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FABULOUS FABRICS

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THEME FOR **SEPTEMBER:**  
**FABULOUS FABRICS**

**F**abric weaving and dyeing techniques have a long history in Japan and have been integral to the development of a sophisticated fashion culture epitomized by the kimono as well as numerous other unique fabric forms. In this month's Feature, we take a close look at some of the representative fabrics of Japan and their wide range of uses.

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**ON THE COVER**  
Fabulous Fabrics  
Photo: Aizawa Tadashi

**EDITORS' NOTE**  
Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

## JAPAN-AUSTRALIA SUMMIT TELEPHONE TALK AND JAPAN-U.S. SUMMIT TELEPHONE TALK



Photograph of the Prime Minister's press conference following his designation

On September 20, 2020, Mr. Suga Yoshihide, Prime Minister of Japan, held a summit telephone talk with the Hon. Scott Morrison, MP, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia and the Honorable Donald J. Trump, President of the United States of America. The overview of the talks is as follows.

### Japan-Australia Summit Telephone Talk

Prime Minister Morrison conveyed his congratulations and his desire to establish a good relation with Prime Minister Suga. In return, Prime Minister Suga thanked Prime Minister Morrison and stated his willingness to build a good relationship with Prime Minister Morrison like his predecessor did with a deep trust, and to strengthen the Japan-Australia relationship.

The leaders confirmed that, as “Special Strategic Partners,” they would further develop their complementary economic relationship. Looking ahead to suppression of COVID-19, the leaders also confirmed the importance of realizing the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” deepening their cooperation for the stability and prosperity of the international community as a whole, and collaborating with like-minded countries in the region. In addition, Prime Minister Suga requested Australia’s continued cooperation in early resolution of the North Korean abductions issue.

Prime Minister Morrison expressed his gratitude for the devoted and brave search and rescue operation to date by Japan Coast Guard in the case of missing livestock cargo ship “Gulf Livestock 1” which had two Australians aboard. Prime Minister Suga replied that Japan would cooperate as much as possible.

### Japan-U.S. Summit Telephone Talk

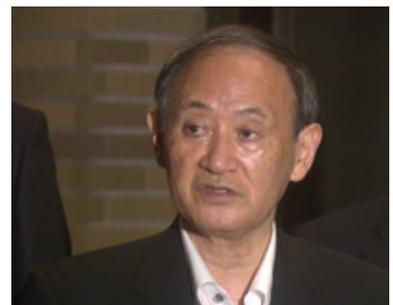
At the outset, Prime Minister Suga emphasized to President Trump that the Japan-U.S. alliance is the cornerstone of peace and stability in the region and the international community, and that alongside President Trump, he would like to further strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance, which has been made stronger than ever before based on the deep personal trust between former Prime Minister Abe and President Trump. In response, President Trump offered his congratulations on Prime Minister

Suga’s appointment to office. He fully reaffirmed Prime Minister Suga’s remarks, and expressed his wish to further consolidate the Japan-U.S. relationship with Prime Minister Suga.

After discussing their respective efforts to combat COVID-19, the two leaders agreed to continue Japan-U.S. cooperation in the development and distribution of therapeutics and vaccines for the disease.

In addition, the two leaders shared the view that Japan and the United States would work closely together to address regional issues, including North Korea, and to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific. With particular regard to the abductions issue, Prime Minister Suga expressed his intention to work resolutely towards the early resolution of the abductions issue, and asked for President Trump’s continued full support towards its resolution.

President Trump also stated that Prime Minister Suga could contact him 24 hours a day if needed.



Photograph of the Prime Minister holding the press conference after the Telephone Talk on September 20





# Japanese Fabrics and the Evolution of the Kimono

Nagasaki Iwao, Professor in the Department of Textile and Clothing at Kyoritsu Women's University

FABRIC weaving and dyeing techniques have a long history in Japan and have been integral to the development of a unique fashion culture epitomized by the kimono. We spoke with Nagasaki Iwao, a Professor in the Department of Textile and Clothing at Kyoritsu Women's University, about the historical characteristics of Japanese fabrics and clothing.

## When does the history of Japanese fabrics begin?

We don't know exactly when fabrics were first made in Japan, but we assume that fabrics were initially created for use as clothing to protect the body and later came to be used for a variety of purposes. It is thought that during the Jomon period (from 10,000 BCE until the start of the Yayoi period), the main raw material for making fabric was hemp. In the Yayoi period (10th century BCE-300 CE), silk came to be used, drawing on silk making techniques introduced from mainland China and the Korean peninsula.

As fabric weaving skills developed, the materials and techniques used for making clothes came to reflect the wearer's social class. In the seventh and eighth centuries, for example, ornate *mon-orimono* figured silken garments came to be worn by the aristocracy. These robes, with their extremely long hemlines and wide sleeves, were adopted to represent authority, influenced by the

court attire in China. *Junihitoe*, the formal court dress of women at this time comprising multiple layers of colorful mon-orimono, is representative of this style. On the other hand, common folk mainly wore clothing made from hemp, until cotton became common in the seventeenth century.

During the Muromachi period (1336-1573), the wearing of silk *kosode*, garments with cylindrical sleeves with small openings, precursor to the modern kimono, became common among women in the samurai class. And in the Edo period (1603-1867), kimono fashion blossomed, based on the *kosode*.

## Why did the wearing of colorful kimono become so widespread in the Edo period?

One important reason is that Edo-period society was peaceful for around 300 years and people's lifestyles improved. Not just the aristocracy and the samurai class, but also ordinary people became able to dress fashionably depending on their financial strength. In particular, the splendor of women's kimono increased through improvements in dyeing techniques such as plant dyeing with indigo. From the latter half of the seventeenth century, *yuzenzome* dyeing was devised as a way to hand-draw patterns onto fabrics. Using this method, it became possible to express scenery and other complex designs, and the variety of figured patterns increased. Kimono and their designs played a very large role even in the

*Japonism* that came into fashion in Europe from the end of the nineteenth century through the start of the twentieth century. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), visitors to Japan bought Edo-period kimono, *noh*<sup>i</sup> costumes, and other dyed and woven textiles in large quantities and took them back to their home countries. These then became the collections at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Museo d'Arte Orientale in Venice where I am involved in research and classification, and their high value as works of art is recognized.

Beginning in the Meiji period, western-style clothing became common as modernization progressed in Japan, and opportunities to wear kimono decreased for Japanese people. However, in the last ten years or so, new ways of wearing kimono, such as wearing them directly over western-style clothing, have been proposed, and more and more young people think that kimono are interesting.

### **What kinds of differences are there between traditional western-style clothing and kimono?**

Western-style clothing is cut and sewn three-dimensionally to match the body's curves, but kimono are cut and sewn flat without regard to the body's curves. For western-style clothing, it has been important to accentuate the body's silhouette through clothing; for example, women shaped their bodies by squeezing them with corsets when wearing dresses. But in Japan, importance has been placed on the beauty of the worn kimono itself rather than the silhouette of the body, and so fabrics were refined to be more beautiful, which led to the development of sophisticated techniques in weaving and dyeing.

As Japan is blessed with abundant nature, kimono are quite often defined by the plant motifs in their figured patterns. They also feature designs based on scenes from literature such as *The Tale of Genji* or *The Tales of Ise*. Such complex designs are not commonly found in western-style clothing.

### **Furoshiki wrapping cloths have gained attention in recent years for their use as alternatives to disposable shopping bags. Tell us about the origins of furoshiki.**

Fabrics have been used to wrap objects in Japan since the distant past. Wrapping an object in cloth makes it easier to carry, but it is thought that it also had the religious significance of keeping a valuable item clean and pure. Even today, it can be said that wrapping gifts in furoshiki is a holdover from this. The word "furoshiki" ("furo" means "bath" and "shiki" means "to spread") dates from the Edo period (1603-1867), when people started using wrapping cloths to carry a change of clothes and prevent their belongings from getting mixed up with those of other bathers in communal bathhouses. All wrapping cloths later came to be called furoshiki.

### **In what fields might Japanese fabric manufacturers make a contribution to life in the future?**

Using Japan's advanced fabric-manufacturing techniques, we can surely contribute to the medical and welfare fields by creating clothing for people with sensitive skin or eczema, for example, or by creating comfortable clothing that can be put on and taken off easily, using kimono-making techniques, for elderly people or the infirm. Japan has long made fabrics using natural dyes and fibers. In recent years, natural materials have been gaining attention for many reasons, including their natural colors, gentle textures, and minimal environmental burden. Understanding the needs of modern-day society to protect the environment, I think we can apply the traditional dyeing and weaving techniques of Japan not just to kimono but also to a variety of uses, including western-style clothing and interior design. ▮

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Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU

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<sup>i</sup> Noh is a form of musical and dance drama that has been performed in Japan for over 650 years.

