resulted in the birth of Meissen porcelain. The craze for Orientalism among European nobility and royalty fueled an increase in exports of large vases and jars for decorative purposes starting in the 1680s.

Okawachiyama Village, situated in a mountainous region of Saga Prefecture and ringed by steep, rocky cliffs, boasts a number of Imari ware kilns. "This area became a source of special ceramic ware around three hundred and fifty years ago," says Takanobu Hara of the Imari Nabeshima Ware Cooperative.

Fifty years after the birth of porcelain in Japan, in fact, Saga's ruling Nabeshima clan sent all its highly skilled potters to Okawachiyama to produce wares for the clan. The goal was to present the Tokugawa shogunate with the most exquisite porcelain ware. To prevent the potters' skills from being stolen, the clan built the village up against steep, rocky mountains and set up a checkpoint at the village entrance. The special porcelain made here was called Nabeshima ware, named after the Saga clan lord.

Imari ware still retains three special characteristics of Nabeshima ware: *iro-nabeshima*—which features gorgeous painted designs and is considered the epitome of porcelains—*nabeshima-sometsuke* blue-and-white ware, and *nabeshima-seiji*, made using magnetite found in Okawachiyama.

The village receives around 220,000 visitors a year. They come to explore the thirty pottery kilns and for the idyllic views of the mountain range surrounding the village. While the number of foreign visitors is growing yearly, the number of domestic tourists has declined. "We're planning



to hold events focusing on younger visitors in their twenties and thirties, such as decorating the streets of the town with Imari wind chimes, and to use social media to raise awareness," explains Hara.

Among the village's thirty kilns, the oldest goes back to the Edo period, and is run by the nineteenth generation of the same family. Other kilns established in the Meiji period (1868-1912) have been passed down for five or six generations. Many kilns opened in the Showa period (1926-89), all of them inheriting the advanced technical skills and tradition of Nabeshima ware to produce crockery to cater to the needs of modern living.

Since most of these operations are small in scale and privately run, they often do everything from drafting the design to shaping the pottery at the wheel to painting the finished pieces. They make tableware for daily use during the day and create their own art pieces at night. Even today, there are Nabeshima pottery kilns that bear the clan crest and continue to specialize in creating just one kind of item.

Craftspeople who have learned pottery techniques at Saga Prefecture's Arita Ceramic University (integrated into Saga University in 2016) often head to Okawachiyama after graduation. Carrying on the ethos, technique and tradition from the clan kiln age, the ceramic products they shape retain their allure even in the modern world. ▮



People from all over the world take part in the Zen events

# THE WORLD'S IN LOVE WITH ZEN

KATSUMI YASUKURA

*Zen concepts and practices have heavily influenced prominent people in the West in all fields, from business to entertainment to the arts. What is it about Zen that attracts them?*

ZEN spread in Japan during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods (1192-1573), a type of Buddhism first practiced by Bodhidharma of India and then in China by Linji Yixuan centuries earlier. The Rinzai, Soto and Obaku schools in Japan, among others, are Zen Buddhist sects.

“When we are born none of us have anything, but as we grow older we acquire knowledge, goodness, morals and values,” says Gyokaku Horio, the chief priest at Tanden-an, a temple affiliated with the Myoshinji school of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. “Zen is a discipline where one seeks to cast off whatever is unnecessary and tries to achieve enlightenment by pursuing one’s truest self. For example, you could say the rock garden at Ryoan-ji in Kyoto is a place that concisely expresses a Zen worldview.”

*Jiyu-jizai* is one of the words that symbolize Zen, he explains. “*Jiyu* is often interpreted to mean freedom or liberation, but in the world of Zen *jiyu* means ‘to be based on one’s self.’ *Jiyu* comes when your individuality, completely separate from the world around you, has been established. If you achieve



A sharp tap to help refocus the mind

that *jiyu* then you are true to yourself, a concept called *jizai* in the world of Zen, thus making you *jiyu-jizai*.”

Horio believes one reason Zen is so popular with many people outside Japan is that, unlike Christianity or Islam, even high-ranking priests and monks of advanced age are considered the same as beginners in terms of finding enlightenment, so they do not seem so distant. “Another reason is the emphasis placed on actual practice over studying and reading sacred texts,” he adds.

It also bears mentioning that the actual practice of Zen is comparatively easy to understand, with few words involved so the language barrier is low. For example, *zazen*, the cross-legged posture of seated meditation that brings mind, body and breath into harmony, and Zen calligraphy—the transcription of words from Zen literature—are not easy, but the meaning behind them is clear. And the idea that even simple tasks necessary for life such as cleaning, doing the laundry, cooking and the preparation and cleanup involved can be thought

of as Zen practice is thought-provoking and new for those in the West.

Horio notes that in recent years, in addition to Zen temples in and outside Japan, there have been many Zen-themed exhibitions held at museums and galleries, including at Tokyo’s Roppongi Hills.

“They’ve brought an increase in the number of people interested in Zen—and not just non-Japanese but young Japanese people as well,” Horio explains. “We feel a need to tell people that Zen Buddhism is not only a part of milestone occasions in their lives, but also part of daily life. If you take a single stick and draw a circle in the water that has collected in a wooden tub, at first not much of the water will move. But if you keep at it, eventually all the water will swirl together.

“My hope for the next generation of young Buddhist monks,” he concludes, “is that they will become the stick that stirs the water. I want them to use their unique vantage point to spread Zen to the world.” 

© Photos provided by Katsumi Hirabayashi

# JAPAN'S GREEN AMBASSADORS: JAPANESE GARDENS OVERSEAS

*Considered the most scenic and authentic of the Japanese gardens overseas, the Portland Japanese Garden in the U.S. has welcomed, delighted and soothed four hundred and fifty thousand visitors per year since its renewal in 2017.*

**AO YAMAMINAMI**

**A**BOUT a hundred and twenty years ago when world's fairs were electrifying the U.S. and Europe, Japan's government decided to introduce visitors to Japanese culture through arts, crafts and the charms of Japanese gardens. World War II stopped that outreach, but after it was over Japan began laying out gardens again in sister cities as a symbol of friendship.

