

HIGHLIGHTING  
*Japan*

VOL.  
**187**  
DECEMBER  
2023



THE JAPANESE AND CRANES

# CONTENTS

VOL. 187, DECEMBER 2023

16



Photo: Toraya

11



10



21 "Birds and Flowers of the Four Seasons" (right screen), an Important Cultural Property by Sesshu, ink and color on paper, pair of six-panel folding screens, 151.0 cm (H) × 351.8 cm (W), collection of Kyoto National Museum

## FEATURES

### 6 Cranes of Japan: Their Species, Characteristics, and Connections with the Japanese

Interview with Hisai Atsuyo, an associate professor at Hokkaido University's Graduate School of Humanity and Human Sciences

### 10 A Nature Reserve Where Rare Red-crowned Cranes Nest Year-Round

We interviewed the staff of the Kushiro Crane Reserve about the ecology of red-crowned cranes and the reserve's activities

### 12 The Home of Folk Tales about Cranes

The popular Japanese folk tale "The Gratitude of the Crane" has been handed down through the ages. We interviewed the director of the Yuzuru no Sato Cultural Heritage Museum about the folk tale

### 14 Traditional Kimono Featuring Crane Pattern Design

We hear about the kimono with crane-designed pattern from an expert specializing in the study of kimonos

### 16 Japanese Confectionery Inspired by the Crane

We introduce *wagashi* inspired by the crane, the history of traditional Japanese confectionery, and explore how to appreciate their flavors through a *wagashi* expert

### 18 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. We introduce the crane-shaped *mizuhiki*, renowned for its good fortune in Japan

### 20 Masterpieces Depicting Cranes

Introducing two representative paintings featuring cranes, a common theme in Japanese paintings since ancient times: a joint work by Hon'ami Koetsu and Tawaraya Sotatsu, along with one by Sesshu

### 22 Prayers for Peace Embodied in Origami Cranes

Introducing the Children's Peace Monument, a statue of a young girl holding up a folded *origami* crane in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima City, the first city in the history of mankind to have an atomic bomb dropped on it



## ALSO

### 24 POLICY-RELATED NEWS

Next January, Japan starts new monthly educational activities for Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals, named “LIFE IN HARMONY PROMOTION MONTH”.

### 26 SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Development of a Mouse Rearing System in Space: Contributing to Healthy Life Expectancy and Human Space Exploration

### 28 MY WAY

Professional Rakugo Performer from Sweden Works to Make the Artform More Familiar to the World

### 30 THE BEAUTY AND THE SPIRIT OF JAPAN: FROM THE JAPAN CULTURAL EXPO 2.0

*Yabusame*: Keeping 800-Year-Old Traditions of Ancient Japanese Horseback Archery Alive in the Present Day

## THEME FOR DECEMBER: The Japanese and Cranes

Seven species of cranes are found in Japan today, including the rare red-crowned crane or Japanese crane with its graceful form and distinctive red crest at the top of its head. Cranes have been loved by the people of Japan since ancient times as birds associated with good luck, a view that still persists today. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* introduces readers to these birds with special meaning for the Japanese, cranes, from a range of perspectives: from the types of cranes that live in Japan and their habitats to kimono with crane designs, *wagashi* confections related to cranes, paintings of cranes, and more.



Photo: Suma Jumichi

On the cover: Cranes perform a mating dance.

### COPYRIGHT © 2023 CABINET OFFICE OF JAPAN

The views expressed in this magazine by the interviewees and contributors do not necessarily represent the views of the Cabinet Office, Agency for Cultural Affairs or the Government of Japan. No article or any part thereof may be reproduced without the express permission of the Cabinet Office. Copyright inquiries should be made through a form available at:  
[www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/mailform/inquiry.html](http://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/mailform/inquiry.html)

### WHERE TO FIND US

Tokyo Narita Airport terminals 1 ●JR East Travel Service Center (Tokyo Narita Airport) ●JR Tokyo Station Tourist Information Center ●Tokyo Tourist Information Center (Haneda Airport, Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, Keisei Ueno Station) ●Niigata Airport ●Kansai Tourist Information Center (Kansai Int'l Airport) ●Fukuoka Airport Tourist Information ●Prefectural Central Libraries

### PRODUCTION

FBI Communications, Inc.

### MANAGING EDITOR

Fukuda Yasuhiro

### EDITORS

Kato Naruho, Kimura Tetsuro, Koike Ginga, Hara Erika

### CONTRIBUTORS

Kato Yukiko, Tanaka Nozomi, Fukuda Mitsuhiro, Murakami Kayo, Moribe Shinji

### DESIGN

Azuma Terutaka, Sawatari Rumi

### EDITORS' NOTE

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



## FEATURES

# The Japanese and Cranes



Above left: A crane chick rests partially hidden in the feathers of its parent's back for protection from the cold and predators.

Above right: The *iro-uchikake* (colored *uchikake*) features the same pattern, worn in three colors: red, black, and white. Paired cranes are embroidered on both sleeves.

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

Below right: *Rakugan* with crane and turtle designs



Seven species of cranes are found in Japan today, including the rare red-crowned crane or Japanese crane with its graceful form and distinctive red crest at the top of its head. Cranes have been loved by the people of Japan since ancient times as birds associated with good luck, a view that still persists today. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* introduces readers to these birds with special meaning for the Japanese, cranes, from a range of perspectives: from the types of cranes that live in Japan and their habitats to kimono with crane designs, *wagashi* confections related to cranes, paintings of cranes, and more.



---

---

# Cranes of Japan: Their Species, Characteristics, and Connections with the Japanese

---

---

**T**he crane has long been associated with good luck in Japan and is a favorite bird even in modern Japan. Hisai Atsuyo is an associate professor at Hokkaido University's Graduate School of Humanity and Human Sciences engaging in research on the theme of the history of relationships between cranes and humans. We interviewed her about the types of cranes found in Japan and the places where they live, as well as how Japanese people view and perceive cranes, including historical background.

## What types of cranes live in Japan, and where are their main habitats found?

There are 15 species of cranes in the world, in the family Gruidae. Of these, seven are found in Japan: the red-crowned crane, white-naped crane, hooded crane, common crane, Siberian crane, sand-hill crane, and demoiselle crane. The red-crowned crane is the largest of the species that have been documented in Japan, with a height of around 150 cm. With their wings spread, they can measure more than 2m across. Regarding their habitats, the red-crowned crane is found mainly on the east side of Hokkaido in sites including the Kushiro Marsh year-round.



Cranes perform a mating dance.



**Hisai Atsuyo**  
An associate professor at  
Hokkaido University's  
Graduate School of Humanity  
and Human Sciences

Meanwhile, the white-naped crane and hooded crane migrate to Japan from abroad. They will spend the spring and summer in the marshes of southeastern

Russia, Siberia, and northeastern China, then come to the Izumi Plain in Kagoshima Prefecture for the winter.

I have been conducting surveys and research on the history of cranes, based mainly on reference materials from around the 16th century onward. At that time, even the red-crowned cranes that live in Hokkaido today were seen in places including mainland Honshu and Kyushu, and it is thought that they may have been migrating between there and other locations in Japan, as well as overseas. More recently, with increasing habitat

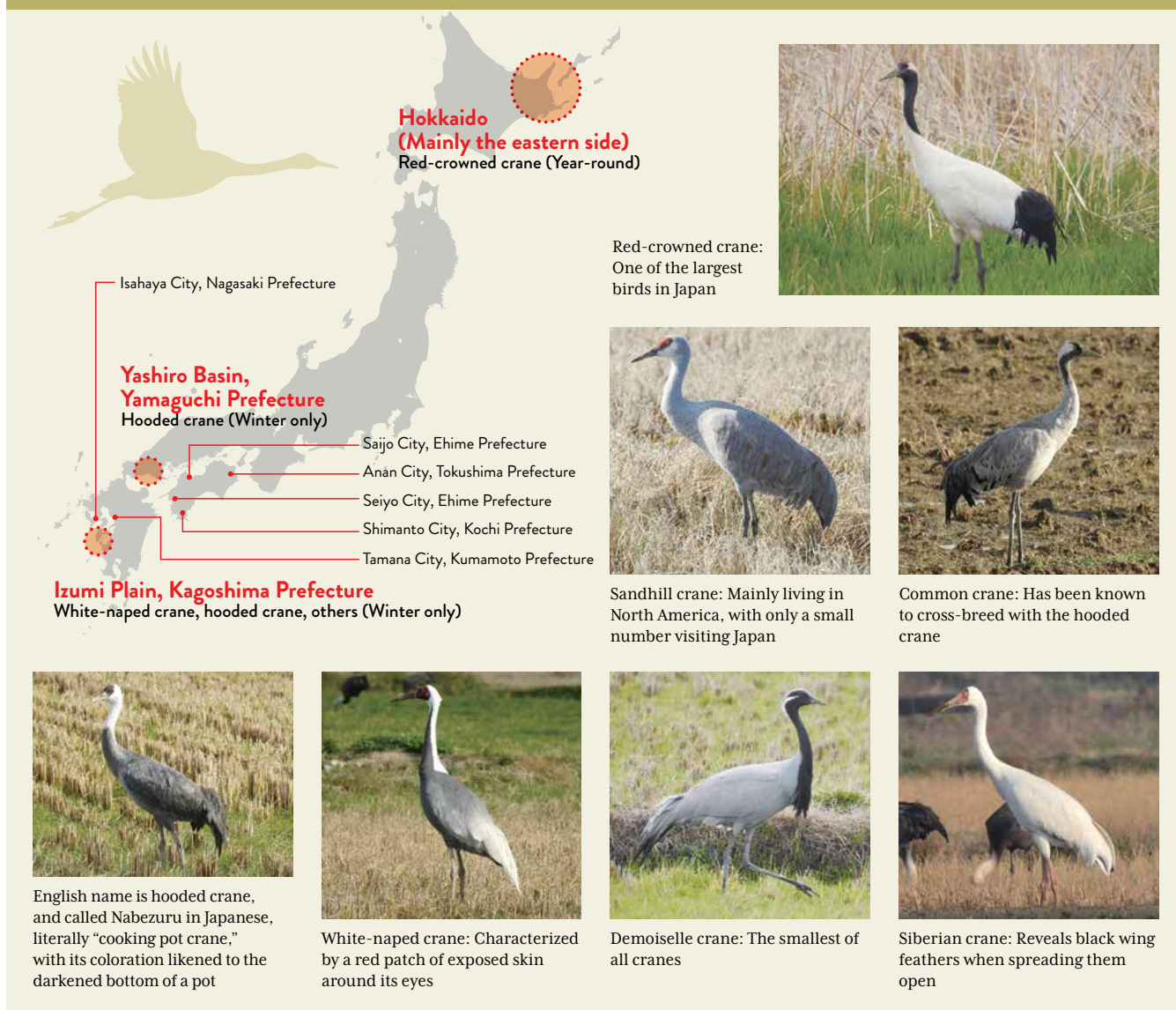
loss in addition to the impact of more active hunting in the 19th century, there was even a time when they were thought to have possibly gone extinct. In 1924, however, dozen of the birds were discovered in the Kushiro Marsh. Today, with the help of conservation activities, their numbers have increased to around 1,800.