# The New Traditions of Nishijin Textiles

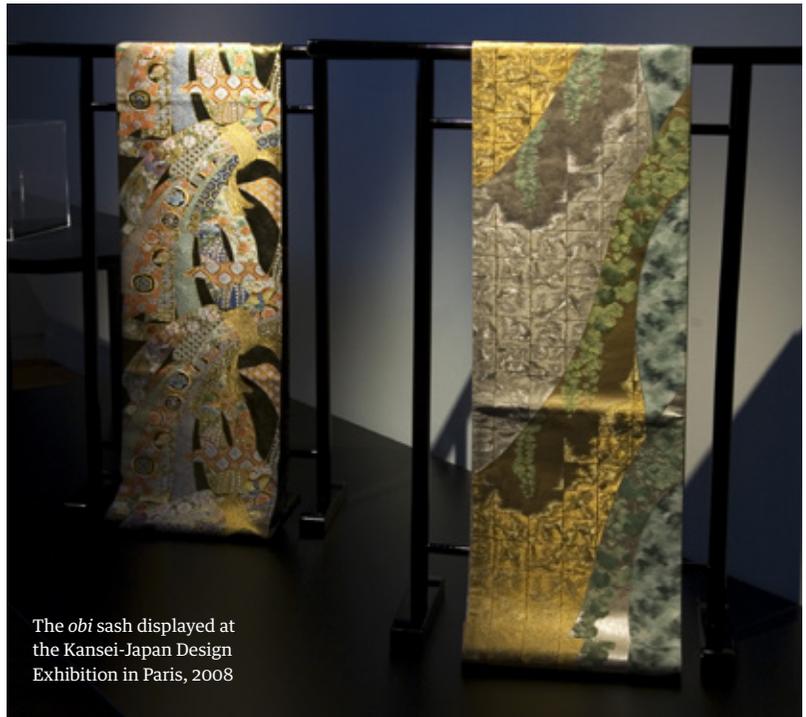
Nishijin, a part of Kyoto famous for the namesake textiles that are representative of Japan, has passed on the textile tradition for more than 1,200 years. In Nishijin, a weaver with more than 300 years of history is producing unprecedented Nishijin textiles through new techniques and collaborations with various artists, attracting a lot of attention both from within Japan and from overseas.

## SATO KUMIKO

NISHIJIN is a district of Kyoto where narrow alleyways are lined with traditional long and narrow buildings built in the *Machiya-zukuri* architectural style. The silk textiles that have traditionally been produced in this district are called Nishijin textiles. The textiles are characterized by their colorful and elaborate patterns.

“Nishijin textile makers have pursued beauty while meeting the demands of the imperial court, aristocracy, temples, shrines and other customers mostly in Kyoto, which was the capital of Japan for over 1,000 years,” says Hosoo Masataka, the 12th-generation family head and president & CEO at HOSOO Co., Ltd. The company has manufactured Nishijin textiles and conducted wholesale trading since its founding in 1688.

In Nishijin, weavers, dyers, thread makers and craftsmen



The *obi* sash displayed at the Kansei-Japan Design Exhibition in Paris, 2008

creating the gold and silver leaf characteristic of Nishijin textiles are mostly gathered within an area measuring just 5 km square. The division of labor at each of the more than twenty highly technical steps needed to complete Nishijin textiles has continued in this district for more than 1,200 years.

While HOSOO Co. continues to make traditional Nishijin textiles, it also has announced various textiles in the last ten years that have surprised the world, and continues to expand the possibilities of Nishijin textiles.

What started this trend was an exhibition at the Kansei-Japan Design Exhibition held in Paris in 2008. At this exhibition, American architect Peter Marino saw an *obi*

sash made by HOSOO Co., and was moved by the sophistication of the weaving technique and the fabric’s gorgeous decorative quality. He saw potential for the textiles to be used as a material for interior design, and requested HOSOO Co. to create a fabric for interior design purposes. However, the width of Nishijin textiles is traditionally 32 cm, which is too narrow for use as an interior design material. To meet his request, the company developed a new loom and began to weave fabric with a width of 150 cm, which is an international standard for textiles. Produced by Marino, the new Nishijin textile fabric has come to be used for wallpaper, curtains and sofa upholstery in stores and hotels in

over 100 cities around the world, including the flagship Christian Dior store in Paris.

Approximately 9,000 warp threads can be woven with the new loom, which is compatible with a width of 150 cm, and a three-dimensional textile can be woven with many layers. The loom can weave a variety of materials and can be adjusted to determine the fabric's radiance, translucence and three-dimensional effects. Making use of this technology, HOSOO Co. collaborates with various artists and corporations. For example, in collaboration with American contemporary artist Teresita Fernández, the company took about one year to weave her artwork *Nishijin Sky*. The textile appears translucent from one side by making use of a weaving technique used for summer clothing called *sha* (silk gauze) and by angling the weave in a certain way. The beautiful fabric produced has "two distinct faces,"



which is the concept behind the artwork.

In collaboration with Panasonic Corporation, a manufacturer of electrical appliances including audio equipment, HOSOO Co. created Ori-no-hibiki, a speaker that combines Nishijin textiles with cutting-edge technology. In addition to functioning as a speaker, it is designed to produce sounds when the fabric is touched with

or approached by the hand. This speaker, which is activated by conductive metal threads woven into the fabric, was awarded the Best Storytelling Award at Milan Salone 2017.

Hosoo says, "Traditions evolve by cooperating with various fields and actively incorporating state-of-the-art technology. If we look back at the long history of Nishijin, perhaps our predecessors also continued to take on these kinds of challenge."

Up until now, talk of Nishijin textiles centered around kimono, but HOSOO Co. launched an original brand, HOSOO, in 2019, and it is developing products as part of this "new tradition." It has expanded the use of Nishijin textiles to all parts of modern life, from sofas and curtains used in homes and offices to pouches and small items, all made using original textiles. As HOSOO Co. intended, the elegant aesthetic sense of Kyoto, built up over 1,200 years, is present in each of these products. 7



Nishijin textiles made by HOSOO Co. are used in the interior design of many luxury hotels, including The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo



# Doncho

## The Weaver's Giant Canvas

**The mighty theater curtains of Japan known as *doncho* are made of one, intricately woven piece of fabric. The curtains, made using sophisticated traditional weaving techniques, are considered works of art in themselves.**

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YANAGISAWA MIHO

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CURTAINS are a standard part of any stage set. Among the many types of stage curtains is the *doncho*, a drop curtain which is unique to Japan. Made from a single piece of fabric measured to match the size of the stage, *doncho* are raised and dropped vertically at the beginning and end of a performance.

*Doncho* trace their history back to the Edo period (1603-1867). Draw curtains that opened and closed to the sides of the stage were used in kabuki theaters certified by the Tokugawa shogunate, but for all other performances, the use of such draw curtains was not permitted. And so, simple curtains that could be raised and lowered were used at playhouses instead. The first modern-day *doncho* was that installed at the Shintomi-za kabuki theater,

which opened in 1879 in Tokyo. Former US President Ulysses Grant, who visited Japan the same year and attended a performance at the theater, presented the curtain to the theater, and this was remade into the *doncho* the following year.

In the period of reconstruction following the Second World War, when many theaters and public halls were built, the demand for *doncho* increased, and a unique *doncho* came to be made for each new venue.

Kawashima Textile Manufacturing (now Kawashima Selkon Textiles Co., Ltd.), one of many textile manufacturers in Kyoto, began making *doncho* in 1893. In 1951, the company created the *doncho* using the famed local *tsuzure-ori* weaving method<sup>i</sup>, recreating an abstract painting by Yoshihara Jiro. After first pulling the longitudinal warp threads tightly together, colorful threads made by twisting together five to six threads of various fibers are wrapped around thread cones ready for the transverse weft. Following the pattern of the design, skilled weavers pull each weft thread with their fingertips through the loom shuttle then draw

<sup>i</sup> *Tsuzure-ori* weaving is done mostly by hand with weavers using their fingertips to "spell out" the intricate designs.

A large loom used for weaving *doncho*  
Photo: Yanagisawa Miho



them together gently with a tool resembling a comb. This advanced weaving technique continues to be passed down even today. Examples of doncho made using the method can be found in the Kabukiza and National Theatre in Tokyo, among other prestigious venues within Japan. The doncho continue to delight the eyes of the theaters' many visitors.

Shimazaki Mitsugu, Group Manager of the Traditional Artistic Textiles Manufacturing Group at Kawashima Selkon Textiles Co., Ltd., has been involved in the making of doncho for many years. He says, "The tsuzure-ori weaving method is able to precisely express most pictures and designs. It also allows for an expression of limitless color and fine color gradations with ease. However, the quality of woven textile is not determined by how detailed the design is. While there is a skill in creating a subtle expression where the viewer may feel unsure if it is a woven textile or a painting, there is also a power

in rough woven textiles. Both are features of woven textiles and both have merit."