Over five hundred Japanese gardens have now sprung up all over the world. The most highly acclaimed is the Portland Japanese Garden in the U.S. state of Oregon. Professor Takuma Tono of the Tokyo University of Agriculture designed this garden, which opened in 1967. It now spans more than twelve acres, features eight different gardens, has three pavilions and attracts around 450,000 people a year—many of them repeat visitors.

The garden curator of the Portland Japanese Garden, Sadafumi Uchiyama, says the allure of Japanese gardens is the chance to experience the beauty of traditional Japanese culture while also being soothed by the surroundings.

“Humans are creations of nature, so when physically or mentally tired we feel the urge to refresh ourselves in natural environments,” says Uchiyama. “This feeling

View of the Portland Japanese Garden | Photo by Portland Japanese Garden



Flat garden and pavilion from beneath a weeping cherry tree | Photo by Jonathan Ley



Beautiful and serene rock garden | Photo by Portland Japanese Garden

is universal, no matter your nationality or race. As such, Japanese gardens' re-creations of nature, with their trees, rocks and ponds, are attractive to many people outside of Japan."

After a major expansion that took two years, the garden reopened in 2017. The primary aim of the project was to make it even more appealing as a healing space.

"Gardens are meant to be serene places, but as the garden gained popularity maintaining this quality became difficult," Uchiyama explains. "To preserve that sense of peace, we've added paths and benches around the garden, and built a new building with cultural facilities and cafes to reduce the sense of crowdedness."

Kengo Kuma, the architect behind the New National Stadium in Tokyo that will be the primary venue for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, designed this new structure. Reflecting the design of traditional Japanese houses, the building blends in harmoniously with the Japanese garden. It has also been LEED\* certified for being environmentally friendly.

Japanese gardens have proven to be charming, soothing conduits for Japanese culture worldwide. Some, however, face maintenance issues due to inadequate budgets or a lack of trained staff. In 2017, Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism responded to that situation by launching a Japanese garden overseas restoration project. The project's aim is to revive gardens that have fallen into disrepair so that these verdant and tran-

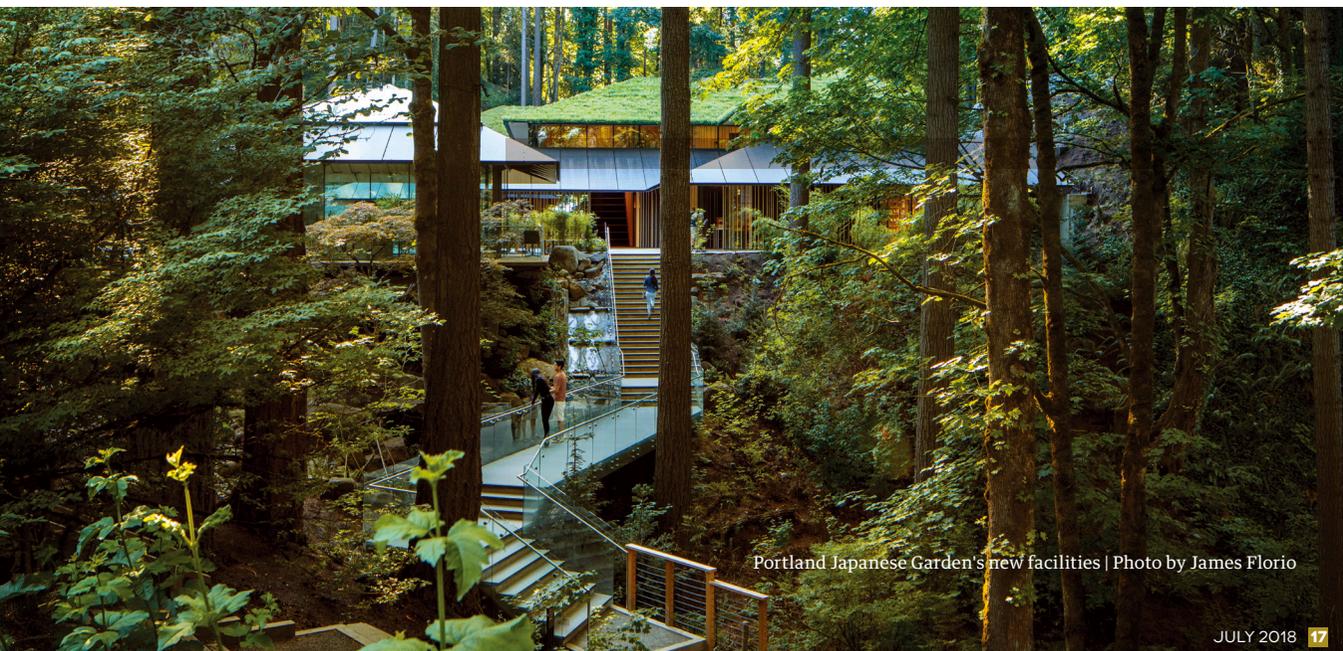
quil spaces can once again spark interest in Japanese culture and inspire visitors to travel to Japan.

Uchiyama is assisting the project by providing information and skilled experts. "To ensure that Japanese gardens overseas are properly maintained, we must help staff gain the necessary skills," he says, "so in 2012, I and a half dozen other practitioners set up the North American Japanese Garden Association, which provides a support network to refine technical skills. At the Portland Japanese Garden I initiated the establishment of the International Japanese Garden Training Center, where they teach everything from practical skills such as garden architecture, construction and management to essential cultural traditions such as the Japanese tea ceremony and flower arrangement."

Whether through the government project or Uchiyama's efforts, the more properly maintained Japanese gardens there are, the more attention these serene spots will attract.

