HIGHLIGHTING

Japan

VOL.
199
NEW YEAR'S
ISSUE 2025

CELEBRATING A BRIGHT NEW YEAR IN JAPAN

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Short sword signed Yoshimitsu (celebrated Atsushi Toushirō)

THEME FOR NEW YEAR'S ISSUE:

Celebrating a Bright New Year in Japan

Japan has many annual events throughout the year, but it has treated its New Year events with special care since ancient times. The Japanese New Year is known for a variety of customs and good luck events related to food, clothing, and shelter, and each has its own meaning. In this month's *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*, we present an interview with a great scholar of folklore on the special meaning that welcoming the New Year has for Japanese people. We introduce kimono, *o-sechi ryori* cuisine (traditional Japanese New Year food), a New Year's herbal sake and indoor decorations for the New Year, all of which help celebrate and add splendid color and enjoyment to the Japanese New Year. We also introduce traditional performing arts including the Shishi-mai dance, and a kite-flying event held at the foot of Mt. Fuji.

On the cover: Performance of the New Year's Shishi-mai dance in the snow in Izumozaki Town, Niigata Prefecture

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Celebrating a Bright New Year in Japan

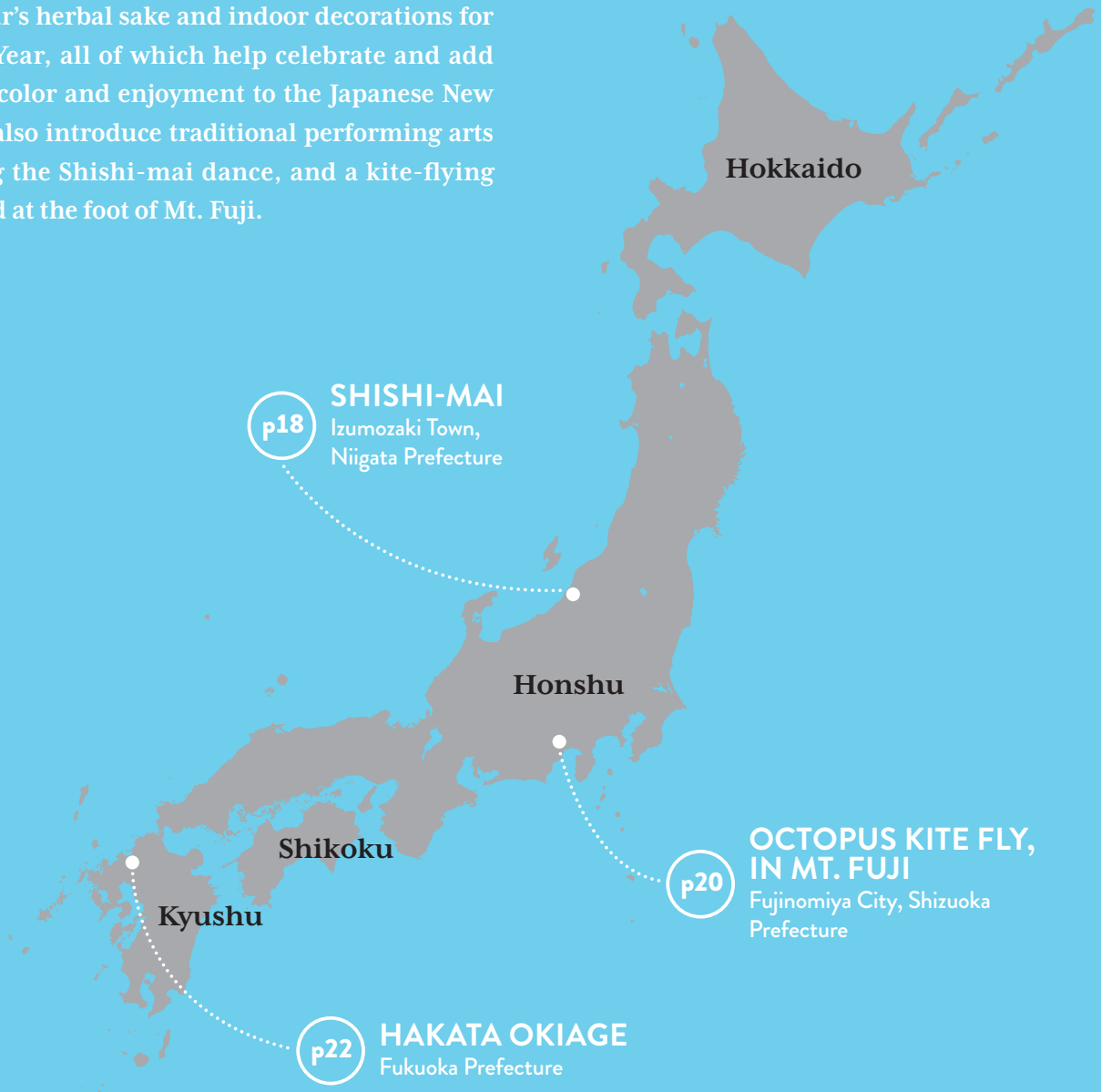
Above left: An example of New Year decorations based on the concept of *shitsurai* in a Japanese home's *tokonoma*.