Red-crowned cranes are omnivores, they eat rice or grains they find in fields, catch fish in rivers, and other forms of marine life and insects found in paddy fields and wetlands. Increasing development and growing human populations left less and less red-crowned crane habitat in Honshu. You might even say that these environmental changes left the red-crowned crane nowhere to live but Hokkaido. In this way, researching and understanding the past conditions of wild animals and birds provide suggestions for considering issues concerning relationships between wildlife and humans in the present day.

**Among the different species of cranes, the red-crowned crane is particularly well known and familiar to the people of Japan. Could you tell us about the life and habits of this bird?**

## Distribution map of Japanese cranes put together by associate professor Hisai Atsuyo

Photo: Hisai Atsuyo



The red-crowned crane is known as the *tancho* in Japanese, written in kanji characters as 丹頂. Just as in the English name, 丹 (*tan*) means red, and 頂 (*cho*) refers to the "crown" of the head. These cranes lack feathers on the tops of their heads, leaving the skin exposed, which appears red from the color of blood beneath it.

Once red-crowned cranes find mates, they stay paired with their partners for life. At the beginning of spring, they build nests and lay eggs. Generally, they will hatch a couple chicks at a time. During the summer, they raise their young in breeding grounds, like wetland locations, and live together in individual family units. After traveling to their wintering location

from the breeding grounds, the cranes live together in flocks. At this part of the yearly cycle, the parents give their young independence. The cranes' lifespans are somewhere around 10 years in the wild.

One thing red-crowned cranes are famous for is their mating dance. The way they move their necks up and down with extravagant movements and jump around with their wings spread out is compared to dancing. Not only males perform these dances, either. Males and females might both approach potential mates. Not only this, but they perform the dances alone, in pairs, and even in groups. It is thought to be part of what might be called their way of playing. (See page 10)





Photo: Hasei Akiyoko

Red-crowned cranes flock together on feeding grounds in wintertime

**Cranes have been loved by the people of Japan as birds associated with good luck. What can you tell us about the historical or cultural background of this view?**

Cranes' associations with long life and good fortune have origins in ancient China. An ancient Chinese book on philosophy entitled the *Huainanzi* ("The Huainan Masters"), thought to have been put together during the former Han dynasty around the 2nd century BC, contains a chapter called *Shuolin* ("Discourse on Forests") with a passage saying, "The crane lives for a thousand years." As such idea was further connection with the Shenxian(xian) thought,<sup>1</sup> and thought to have given rise to the crane's association with long life. From around the 8th century to the 12th century, this thought made its way to Japan, and cranes began to appear in paintings and patterns with this association. If we take a look at the *Manyoshu* ("Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves"), Japan's oldest collection of *waka* poetry, which was compiled earlier, around the



Photo: Suma Junichi

A crane chick rests partially hidden in the feathers of its parent's back for protection from the cold and predators.

mid-8th century, cranes appear merely as part of landscapes, particularly together with seaside scenes as a set. It can be said that there is no expression that was conscious of it as an auspicious animal.

Consider that, long ago, cranes were familiar birds living near where people lived all throughout Japan. Their habits were well known to people, such as the way they remained paired with their partners for life and lived together in family units. This must be one of the factors that endeared them to the people of Japan as birds fitting to be associated with wedding ceremonies, for instance.

**What are some characteristic features concerning the way cranes are viewed in Japan?**

Folklore concerning rice cultivation claiming that the practice was brought to Japan by cranes is found in regions throughout Japan. This is one characteristic of the way cranes are thought of in Japan. While folklore involving rice plants being brought from the heavens by birds is common to Japan, Korea, China, and other parts of Southeast Asia, Japanese folklore most often identifies these "birds" as cranes. The origins of this can be traced back as far as the times of the *Kojiki* ("Records of Ancient Matters") and *Nihon Shoki* ("The Chronicles of Japan")<sup>2</sup>. As the practice of rice cultivation spread throughout Japan, cranes would sometimes be seen flying in to the paddy fields and engaging in behaviors like pecking at rice plants, picking grass or leaves up with their beaks and tossing them around, and such. I think it is possible that such scenes may have given appearances as if the cranes were bringing ears of rice with them, leading to their associations with rice cultivation folklore.

**Can you recommend any particular works of art or literature involving cranes to our readers?**

A couple of the most famous Japanese stories featuring cranes are *Tsuru no Ongaeshi* ("The Gratitude of the Crane"; see page 12) and *Tsuru Nyobo* ("The Crane Wife"). Both of these stories involve a crane returning a favor after being helped by a human, becoming their wife, and weaving fine fabric for them in return. It seems that there are versions featuring an Oriental stork in place of a crane, due to the way the bill-clattering<sup>3</sup> of storks resembles the *clack clack* of a weaving loom. Besides these, there is also a book called *Kesorap no Kami - Tan-*

*cho-zuru no Kami* (“The Kesorap Deity and the Red-Crowned Crane Deity”) featuring cranes as viewed by the native Ainu people of Hokkaido. The book includes descriptions of a crane in a courageous form called the Sarorun Kamuy (God of the Marshes) that even takes on fights with bears.

One painting that I think captures cranes particularly well is the *Gunkaku Zu Byobu* (“Cranes”) folding screen painted by Ishida Yutei<sup>4</sup>. This flock of cranes he painted features not only the commonly seen red-crowned crane, but five species in all, including even the particularly rare demoiselle crane. It was so exciting to me to see that! Even viewing a work of art like this, my attention goes first to the cranes themselves.

### What are some good places for visitors from outside Japan to view cranes, and when would be the best times to visit?

The fact that the red-crowned crane is found nowhere but Northeast Asia, such as in Japan and Russia, makes it an especially appealing species to bird-watchers around the world. The Japanese government Ministry of the Environment provides food at three major feeding grounds: the Tsurumidai feeding ground and Tsurui-Ito Tancho Sanctuary in Tsurui Village, and the Akan feeding ground in Akan, Kushiro City, all on Hokkaido. These are great places for taking in the beautiful sight of red-crowned cranes amid snowy winter landscapes. Another site that attracts many sightseers who hope to photograph red-crowned cranes is the Otowabashi Bridge that spans the Setsuri River, one of the places where the cranes stay in the winter, also in Hokkaido.

Outside Hokkaido, there is a site called Arasaki with land left undeveloped where hooded cranes and white-naped cranes begin to arrive in mid-October. This is located on the Izumi Plain in Kagoshima Prefecture. In the peak season from around December to January, flocks of over 10,000 cranes can be seen. Arasaki is one of the best locations in the world to see these species, and one of the largest wintering grounds for cranes in all of Japan. Over 90% of the hooded



Photo: Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art



*Gunkaku Zu Byobu* (“Group of Cranes”) by Ishida Yutei

While appearing to feature a single type at first glance, the painting actually incorporates five different crane species. A particularly rare instance of the Siberian crane and demoiselle crane being included.

cranes and over 60% of the white-naped cranes in the world spend winters there. This is a truly impressive sight. I highly recommend you visit there if you get the chance. 📷



Photo: PIXTA

Morning on the Setsuri River. The golden glow of river mist illuminated by the morning sun creates lovely scenery.

1. Ancient Chinese thought. The elements of this ideology were the existence of immortal hermits and the desire of people to become immortals themselves. It is said to have become one of the basic ideas of Taoism.
2. Ancient Japanese historical works. The *Kojiki* was compiled in 712; *Nihon Shoki* in 720.
3. A habit of Oriental storks, where the birds rapidly and noisily open and shut their bills (beaks), making sounds to threaten others or attract mates.
4. A painter who was active in Kyoto in the 18th century. His style features vividly realistic representations and beautifully decorative qualities. He was the teacher of Maruyama Okyo, a representative Japanese painter of the early modern period.

# A Nature Reserve Where Rare Red- crowned Cranes Nest Year-Round



Photo: Kushiro City

The Kushiho Crane Reserve was established through a municipal public-private partnership.

The red-crowned crane that also called “Japanese crane”<sup>1</sup> was once on the verge of extinction, but in 1958 a nature reserve for this rare species was established in Hokkaido, with the aim of protecting and propagating it. We interviewed reserve staff about the ecology of red-crowned cranes and the reserve’s activities.  
(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)



Photo: PIXTA

A family of red-crowned cranes flying in formation





Photo: Kushiro City

A red-crowned crane chick covered with brown downy hair



Photo: Kushiro City

Inside the Kushiro Crane Reserve, leaving Red-crowned cranes to roam at will in a wetland that measures 180m north-south and 340m east-west.

In the eastern part of Hokkaido, the northernmost prefecture of the Japanese archipelago, about a 10-minute drive from Tancho Kushiro Airport, there is a nature reserve where red-crowned cranes are bred. We asked Takashima Kenji, the staff of the Kushiro Crane Reserve in Kushiro City about the reserve's activities.