"However, if too much emphasis is placed on the artistic and cultural qualities of Japanese gardens, some people may lose interest in visiting," Uchiyama warns. "While those elements are certainly important, I want to create a space that appeals to the full range of human emotions—as well as be a place of healing—and make it easily accessible to everyone." 

\* LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and also refers to the certifying measures used to assess the environmental impact of buildings and cities employed by the U.S.-based nonprofit Green Building Council.



Portland Japanese Garden's new facilities | Photo by James Florio

# BRINGING JAPANESE CINEMA TO THE WORLD

*Known internationally for works such as Godzilla, Toho has been working overtime to bring Japanese anime and other cinema to the rest of the world. Here are some of the reasons behind the surging popularity and positive ratings Japanese films are earning among movie audiences overseas.*

## TAMAKI KAWASAKI

“**J**APANESE anime and other movies have been getting high ratings from foreign countries lately,” says Koji Ueda, general manager of the international business department at Toho Co., Ltd, Japan’s largest movie company. “Among all these works,” Ueda adds, “the copyright licenses for anime get bought up by companies worldwide the moment they’re offered outside of Japan.” The main reason behind the prosperity of anime is likely due to the two main types of movie audiences out there.

After streaming services—such as Netflix in the U.S.—gained prominence, audiences have

shifted to mainly going to movie theaters to see major popular Hollywood titles. Award-winning movies from movie festivals such as Cannes and Berlin rarely bring in strong box-office earnings worldwide, which reveals a

clear division between films that professional movie critics rate highly and movies that people simply watch for pleasure.

“That has resulted in two distinct groups—global viewers who watch films for relaxation,



Toho’s promotional booth at the Cannes Film Market, which is held in conjunction with the Cannes Film Festival

and local viewers who seek art and cultural quality,” Ueda explains. “Anime seems to be the middle ground that satisfies the needs of both types of viewers.”

Another factor is that China now ranks second in movie box-office sales after the U.S., which shows another type of audience. Animation is often more suited to expressing inner worlds or fantastical concepts with no basis in reality, and because it is easy to understand viewers can follow the story, no matter their country of origin.

The quality of Japanese animation has gotten so high that even adults enjoy watching it. Animation was once seen as something only for children, which featured the main character as a hero. However, Japanese anime features school life, families, adult relationships and human drama like live-action films, and has covered many real-life genres, to the point that it conquered that stereotypical image.

Japanese anime began to gain momentum when it became wildly popular among a core group of fans, many of them men in their twenties and thirties in North America and Europe. After winning over this group, interest in the genre expanded, leading to several major hits. Titles such as blockbuster *Kimi no Na Wa* (Your Name) and works from Studio Ghibli such as *My Neighbor*

*Totoro* and *Princess Mononoke* gained great popularity among a wide demographic worldwide straight away.



*Kimi no Na Wa* was a blockbuster in both Japan and China

If you take a look at recent popular international works, there is a definite trend toward globalization. The original stories and intellectual properties, such as characters or logos, tend to be multicultural and ethnically diverse, and many feature the Middle East, South America, Asia and Africa. It is clear that numerous movie producers in Hollywood and elsewhere are seeking fresh new themes for films they hope will become worldwide hits.

The epic *Godzilla* series, which has even made it into the Guinness World Records for its longevity, also gained global fame thanks to several high-profile

Hollywood movie adaptations. “I’d like to make other influential Japanese intellectual properties,” Ueda says with great passion. Foreign fans of Japanese movies rate the unique aspects of Japanese culture highly, and believe that those singular elements are the strength behind Japanese works.

While many Japanese movies and anime productions use Japanese approaches and perspectives, they also incorporate deep universal themes and portray complex emotions, allowing non-Japanese viewers to relate the action to their own lives and enjoy the experience. Japan is third in movie box-office sales worldwide, and Japanese creators of cinema such as Toho will use their own ideas to continue making appealing anime and other works that thrill the world. [7]



Poster of the major hit *Godzilla*

# A Global Fashionista Favorite from Japan

MIKA HATANAKA

*Designer and owner Chitose Abe's brand, sacai, has caught and held the critical eye of fashion devotees worldwide. We asked her about sacai's worldview.*

**W**HEN Chitose Abe launched her label sacai in 1999, she and the brand had just five knitwear designs to offer. They steadily added new creations, however, and by 2004 had staged their first exhibition in Paris. In 2009 sacai started a line of menswear, and Abe also became the first Japanese person ever appointed as a designer for French apparel manufacturer and lifestyle brand Moncler—known for their famous down jackets—which boosted the label's profile significantly.

Abe held a show at the Paris Collection in 2011, and since then she has gone on to stage shows at Paris Fashion Week and actively pursue overseas markets. In 2015 she was invited to an official dinner at the White House during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to the United States.

She has grown sacai into one of the most indispensable Japanese fashion brands around. In Japan, she established a flagship store in Tokyo's trendy Aoyama district, and actresses started wearing sacai dresses at film festivals.

Since its foundation, sacai has stayed true to the concept of "designs that stand out in everyday life."

"The clothes I make are clothes I would like to wear myself. No matter how innovative an idea may be or your ability to create it, I believe it's meaningless unless it can actually be worn by people," says Abe of the origins of the sacai style. "This value spreads to the underlying concept of the brand. I want my pieces to be worn in all sorts of daily situations rather than for just one specific occasion. I always keep this in mind while I'm creating clothes."