Above right: Pouring O-toso into a *sakazuki* (sake cup).

Below left: An example of o-sechi cuisine, beautifully arranged in a lacquered *jubako* box. The three-tiered circular vessel on the left is a lacquered sake cup.

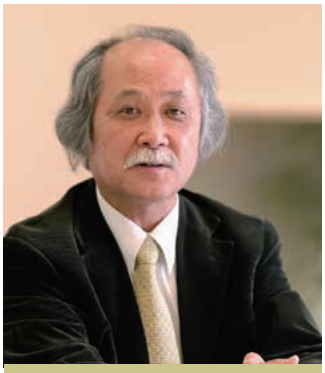
Below right: An example of a *furisode haregi*: Long-Sleeved Robe ("Furisode") with Clouds, Bamboo Curtains, and Tachibana Oranges (19th century, Tokyo National Museum collection).

Japan has many annual events throughout the year, but it has treated its New Year events with special care since ancient times. The Japanese New Year is known for a variety of customs and good luck events related to food, clothing, and shelter, and each has its own meaning. In this month's *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*, we present an interview with a great scholar of folklore on the special meaning that welcoming the New Year has for Japanese people. We introduce kimono, *o-sechi ryori* cuisine (traditional Japanese New Year food), a New Year's herbal sake and indoor decorations for the New Year, all of which help celebrate and add splendid color and enjoyment to the Japanese New Year. We also introduce traditional performing arts including the Shishi-mai dance, and a kite-flying event held at the foot of Mt. Fuji.



The Origins and Significance of Japan's New Year's Culture

Shogatsu, the New Year's celebration, is a particularly special time among the various annual events in Japan. For this issue, we interviewed Professor SHINTANI Takanori, a folklorist and expert on ancient Japanese culture, about the origins and underlying sentiments associated with the unique customs and features of the Japanese New Year.



SHINTANI Takanori
Folklore scholar

Professor emeritus at the Graduate University for Advanced Studies and National Museum of Japanese History and former professor at the Kokugakuin University school of graduate studies. Author of many works including *Minzokugaku to ha nanika:Yanagita, Origuchi, Shibusawa ni manabinaosu* ("Folklore Studies: Relearning form Yanagita, Origuchi and Shibusawa") and *Ujigami-sama to Chinju-sama: Jinja no Minzoku-shi* ("A Folk History of Shinto Shrines: Patron Deities and Local Tutelary Deities").

Among the various annual events in Japan, the *Shogatsu* New Year's celebrations have particular importance. Could you discuss the special significance this holiday has for the people of Japan?

Shogatsu literally means the first month of the new year: the starting point of the year just beginning. Greeting the new year does have special significance for the Japanese.

To begin with, it corresponds to *Toshitori*. This means that everyone turns one year older on New Year's Day, regardless of their birthday. Up until 1873, when the modern Western calendar was adopted, the idea like, *kazoedoshi* system of counting people's ages was traditionally used. This meant counting people's ages by the number of *toshidama* they had received. The belief was that the Toshigami[1] deity would come with the New Year and grant each person another year to add to their age. These were referred to as *toshidama*, literally a "year spirit." Also, babies were considered to have one life — in other words, one spirit — so, they were considered to be "one year old" at the time of birth. This meant that babies born in February and those born in November of the preceding year would both be considered two years old when the new year arrived. This idea has been almost completely forgotten in Japan today. Originally, though, people of all ages and genders would each receive a *toshidama* from Toshigami deity and add one year to their age in this way. That was a large part of the significance of New Year's celebrations. This concept of *toshidama* is actually the origin of the custom of *o-toshidama*,[2] meaning a New Year's gift, where children in Japan today receive money from parents and other family members on New Year's Day.