"The Kushiro Crane Reserve was established specifically for the red-crowned crane, which is one of the rarest species in the world. Here, we achieved the world's first successful artificial hatching of Japanese red-crowned cranes in 1970. The nature reserve offers visitors the opportunity to observe the red-crowned crane, a species designated as a special natural monument, at any time of the year. Chicks are born annually from April to June, and visitors can also watch the cranes raise their young," says Takashima.

Until the mid-19th century, there were wetlands all over Hokkaido, and the red-crowned crane was not a rare species. However, in the late second half of the 19th century, as part of Japan's modernization efforts, land cultivation advanced and wetlands were converted to farmland. Combined with overhunting, these developments pushed the red-crowned crane to the brink of extinction within 20 to 30 years. By the 1910s, they had disappeared from view and were considered to be extinct. But in 1924 more than a dozen were discovered in Kushiro Marsh. In response, the following year the area was declared a no-hunting zone and a national conservation policy was initiated. The red-crowned crane is the only crane species that breeds in Japan. It is a rare species with a total population of about 3,000 birds worldwide, more than half of which live primarily in the eastern part of Hokkaido."

The red-crowned crane was designated a national natural treasure in 1935 and a special natural treasure of Japan, as a nationally protected species, in 1967. Local people also began conservation activities more

than 80 years ago, and their work led to the opening of the Kushiro Crane Reserve in 1958 in cooperation with Kushiro City. "We keep and breed more than a dozen red-crowned cranes at any given time, and when their numbers in the reserve increase, we release some into the wild. We also protect the eggs in incubators to increase the hatching rate."

According to Mr. Takashima, who is in close contact with red-crowned cranes for the purpose of breeding them, "The charm of red-crowned cranes lies not only in their beautiful appearance, but also in their human-like behavior. For example, when they peck for food, they look around cautiously as if they were humans. The contrast between their graceful appearance and their human-like behavior is fascinating."

A particularly large number of overseas visitors to the nature reserve come from East Asia. "The red-crowned crane is considered a lucky animal in Asia, so they seem to enjoy it a lot," says Takashima.

The nature reserve has information brochures in English, Chinese, Korean, and other languages to accommodate overseas visitors.

"The red-crowned cranes that soar gracefully over the wetlands are the pride of our homeland. We cherish them and commit to continue our efforts to breed them." The Kushiro Crane Reserve is a rare place where visitors can observe the red-crowned crane, a natural monument of Japan, up close, and is well worth a visit if the opportunity arises. 📷



Red-crowned cranes in a snowy landscape

Photo: Kushiro City

1. The red-crowned crane is also known as "Japanese crane" in English. Its Latin-based scientific name is *Grus japonensis*, which also means "Japanese crane."

Kakufuzan Chinzoji Temple, where the legend of *Tsuru no Ongaeshi* (“The Gratitude of the Crane”) has been handed down through the ages.



Photo: Nanyo City

# The Home of Folk Tales about Cranes

Nanyo City in Yamagata Prefecture in Japan’s Tohoku region is known as the home of the folk tale *Tsuru no Ongaeshi* (“The Gratitude of the Crane”). We interviewed the director of the Yuzuru no Sato Cultural Heritage Museum, which was established to preserve the region’s folk tales for future generations.

(Text: Kato Yukiko)

In the western part of Nanyo City, Yamagata Prefecture, near the Orihata River, which flows through the Urushiyama district, there is a temple called Kakufuzan Chinzoji Temple (Buddhist temple), where the popular Japanese folk tale “The Gratitude of the Crane”<sup>1</sup> has been handed down through the ages. The area retains many place names evoking to the famous story, such as Tsuru-maki-

da (*tsuru* means crane) and Hane-tsuki (*hane* means bird feather), and prospered as a silk manufacturing town during the Meiji period (1868-1912). Today, a museum called Yuzuru no Sato (lit. “Home of the Twilight Crane”) has been established, where visitors can enjoy exhibits on silk spinning, oral performances of folk tales, weaving workshops, and other activities. We interviewed Mr. Yamada Kazuo, director of the Yuzuru no Sato Cultural Heritage Museum.

“In the folk tale of the crane’s gratitude handed down in this area, a man named Kinzo rescued a crane that children were cruel to, and the crane returned the favor by transforming into a woman and weaving for the man using her own feathers,” Yamada says.



Photo: Yuzuru no Sato Cultural Heritage Museum

Yuzuru no Sato Cultural Heritage Museum. The museum is about a 10-minute walk from Chinzoji Temple.





Photo: Nanyo City

Weaving looms at the archives center (Weaving workshops are also available.)

Above: A display that explains how a crane that transformed into a woman and became Kinzo's wife wove using a loom in the house.

Below: Local people who love folk tales take the lead in storytelling activities.



Photo: Yuzuru no Sato Cultural Heritage Museum



Although the details of the story vary depending on the literary sources and local folk tale, it remains widely known to children all over Japan through picture books and oral traditions as a folk tale that teaches valuable lessons. Yamada explains why.

“It is likely that this folk tale gained popularity because of its role in passing on lessons about the importance of keeping promises and helping those in need, and because the crane was a familiar bird before its numbers drastically declined through overhunting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.”

Yuzuru no Sato consists of two buildings: an archive center and a house of storytellers. “After the establishment of a mechanical spinning mill in 1873, silk manufacturing flourished as a local industry. In recognition of this history, the archive’s center is a building we remodeled a white-walled warehouse for cocoons built during the Taisho period (1912-1926). At the house of storytellers, *kataribe* (storytellers) who

recount folk tales and legends from around the region tell “The Gratitude of the Crane” and other stories in an emotionally rich way.”

At Yuzuru no Sato, visitors can watch the story video of “The Gratitude of the Crane” with subtitles in English, Korean, and Chinese (traditional Chinese characters). English brochures are also available. “We have visitors from overseas, too. Sometimes they share their impressions with us in the sense that paying back kindness is important. This feedback shows that they really understand the content of the story, which makes us very happy.” We hope that many people will visit the place where the legend of the crane has been handed down from generation to generation, and enjoy the world of Japanese folk tales. 📺

1. A folk tale that has likely been passed down since the 15th century. Its author is unknown. As it has been retold through the generations in many regions of Japan, there are various theories as to the original story. Playwright Kinoshita Junji (1914-2006) published his play *Yuzuru* (“Twilight Crane”) based on this story in 1949. It was later adapted into an opera in 1952. The Kabuki actor Bando Tamasaburo V also caused a sensation with his performance as the main character Tsuu.

Yohyo, a simple and honest young man who lives in a snow-covered village, saves the life of an injured crane. To repay his kindness, the crane transforms into a woman and comes to live in Yohyo's house as his wife, Tsuu. She uses her own feathers to weave a cloth called *senbaori*, or “Thousand Crane Feathers Weave,” which she presents to Yohyo. Tempted by the prospect of selling her cloth for good money in the city, Yohyo demands that Tsuu weave more of it. Tsuu is disappointed in the money-obsessed Yohyo, but decides to weave the cloth, believing that Yohyo will return to the honest person he once was by

#### COLUMN

### Synopsis of the play *Yuzuru* (“Twilight Crane”) by Kinoshita Junji, based on the folk tale “The Gratitude of the Crane”

woven, bids him farewell, and flies high into the sky.

[Based on the introduction by the New National Theatre, Tokyo]

In the Urushiyama district of Nanyo City in Yamagata Prefecture, legend has it that the last piece of cloth left by the crane was offered to Chinzoji Temple as a temple treasure.

getting the *senbaori*. Although Yohyo has been warned by Tsuu not to look into the room where she is weaving under any circumstances, he cannot help himself and takes a peek, only to see a crane weaving a cloth. The next day, a thinned Tsuu hands Yohyo the cloth she has



# Traditional Kimono Featuring Crane Pattern Design

The crane-designed pattern is a familiar motif in Japan, often used during joyous occasions. In this section, we hear about the kimono with this pattern from an expert specializing in the study of kimonos. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

“An exemplary example of a kimono adorned with crane patterns is the *uchikake*<sup>1</sup>, often worn during wedding ceremonies. Kimonos commonly feature designs incorporating symbols of longevity such as turtles, cranes, and patterns representing good fortune, such as pine, bamboo, and plum,” explains Oyama Yuzuruha from the Research Section of the Tokyo National Museum.

The use of cranes as symbols of longevity and good fortune motifs<sup>2</sup> originated in ancient China. In the late 9th to 10th centuries, the spread of Shenxian thought<sup>3</sup> led to the depiction of the immortal beings Jusei and Fukurokuju riding on the back of cranes as one of their motifs. This imagery began to be represented in textile arts. It is believed that this philosophy was transmitted to Japan around the 11th century.

“Although kimonos adorned with crane designs can be found as early as the 16th century in Japan, their deliberate popularity as symbols of good fortune became more evident in the 17th century,” notes Oyama. “Within the *kosode*<sup>4</sup> believed to have been worn by women of the samurai class, there is a formal garment known as *jinashi kosode*<sup>5</sup>. This attire is adorned with embroidered crane and tortoise motifs, as well as pine, bamboo, and plum, with the fabric dyed in three distinct colors: red, white, and black. This design, once worn by women of the samurai class, has been passed down as a tradition and is now incorporated into the modern Japanese wedding *uchikake*.”

The crane patterns designed on the *uchikake* depict a pair of cranes flying together, symbolizing a harmonious and enduring marriage. This design symbolizes wishes for marital bliss and lasting happiness. “The elegant flight of cranes, resembling a dance, is a factor

contributing to the popularity of their design, appreciated for both its symbolism and aesthetic beauty,” says Oyama.

She continues, “While the chrysanthemum is also renowned as a symbol of Japan, it is specifically used as the imperial crest for the Imperial family. On the other hand, while crane motifs may be used in the imperial court, they are not exclusively utilized for the Imperial family. This pattern was not prohibited for civilian use, contributing to its widespread popularity.” Additionally, auspicious patterns are believed to offer protection when worn or put on, making them particularly prevalent in traditional Japanese attire, especially kimonos.