The sacai philosophy on making clothes can also be glimpsed in their "hybrid" designs and active



Design from a collaboration with Nike

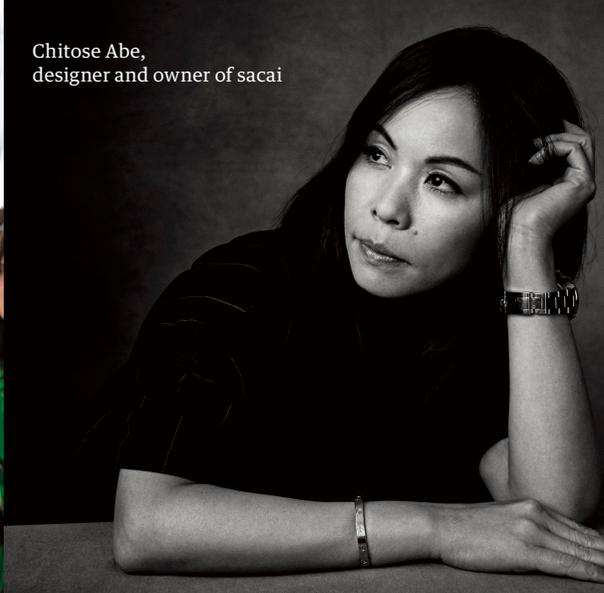


The sacai touch is evident in this jacket created for The North Face



Example of sacai's "hybrid" designs

Chitose Abe,  
designer and owner of sacai



©TALENT BY VICTOR DEMARCHELIER FOR SACAII



Models posing  
in some of Abe's creations

collaborations with other brands. For example, they create different silhouettes by combining contrasting materials or parts from different clothing items, such as sweats and pleats. The brand announced collaborations with Nike in 2015 and The North Face in 2017, and the limited collections they produced caught the imagination of people of all ages and completely sold out.

"I value craftsmanship that cannot be found anywhere else, that cannot be stereotyped and can only have come from sacai," Abe explains. "Japanese people are very open when it comes to incorporating new cultural or street elements into fashion, and I think we're good at bringing out that kind of ingenuity."

As for why sacai's creations resonate with so many people, Abe believes it is because a lot of women in the modern world take on a variety of roles in their lives.

"I myself am both a designer and the manager of a company. When I return home I am a mother, I am a woman. Women in the world, like me, are not just one-dimensional. We have various sides and face a variety of situations. That's why I think sacai's worldview and the clothes I make—the clothes I want to wear—resonate with them."

The appeal of sacai has much to do with the way it communicates how women work and live, through Abe as a person. That's probably why the brand is able to continue moving forward, vigorously and flexibly, through the fast-moving waters of the fashion industry. The label is likely to stay in the spotlight, broadcasting the "now" of Japan to the world. **V**

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**YUKIKO ISHIKAWA**

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*“Japonismes 2018: Les âmes en resonance” is a series of events introducing Japanese culture that will begin in July 2018 in France. We asked Director General, Secretariat for JAPONISMES at the Japan Foundation Korehito Masuda about the purpose and content of this unprecedented large-scale festival.*



**What is Japonismes 2018 celebrating, and what are its objectives?**

We will be celebrating the 160th anniversary of Japan-France diplomatic relations this year, as well as one hundred and fifty years since the Meiji era (1868-1912) began and the birth that same year of Paul Claudel, the famed dramatist and French ambassador to Japan.

Japonismes 2018 will be held mainly in Paris, starting in July and continuing until February 2019. As one of the projects introducing Japan abroad in the run-up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, Japonismes 2018 aims

to not only present Japanese culture but also to promote inbound tourism through rediscovering Japan.

In addition, we want Japonismes 2018 to show people around the world the aesthetic sense underlying Japanese culture. Since ancient times, Japan has had a penchant for incorporating contrasting or opposing elements and fusing them together. By sharing this culture of harmonious blending and the value it brings, the initiative may provide hints for solving problems such as the growing sense of nationalism and conflicts between countries we are seeing in international society.

Japonismes 2018 also has the ambitious goal of not only contributing to the national interests of Japan but also tackling turmoil around the world.

### What are the highlights of Japonismes 2018?

There will be over fifty events held at nearly one hundred venues, so it would be impossible to talk about everything, but the initiative is built around four main pillars: exhibitions, performing arts, audiovisual, and lifestyle and culture. There are also many challenging projects, including some being held for the first time in Europe. For example, from September to October we plan to hold an exhibition called “Jakuchu, Colorful Realm of Living Beings,” the first large-scale exhibition of works by Ito Jakuchu in Europe, at the Petit Palais—the City of Paris Fine Art Museum. Jakuchu has become increasingly popular in Japan in recent years but surprisingly is not well known in France, so it will be fascinating to see how the exhibition is received.

Among the stage performances, along with traditional arts like *kabuki*, we plan on showing “2.5 Dimensional Musicals”<sup>1</sup> based on animations like *Sailor Moon*, content unique to modern Japan. In addition, there will be a wide range of projects such as “Naomi Kawase<sup>2</sup> –Retrospective and Exhibition”—a rarity for a living director—and the Japanese Culinary Culture series, which will offer visitors the opportunity to learn how to make Japanese food or enjoy sake-pairing menus at many restaurants in Paris.

### What would you like attendees to take away from the event?

There are still many people who are only familiar with stereotypes of Japanese culture, only thinking of sushi when Japanese food is mentioned or *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints as all there is to Japanese art. However, Japanese culture is much more diverse, with more flexibility and abundant creativity. I hope that people coming to Japonismes 2018 will experience these unknown facets of our culture, and that we can break down stereotypes.

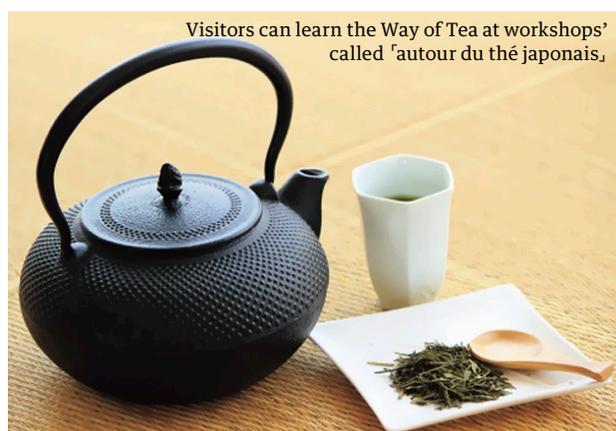
Be sure to visit Paris and France during this festival, as Japonismes 2018 is a chance to enjoy Japanese culture even more than if you were in Japan. 

