



Crane-Shaped *Mizuhiki* Add Feeling to Gifts

In Japan, there has been a long-standing tradition of using *mizuhiki*, traditional Japanese paper cords used to wrap around gifts, envelopes, and other items. Over its long history, *mizuhiki* has evolved to include intricate knotting techniques, becoming more decorative and capable of representing complex shapes, such as cranes. Here, we introduce the crane-shaped *mizuhiki*, renowned for its good fortune in Japan. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

The exact time when *mizuhiki* first appeared in Japan is unknown. Tamura Keishuku, Head of the Chushu-ryu school who carries on the tradition of *mizuhiki* craftsmanship from her mother's generation, shares her insights into the history of this traditional art.

"*Mizuhiki* is crafted from fine washi (Japanese paper) cords. It is made by finely cut washi strips twisted into cord-like shapes, fixing them with glue, then coloring them or wrapping them in gold or silver thin paper. *Mizuhiki* is a knot with an intricate design created using those fine cords," explains Tamura. "In Japan, the act of using *mizuhiki* to tie gifts signifies the importance and value of the items being presented."

While the exact origin of *mizuhiki* has multiple theories, it is believed to have originated when Ono no



*Shikishi** adorned with crane and turtle *mizuhiki*

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Ornate *hagoita*¹ for the New Year, adorned with decorative elements including cranes and turtles, symbolizing longevity

Imoko², sent as a diplomatic envoy to the Sui Dynasty³ in China in 607, returned with gifts that were tied and decorated with red and white dyed hemp strings. Subsequently, from the 14th to the 15th centuries, the use of *washi* twisted into cords for *mizuhiki* began, and by the 16th century, it had permeated into the daily lives of common people.

“Originally, *mizuhiki* were used by the warrior and aristocratic classes as a high-status item in ceremonies,” notes Tamura. “As merchants gradually gained influence, *mizuhiki* evolved into more luxurious and intricate forms during wedding ceremonies, with elaborate knotting styles depicting cranes, turtles, pine, bamboo, and plum, used as a reflection of wealth.”

In modern-day Japan, it is customary for individuals invited to celebratory events such as weddings to use envelopes that are tied with *mizuhiki* when presenting monetary gifts, demonstrating a well-known tradition.

“The *mizuhiki*, particularly when fashioned into the shape of a crane, is widely utilized for its three-dimen-

sional, vibrant appearance, showcasing a captivating blend of colors. Crane-shaped *mizuhiki* are commonly featured in readily available commercial products, such as gift-wrapping items. Moreover, it has evolved beyond its original role of accompanying gifts and is now used in new applications, such as crafting accessories like brooches exclusively from *mizuhiki*,” says Tamura. “We also have opportunities to share the art of *mizuhiki* with people from other countries. Despite potential language barriers, the intricate and beautiful process of crafting *mizuhiki* seems to feel the emotions and intentions that Japanese people put into it. *Mizuhiki* embodies the essence of the Japanese spirit. Including its cultural background, we look forward to sharing this art with many more people in the future,” she continues. ■

1. A *hagoita* is a rectangular paddle used for the traditional Japanese New Year game of *hanetsuki*, which is similar to badminton. It is also used for ornamental purposes.
2. Birth and death dates unknown. It is believed that he was appointed by Prince Shotoku and was dispatched to the Sui Dynasty in 607 as part of a diplomatic mission, serving as the first envoy.
3. An official envoy sent from Japan to the Sui Dynasty (581-618) in the early 7th century. The envoy was sent several times during the period between 600 and 614. (There are various theories as to how many times it was sent.)
4. Four-sided thick paper used for writing traditional Japanese *waka* poetry, *haiku*, calligraphy, and paintings.

Glossy New Year decoration crafted with crane-shaped *mizuhiki*.



Commercially available envelope for presenting celebratory money, adorned with various *mizuhiki* designs. The central part features crane-shaped *mizuhiki*.