“The crane is often depicted in pairs, and its depiction includes both closed-beak and open-beak expressions, symbolizing the concept of *A-un*<sup>6</sup>. In doing so, there is also an intention to convey a prayer for a healthy and harmonious life,” comments Oyama. The paired crane pattern expresses the wishes and prayers of the Japanese people. In this way, understanding the significance of the design enhances the joy and fondness for kimonos even more. 📖

- 
1. An elegantly formal kimono, still worn today, often by brides during weddings.
  2. A collective term for patterns symbolizing good omens and signs of good fortune. While many are influenced by ancient China, some have originated in Japan. Representative patterns include cranes, turtles, pine, bamboo, plum, the Four Gentlemen (orchid, bamboo, plum, and chrysanthemum), and treasures.
  3. An ancient Chinese philosophy in which people believed in the existence of sages with eternal youth and longevity and wished to become one by acquiring the secret of immortality.
  4. In contrast to the voluminous sleeves used in courtly and warrior ceremonial attire, the cuffs are small and narrow and the size of the sleeves is smaller. This laid the foundation for the modern kimono design.
  5. A fabric minutely decorated with extensive embroidery, *shibori* (tie-dyeing), and others where there is no blank space. This intricate design is commonly found in formal attire.
  6. A phonetic representation of the first and last characters of the Sanskrit language, in esoteric Buddhism, it symbolizes the beginning and end of all things. It also represents exhalation and inhalation. In Japan, the expression “*a-un no kokyū* (breathing)” signifies spending a long time together and understanding each other without words, indicating an extraordinary level of harmony.





Kosode made from black, red, white-dyed *rinzu* silk with crane, pine, flower, and bird patterns, held in the Agency for Cultural Affairs collection. Various crane motifs are intricately embroidered on the sleeves and body.



The *iro-uchikake* (colored *uchikake*) features the same pattern, worn in three colors: red, black, and white. Paired cranes are embroidered on both sleeves. Held in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum.



*Karaori* (a silk fabric with raised patterns) featuring red background with flower, diamond, turtle shell, and crane pattern. The design, symbolizing good fortune, features cranes arranged in diamond shapes. The cranes' beaks alternate between closed and open. Held in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum.





## FEATURES

# Japanese Confectionery Inspired by the Crane

Traditional Japanese confectionery, or *wagashi*, is often designed to convey the unique charm of the changing seasons in Japan. Among these, there are sweets shaped like cranes, commonly served during joyous occasions. Here, we introduce *wagashi* inspired by the crane, delve into the history of traditional Japanese confectionery, and explore how to appreciate their flavors through a *wagashi* expert.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

“First Sunrise” with wooden mold

**T**oraya Confectionery (“Toraya”), a Japanese confectionery shop with a history of approximately 500 years, houses a dedicated reference room for *wagashi* known as Toraya Archives (Toraya Bunko). Explaining the origins, Nakayama Keiko, Senior Researcher at Toraya Archives, states, “In its original sense, the term *kashi* referred to nuts and fruits. In the 16th century, Sen no Rikyu<sup>1</sup> estab-

lished the art of tea ceremony, and during that time, confectionery mainly consisted of simple items such as fruits and rice cakes.” She continues, “In the 17th century, confections underwent significant development, particularly in Kyoto, where luxurious sweets inspired by the changing seasons were crafted and enjoyed by the affluent, including the imperial court, nobility, and feudal lords.”





Rakugan with crane and turtle designs (right) and their wooden mold (left).

Yoshida Collection/Photo: Toraya



Photo: Toraya

Red-crowned crane

The red-crowned crane featured in Toraya's 1918 illustrated book of confectionery designs (left and right).



Photo: Toraya

Traditional *wagashi* are made using plant-based ingredients like rice and beans. They encompass various types, including *rakugan*<sup>2</sup>, which is made using wooden molds, *yokan*<sup>3</sup>, which is poured into molds, and *namagashi*<sup>4</sup>, where artisans employ tools and techniques for shaping. The main motifs feature plants (cherry blossoms and plums), animals (plovers and geese), natural phenomena (rain and snow), scenery (beaches and the moon), furnishings (folding fans and strips of paper) and more, resulting in a diverse and varied array.

“*Wagashi* is often referred to as ‘edible art,’ beautifully incorporating the changing seasons into its design. Its motifs, often inspired by traditional *waka* poetry, have been also favored as subjects in various art forms such as painting, textile weaving, and pottery. Even today, this tradition continues to be passed down,” explains Nakayama. “Among them, the crane is a representative animal motif in Japanese confectionery. The graceful movements of cranes, such as dancing, standing, and crouching, have been intricately incorporated into various designs.”

As the proverb goes, ‘A crane lives for a thousand years, a turtle for ten thousand years,’ cranes and turtles are symbols of longevity. Therefore, during occasions such as New Year, weddings, and celebrations, sweets in the form of crane and turtle sets are commonly prepared as treats associated with good luck.

“Even when it comes to confections depicting cranes, the shapes vary greatly from one shop to another,” says Nakayama. “One of our specialty *wagashi* named ‘First Sunrise’ features a design that captures the image of a crane spreading its wings like opening a folding fan, soaring against the backdrop of the sunrise. Furthermore, our white *jouyo manju*<sup>5</sup>, made from *tsukune-imo* yam<sup>6</sup>, shows the red-crowned crane’s head by adding a vivid red dot (see pages 10-11) with the

wings expressed with grilled markings.

There are another *wagashi* called ‘Tsurunoko (Torinoko) Mochi’, shaped like a crane’s egg, made by mixing sugar into rice flour dough and shaping it into an egg-like form. It is often prepared in red and white colors for celebrations such as childbirth, a child’s entrance into preschool or school, and other joyous occasions.

“*Wagashi* is often described as the art of the five senses: Delicious flavors (taste), the visual appeal of different shapes and colors (sight), delicate aromas provided by ingredients like *azuki* beans and yam (smell), and textures such as softness and moistness (touch),” comments Nakayama. “In addition, many *wagashi* have poetic Japanese names (sound) derived from traditional Japanese poems such as *waka* and *haiku*. The confectionery names themselves carry a certain resonance, and it is enjoyable to evoke images based on the sounds of the words or the associations with the *waka* or *haiku* that inspired their naming.

*Wagashi* is an art of collaboration among the five senses, making it even more enjoyable.” When in Japan, be sure to try the rich and diverse world of *wagashi* to fully experience its depth. 📖



Photo: Toraya

Tsurunoko (Torinoko) Mochi

1. Sen no Rikyu, who lived from 1522-1591, was a grand master of the Japanese tea ceremony and the founder of the “Senke” school.
2. A type of dried confectionery made by pressing a mixture of rice flour, sugar, and other ingredients into a wooden mold for hardening.
3. A mixture of *azuki* beans, sugar, agar made from seaweed, and other ingredients poured into a mold and solidified.
4. *Namagashi* are fresh sweets and beautifully hand-crafted confections made from mainly sweet bean paste.
5. In general, a steamed bun filled with sweet bean paste, made from a dough consisting of a mixture of grated *tsukune-imo*, sugar, and rice flour.
6. A type of yam (*yamaimo*) known for being the stickiest among yams and has the characteristic of becoming fluffy when heated.





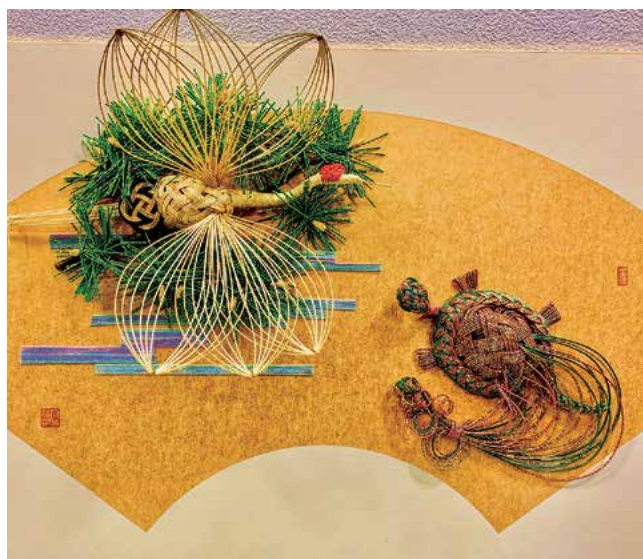
# Crane-Shaped *Mizuhiki* Add Feeling to Gifts

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*



Left page

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

Imoko<sup>2</sup>, sent as a diplomatic envoy to the Sui Dynasty<sup>3</sup> 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*.

# Masterpieces Depicting Cranes

Since ancient times, the crane, traditionally associated with good fortune, has been frequently depicted in Japanese art due to its graceful appearance. Here, we highlight two representative masterpieces, introducing their charms. Both are pieces held in the collection of the Kyoto National Museum. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)



The collaborative work of two prominent artists representing Japan's early modern period, Hon'ami Koetsu<sup>1</sup> and Tawaraya Sotatsu<sup>2</sup>, titled "Anthology with Cranes Design," is an illustrated handscroll measuring approximately 34 cm in height and spanning about 13.6 meters in length. Sotatsu painted the design, over which Koetsu has added the calligraphy for the *waka* poetry.

Fukushi Yuya, curator of Early Modern Japanese Painting at the Kyoto National Museum, provides an explanation of the charm of the artwork: "The depicted motif is limited exclusively to cranes. Unfolding from the beginning of the lengthy scroll is a spectacular depiction of a flock of over 100 cranes, uniformly and vividly portrayed with gold and silver clay<sup>3</sup>. While depicted with seemingly simple brushstrokes, the beauty of the cranes' soaring and resting postures is unparalleled, particularly in the elegance of their silhouettes."