1 2.5 Dimensional Musicals are plays or musicals based on manga comics, anime movies and video games.

2 Kawase is a Nara-based filmmaker who has won multiple awards for her films at the Festival de Cannes.



A shot from *VISION*, Naomi Kawase's latest film  
©2018 [Vision] LDH JAPAN, SLOT MACHINE



Visitors can learn the Way of Tea at workshops' called 'autour du thé japonais.'



One of Ito Jakuchu's colorful works

# A VR SIMULATOR THAT SHOWS LIVING HEARTS AT WORK

**BIFUE USHIJIMA**

*A new viewer that virtually reproduces hearts in 3D and shows their real-time mechanisms with VR technology is already being used as a medical education tool far superior to textbooks and anatomy models, and research on its potential clinical uses is progressing.*



**MASAHIRO WATANABE**  
Head of Heart Explorer research and development

**T**HE typical adult heart beats 60 to 80 times per minute, incessantly pumping roughly five liters of blood throughout the body. It is one of the most essential organs in the human body. The heart's complex structure makes it hard to properly observe the flow of blood and how the organ transmits electronic signals. Heart disease is the second leading cause of death for Japanese people, yet much remains unclear about the illness. That makes research to illuminate the state of the heart vital.

Fujitsu and The University of Tokyo have developed a way to see into the heart in 3D: precise data output by a numerical simulator that shows its real-time movements, blood flow and more. Named Heart Explorer, it went on sale in April 2018 as a medical education tool.

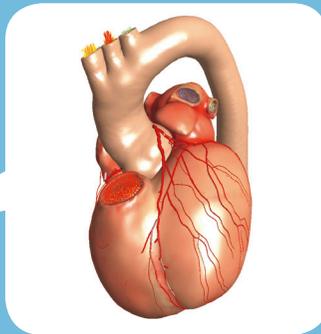
One major feature of Heart Explorer is that the tool doesn't just construct a 3D model of the heart using a CG creator—it's an actual "heart" that works thanks to numerical simulation from the K computer. Using mathematical modeling of real

heart phenomena, such as the movement of the myocardium, heartbeat, blood output and blood pressure in coronary circulation, Heart Explorer can reproduce the heart's condition and functioning. It is also possible to reproduce the behavior of a specific patient's heart using medical images and their diagnostic information.

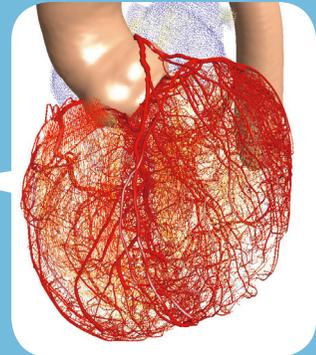
With the virtual reality display, a 3D model of the beating heart appears that can be turned and rotated as if you were holding it in your hands. It's possible to zoom in and even view the underside of the heart and the functioning of the aortic valves. In the cross-sectional display, phenomena hard to capture with an MRI or CT scan—such as the state of the myocardium or the blood flow inside the heart—are visible. It's also possible to overlay real data from an electrocardiogram (ECG) with what has been observed for comparison.

At medical and nursing schools, Heart Explorer is being used as a learning tool to educate students by linking all kinds of data with the structure, condition and functioning of the heart, which

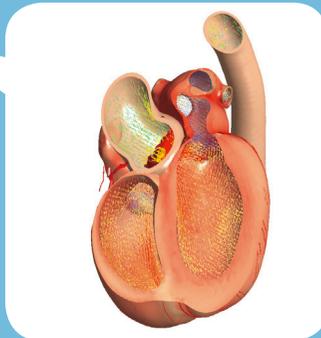
Heart Explorer can simulate all aspects of the human heart, a boon for patients and doctors alike



Shape of myocardium



Blood vessel



Inside view

is difficult to grasp from textbooks and anatomy models. A few university medical departments, including that of The University of Tokyo, have courses that incorporate Heart Explorer.

Fujitsu's research into the heart simulator began in 2008 as a collaborative effort with The University of Tokyo. In order to create an app that could solve real-world problems, they began clinical studies using data from heart failure and congenital cardiac disease patients in 2013.

"It was not easy to link up real ECG data with the heart models created from CT scans, MRI and other imaging," says Masahiro Watanabe, head of Heart Explorer research and development, describing the development process. "We were also constructing extremely complex mathematical models to reproduce the interactions of the myocardium and blood flow, as well as the state of the excitatory signals—the electronic signals that tell the heart to beat."

Fujitsu is researching and developing clinical uses for Heart Explorer as well.

"Before, heart simulation technology only consisted of tools to explain things to patients who'd already completed treatment," says Watanabe, "but we also want this research to be useful in diagnosis and treatment. It became possible to find the optimal location for CRT (cardiac resynchronization therapy) electrodes for patients who have pacemakers, and we are considering future uses such as predicting the postoperative status of the heart by performing virtual surgery on models made from real patients' hearts."

Clinical use raises the issues of effectiveness, safety and cost. Compared to the mathematical processing of the past that took roughly ten days to calculate five full cardiac cycles, however, today's simulation and visualization technology can do it in ten hours, and is progressing at light speed. As the value of 3D heart model visualization gains more recognition, research into its clinical applications is expected to continue to evolve. 



# LINKING JAPAN'S PAST AND FUTURE

**YUKIKO ISHIKAWA**

*Nicolas Soergel runs a shop that has specialized in umeboshi—Japanese salt-pickled plums—for generations. How did this German expat also end up launching an e-commerce site that gives makers of traditional Japanese products a sales channel to the world?*

**N**IHON ICHIBAN is an e-commerce site that sells traditional Japanese foods, art and handicrafts to customers abroad. The site's owner, Nicolas Soergel, came to Japan in 2001 when the German company he worked for transferred him to its Japanese branch. In 2010, Nicolas left that job to help his wife take over her family business in Kanagawa Prefecture—an *umeboshi* specialty shop in Odawara called Chinriu Honten, established in 1871 by the last chief cook of Odawara Castle—as its fifth-generation proprietors.