When using a picture as a template, the most time is spent arranging the design. First, a 1/20 size copy of the design is created. Once the design has been decided, a portion of the doncho is delineated as a sample and a one square meter prototype is made to test thread types and the weave. Then, a full-size sketch of the entire design is made, the color scheme is determined, and the weaving design plan is completed. As a doncho made to fit the size of a stage has a width of dozens of meters, the design plan is placed under a large loom, and the doncho is woven jointly by several weavers lined up side by side. The threads used are thick. Doncho made using the tsuzure-ori weaving method weigh about four kilograms for every one square meter on average, and a 200 square meter doncho has a weight close to approximately one ton, even though it is a single piece of cloth. For this reason alone, the physical fatigue experienced by a weaver when working on a doncho is different from that felt when working on an *obi* sash for a kimono, for example. Some weavers even report that their fingers grew fatter when making doncho. Even though it is a difficult job, many weavers say that they feel happy to be involved in the creation of art-like doncho.



A *doncho* weaver at work  
Photo: Yanagisawa Miho

The nature of requests for doncho has begun to change in recent years, with some customers asking for doncho that can be used as screens for projection mapping, for example. Though made primarily to demarcate the boundary between real and virtual worlds, doncho continue to play a role in delighting the eyes of an audience. Doncho may yet evolve further together with the changing of the times. 

# SILK FLOWERS CONVEYING THE ELEGANCE OF THE COURT

The custom of making and displaying silk flowers, which began in the imperial court in around the eighth century, continues to this day, with one expert practitioner very much to the fore.

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**SUGIYAMA MAMORU**

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THE word “*yusoku*” refers to the rules of ceremonies and events in the imperial court and related rules implemented by the nobles who served the emperor and samurai. “Yusoku silk flowers” as they are known today were used as decorations on such occasions. The flowers, which were made in a specific, formal style, appear in *waka* poetry from as early as the middle



Cherry blossoms  
made of silk

All photos: Aizawa Tadashi



A *hirakusu* wreath of  
Japanese silver grass and  
egret made from silk

of the eighth century. Later, in the fourteenth century, the Karin school of artificial flower making was founded, and the art of making silk flowers further developed as a part of court culture.

Among the court events in Japan, the *Gosekku* (January 7, March 3, May 5, July 7, and September 9) are important ceremonies held to dispel evil spirits at the changing of the seasons. Introduced from China, the ceremonial events took hold among the common people and continue to be practiced to this day.

Use of the flowers has expanded from decorations at court events to wedding ceremonies for samurai and, in more recent years, to events or festivals involving the general public.

The most popular of the festivals today rooted in the old court events is *Momo no Sekku* (“Peach Festival,” more commonly known as Girls’ Day), held annually on March 3. On this date households display *hina-ningyo* ornamental dolls wearing imperial clothing to wish for the healthy growth of girls and happiness in their homes. Yusoku silk flowers of the cherry and *tachibana* orange trees are also displayed on this occasion.

A variety of other specific styles have been

developed, such as *kusudama* incense balls made of silk flowers and *hirakusu* silk flower wreaths, and these decorative forms survive to this day. The beautiful designs of yusoku silk flower arrangements remain courtly and elegant.

Oki Suju is one of the few masters of the yusoku



Nishijin silk thread

silk flower art form still working today. Oki studied the techniques on his own after becoming fascinated with the flowers' elegance.

“Rather than being an imitation of a flower, there is a dedication to realism,” he says. “The most fascinating part is recognizing the intrinsic beauty of the flowers and then elevating it to the stylistic beauty of the yusoku silk flowers.” The colors, richer and brighter than real flowers, are part of the yusoku style that allowed the flowers to appear brilliant even in dimly lit rooms at a time long ago when there were no electric lights.

The flowers, petals, leaves, and other features of yusoku silk flowers are created by taking silk cloth lined with dyed *washi* paper and cutting it with metal dies or scissors. The cut-outs are then shaped into three-dimensional forms with elegant curves by pressing them against a heated *kote*,

a metal tool also used to flatten out silk. The parts, carefully made one by one using a variety of cutting dies and *kote*, are then brought together into the desired shape—for example, a flowering tree or a wreath—using silk thread and a frame. A cherry tree design might have 3,000 individual artificial flowers. Creating such displays is a time-consuming task.

Oki says, “You can make similar flower shapes using paper alone, but the texture is completely different from silk. The soft luster of silk breathes life into the flowers and reproduces the character of the court culture.”

The silk thread used in yusoku silk flower design is the same thread used to weave *obi* sashes in Nishijin, a famous textile producing district of Kyoto. It is essential to have a variety of types of thread and a number of colors. For example, to express pine needles, a slightly firm and frizzy silk thread is needed, whereas for the heads of maiden silver grass, a flexible, shiny silk thread is required.

Oki laments, “Demand for the making of yusoku silk flowers has dwindled, and I handle all the work that in the past was divided up. The number of specialists who create dies and *kote* has also declined, and it will certainly be difficult to pass on the techniques to the next generation.”

Oki is working to reproduce the yusoku silk flowers described in early literature and documents to throw more light on the history of the flowers and hand it

down. He is also experimenting with ways to express seasonal scenes encountered when out on a walk. Oki says that he sees yusoku silk “flowers” in practically everything, and he expresses what he sees every day—not just flowers, but also the moon, animals, and bugs—within the framework of the traditional style. In this way, Oki hopes, the tradition of yusoku silk flower making will take root again and blossom. 🌸



A *hirakusu* wreath made with chrysanthemums, irises and other flowers associated with the *Gosekku* ceremony



*Noren* created by Katayama Akira at a soba noodle shop in Nippori, Tokyo

# *Noren* The Face of a Shop

***Noren*, made of cloth and hung at the entrances of restaurants, bars and other establishments in Japan, are each uniquely designed and proudly displayed. Traditional *noren* are carefully made by hand by artisans who have inherited the craft.**

## SUGIYAMA MAMORU

**I**N addition to fixed signage, curtain-like cloths called *noren* are displayed by many restaurants, bars and other establishments in Japan. *Noren* are hung at the entrance when the store opens and taken inside when the store closes. Customers pass through the *noren* when entering the shop and pass through them again to leave. Many *noren* are dyed with patterns that symbolize the shop's name and show the type of shop it is. While *noren* have been used since ancient times as sunshades, wind and dust shields, and screens for shop entrances, they have also functioned as advertising and signage for shops. In a sense, *noren* are the "face" of a shop.

All photos: Courtesy of Katayama Noren Dyeing Factory

In Japan, there is an expression: "To damage the *noren*." In this expression, the *noren* hanging from the shop represents trust in that shop and its reputation and status, and damaging the *noren* represents damaging trust in that shop.

The Katayama Noren Dyeing Factory, located along the Sumida River in Arakawa City, Tokyo, has been making *noren* for around 100 years, mainly for bars and restaurants, including many soba noodle shops, with *soba* being a representative food culture of Tokyo. Third-generation factory owner Katayama Akira continues this traditional work by hand, taking pride in creating a face for shops.

The creation of a conventional *noren* on which, for example, a white text or designs stand out from a dark blue background, first begins with the creation of paper stencils by cutting out the text or designs. The stencil is then placed on top of the cotton or hemp fabric and covered with a paste resist made from glutinous rice flour. The fabric is then soaked in dye or painted with dye using a brush, and the fabric

- 1, 2 Katayama Akira at work on two *noren*
- 3 Katayama cuts out a paper stencil
- 4 *Noren* hung out to dry

is imbued with a vivid blue. The beautiful white designs are then revealed when washing off the paste. Katayama's techniques have been recognized as being distinctive in the area, and have been designated as intangible cultural properties by Arakawa City.

Katayama says, "A fabric's strength is increased through dyeing. *Noren* need to hold their vivid colors for many years at a shop. This is why the joy is so great when *noren* are used continually for a long time. In the past, there were many shops that changed their *noren* according to the season, using hemp *noren* in summer and cotton in winter. It's sad to see such a tradition die out."

Up until the time of Katayama's predecessor, many dyeing factories gathered along the nearby Sumida River, and you could see people washing out paste in the river water, but today Katayama's factory is the only one left in the area.

However, Katayama says that orders from all over Japan have come flooding in, as traditional, handmade products are in demand. He also says that lately, clients thoroughly communicate their preferences and features of their shops while directly speaking with factory staff, and they often create *noren* that are not strictly bound by tradition.

