

# Cherry Blossoms Connecting Japan and the United States



Cherry trees on the banks of the Potomac River in Washington, D.C.  
Photo: ikana / PIXTA

**In 1912, Japan presented ornamental cherry trees to Washington, D.C., beginning the spread of a love of cherry blossoms in the United States. Today, almost 110 years later, cherry blossoms flower in abundance along the Potomac River and in their place of origin, Tokyo, Japan, delighting onlookers.**

## YANAGISAWA MIHO

JAPAN is not the only place where beautiful cherry blossoms are to be found. The parks full of cherry trees along the Potomac River in Washington, D.C. are also famous.

These trees were gifted by Japan to the United

States in 1912 as a symbol of peace and goodwill between the two nations. The gift was made possible by the contribution of many people both in Japan and the United States, including journalist and world traveler Eliza Scidmore, US First Lady Helen Taft and Tokyo Mayor Ozaki Yukio. In 1909, Japan gifted 2,000 cherry blossom trees which arrived the following year in Washington, D.C. However, all of those trees had to be incinerated because they were found to be infested with harmful insects. In 1912, 3,020 cherry blossom trees were presented to the United States and arrived safely. The first of these were planted by First Lady Taft and Chinda Iwa, the wife of the Japanese Ambassador, in a ceremony on March 27, 1912.<sup>1</sup>

The cherry trees were grafted from branches (scion wood) taken from cherry trees on the embankment of the Arakawa River in Tokyo, using *Yamazakura* (Japanese mountain cherry) rootstock grown in Hyogo Prefecture.

The Arakawa riverbank in what is today Adachi City, Tokyo, has been famous for its cherry blossoms



A painted postcard of the Goshiki Zakura (five-color cherry trees) at Arakawa (around 1920)  
Photo: Courtesy of Suzuki Makoto



Cherry blossoms of various colors on the Arakawa riverbank  
 Photos: Courtesy of Higuchi Keiichi

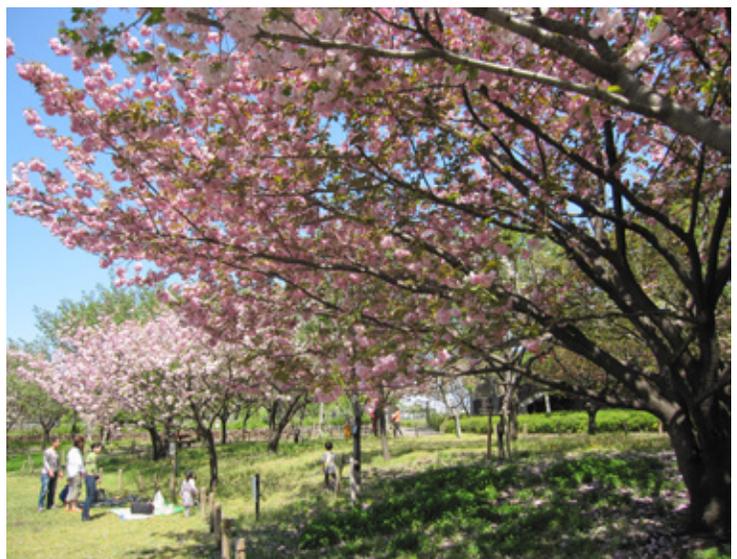
since the late nineteenth century. The seventy-eight varieties of cherry trees planted here were called “Goshiki Zakura (five-color cherry trees) of the Arakawa River” due to their various blossom colors: white, yellow, green and purple, as well as pale pink.

However, these cherry trees died as a result of damage sustained in World War II and pollution, while the cherry trees along the Potomac River continued to bloom.

In 1952, Adachi City lobbied the United States for the “return” of the cherry trees along the Potomac River in an attempt to regenerate the Goshiki Zakura. This initiative was rewarded with the gift by the United States of fifty-five cherry seedlings of eight species on the Potomac River, which were then planted along the Arakawa River embankment. In 1981, a further 3,000 cherry trees of thirty-five species were donated. These trees were planted on the Arakawa riverbank as well as in schools, parks and various other locations around the city, and continue to bloom magnificently today.

In 2012, to commemorate the cente-

Some of the ornamental cherry trees  
 “returned” to Arakawa  
 Photo: Courtesy of Suzuki Makoto



nary of the arrival of the Arakawa River cherry trees in the United States, various events were held led by the Japan-America Cherry Blossom Exchange 100th Year Anniversary Undertaking Executive Committee. These included a re-signing ceremony of the twinned river partnership between the Potomac and Arakawa Rivers and the publication of the *Cherry Blossom Trees of Arakawa River* booklet in English. Tokyo University of Agriculture Professor Emeritus Suzuki Makoto, who served as the chair of the committee, says, “I would like to pass on to the next generation the story of the bond between Japan and the United States created through the exchange of ornamental cherry trees. To do so, I believe it is important to understand the appreciation of the blossoms as a cultural activity and enhance its value.”

Today, the bank of the Arakawa River is lined with 4.4 kilometers of cherry trees and is known as the “Adachi Goshikizakura no Sanpomichi Walk.” Every spring, the cherry trees that returned to the Arakawa River all the way from the banks of the Potomac River bloom in a variety of colors, ensuring the story of the 110 years of cherry-tree exchange between Japan and the United States is never forgotten. **1**

1 For details, refer to the following URL:  
[https://arakawa-gakkai.jp/pdf/sakura\\_booklet\\_en.pdf](https://arakawa-gakkai.jp/pdf/sakura_booklet_en.pdf)