“At the time, other long standing businesses that provided goods to the same department store we did were complaining that the Japanese market was

shrinking, and that they wanted to expand overseas but didn't know how,” Soergel says. “I realized that I had the capability to do that, and that this could be my forte.”

The first thing he did was to set up an overseas marketing and sales division within Chinriu Honten. In 2012, he launched the NIHON ICHIBAN site. Since the site had no track record yet, all he had to convince potential suppliers was a proposal on paper.

“I took that proposal and visited local craftsmen and famous manufacturers of traditional goods. A common refrain among them was that ‘lots of companies call to say they'd like to sell our

Kabazaiiku tea caddies, made from cherry bark



Chinriu Honten, Soergel's family business



The family's umeboshi salt pickled plums are also sold on NIHON ICHIBAN



Lacquered deerskin products made for the European market

products online, but you're the only one who actually came to visit.' That face-to-face approach helped to establish trust and deepened my understanding of their businesses. I was able to clearly explain the unique selling points of their goods."

Now NIHON ICHIBAN lists around one hundred companies and two thousand three hundred items. "I'd like to see the catalogue reach over ten thousand items eventually," Nicolas says. His dream is for NIHON ICHIBAN to become NIHON ICHIBAN Holdings—a business platform for flagship stores selling traditional products.

"Many Japanese traditional craft makers face the problem of having no successor," he observes. "If they end up closing shop because of that, it would be a great loss for this aspect of Japanese culture. My plan for NIHON ICHIBAN Holdings is to acquire companies without successors and then develop them through an international online network that can help protect the knowhow of traditional craftsmen.

"Quite often these artisans do not have many skills outside of their specialty," he adds. "The holding company can gather experts in handling finance, marketing or design matters, then everyone can share these resources to build their business and fill in the missing pieces over time."

As part of this push, Nicolas urges suppliers to create products with overseas buyers in mind. Last year, patterned and lacquered deerskin products made in collaboration with traditional manufacturers targeting the European market were decorated with simple designs to appeal to local tastes.

"Some Japanese products can sell overseas as they are, and some can't. We need to take into account the preferences of the target market and times, to bring a breath of fresh air to the world of traditional Japanese crafts."

His business has slowly but surely expanded, but it wasn't easy at first. In the startup years he worked round the clock and had to do everything from creating the site to writing all the product descriptions.

"I worked on projects starting from scratch in my previous career, so I know that it takes at least three years of hard work before seeing any results," Nicolas states.

His ultimate dream, he says, is to link Japan's traditions and future, and Nicolas continues to make steady progress toward fulfilling that vision. **■**

# MOTTAINAI

## Reduce, Reuse, Recycle—and Respect

SELENA HOY

*The MOTTAINAI Campaign is a movement in Japan with an interesting genesis that takes its name from the Japanese word mottainai, which is often translated as “What a waste!” The meaning, however, goes much deeper, and the concept is far older.*



“THE word *mottainai* comes from a Buddhist term *mottai*, which means ‘undue importance,’ along with the word *nai*, which denotes negation,” says Tatsuo Nanai, the MOTTAINAI Campaign’s chief of secretariat. “Thus, *mottainai* means ‘without importance.’ For example, to leave behind a grain of rice when eating is to waste it, to render it meaningless.” Nanai notes that the term has apparently been around for nearly eight hundred years, and there are various opinions on the origins and interpretation of it.

“When Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai\* was in Japan, she asked if there was such a concept as ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’ in Japan, and we told her about the concept and culture of *mottainai*,” says Fumiko Anbo, a MOTTAINAI Campaign secretariat. “She was really interested in that. The 3R concept is a very Japanese concept, but the idea of *mottainai* also includes the nuance of a fourth R—that of respect.”

After Maathai’s visit, The Mainichi Newspapers launched the MOTTAINAI Campaign to encourage

environmentalism and reduce waste in 2005. The paper partnered with Itochu Corporation, and in collaboration with Maathai they worked to spread the *mottainai* concept both within Japan and internationally. For example, in 2005 Maathai spoke about the campaign at the United Nations in New York.

The campaign has four main pillars. The first is a tree-planting effort in Kenya called MOTTAINAI Green Project, where proceeds from events in Japan are used to aid in the reforestation of Maathai’s home country.

Secondly, the campaign works to spread the idea of *mottainai* through its website and other media efforts. The campaign also hosts various events to promote the concept, such as flea markets and handmade craft fairs. And finally, they have launched a web shop selling products that adhere to the 4Rs: reduce, reuse, recycle and respect. For example, they sell *furoshiki* (traditional Japanese wrapping cloths) made from fabric created from recycled plastic bottles. They are reusable and



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- 1 Maathai promoting her Green Belt Movement
- 2 Craft fair in full swing
- 3 Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai
- 4 Furoshiki wrapping clothes can be reused in many different ways
- 5 Visitors can check out products and learn about the movement at MOTTAINAI STATION

© THE MAINICHI NEWSPAPERS



4



5

meant to reduce packaging waste, while the cute and beautiful designs encourage careful and enthusiastic use.

Maathai understood that the idea of *mottainai* not only connects to reducing, reusing and recycling, but also respecting the things we eat and the things we use—the things that are part of our everyday lives. Things should be used with reverence for their worth to us, repaired and treated with care. It’s not unusual in Japan to say *otsukaresama*—meaning “thank you for your hard work”—to an item when it can no longer be used. A great example is Hari Kuyo (literally “a mass for needles”), an annual festival where people solemnly “retire” their old and broken needles, placing them in a block of soft tofu or *konnyaku* (jellied devil’s tongue root).