Takumi, Katayama's son who has taken over as the fourth-generation factory owner, is involved in designing new, unprecedented, and modern patterns in collaboration with other designers, as well as in activities to communicate the tradition and beauty of dyed textiles to the general public through hosting indigo dyeing workshops. Takumi has also recently taken on the challenge of planting seeds and growing indigo and madder, the plants used as materials to dye *noren* fabric, on his own in the Tokyo metropolis. He also plans to produce towels, placemats and cushions featuring family crests and other such emblems using *noren*-making techniques.

As the traditional techniques of *noren* making are passed on, so new forms of expression through dyeing continue to be created. 



# Imabari: The Home of Towels



imabari towel  
Japan

Facing the Seto Inland Sea, Imabari City in Ehime Prefecture is the representative towel producing area of Japan. The towels, produced to original high standards of quality, are very popular both in Japan and abroad for their superior absorbency and softness.

SATO KUMIKO

(Left) The imabari brand logo with a design that combines the sun and ocean



The flagship imabari towel store in Imabari City  
Photo: Courtesy of IMABARI TOWEL INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATION

**I**MABARI City in Ehime Prefecture is the leading towel production area in Japan, with close to 200 related factories gathered here in addition to factories where towels are weaved, including twisted yarn factories, dye works, and more. Producing 11,000 tons annually, the city accounts for more than 50% of the share of domestically produced towels distributed in Japan. Among the towels produced here, awareness of the “imabari” towel regional brand is spreading not just in Japan but overseas, as well. These towels have a characteristic softness, smooth texture, and above all, superior absorbency.

Inoue Hiroki, president of the Imabari Towel Industrial Association, says, “Twelve original integrity standards of quality have been established for the imabari towel brand, including superior absorbency, durability and fade-free colors, but these towels became famous for the ‘Five Second Rule’ that

shows the quality well.”

The “Five Second Rule” is a test to check the towel’s absorbency, and is a standard that verifies whether or not a 1 cm square piece cut from a towel begins to sink within five seconds of being floated on water. From this we can see that imabari towels have extremely superior absorbency, as the general Japan Industrial Standards (JIS) standard is 60 seconds.

The textile industry of Imabari City flourished from the early days of Japan’s modernization, for two main reasons. One is that the city faces the Seto Inland Sea, and its warm climate is suitable for growing cotton. The other is that marine transport to Osaka, a commercial center, was developed, making the distribution of goods easy. Towel production started here in 1894.

Production of towels from Imabari differs from ordinary towel production, traditionally using a technique known as “*saki-zarashi saki-zome*,” where yarn is refined and bleached and then dyed before weaving. Large amounts of water are required for this technique, which makes use of the original softness of the cotton, and this is made possible by the abundant underground water of the Soja River that flows through the city. The soft water with its low amounts of calcium, magnesium and other metal ions is gentle on the cotton yarn, allowing for a towel with a fine, soft texture.

At its height in the 1970s, about 500 towel manufacturers participated in the Imabari Towel Industrial Association, but from the 1990s, there were successive bankruptcies and withdrawals from the market



A worker prepares yarn for towel weaving  
Photo: Courtesy of IMABARI TOWEL INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATION



A view from Imabari City over the Seto Inland Sea

following an increase in imports of cheap foreign-made towels, and today participating manufacturers have decreased to about 100. In 2006, “The Imabari Towel Recovery Project” was launched and successfully revitalized the “imabari towel” brand name, protecting this regional industry that was threatened with obsolescence. The project established that the value of the towels of Imabari lies in the quality of the towels itself. It also established the twelve original integrity standards of quality, including the Five Second Rule for absorbency, resistance and strength through use, and more. Products which met these standards came to be marked with a logo featuring a design that combines the sun and ocean, expressing a passion for towel manufacturing and the quality of the product.

A white towel bearing this logo was popular at MACEF, the International Home Show in Milan, Italy in January 2011, and at the Gift Show in Shanghai, August 2011, leading to the formation of the brand and an expansion of the domestic and international markets.

Today, many imabari towel products are aimed at the domestic market, but several manufacturers are developing exports to countries in North America,

Europe and Asia. Inoue says, “I think the fact that the imabari towel brand is not a single company, but rather a regional brand made up of about 100 manufacturers, is a strength.” Consumers can choose their preferences in towel thickness, softness, length of terrycloth loops, and so on, as each manufacturer produces towels with their own characteristics.

Imabari City is the terminus and departure point for the Shimanami Kaido, an expressway that connects the main islands of Honshu and Shikoku via islands of the Seto Inland Sea, and the city has become famous as a place where many cyclists from within Japan and around the world gather to tour the magnificent cycling road above the sea. You will surely get the sense that imabari towels were developed from the beautiful nature here as you wipe away sweat while cycling along the expressway. 

Imabari towels have excellent absorbency and a soft texture  
Photo: Courtesy of IMABARI TOWEL INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATION



A furoshiki specialty store



Yokoyama Isao, the Furoshiki Prince

# The Furoshiki Prince and the Revival of the Wrapping Cloth

The traditional wrapping cloths known as *furoshiki* are making a comeback in Japan as an alternative to disposable shopping bags. Yokoyama Isao, the self-styled “Furoshiki Prince,” is promoting the revival of furoshiki by demonstrating how to use the traditional wrapping cloths in everyday modern life.

UNO MASAKI



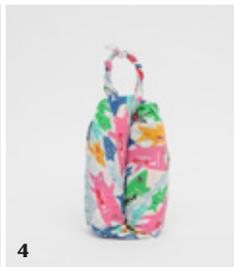
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All photos: Courtesy of Yokoyama Isao

**T**HE *furoshiki* is a nearly square-shaped piece of fabric which has long been used to wrap and carry things in Japan. The custom of wrapping valuable objects in cloth is said to have started in the Nara period (710-794), but it was in the Edo period (1603-1867) that wrapping cloths became widely used by the general public. In this period, communal public bathhouses (now *sentō*) grew in popularity in cities in Japan, especially in Edo (present-day Tokyo). Before taking a bath, people took to bundling their clothes and belongings in wrapping cloths in the dressing room to prevent them from getting mixed up with those of other bathers, giving the cloths their name, “*furoshiki*.” (“*Furo*” means “bath” and “*shiki*” means “to spread.”) *Furoshiki* were widely used in the Edo period for carrying things on trips, too. There are many *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints of the time depicting travelers with bulging *furoshiki* slung over their backs.

As modernization gathered pace in the latter half of the nineteenth century, *furoshiki* dropped out of use as Japanese lifestyles became increasingly westernized, and after the Second World War, *furoshiki* disappeared from everyday life, being replaced by handbags or backpacks and disposable shopping bags.

However, there is one person busy holding workshops and events across Japan to try and bring the *furoshiki* back to everyday life. That person is Yokoyama Isao—the *Furoshiki* Prince. Yokoyama demonstrates ways to utilize *furoshiki* in a variety of everyday situations—from travel and outdoor activities to carrying children’s toys and first aid—beginning with the basics of wrapping and tying.

Summarizing the *furoshiki*’s advantages, Yokoyama says, “Items carried inside a *furoshiki* don’t rattle around as they can be tightly wrapped, enveloping their shape. Depending on the way you wrap

or tie it, the *furoshiki* can also be used as a bag. Best of all, after it has been used, the *furoshiki* can be folded back into a small, single piece of fabric, ready to be used for another purpose.”

Yokoyama became fascinated by the high functionality and efficient beauty of *furoshiki* as a student at art university. He has used a *furoshiki* in place of a bag ever since, some twenty years now, no matter where he goes.

“The world is filled with disposable things,” Yokoyama says. “When plastic and paper bags at the grocery store and product packaging are thrown away, it places a burden on the environment. With a single *furoshiki*, you can wrap and carry objects of any shape using different wrapping methods, and there is no waste as you can use the *furoshiki* time after time. Many people from overseas go to *furoshiki* specialty stores to find souvenirs. There are so many designs at these stores that a customer can enjoy just looking at them all. *Furoshiki* can also be enjoyed as a fashion item as they come in a range of sizes, from 50 cm squares to 200 cm squares.”

Plastic shopping bags began to incur a mandatory fee starting in July 2020 as one measure against plastic garbage in Japan, and this is pushing residents to reexamine their lifestyles. Recently, more and more people carry reusable shopping bags that can be folded up when shopping. Yokoyama explains that packing a *furoshiki* on shopping outings has plenty of benefits.

“A *furoshiki* can be used as a backpack or a tote bag. Breakable bottles can then be wrapped and carried safely. Or the *furoshiki* might be used as a shawl or hood to protect against the wind, cold or rain. I hope to spread word of the many qualities of *furoshiki*, which modern Japanese people have largely forgotten about, and contribute to the preservation of the environment at the same time.”