The elegantly portrayed and vibrant flock of cranes evokes the scenery of Izumi in Kagoshima Prefec-

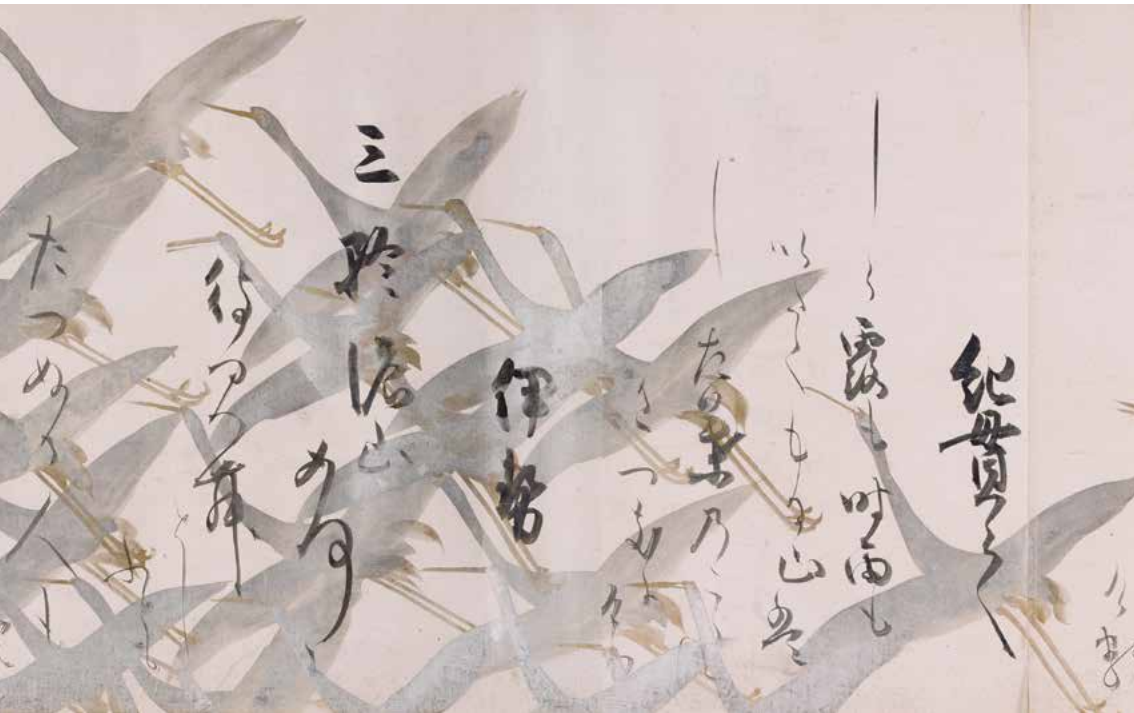
ture (see page 7), where approximately 10,000 cranes migrate and winter each year.

Additionally, the calligraphy by Koetsu, inscribed over the artwork, features *waka* poetry, the traditional Japanese poetic form, from 36 famous poets spanning ancient times to around the 10th century<sup>4</sup>. The verses reveal a vibrant and ornamented yet dynamic brushwork. With the combination of the painting and calligraphy, the artwork offers a rich and inviting experience, as if the cranes themselves are guiding the viewer into the profound world of *waka* poetry.

The other artwork featuring cranes is "Birds and Flowers of the Four Seasons," a pair of folding screens painted by Sesshu<sup>5</sup> in the 15th century. The crane was depicted on the right screen, illustrating the seasons from winter and spring to summer. The winding trunk and roots of the pine tree on the right side, coupled with the elegant posture of a crane standing beneath the branches on the left, leave a striking impression. Drawn in almost life-size proportions, the artwork exudes considerable impact when viewed up close.




“Birds and Flowers of the Four Seasons” (right screen), an Important Cultural Property by Sesshu, ink and color on paper, pair of six-panel folding screens, 151.0 cm (H) × 351.8 cm (W), collection of Kyoto National Museum



Part of “Anthology with Cranes Design,” an Important Cultural property by Tawaraya Sotatsu, Calligraphy by Hon’ami Koetsu, Gold and silver paint on paper, 34.1 cm (H) × 1,356 cm (W), collection of the Kyoto National Museum

Sesshu (born in 1420 and passing away around 1506) is a great painter in the history of Japanese art, having had a significant influence on later generations of artists. Mori Michihiko, an Associate Curator of Japanese Medieval Painting at Kyoto National Museum, comments, “There are several flower and bird paintings attributed to Sesshu, but most of them are works by his disciples or from a later period. Among them, this folding screen stands out as the only one with a high likelihood of being personally painted by Sesshu. The screen is framed by a mighty and intricately shaped giant tree resembling a dragon, and the peculiar dynamism and three-dimensional arrangement of such trees and rocks can be described as unique to

Sesshu, who had experience in China. Furthermore, in contrast to such dynamic and powerful expressions, allowing quietly playing birds of modest fields and mountains rather than flashy exotic birds is likely a reflection of his identity as a Buddhist monk-painter.”

The Kyoto National Museum, which houses these two works, attracts a significant number of international tourists. Part of the exhibit explanations and pamphlets are available in English, Chinese, and Korean. While in the historic city of Kyoto, consider not only exploring artworks featuring cranes but also immersing yourself in various Japanese paintings in the Museum. It’s a wonderful opportunity to encounter the diverse world of Japanese art. 

1. Born in Kyoto in 1558 and passing away in 1637, Koetsu played a prominent role as a leader in the art and craft industry in the early modern period. He was also renowned as a representative calligrapher of his time. Crossing various fields such as ceramics and lacquerware in addition to calligraphy, he left behind a multitude of works.  
2. Exact birth and death years unknown, Sotatsu was a painter believed to have been active in Kyoto during the first half of the 17th century. One of his renowned masterpieces is the famous national treasure “Wind God and Thunder God.”  
3. Material used in painting: Metal finely crushed into a powder like pigment, and kneaded into a clay-like substance using animal collagen as an adhesive.

4. Poems featured in “Thirty-Six Immortals of Poetry,” a collection selected by the poet Fujiwara no Kintō (966-1041), who was active from the late 10th century to the 11th century. The collection includes waka poems by 36 representative poets from the 7th to the 10th centuries.  
5. Born in 1420 and passing away around 1506, Sesshu was a great master who was active in 15th-century Japan and perfected Japanese ink painting. His prominence was established through the study of ink painting techniques during a two-year stay in the Ming Dynasty of China, which he skillfully incorporated into his own distinctive style.



# Prayers for Peace Embodied in Origami Cranes

Hiroshima City in Hiroshima Prefecture is the place where, on August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb in human history was dropped, leading to the loss of many lives. In the park near the hypocenter, there is a statue of a girl holding an origami crane<sup>1</sup>. Here, we introduce the story behind this iconic monument. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

The statue of the girl holding an origami crane is called the Children's Peace Monument. At the foot of the statue, there are rows of display booths containing numerous *senbazuru*<sup>2</sup>, bundles of folded paper cranes offered as prayers or wishes. Nakanishi Rie from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum talked about the background of the statue's establishment.

"The creation of the Children's Peace Monument was inspired by a girl named Sasaki Sadako. Ten years after her exposure to the atomic bombing, Sadako developed leukemia in the sixth grade of elementary school. While praying for her recovery, she continued folding origami cranes on her sickbed until her passing," explains Nakanishi.

For the Japanese, the crane symbolizes longevity and good fortune, and it has also been a symbol of heartfelt wishes, such as the fulfillment of desires and recovery from illness, often expressed through *senbazuru*.

"Classmates deeply affected by Sadako's death initiated a nationwide fundraising campaign to establish a memorial for her and other children who perished in the atomic bombing. Three years after Sadako's passing, in 1958, a statue was installed in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park," says Nakanishi.

After the statue was erected, Sadako Sasaki's poignant tale and her origami cranes became the inspiration for numerous books and films. The global dissemination of her story began with the 1977 pub-



The Children's Peace Monument erected in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park



Photo: Donated by Sasaki Shigeo and Sasaki Masahiro  
Collection of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Origami cranes folded by Sadako, including some that remain unfinished.



Photo: Donated by Umeda Yoriko  
Collection of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Origami cranes folded by Sadako from medicine wrapping paper—a gift for a classmate who came to visit her in the hospital.



Photo: Donated by Okura Kiyo  
Collection of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

The film script of the movie “Senbazuru,” which was produced around the time the monument was created.



Photo: PIXTA



Display booths at the foot of the Children's Peace Monument showcase bundles of *senbazuru*, with additional artworks inspired by origami cranes.



Photo: PIXTA

*Senbazuru* offerings.

lication of “Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes” by Eleanor Coerr in the United States. Coerr, a correspondent for a Canadian newspaper in Japan at the time, brought this touching narrative to the world. In the 1990s, an illustrated book titled “Sadako,” based on Coerr’s work, was published in the United States and later adapted into a musical for the stage. The story also found its way into school lessons, and to this day, it continues to be shared and remembered globally in various forms.

The Children’s Peace Monument is also known as the “Tower of a Thousand Cranes” due to the many offerings of *senbazuru* throughout the year. As Sadako’s origami cranes became regarded as a symbol of peace, many people came to sympathize and began to dedicate origami cranes to the Monument. Even today, approximately 10 million paper cranes, about 10 tons, arrive from around the world each year.

In recent years, the City of Hiroshima has initiated efforts to make use of the paper cranes received from around the world. Rather than preserving them as

they are, the City of Hiroshima actively launched the Paper Crane Recycling and Circulation Project in 2012, aiming to channel the thoughts and feelings embodied by paper cranes into new forms and share them with others. For instance, the paper recycled from the paper cranes is utilized in events such as a lantern floating ceremony held on August 6, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Day.

The sentiments embodied in the paper cranes sympathize not only within the hearts of the Japanese but also echo across the globe, expanding into new realms. “When you visit Japan, I encourage you to come to Hiroshima and see firsthand the numerous *senbazuru* received from around the world and experience the heartfelt wishes for peace,” Nakanishi suggests. **7**

1. Origami is the art of creating various works by folding a single square sheet of paper without cutting. This example refers to origami folded into the form of a crane. It is one of the most common origami creations in Japan.
2. *Senbazuru* (literally “1,000 cranes”) refers to a collection of origami cranes connected with strings into a bundle. It is believed that by gathering many of these cranes, considered as symbols of good luck, especially 1,000, one’s wishes are more likely to come true. People create these bundles while expressing wishes for longevity, success, healing from illness, and more.