Nanai and Anbo hope that the *mottainai* concept will continue to spread. On the topic of plastic and packaging, for example, they acknowledge that a cultural shift needs to happen in Japan to convince people to waste less. However, there have been changes in the last decade. More people are refusing

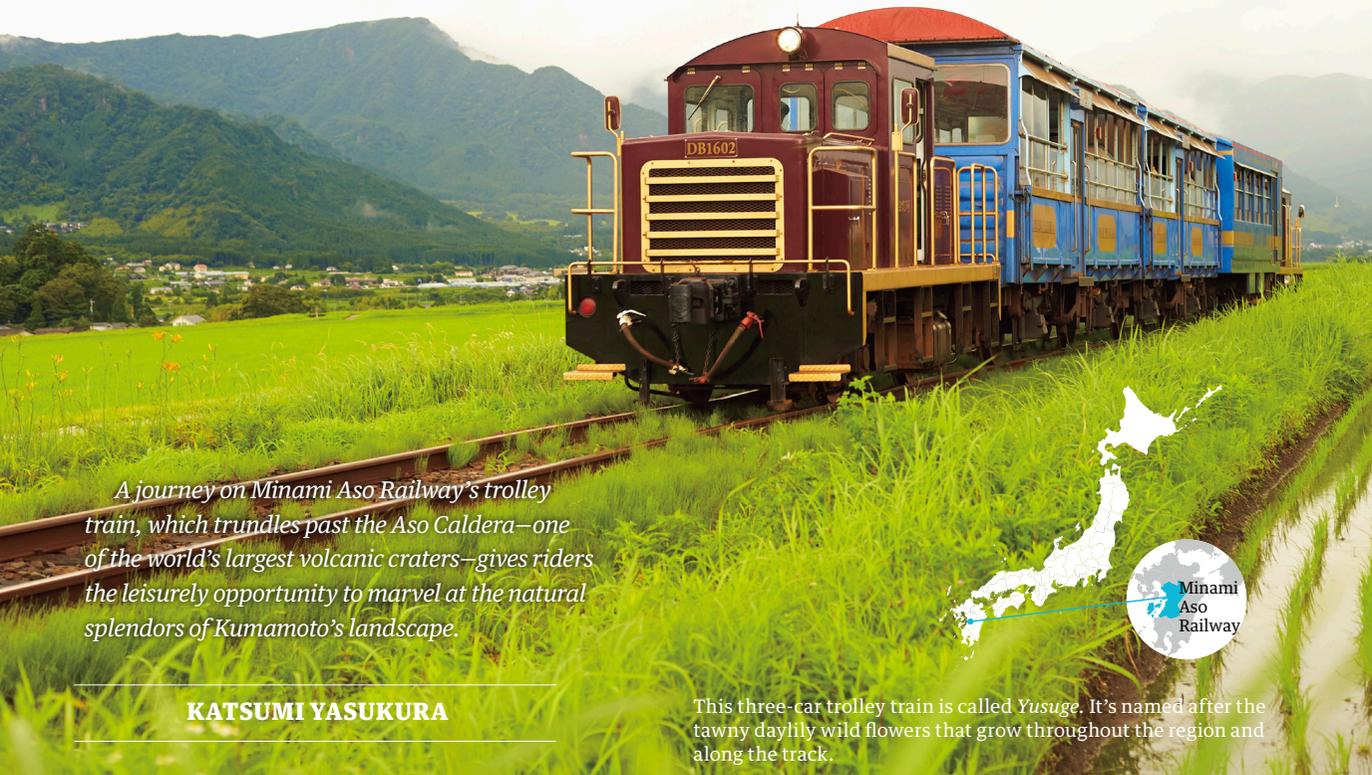
disposable bags and cups in favor of reusable ones. And the campaign is targeting the younger generation with events like kids-only flea markets to expose children to the idea early. Some textbook producers have even asked to include passages about *mottainai* in their pages.

Around the world, the concept is also taking off. In Indonesia there is a “*mottainai* dance,” and in Vietnam they have held a *mottainai* festival. The best thing about these events is that they were not organized by the MOTTAINAI Campaign, but rather were picked up and created by local communities themselves.

The concept of *mottainai* is an ancient one in Japan, but its resurgence in Japan and the world owes a great debt to Wangari Maathai. Although Maathai passed away in 2011, her work lives on through the MOTTAINAI Campaign and her resonant message of respect, gratitude and reducing waste. **7**

\* Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai worked for nearly forty years on a range of social issues, and in 2004 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work on sustainable development, democracy and peace in her native Kenya and beyond.

# A Train That Conveys the Spirit of Recovery



*A journey on Minami Aso Railway's trolley train, which trundles past the Aso Caldera—one of the world's largest volcanic craters—gives riders the leisurely opportunity to marvel at the natural splendors of Kumamoto's landscape.*

**KATSUMI YASUKURA**

This three-car trolley train is called *Yusuge*. It's named after the tawny daylily wild flowers that grow throughout the region and along the track.

**T**HE Minami Aso Railway ordinarily operates on a 17.7-kilometer-long track from Takamori Station to Tateno Station, where it connects with the JR Hohi Line that extends all the way to the city of Kumamoto. The line suffered extensive damage in the earthquake that shook Kumamoto in April 2016, however, and currently only runs 7.1 kilometers, with five stops between Takamori and Nakamatsu stations. They aim to have the whole line back in service by the end of March 2022.