The return of *furoshiki* to modern life draws on a Japanese trait that has not been lost, that of using things carefully and wasting nothing. Clearly, a great many possibilities are wrapped up in the revival of the *furoshiki*. 

- 1 *Furoshiki* wrapping cloths laid flat
- 2 A single *furoshiki* can be tied to create a backpack
- 3 A *furoshiki* tied into the shape of a tote bag
- 4 A *furoshiki* wrapped around two glass bottles
- 5 A *furoshiki* made into a reusable shopping bag

# A Reusable Shopping Bag That Folds in an Instant



Foldable bags in the popular new range

**Charging a fee for plastic shopping bags became mandatory for shops in Japan on July 1, 2020. As a result, many people now carry their own bags with them at all times. One new type of bag which is compact and can be folded quickly is proving particularly popular with shoppers.**

## KATO KYOKO

**T**HE number of people walking around carrying small, foldable shopping bags has recently increased due to the mandatory fee for plastic shopping bags. These reusable shopping bags come in a variety of sizes and designs, and there are more than a few people who use several bags depending on the purpose and situation. Among these bags is a hit product that has shipped more than seven million units since sales began in 2015.

This product is the Shupatto<sup>i</sup> series of compact bags developed by MARNA INC., a manufacturer of household goods that was established in 1872. The standout feature of this foldable bag is that it can

easily be made smaller simply by pulling both ends, while also being easy to open up. For its functionality and design, the Shupatto bag was awarded the prestigious German Red Dot Award 2016<sup>ii</sup> and iF DESIGN AWARD 2017<sup>iii</sup>.

Kikuta Minami, product designer at MARNA INC., explains the background to the creation of the bag.

“With conventional reusable shopping bags, even if they can be folded small, albeit with some bother, storing them in the included storage bag was a bit of a pain. My superior said, ‘It’d be great if there was a bag that could easily and properly be folded. Why don’t you try and make one?’ So I began developing one in my first year at the company.”

As Kikuta observed people using reusable shopping bags, she noticed that they folded the bags while looking for the fold marks on the bag. But after the bag is used a number of times, those fold marks disappear. Days continued as she thought about how to make a bag easy to fold. She got a hint from a disposable hat made of nonwoven fabric that she had worn when doing inspections at a distribution center

i Shupatto has acquired intellectual property rights both in Japan and overseas.

All photos: Courtesy of MARNA INC.

ii Sponsor: Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen

iii Sponsor: iF International Forum Design GmbH (iF)



Over-the-shoulder foldable bags



The design keeps the contents of the bag out of sight



Forming a belt-like shape quickly by pulling both ends, the bag can be rolled up into a compact shape



Two bags pulled and rolled

during her new employee training. Before use, it came folded in a long, thin, belt-like shape, but it turned into a hat when opened up. From this shape, she thought of a design that would fold when pulled.

Kikuta says that she aimed “for the bag to intuitively be folded quickly and properly, even without reading the instructions.”

The highly reproducible fabric was processed with pleats that can’t be easily removed, creating strong fold marks. And by making the color of the bag different from the color of the tape on both ends that are pulled when storing, it makes it easy to understand where to pull. It also isn’t necessary to store the bag in a separate storage bag as the bag can be rolled and fastened with the rubber elastic or snaps that are attached to the bag.

Shupatto’s features include the fact that the bag can be opened up wide like a *furoshiki* wrapping cloth and fit to the shape of the contents when in use, as the design has no bottom gusset. “You can

carry items of a variety of shapes, including things that are flat, round or square,” says Kikuta. “The polyester material is lightweight and fully machine washable, so it can easily be cleaned, too.”

The standard M size, sold from the start, can carry items weighing up to 5 kg and, when in use, measures about 30 cm by 32 cm. When folded, it becomes smaller, with an approximate diameter of 6 cm by 8 cm. In addition to different sizes of compact bags, the product comes in the form of backpacks, shoulder bags and Boston bags, as well. In March 2020, the company also sold a reusable shopping bag that was jointly developed with Seven & i Holdings Co., Ltd. and made with recycled polyester from discarded plastic.

The variety of uses are expanding for reusable shopping bags that are lightweight, easy to open, easy to fold, and multifunctional, so they can be used not only as shopping bags, but also to carry lunch boxes, unexpected purchases made on an outing, and more. 

# The Public Opening of the State Guest Houses



■ The Main Building of the State Guest House, Akasaka Palace

**The two State Guest Houses, located in Tokyo and Kyoto, are national facilities to welcome monarchs, presidents, prime ministers and other dignitaries with the best hospitality. Both Guest Houses are open to the general public, as long as their primary activities of welcoming dignitaries are not interrupted, and visitors can enter into the interior of the buildings and see the interior decorations and furniture integrating the best essence of Japanese architecture, art, craftsmanship and more.**

## SAWAJI OSAMU

### STATE GUEST HOUSE, AKASAKA PALACE

The State Guest House, Akasaka Palace, located not far from Yotsuya Station in Tokyo, was originally built as the Togu Gosho (Crown Prince's Residence) in 1909. After the Second World War, various governmental organizations used the building, and it was opened as the State Guest House in 1974 after undergoing large-scale repairs. At that time, Yushintei, a Japanese-style annex, was newly built for tea ceremonies and other forms of Japanese-style hospitality. Since then, the State Guest House has been a place for state guests and other dignitaries to stay and a stage for diplomacy for summit meetings, the hosting of international conferences, and more. In 2009, the Main Building, front gate and other parts were designated as National Treasures.

In April 2016, the buildings began to be opened to the public year-round, with many tourists from within Japan and abroad coming to visit. Currently, the buildings are open with novel

coronavirus disease (COVID-19) measures in place, such as temperature checks at the entrance, stationing of hand sanitizer dispensers, and ensuring of social distance between visitors.

The Main Building, with its two above ground floors and one basement floor, is 125 meters wide, 89 meters deep, and 23.2 meters tall. It is the only palace in Japan that was built in the Neo-Baroque style. There are four rooms set up to welcome guests.

Asahi no Ma, the most elegant room in the State Guest House and used as a salon for dignitaries, features a ceiling painting of Aurora, the Roman goddess of dawn, driving a chariot in front of the rising sun. A hand-woven *dantsu* carpet with cherry blossom designs is laid out on the floor.

The ash panel walls of Kacho no Ma, where banquets are held, are decorated with thirty cloisonné

medallions depicting flowers of the four seasons and birds.

In Hagoromo no Ma, where dignitaries are ceremonially welcomed, three huge chandeliers—at 3 meters tall the largest of all those in the State Guest House—hang from the ceiling, which is painted with pictures based on the *noh* play *Hagoromo (Robe of Heaven)*.

Used as a waiting room for guests, Sairan no Ma is decorated with golden reliefs of mythical *ran* birds, which symbolize peace. There are other highlights as well, including a large hall and the main garden with its fountain.

A tourist lounge (9 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed Wednesdays, free entry) was opened in June 2020 in the park in front of the State Guest House. In addition to rest areas set up both inside and outside, the tourist lounge features a multi-purpose toilet, café, gift shop, and a multi-screen display

### State Guest House, Akasaka Palace

**Access:** 7-minute walk from Yotsuya Station on the JR and Tokyo Metro lines

**Hours:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (usually closed on Wednesdays)

**Admission Fees:** Adult ¥1,500 (Main Building and gardens can be visited. Advanced reservations are required to visit the Japanese-style annex. The fee for the Main Building, Japanese-style annex, and gardens is ¥2,000)

**URL:** [www.geihinkan.go.jp/en/akasaka](http://www.geihinkan.go.jp/en/akasaka)



that plays films related to the State Guest House.

## KYOTO STATE GUEST HOUSE

The Kyoto State Guest House was opened in 2005 to welcome distinguished guests from abroad to Kyoto, the ancient capital boasting a long history and rich traditional culture. The building, located inside the Kyoto Gyoen National Garden, features an *irimoya*-style roof and a *sukiya*-style external appearance typical of Japanese traditional residences, in order to harmonize with its historic landscape and surrounding natural environment. The interior incorporates wood and *washi* paper in abundance creating a distinctively Japanese atmosphere. The concept for the interior is made up of “modern Japanese,” combining the essence and beauty of traditional Japanese architecture with modern architectural techniques, and the *teioku-ichinyo* philosophy, in which an exquisite harmony is achieved between a Japanese garden and its buildings.

The Kyoto State Guest House began to be opened to the public

year-round from 2016. Currently, the Kyoto State Guest House is implementing thorough measures to prevent COVID-19 infection, and the buildings are opened to the public with advanced reservation only while guided tours are conducted with a limited number of guests.