# Next January, Japan starts new monthly educational activities for Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals, named “LIFE IN HARMONY PROMOTION MONTH”.

Today, more than three million foreign nationals live in Japan. The three visions of Japan’s ideal society of harmonious coexistence with foreign nationals are “Safe and Comfortable Society”, “Diverse and Vibrant Society”, and “Society that Respects Individual Dignity and Human Rights”. In order to foster awareness and promote understanding for the realization of such a society of harmonious coexistence with foreign nationals, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) decided to designate the entire month of January of each year as “LIFE IN HARMONY PROMOTION MONTH”, starting from 2024. During this period, the MOJ will carry out in a focused manner various publicity and educational activities, such as “ALL TOGETHER FESTIVAL”, which will be the main event of the initiative.

Plaza Heisei, Tokyo International Exchange Center (Koto Ward, Tokyo), where the ALL TOGETHER FESTIVAL will be held in January 2024.



Flyer for the event “ALL TOGETHER FESTIVAL”

## Working toward the realization of a society in which Japanese and foreign nationals coexist in harmony

There are currently about 3.22 million foreign nationals<sup>1</sup> living in Japan. The number of foreign residents in Japan is increasing year by year, and their countries and regions of origin are becoming more diverse.

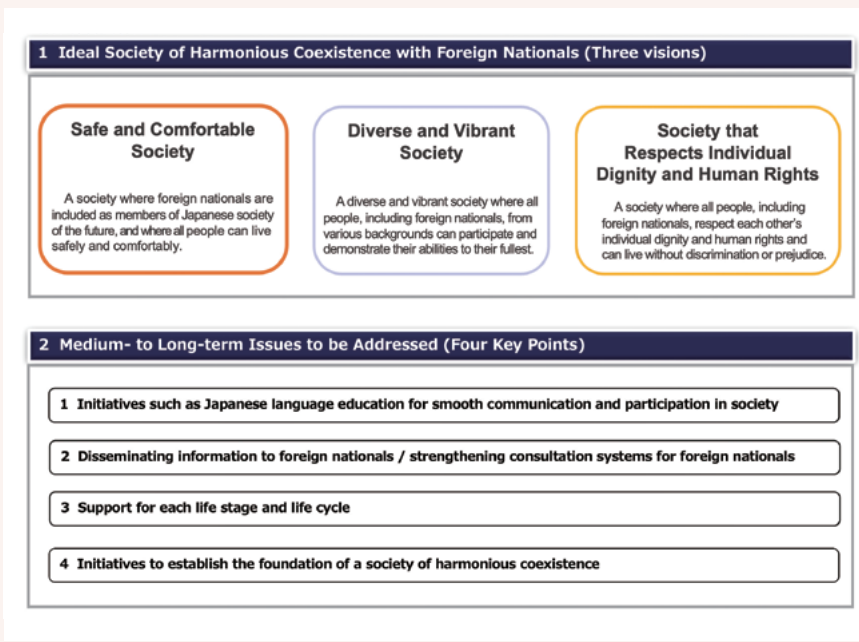
As cross-border social and economic activities intensify and Japan’s population enters a period of decline, it is becoming increasingly important for Japan to realize a society in which Japanese and foreign nationals coexist in harmony and to create an environment conducive to the

acceptance of foreign nationals.

In June 2022, the Government of Japan formulated a Roadmap for the Realization of a Society of Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals (see below). The Roadmap outlines Japan’s visions for an ideal society of harmonious coexistence with foreign nationals, as well as the issues to be addressed and the specific measures to be taken to achieve these visions.

In this Roadmap, the government specified the following three visions for an ideal society of harmonious coexistence with foreign nationals: “Safe and Comfortable So-





Roadmap for the Realization of a Society of Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals

Photo: KA-HIRO / PIXTA

Initiatives to foster awareness and promote understanding

MOJ decided to designate the entire month of January of each year as “LIFE IN HARMONY PROMOTION MONTH”, starting from 2024, with the goal of fostering awareness and promoting understanding of harmonious coexistence. During this period, MOJ, in collaboration with relevant government ministries and agencies, local public entities, and concerned institutions and organizations, will carry out in a focused manner various publicity and educational activities to foster awareness and promote understanding toward the realization of a society of harmonious coexistence with foreign nationals.

As an example of such educational activities, the organizers will host “ALL TOGETHER FESTIVAL” as the main event of “LIFE IN HARMONY PROMOTION MONTH”. The festival will be held at the Tokyo International Exchange Center Plaza Heisei on January 21, 2024.

With the theme “Enjoy! Learn! World Cultures and a Society of Harmonious Coexistence,” the festival will feature exhibitions, workshops, and performances that will allow participants to enjoy learning about the cultures and customs of other countries and to reflect on various aspects of harmonious coexistence with foreign nationals.

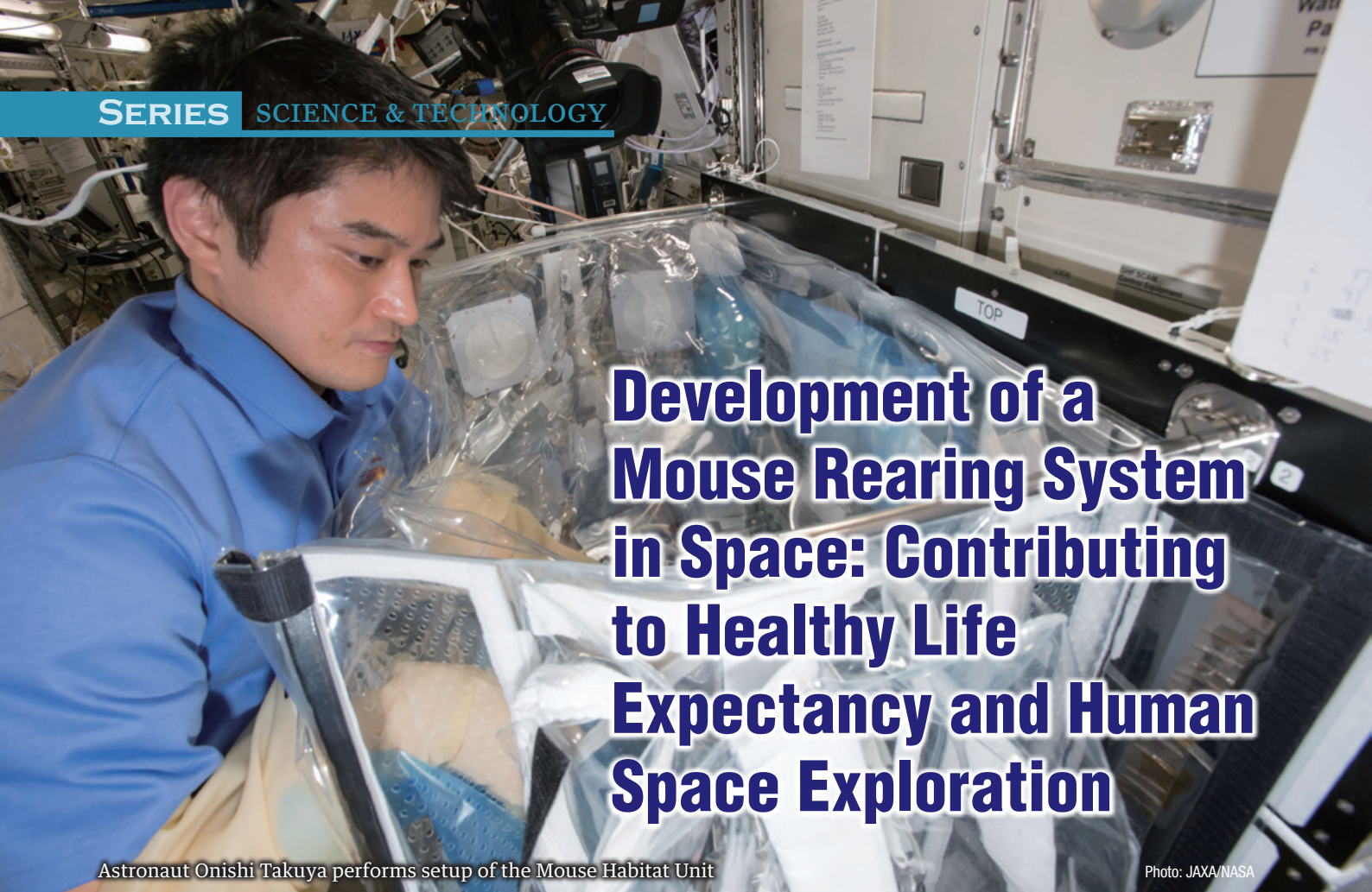
The organizers will use “LIFE IN HARMONY PROMOTION MONTH” and “ALL TOGETHER FESTIVAL” as opportunities to encourage both Japanese and foreign residents to consider a society of harmonious coexistence as part of their daily lives.

city”, “Diverse and Vibrant Society”, and “Society that Respects Individual Dignity and Human Rights”.

To realize these visions, it will be essential for all people living in Japan to coexist in a society that transcends differences in nationality and culture, and understands and respects the diversity of each individual. To achieve this, it is necessary for all Japanese citizens and foreign residents to deepen their interest in and understanding of the significance of a society of harmonious coexistence.

Note1. As of the end of June 2023





# Development of a Mouse Rearing System in Space: Contributing to Healthy Life Expectancy and Human Space Exploration

Astronaut Onishi Takuya performs setup of the Mouse Habitat Unit

Photo: JAXA/NASA

The International Space Station (ISS) is a massive, crewed research facility orbiting approximately 400 kilometers above the Earth. It is home to the Japanese Experiment Module Kibo, where scientists conduct experiments and measurements that take advantage of the specific environment (microgravity), in which the effect of gravity is much weaker than on Earth. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), which is responsible for the projects conducted on Kibo, has been engaged in joint research with various research institutions since 2016. In the fiscal year 2020, JAXA and the University of Tsukuba, one of the collaborative research institutions, received an award from the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology for their contribution to extended healthy life expectancy and human space exploration through the development of a Mouse Rearing System in Space.