From March to November, the railway runs a trolley train twice a day on weekends, public holidays, the spring and summer holidays, and during Golden Week<sup>1</sup>. Visitors come from all over Japan and overseas to ride these trolleys. On board, you'll find retro electric fans and lamps—original equipment dating back to the days of the national

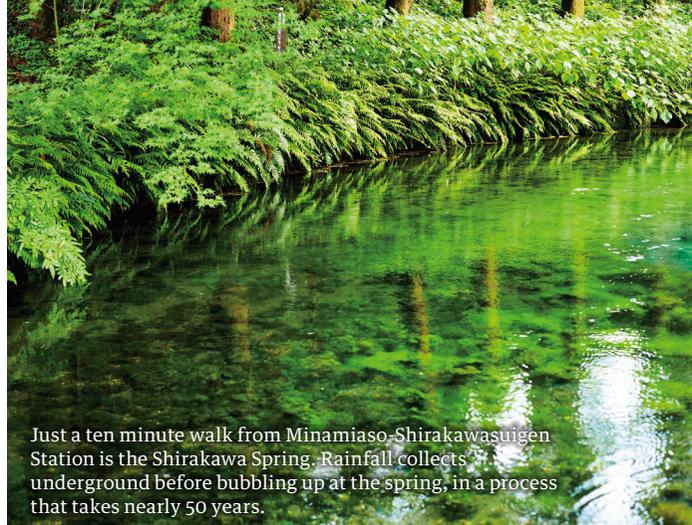
railway<sup>2</sup>, when the trolleys were used as freight trains—that evoke a nostalgic atmosphere. The windows slide open, and when the weather is nice you can open them completely to take in Minami Aso's fresh air during the trip, which is 25 minutes each way.

The scenery is magnificent, and the most impressive sight are the five peaks that make up Mount Aso. Seen from afar, this mountain range resembles the silhouette of an enormous Buddha lying in repose, so it is also known as the “Statue of the Buddha in Nirvana.” Rice paddies and vegetable fields cover the surrounding terrain in vibrant shades of green.

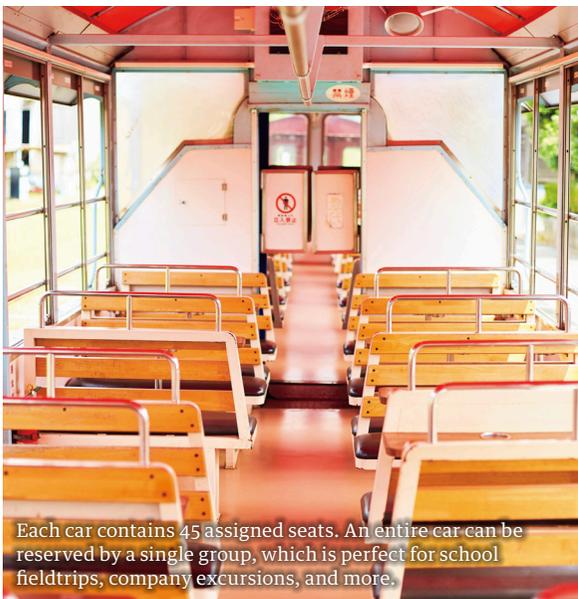
The maximum speed of the trolley is forty kilometers per hour, which is far slower than an ordinary train. When the train nears one of the many interesting spots that dot the landscape of the



Minami Aso Railway's terminus station is at Takamori. Inside, there's a shop that sells trolley train souvenirs and famous goods from Kumamoto Prefecture.



Just a ten minute walk from Minamiaso-Shirakawasui Station is the Shirakawa Spring. Rainfall collects underground before bubbling up at the spring, in a process that takes nearly 50 years.



Each car contains 45 assigned seats. An entire car can be reserved by a single group, which is perfect for school fieldtrips, company excursions, and more.

Minami Aso region, such as the headwaters of rivers, it slows to a walking pace. As a result, you get to experience the fluttering of butterflies, chirping of birds, and scent of plants that you would otherwise miss.

It's also nice that people walking down the roads or working in the fields will almost always stop to wave as the train passes by. When they do, people on board instinctively wave back, and smiles ripple throughout the train. Hideaki Yamamoto of the Minami Aso Railway says, "The locals started to wave spontaneously. I believe it's a manifestation of their support of the railway and their desire to see the track fully reopened."

The conductor's commentary is another highlight. They jovially tell passengers about the formation of Aso's five mountains, the history of the Minami Aso region, and provide sightseeing

and local food recommendations. Audio guides in English, Korean and Taiwanese are available for visitors from overseas.

The stations along the way have their own charms. For instance, Minamiaso-Shirakawasui Station is the closest stop to the source of the Shirakawa, a river that flows at a rate of sixty tons of water per minute. Minami Aso has so many water sources that it is sometimes called "the birthplace of water," and the Shirakawa's source is particularly renowned—selected as one of the 100 Remarkable Waters in Japan by the Ministry of the Environment—and many people come to sample its waters.

Another highlight is a bento box offered at the station that features local Akaushi beef stewed in ginger and soy sauce. Nakamatsu Station is famous for the toy collection on display, which was assembled by the owner of the café inside the station building. The coffee there is made with local spring water, and is the perfect way to relax. There's also a giant cherry blossom tree in Isshingyo Park—just a fifteen-minute walk from the station—that's four centuries old.

Even along the section of track currently closed (between Nalamatsu and Tateno stations), the Minami Aso Railway has so much to offer, including hot springs and bridges with spectacular views of nearby valleys. The train will continue to trundle along as rail fans and locals eagerly await the day in 2022 when the whole track is operational again. 🚆

- 1 Golden Week: a period of national holidays that stretches from late April to early May.
- 2 National Railway: The Japanese National Railway (JNR) was the name for the railway when it was run by the government. The JNR was broken up and privatized in 1987, and is now operated by the JR Group.



# HAKATA GION YAMAKASA FESTIVAL

**H**akata Gion Yamakasa is a midsummer festival held in Fukuoka City's Hakata Ward in Fukuoka Prefecture. A votive ritual over seven centuries old, it honors the guardian deities of Hakata enshrined at Kushida Shrine. Between July 1 and 15, Hakata's streets come alive with the vivid colors of Yamakasa floats, drawing around three million spectators.

The festival's highlight is watching thousands of people in traditional *mizu-happi* costumes exhort each other as they carry the floats at top speed around a five-kilometer course through Hakata's streets. The excitement and energy of this traditional celebration make it a must-see for visitors to Fukuoka.

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**JAPAN GOV**  
THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

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The official JapanGov website functions as a portal for users to access a broad range of information from policy-related information to cultural content.