At the Kyoto State Guest House, visitors can see many beautiful pieces of furniture made using traditional Japanese techniques. For example, when banquets and ministerial meetings are held, Juraku no Ma is used as a waiting room for dignitaries or accompanying staff. In the room, there are comfortable chairs, constructed without iron nails using the *kyosashimono* traditional joinery technique, covered in a vivid crimson upholstery, woven in Kyoto's Nishijin district.

In Fuji no Ma, used as a venue for banquets and ceremonial welcomes, a tapestry depicting thirty-nine varieties of flowers and woven in the *tsuzure-ori* technique brings splendor to the room.

A 12-meter-long deep black lacquer table is located at the center of Kiri no Ma, a Japanese-style room with *tatami* mats for banquets where authentic Kyoto cui-

- 1 The tourist lounge in the park in front of the State Guest House, Akasaka Palace
- 2 Fuji no Ma in the Kyoto State Guest House
- 3 Kiri no Ma in the Kyoto State Guest House

sine is served, and guests of honor can gaze at the Japanese-style garden from where they are seated.

And from the open-air covered bridge that crosses the pond, visitors can see the shapes of many varicolored carp slowly swimming among the reflection of the building on the water's surface.

Opening hours at the Kyoto State Guest House are extended until 7 p.m. for two days, from November 21 (Sat) through 22 (Sun), with guided tours for a small group of people starting at 4:30, 5:10, and 5:50 p.m. On these days, the building and gardens are illuminated and their daytime appearance is transformed. The soft, golden light filtering through the paper sliding doors of the Kyoto State Guest House is reflected in the pond making the building appear to float, and the colorful autumn leaves in the garden look more radiant than ever. **[7]**



- The Kyoto State Guest House illuminated in 2019 during a period of extended opening hours

### The Kyoto State Guest House

**Access:** 7-minute walk from the Kyoto City Bus Furitsu Idai Byoin-mae (Univ. Hospital, Kyoto Prefectural Univ. of Medicine) bus stop. 15-minute walk from Imadegawa Station on the Kyoto City Subway Karasuma Line. 20-minute walk from Demachi Yanagi Station on the Keihan Railway

**Hours:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Admission Fees:** Adult ¥2,000 (For the time being, guided tours are conducted ten times a day. Each tour is for up to thirty people. Advanced reservations required)

**URL:** [www.geihinkan.go.jp/en/kyoto/](http://www.geihinkan.go.jp/en/kyoto/)

■ Former headquarters building of Komatsu Matere, which underwent seismic reinforcement using CABKOMA Strand Rod  
Photo: Courtesy of Komatsu Matere Co., Ltd

# A New Rust-Free Material That Is Stronger and Lighter than Steel

**A textile company in Ishikawa Prefecture has developed a carbon fiber composite material, a new material stronger than steel, by applying a traditional Japanese braiding technique known as *kumihimo*. This new material is gaining attention as a new one for seismic reinforcement, being one-fifth as light as steel and extremely strong.**

## UMEZAWA AKIRA

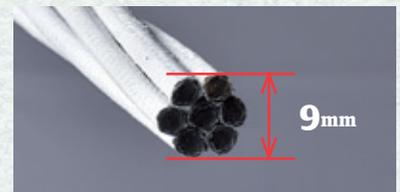
**K**umihimo is a traditional braiding technique in Japan with more than 1,000 years of history. Ordinary textiles are made by crossing the warp and the weft (weaving). Kumihimo, in contrast, is a technique where several threads or several dozen threads of silk or other fibers are clustered together as one, and, gathering three or more of these clusters, a braid is created by crossing them diagonally, front to back, or top to bottom. The shape of the braids is often likened to girls' pigtail hair with three or four braids. It is difficult to make a large, flat, textile-like object with this technique, but it is suitable for making cord-like

objects. In Japan, it is said that this technique was brought over from mainland China in ancient times and the technique was developed in the Heian period (from 794 until around the end of the twelfth century), mainly being used for small decorative parts of kimono and later being used as decorations for weapons and more, which continues to the present day. Even today, it is common to attach a kumihimo braid on top of the obi sash as decoration (the *objime*) when wearing kimono in Japan.

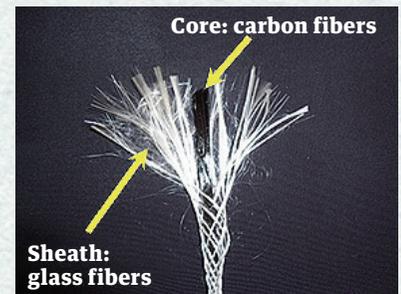
CABKOMA Strand Rod (CABKOMA, for short), a carbon fiber composite material in wire form developed by Komatsu Matere Co., Ltd, a textile company in Ishikawa

Prefecture, uses the kumihimo technique in the manufacturing of wires for buildings.

Okuya Teruhiro, Director of the Research and Development Divi-



■ CABKOMA cross section  
Photo: Courtesy of Komatsu Matere Co., Ltd



■ CABKOMA's sheath-core fiber structure, which covers the carbon fiber core with a glass fiber sheath  
Photo: Courtesy of Komatsu Matere Co., Ltd



■ Lightweight and portable, a roll of CABKOMA  
Photo: Courtesy of Komatsu Matere Co., Ltd



■ Tomioka Warehouse No.3, with CABKOMA installed as a seismic reinforcement material  
Photo: Courtesy of Komatsu Matere Co., Ltd

sion at Komatsu Matere, says, “In 2008, Ishikawa Prefecture developed a policy to promote the advancement of the textile industry into fields other than clothing-related fields to promote the development of textiles, which is the most important industry in the prefecture. In response, our company moved forward with the development of new wires that could be used in the field of architecture, utilizing textile techniques. Conventional wires used as construction materials were heavy, and the handling and transportation costs had become an issue, so we thought there was great need for a lightweight, flexible product that withstood time-related deterioration. We decided to make use of the traditional kumihimo technique in developing a product.”

To make CABKOMA, seven strands of carbon fiber are each wrapped in a sheath of multiple glass fibers in the braided manner of kumihimo then twisted together and soaked in resin to form a wire.

Its biggest features are that it is lightweight, strong and rust-free. With a weight one-fifth the weight of steel and approximately ten times the strength, it also has superior heat and chemical resistance.

Ordinary carbon fiber has strong elasticity, but is weak to paral-

lel force. CABKOMA, however, is strong and flexible due to the glass fibers covering the carbon fiber core being braided like kumihimo. It has a diameter of 9 mm, but even an approximately 160-meter-long strand weighs only 12 kg, and can be carried by hand. It is just one-fifth the weight of conventional metal wire but with the same level of strength.

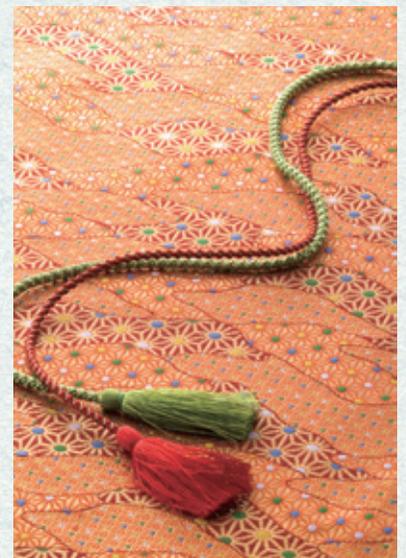
This CABKOMA is currently gaining attention especially as a material for seismic resistance in earthquake-prone Japan.

In 2015, Komatsu Matere used CABKOMA as a material for seismic resistance for renovations of their headquarters at the time. CABKOMA was not only attached like bracing on the interior of the building, but it also connected the roof of the building with the ground on the exterior. Dr. Kuma Kengo, a world-famous architect, worked on the cutting-edge design that stretches and wraps approximately 1,000 CABKOMA cables around the entire building. Dr. Kuma, who after the Great East Japan Earthquake thought that the time had come where buildings would be built with flexible materials, praised CABKOMA, as it combines flexibility with strength.

Later, after gaining experience in seismic retrofits at the Zenkoji Temple Scripture House

in Nagano Prefecture and the former Tomioka Silk Mill in Gunma Prefecture, CABKOMA was certified as a Japanese Industrial Standards (JIS) standard for a material for seismic resistance in 2019 - the first such certification for a carbon fiber composite material.

Okuya comments, “It is said that there are several million wooden homes that do not meet earthquake resistance standards in Japan, and more and more of these homes urgently need seismic reinforcement. I want to contribute to this field first. In the future, we hope CABKOMA can be used in the same way as steel is used in steel-reinforced concrete. The deterioration of steel-reinforced concrete begins with the steel inside the concrete rusting. If CABKOMA is used in place of steel, it will be possible to expand the current 50-year lifespan of steel-reinforced concrete to over 100 years. I would be happy if we could contribute to the longevity of buildings around the world with this technology.” 