## Fukuda Mitsuhiro

After long periods in space, even healthy astronauts experience symptoms such as weakened bones and muscles, worsened sense of balance, and decreased immune function. Research shows that these symptoms are very similar to those experienced by the elderly and bedridden here on Earth.

Clarifying the mechanisms of these symptoms, which occur during extended stays in space, can contribute solutions to various issues, such as extending healthy life expectancy (the period during which people can live without being restricted by health problems) in the super-aging society

of Japan and many other countries, and maintaining health during future human space exploration. This idea gave rise to the Mouse Rearing System in Space study. By installing small habitat units, in which mice can be bred separately, in a centrifuge, this system can be used to artificially create gravity even in a space environment and rear mice (see diagrams, interior photo, and installation diagram below).

It was already known that when mice are bred in the environment of outer space, they undergo changes similar to those that occur in humans. However, it has been difficult to accurately assess the mechanism of change in space mice compared to ground

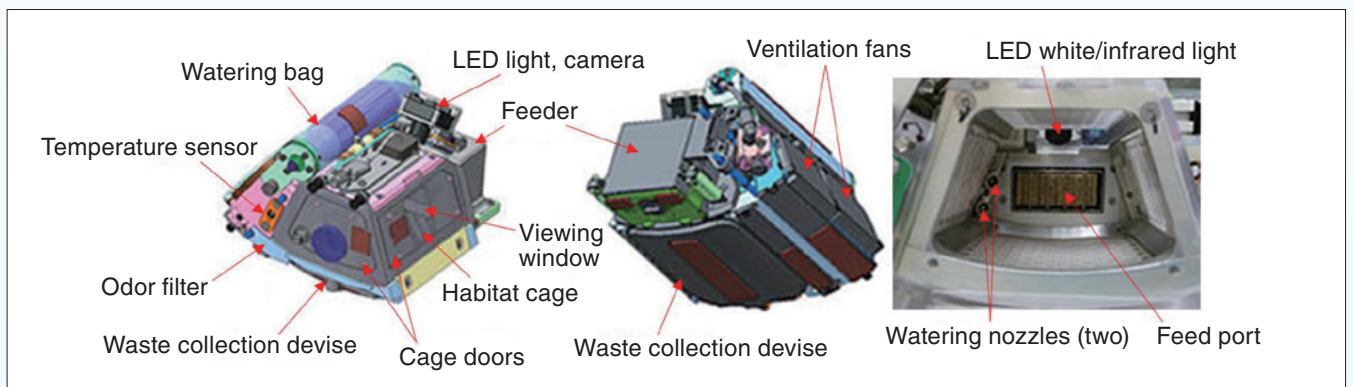
mice because the effects of the large gravitational load experienced during rocket launch and landing on experimental results could not be ignored.

In the Mouse Rearing System in Space study, one group of mice was raised in microgravity in space and another group of mice was raised in gravity equivalent to that on Earth (1G) for about a month without changing other conditions. The results showed no difference between the mice raised in the 1G environment and those raised back on earth, but there were clear changes in muscle and bone density in the mice raised in microgravity. This is a step forward in understanding the mechanism of change at the molecular level in the future.





Overall view of the Japanese Experiment Module (JEM) Kibo, photographed during a spacewalk by US astronauts Photo: JAXA/NASA



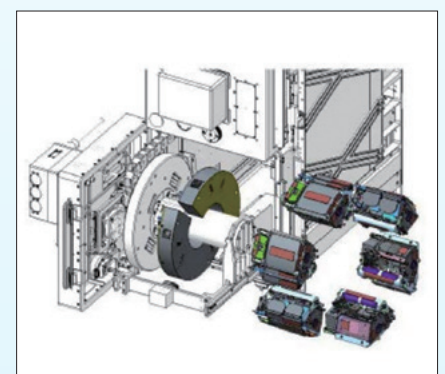
Diagrams and interior photo of the Habitat Cage Unit (HCU)

Photo: JAXA

Furthermore, in anticipation of future space development such as human exploration of the Moon and Mars, the Mouse Rearing System in Space study compared mice reared in a 1G environment with mice reared in an environment with 1/6G gravity, the same as on the lunar surface. The results showed that the quantitative changes in muscles that occur in microgravity were not observed in the case of lunar gravity. However, there was a qualitative transformation in the muscle fibers from slow muscles, which are necessary for endurance, to fast muscles, which are essential for instantaneous force, demonstrating that the effect of gravity on muscle

quantity is different from its effect on muscle quality. Elderly people are generally characterized by weakened muscles and slower movements, and one of the factors behind this deterioration is linked to the age-related decrease in fast muscles. Analysis of the results of this series of experiments may provide a possible key to extending healthy life expectancy.

The physiological changes observed during stays in space are said to progress at an accelerated rate compared to those observed on the ground. Research using the Mouse Rearing System in Space is expected to continue to provide insights that cannot be obtained from experiments on the



Installation of the HCU in a centrifuge

Photo: JAXA

ground, and many clues that will contribute to extended healthy life expectancy and human space exploration.



## PROFESSIONAL RAKUGO PERFORMER FROM SWEDEN WORKS TO MAKE THE ARTFORM MORE FAMILIAR TO THE WORLD

Kouseinen performs *rakugo* in front of an audience.

***Rakugo* is a traditional storytelling art in which a single performer plays the parts of multiple characters. It has a history of around 400 years. One professional *rakugo* performer by the name of Sanyutei Kouseinen, who came to Japan from Sweden, ventured into the demanding world of *rakugo*. While styles of *rakugo* range widely from traditional classics passed down over the generations to creative modern versions, all forms tend to involve humorous tales about ordinary people and moving stories revealing human nature. Kouseinen performs in Japanese, as well as English and Swedish as he works to convey to the world the charms of the form.**

### Murakami Kayo

Sanyutei Kouseinen originally came to Japan as an exchange student. His first encounter with *rakugo* came when he happened to be invited to a *rakugo* club at the university he attended. *Rakugo* is unique in the way it is performed, with the performer kneeling on a cushion, wearing a kimono, and taking on several roles on their own, distinguishing between different characters using only the tone of their voice and gestures without relying on costume changes or stage settings. This fascinated Kouseinen. After obtaining a university degree back in his native Sweden, he had the realization that company work life was not meant for him. Feeling that his encounter with *rakugo* had been fateful, he decided to return to Japan and pursue the path of the professional *rakugo* performer in earnest. While taking courses at

an acting school, he made repeated visits to performances at *yose* theaters, where *rakugo* is performed.

To become a professional *rakugo* performer, one must find a master and study under them as an apprentice. From among the many performers he came across, one stood out as the one he strongly hoped to study under. This was master Sanyutei Koraku. To convey his ambitious intent, Kouseinen paid Koraku a visit backstage, bringing with him a long letter written in Japanese.

Kouseinen explains, “My master’s *rakugo* has warmth to it. He is a person you can really look up to. In my letter, I conveyed to him that although I came from outside Japan, I hoped to study *rakugo* under him.”

Kouseinen’s sincere intent came across to Koraku, and he was accepted as an apprentice. While he ventured into the world of *rakugo* with the

understanding that it would require highly demanding training, he admits that he was confused at first by certain unique customs and differences from Swedish culture.

He recalls, “I had to start from the very beginning learning some things, like the correct way to fold a kimono and related etiquette, the way to serve tea, and so on. One thing that took me a particularly long time to learn was the proper way to make apologies. In Sweden, when some kind of trouble occurs, we explain the reason for it. If you take this same approach in Japan, though, it can come across like you are trying to make an excuse. When a fellow apprentice makes a mistake, you all have to take collective responsibility and apologize together with them. The world of traditional performing arts has many unique rules like this. It did take me a little while to fully come to terms with certain things





Sanyutei Kouseinen Photo: Nakamura Kyohei



A performance in Sweden Photo: Sanyutei Kouseinen

like that.”

In August 2020, four years after becoming an apprentice, he was promoted to *futatsume*, the second-highest rank for professional *rakugo* performers, allowing him to perform as a professional. He then received the name Sanyutei Kouseinen from his master. In his specialty, *Gojo-Kyu*, the main character is a man whose friend brags to him of how well he has endured the great heat of moxibustion<sup>1</sup> treatments he has received at a clinic with a reputation for being effective though involving intense heat. In an attempt not to be outdone, the man prepares and applies plentiful moxibustion to his arm and dares to endure the intense heat. Currently, in addition to Japanese, Kouseinen performs programs translated into English and Swedish as well. He also organizes *rakugo-kai*<sup>2</sup> performances in European countries, including his native Sweden.

“When translating *rakugo*,” he says, “I try to preserve a sense of its

characteristic human touch, as well as the *ochi*.<sup>3</sup> Also, when there are expressions that audiences will not understand without knowledge of Japanese culture, I find replacements with similar meanings from the local culture.”

Lately, he has also been trying his hand at creating original *rakugo* involving themes from Swedish culture, such as the Christmas and Midsummer holidays. His plan for the future is to train further as a professional *rakugo* performer with the aim of advancing to the *shin-uchi* rank, which would allow him to take on apprentices of his own.

“First I want to improve my own skills further, while being careful to preserve the traditions, so that I can be recognized as a professional *rakugo* performer in my own right,” he says. “Then, I hope to build on that, pursuing a form of *rakugo* that takes advantage of my individual character, and make *rakugo* more widely familiar to the world. This may be quite a ways

ahead still, but I also think it could be interesting to take apprentices myself one day, if anyone else from outside Japan is hoping to become a professional *rakugo* performer, or if there is interest in *rakugo* performed in English.”



Beyond traditional classical *rakugo*, he tries out creative versions of his own as well.