■ Kumihimo

# Using Knitting to Support Recovery and Reconstruction

▣ Martina Umemura  
knitting a vest



**German-born Martina Umemura supports the recovery and reconstruction of disaster-stricken areas in the Tohoku region and brings people together through sharing the joy of knitting.**

SATO KUMIKO

When getting off the train at Kesenuma Station on the JR Ofunato Line, which connects the inland part of southern Iwate Prefecture with the coastal region of northern Miyagi Prefecture, there's a small, charming shop right in front of the station. Step inside and your eyes will be drawn to the many colorful bundles of yarn. This shop is KFS (Kesenuma Friedenssocken), which carries yarn for knitting and more, established by German-born Martina Umemura. The company's name means "peace socks" in

German.

Umemura, who was a medical student in Berlin, first came to Japan as a researcher in 1987. She transferred from Gunma University to the graduate school at Kyoto University, continued her research, and got married in Kyoto. Later, when she became a mother and it was hard to find time for research, she took it into her head to start knitting. She says, "In Germany, children learn how to knit socks at school. I really liked that. Then my mother in Germany told me that there was a factory producing attractive yarn near their house in

southern Germany. The yarn from that factory was very interesting. It was not a single color but dyed with a variety of colors, producing a variety of patterns through knitting. It was truly magical yarn."

She then quickly sent off for some yarn made by TUTTO, the company producing that magic yarn, knitted some socks, and then gave them to coworkers from the university where she taught German at the time. "Everyone was very pleased, but Japanese people will always give a present back in return. If that was the case, then I thought that if I accepted money

Name order is the order used and preferred by the interviewee.



■ Umemura's Kesennuma Color series yarn, inspired by the nature and lifestyles of Kesennuma. From left, "Cherry Blossom," "Sea" and "Forest."

■ Samples of knitted yarn on display in the store

and spent it on something useful for society, then everyone would be happy." This is what started her work towards "Peace Socks" (Friedenssocken). This name comes from her work selling knitted socks at a craft market in Kyoto in 2003 and donating the profits to someone she knew who was supporting recovery from war damage in Afghanistan. Umemura gradually expanded her activities.

And then, the Great East Japan Earthquake happened in 2011, and being unable to contain herself seeing the state of the disaster-stricken areas in the media day after day, she sent donations of relief money

from Kyoto to the affected areas in the Tohoku region. She also sent knitting sets with yarn and needles to people who were living in shelters, saying, "You can be free from troubling thoughts when knitting." Soon thereafter, one of the shelters in disaster-affected Kesennuma City asked her to send more yarn, and a connection between Umemura and the people of Kesennuma was forged.

After a year had passed since the earthquake and people from the disaster-stricken areas were trying to return to normal life after leaving the shelters, Umemura began to consider how it was

essential for these people to have a place to work. And so, in 2012, she established the Umemura Martina Kesennuma FS Atelier Co., Ltd. in Kesennuma. Currently, ten local female employees import and sell TUTTO-made yarn, and knit and sell cylindrical Haramaki-Boshi (bellyband hats) and Peace Socks, which have become synonymous with Umemura.

Learning of Umemura's activities, TUTTO proposed a project for a private brand, and they now produce unique yarn for KFS. There are more than 100 varieties of yarn that have been developed by KFS, including the Kesennuma Color series, inspired by the nature and lifestyles of Kesennuma, the Family's Smile series, which imagines each member of the family, and more.

Among the yarn varieties is a zebra color yarn designed by TUTTO for activities to protect the tropical rainforests. As this color is a favorite of Umemura's, there is a zebra mascot placed outside the KFS store. Zebra mascots slowly began to increase in number, and before long, they spread out from the shop all across Kesennuma city. Just as Umemura believes that knitting connects people, the zebras seem to be running around the city as messengers of peace. 7



■ Umemura with the storefront zebra mascot

□ “Yamanashi” was declared the first geographical indication in Japan for wine by the Japanese government

Image photo

# The Delicate Flavor of Koshu Wines

It is said that the cultivation of grapes in Japan began more than a thousand years ago, but the production of wine from grapes only began after the start of the Meiji period (1868-1912). Nowadays, this wine is exported globally and has received critical acclaim.

## SASAKI TAKASHI

Yamanashi Prefecture boasts the highest yield of grapes and production volume of wine in Japan, and in 2013, “Yamanashi”<sup>1</sup> was declared the first geographical indication in Japan for wine by the Japanese government. There are currently around eighty wineries in the prefecture, and a little less than half of those are located in the Katsunuma region of the city of Koshu.

Katsunuma is over 100 km west of the central part of Tokyo,

located to the east of the Kofu Basin that expands out northward from Mt. Fuji. Far from the sea, the Kofu Basin sees little rain and receives many hours of daylight, and so grape cultivation has prospered in the area since ancient times. The grapes cultivated here are the Japanese native Koshu variety and, having been here since long ago, they are well suited to the climate of Yamanashi. Now cultivated for the production of white wine, the grapes further benefit from the large temperature



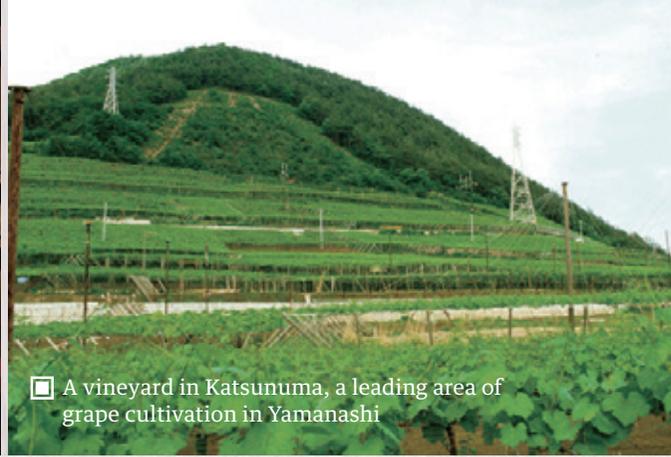
□ Takano Masanari (left) and Tsuchiya Ryuken

difference between day and night.

About 140 years ago in 1877, right after Japan began to modernize, there was an opportunity to begin authentic wine production

<sup>1</sup> Not all wines made using grapes from Yamanashi Prefecture and produced in the prefecture are given this geographical indication. There are strict standards for grape variety, quality, production method, etc. A wine must meet all of these standards to use the geographical indication.

Yamanashi wines aging in barrels at a winery



A vineyard in Katsunuma, a leading area of grape cultivation in Yamanashi

in Japan. A private wine company called the Dainippon Yamanashi Wine Company was established in Katsunuma, and two young men, Takano Masanari and Tsuchiya Ryuken, were sent to France to study wine making there.

Anzo Mitsuhiro, chairman of the Yamanashi Prefecture Wine Manufacturers' Association and General Manager / Chief Winemaker at Château Mercian, which has its roots in the Dainippon Yamanashi Wine Company, says that "Wine production in Japan was actually also a governmental national policy at the time." He says that at the time, there was a shortage of rice due to civil unrest and a poor harvest, so the government sought to control the consumption of rice, an ingredient in sake, through expanding wine production.

When Takano and Tsuchiya returned to Japan from France, wine production began quickly, but it didn't sell well in Japan, as Japanese people weren't accustomed to the taste of wine, and the company was finally driven to bankruptcy. But the two men left behind their knowledge of grape cultivation and wine making to the local people, and through that, they opened a path for many wineries to later

emerge in Katsunuma.

A variety of wines are made in Katsunuma, including white wine made with Koshu grapes that offers a mild flavor and a red wine made from Muscat Bailey A grapes with an aroma reminiscent of strawberries and a mild astringency from the tannins. One variety that is especially popular is a dry white wine made from Koshu grapes called Koshu Sur Lie<sup>2</sup>. The wine, with its light, fruity aroma and clear acidity pairs extremely well with Japanese cuisine. Anzo says, "The pairing of Koshu Sur Lie with Yamanashi's famous simmered shellfish, such as *nigai* (abalone boiled in soy sauce) or *hamaguri-no-ushiojiru* (a clear hard clam soup made with rich dashi stock), is exquisite."

In recent years, Yamanashi wine has increasingly received recognition globally. In 2010, Koshu grapes were registered as the first Japanese grapes for use in wine making on the list of grape varieties created by the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) in Paris. This meant it was now possible to sell wine within the EU using "Koshu" on the wine label as the variety of grape used rather than merely stating "Japanese wine." In 2013,

Muscat Bailey A grapes were also registered. There have also been many instances of Yamanashi wines receiving awards in the International Wine Challenge (IWC) and other international competitions, and export volume is steadily increasing. Wine from Yamanashi, with its old history of grape cultivation, has now come to be enjoyed around the world, and in particular, wines made from the native Koshu and Muscat Bailey A grape varieties continue to increase in popularity. 



A red wine made in the Katsunuma region of Koshu



Koshu grapes

2. Wines aged *sur lie* (French for "on the lees") are kept in contact with the lees (sediment) and are not racked (filtered) before bottling. The method is standard in red wine production, and is now used for numerous white grape varieties as well, to enrich the wine produced.

A photograph of the Nishina Shinmei Shrine, showing traditional Japanese wooden buildings with steeply pitched, layered roofs. The shrine is nestled in a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The lighting is soft, suggesting a misty or overcast day.

■ Nishina Shinmei Shrine

# Japan's Oldest Extant Shrine in the *Shinmei-zukuri* Style

Nishina Shinmei Shrine, a national treasure, is located at the foot of a mountain that leads to high peaks in Japan. The shrine buildings have passed on an ancient style to the present day and boast a dignified presence among the beautiful forest.

SASAKI TAKASHI

O machi City, with a population of 27,000, is located in the north-western part of Nagano Prefecture and is surrounded by nearby mountains. It is the gateway to mountain climbing and tourism in the Hida Mountains with its many 3,000 meter high peaks, also known as the Japanese Northern Alps. Nishina Shinmei Shrine, a national treasure, is built in a hilly area of the city.

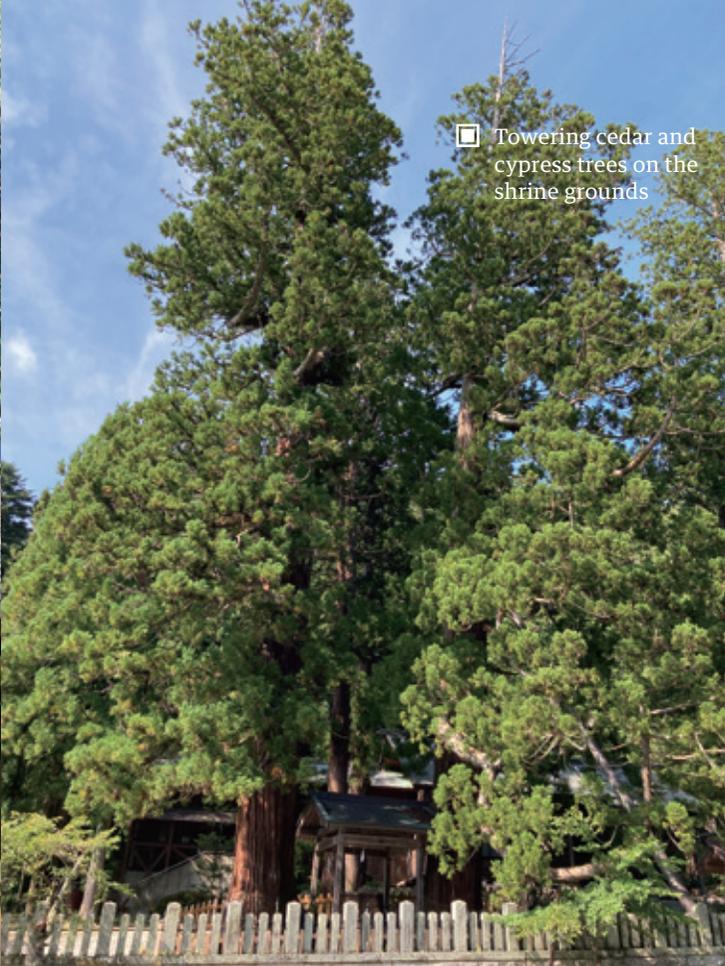
It is unclear when Nishina Shinmei Shrine was founded, but it is thought that the shrine has more than 900 years of history. In the past, this area was known as Mikuriya (the honorific term for a “demesne”) and was a place to procure hemp and Japanese paper offerings for the gods to be offered at Ise Jingu, the most prestigious shrine in Japan.

Just like Ise Jingu, Nishina Shinmei Shrine enshrines Amaterasu Omikami, the mythical Japanese sun goddess, and the shrine buildings were built in the *Shinmei-zukuri* style. The prototype for this style is said to be ancient Japanese granaries built with a raised floor (*takayuka-shiki*). This characteristic style, which raises the floors high off the ground to allow for good ventilation and to prevent humidity, was established during the Yayoi period (from around the 10th century BCE to 300 CE). Japanese cypress, one of the finest materials used in Japanese wooden construction, was used as a building material, and the style features simple, straight lines, making use of the beauty of the cypress tree bark itself. The *honden* (main hall) and *chumon* (inner gate), as well as the *tsuriya* (suspended roof) which con-

nects the two, have been designated as national treasures, as they are the oldest examples of *Shinmei-zukuri* architecture in Japan.

Miyazaki Eisuke, a representative of shrine parishioners helping to manage Nishina Shinmei Shrine, says, “At Nishina Shinmei Shrine, the *Shikinen Sengu* is carried out once every twenty years, just like at Ise Jingu. There are thirty-five *munafuda*-wooden ridge plaques which record the details of the ritual-in existence, starting with one from 1376.”

*Shikinen Sengu* is a ritual where the *shaden*, or main building of the shrine, is rebuilt at an adjacent site in a specific architectural style at regular intervals and the object of worship is transferred to the newly-rebuilt building. This ritual has been carried out for over 1,300 years at Ise Jingu.



❑ Towering cedar and cypress trees on the shrine grounds



❑ The roof of the main hall, thatched with cypress bark



❑ The raised-floor granary

Full of pride, Miyazaki says, “There aren’t any other examples in Japan of carrying out Shikinen Sengu continuously for so long without any breaks, even amidst war or disaster.”

Among Nishina Shinmei Shrine’s wooden munafuda, the twenty-seven plaques from before modern times have been designated as Important Cultural Properties, and from the records remaining on these plaques, we know that the main building was not fully rebuilt in the Shikinen Sengu carried out in the early part of the Edo period in 1636. Only the re-thatching of the roofs and repairs for damaged parts were undertaken for the main hall, inner gate, and suspended roof, and so these buildings from that time, built close to 400 years ago, have been maintained as they are.

In November 2019, Shikinen

Sengu was carried out as scheduled for the first time in twenty years at Nishina Shinmei Shrine. The main parts of the main hall were left as is, but the roof was re-thatched by layering thinly sliced Japanese cypress bark layers in a process called *hiwadabuki*, and damaged parts were also repaired. The beautiful appearance of the main hall was thus restored, and the object of worship, which had been moved to a temporary shrine, was once again transferred to its proper place in the main hall.

Around Nishina Shinmei Shrine, which boasts expansive grounds of nearly 20,000 square meters, is a dense forest, with large Japanese cedar and Japanese cypress trees standing as if reaching for the heavens, including two Japanese cedars estimated to be about 1,000 years

old. Due to its mysterious atmosphere, this forest has gained popularity among young women and others as a location flowing with mystical energy that can increase one’s fortunes. Solemnly standing within this dense forest, Nishina Shinmei Shrine has become a place of prayer and, though not well connected by public transport, is visited by around 30,000 worshippers each year. 7



❑ Wooden munafuda



Mt. Mitokusan and  
Misasa Onsen



JAPAN HERITAGE

## Thrills and Spills: An Exciting Climb and Healing Hot Springs

**M**t. Mitokusan and the nearby hot spring town of Misasa Onsen in Tottori Prefecture will take your breath away—in more ways than one. Mt. Mitokusan is a sacred site, particularly for followers of the *shugendo* form of folk religion that focuses on mountain worship. This has been a place of mountain training for monks since the ninth century, and a handful of beautifully preserved temple buildings still dot the area. Among them, perhaps the best-known is Sanbutsuji Temple's Nageiredo Hall, which was built into a sheer precipice almost one thousand years ago and seemingly defies gravity as it clings to the cliff. The steep, narrow path to the mountain's summit resembles a natural obstacle course that has earned a reputation for being the most dangerous path to any of Japan's national treasures. The climb through beautiful forests is said to purify the six roots of perception in Buddhism—the five senses and consciousness—but another reward for overcoming this physically challenging ascent is a breathtaking view of the remarkable hall and surrounding mountains. This is one of the few places in modern-day Japan that gives a true insight into the religious and spiritual teachings of shugendo.

Bodies weary from these exertions—or perhaps preparing to endure them—can find relief in nearby Misasa Onsen. Visitors here experience a “real” hot spring town, from the traditional *ryokan* inns that date back more than 150 years, to the streetscapes and the radon-rich hot springs. The name Misasa means “three mornings” in Japanese, and derives from an old legend that says on the third morning of a stay here, one's ailments will be almost completely healed. A stroll through the streets that have retained their charm from years gone by feels like taking a step back in time—relax and enjoy the journey.

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