Photo: Sanyutei Kouseinen

1. A method of treatment used in Eastern medicine. A material called moxa is used for it, made from downy hairs from the undersides of mugwort leaves that are dried and formed into cotton-like bunches measuring about 3 to 5 mm across. Burning moxa is applied to the skin at certain locations, which is thought to promote healing of various health conditions by stimulating the body with heat.
2. Performances where *rakugo* performers visit halls, theaters, and other spaces where *rakugo* is not ordinarily performed.
3. Generally a means of providing an effective conclusion to a story. In *rakugo*, it refers to the act of bringing a story to a finish using a pun or other wordplay, or to the part of the story where this occurs.





## Yabusame: Keeping 800-Year-Old Traditions of Ancient Japanese Horseback Archery Alive in the Present Day

The Japan Cultural Expo 2.0 aims to build momentum for the upcoming Expo 2025 (World Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai), to support renewed interest in inbound travel to Japan, and to encourage further demand for domestic tourism. It also features a focus on “The Beauty and The Spirit of Japan,” promoting Japanese cultural arts and spreading awareness of their diverse and universal charms within Japan and around the world. This is a large-scale project with Japanese cultural facilities, arts organizations, and many others hosting and participating in a diverse range of projects and events. In this article, from among these participants, we will focus on efforts of the Japan Equestrian Archery Association to maintain *yabusame*<sup>1</sup> practices as heir to traditions that have been passed down for around 800 years.

Moribe Shinji

A *yabusame ite* prepares to shoot an arrow while riding a galloping horse

Photo: The Japan Equestrian Archery Association

### Takeda School Yabusame: An 800-Year Tradition

In *yabusame*, archers shoot arrows at targets one after another while riding galloping horses. *Yabusame* has been dedicated to Shinto shrines throughout Japan as a ritual (*yabusame-shinji*) for *tenka taihei* (universal peace), *gokoku hojo* (abundant harvests), and *banmin sokusai* (good health for all people)<sup>2</sup>.

The Takeda School, which the Japan Equestrian Archery Association (hereinafter referred to as “the Association”) is working to promote, is one of the oldest schools of *yabusame*, with a history of around 800 years beginning in the late 12th century. The Takeda School is maintaining the tra-

dition by passing down the practical techniques and spirit that the Kamakura samurai<sup>3</sup> valued. These included mastering the art of riding galloping horses skillfully, which was considered a strength. Every year, the school presents events with brave demonstrations of *yabusame* and *kasagake*<sup>1</sup> at locations including Meiji Shrine (Shibuya City, Tokyo), Kamigamo Shrine (Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture), and Samukawa Shrine (Samukawa Town, Kanagawa Prefecture).

Horseback riders in *yabusame* are referred to as *ite*. These *ite* must learn a unique Japanese equestrian technique called *tachisukashi*. This is a technique for achieving unity of rider and horse in which the rider places their full body

weight on the stirrups (*abumi*)<sup>4</sup> and avoids pressing their legs against the horse’s torso (body) or resting their body on the saddle (*kura*)<sup>4</sup>, maintaining a slight distance between their hips and the saddle. This gives them greater accuracy hitting the targets by allowing them to maintain a proper posture without vertical motion. The Takeda School is one of the schools working most effectively to promote such ancient horseback archery traditions. It is also well known for the fact that a previous head of the school gave guidance on horsemanship in the making of films such as *Seven Samurai* and *The Hidden Fortress* by internationally acclaimed director Kurosawa Akira and also appeared in the films himself.





### Yabusame *ite* make their appearance

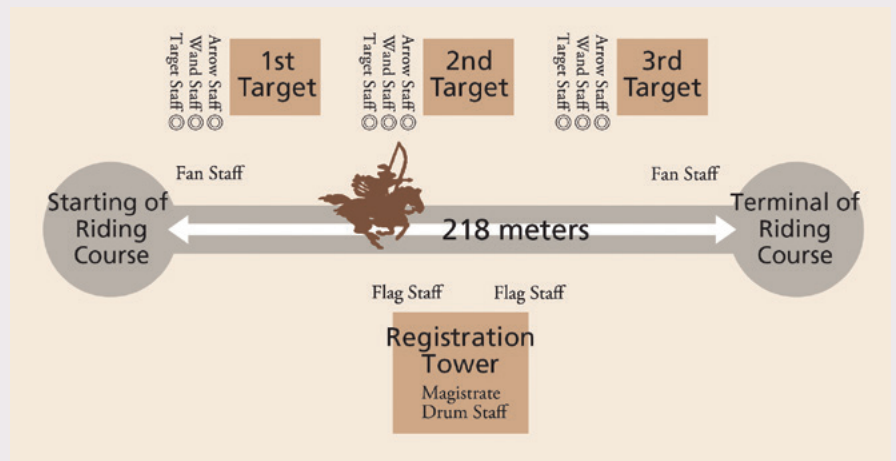
*Ite* make their way to the *yabusame* ground on horseback. They wear traditional *kasa* hats, *shozoku* kimono, and *igote* armguards embroidered with family crests and are armed with long swords, bows, and arrows – just as the Kamakura samurai of old might have appeared.

Photo: The Japan Equestrian Archery Association

## A Participant in Japan Cultural Expo since 2020

In recent years, more visitors from outside Japan have been viewing *yabusame*. In response, the Association has been providing commentaries at events in English to help visitors understand more about *yabusame*, such as its techniques, etiquette, and highlights. The Association has also been holding exhibitions in response to requests from the Government of Japan, foreign embassies, and others when overseas guests of honor visit Japan. For instance, former U.S. Presidents including Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama have observed *yabusame* events while on official visits to Japan. Furthermore, the Association has also held events outside Japan in locations around the world to convey the special appeal of *yabusame*.

As part of such efforts to promote international goodwill, the Association has participated in the Japan Cultural Expo since 2020. This has included events held at the Kamakura



### Diagram of *yabusame* riding ground

Conceptual diagram of *yabusame* riding ground. The Japan Equestrian Archery Association claims to follow original traditions from the late 12th century concerning details such as the length of the straight track and the spacing of the targets.

Photo: The Japan Equestrian Archery Association

Ground, which the Association established especially for *yabusame*, and a live-streamed event at Meiji Shrine. In addition, the Association has produced videos to explain more about *yabusame* and streamed them on their website in both Japanese and English.

This year, in 2023, as a project selected for Japan Cultural Expo 2.0, the Association held events including a *kasagake* ritual at Kamigamo Shrine in October, which included a lecture explaining more about *kasagake* and a meet-and-greet with *ite* archers. It also presented an exhibition and talk show in collaboration with the Kamo Kurabeuma horse racing event held at the shrine, a ritual with a history of 930 years. In July and December, the Association held events at the Kamakura Ground as well. These included exhibitions of Nohgaku and Kamakura-bori lacquerware, demonstrations of horseback archery by riders dressed

in heavy Kamakura-period armor called *o-yoroi*, and meet-and-greet sessions with the archers. Scenes from the July event were streamed on the Association's website, including videos and explanations in English.

In order to cultivate the next generation of *ite*, the Association holds weekly training sessions at the Kamakura Ground on Sundays, and they are also open to visitors. The range of trainees is diverse, including many female trainees, and advanced learners from outside Japan, too. Trainees are diverse in age as well, ranging from their teens to those in their 60s. The youngest has even attained *ite* certification while still a high school student. Anyone interested in viewing a training session can apply through the Association's website. If you have the chance, even at a training session, you will surely enjoy impressive demonstrations of true *yabusame*.

#### The Japan Equestrian Archery Association website

<https://yabusame.or.jp/english/>

#### Video of a *kasagake* ritual held at Kamigamo Shrine as part of the Japan Cultural Expo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wZMTx9-CX8>

1. *Yabusame* is a type of horseback archery in which the target is shot from a galloping horse with a *kaburaya* arrow and is mainly conducted as a Shinto ritual. *Kasagake* is another type in which targets are set in positions that are difficult to aim at, such as the lower left and lower right of the archer. This was practiced by samurai primarily for training.
2. *Tenka taihei*: Peace throughout the land, with no conflict. *Gokoku hojo*: Abundant harvests of crops; particularly the "five grains," including rice and barley. *Banmin sokusai*: Safety and good health for all people.
3. Samurai warriors who held power in the samurai government that established the Kamakura shogunate in the second half of the 12th century. Greatly respecting the spirit of *shitsujitsu goken* (simplicity and vigorous strength), they devoted themselves to martial arts.
4. *Kura*: saddle; a piece of gear placed on the back of animals such as horses or cattle. *Abumi*: stirrups; pieces of horse-riding gear hung from both sides of the saddle for the rider to place their feet in. In *yabusame*, riders use unique Japanese forms of these called *Wa-gura* and *Wa-abumi*.



Birds of Japan

## Oo-hakuchou

Whooper swan



All photos: PIXTA

Several species of swan can be seen in Japan, including the whooper swan and the tundra swan. The largest of these is the whooper swan, which has a body about 140 centimeters long, and a wingspan that can reach over 2 meters. It is known as a winter bird in Japan, migrating from Siberia in the winter in search of food and spending the winter in the northern part of Japanese archipelago, such as Hokkaido and northern Honshu (the main island of Japan). The young birds are gray, while adults are entirely white. They inhabit areas around lakes, marshes, and rivers, and they take advantage of their long necks, plunging their heads into the water to mainly feed on aquatic plants that grow in the water. Their beaks are black and yellow and their legs are black. Because family ties are close, they are often seen together in groups.

The *Nihon Shoki* ("The Chronicle of Japan"), said to have been completed in the year 720, recounts the heroic legend of Yamato Takeru no Mikoto, the son of the 12th emperor, Keiko. In the story, Prince Yamato Takeru turns into a swan (the type of swan is not specified) and flies away after his death and burial.

HIGHLIGHTING

# Japan

PLEASE VISIT the top page of Highlighting Japan for links to all our past issues including videos.

[www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/](http://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/)



HIGHLIGHTING JAPAN



[www.instagram.com/highlightingjapan/](https://www.instagram.com/highlightingjapan/)



ALL PAST ISSUES available online

PLEASE VISIT the Government of Japan's official English-language website



JAPAN GOV  
THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

<https://www.japan.go.jp/>

KIZUNA



The official magazine of the Government of Japan