Photo: PIXTA

Rice plants bear kernels of rice, a crop that has had special importance to the people of Japan

At the same time, special value has also been placed on rice in Japan, where cultivation of the crop has been practiced since ancient times. Eating rice gave people energy and strength, which led to the conception that it contained spiritual power. While a belief in a spiritual power held in grains and cereal crops, including barley and rice, is widespread, found throughout the world, in Japan, the belief came to be particularly associated with rice and rice plants. This is also called belief in *inadama* — literally "rice plant spirits."

Starting from a single grain in the spring, this crop that grants life force to people grows to hundreds or thousands times as many heads and grains of rice by autumn, when it is harvested. This vital strength and gratitude to the crop for the food it provides led to a belief in a spiritual power contained in rice. Eating this rice, harvested once a year, was also part of the reason for the belief in *toshidama* that the Toshigami deity would come and grant each person another year to add to their age.

This is why, while precious rice was ordinarily used sparingly, many areas of Japan did in fact have customs of eating steamed white rice, at least from New

Year's Eve through the first three days of the new year (four days from December 31 to January 3), no matter what it might take. This was true even in places with limited access to rice, including villages throughout Japan where assorted grains or barley mixed with rice were commonly eaten until the 1950s, as well as fishing villages and mountain villages where almost no rice was harvested.

Traditionally, steamed white rice was eaten at *toshitori* aging celebrations. It was around the 11th century during the mid-Heian period that this custom shifted to white *mochi* cakes of pounded rice. In such ways, a culture of rice cultivation can be seen at the foundation of Japanese culture, and it has had considerable influence on the identity of the Japanese people and the country's collective social structure. The act of growing and eating rice together was extremely important within the community. Against this background, I think we can see that, unlike doctrine-based religions as found in Western countries, Japanese religious views are characterized by greater flexibility and practicality, with a focus on connections and relations with nature and people in local communities.

There is actually one more thing the Toshigami deity brings at New Year's besides another year to add to people's ages: good fortune for the new year. There was a belief that all of the various good things and bad things that might have happened during the old year would be cancelled out completely on *Oomisoka* (New Year's Eve) for a fresh reset. People believed that, as they greeted the new year, if they could be granted good fortune from the deity, the whole year ahead would be a good one. In order to receive good luck and good fortune brought by Toshigami, people would work to clean up their bodies and minds, including *susuharai*[3] and *oosoji* to cleanse all parts of houses and other places, starting from around the middle of December. To have *Shogatsu* preparations finished by around the 26th to 28th of the month was once the traditional practice in Japanese homes.

Japan has a culture of celebrating the New Year with a number of brilliant, showy items associated with good luck. These include *kadomatsu* pine-and-bamboo decorations, *kagami-mochi* (stacked pairs of round *mochi* cakes with bitter oranges placed on top), and the traditional *Shogatsu* cuisine, *o-sechi ryori*. Could you say more about the origins and historical developments associated with each of these?

Toshigami-dana shelves are set up in front of the family's *kamidana* shrine in their home's traditional *zashiki* tatami room for New Year's only.

Looking closely into the history of *Shogatsu* events in Japan reveals the fascinating fact that their history involves the co-existence of traditional cultural practices that have been handed down and transitional elements that have undergone change. There has come to be a mixture of ancient customs passed down from long in the past and new practices that have resulted from change over time.

As I mentioned earlier, there was a belief that Toshigami visited people's houses on New Year's day. Accordingly, on the 13th day of the old year's December, people would begin their preparations for the events, which is known as *Shogatsu Kotohajime*. After finishing preparations — cutting pinetree branches for the *kadomatsu*, known as *matsu-mukae*, hanging wreaths called *shimekazari* made with lengths of straw rope which represents a house that welcomes the Toshigami, *mochitsuki*: pounding the *mochi* cakes, and so on — families would stay at home together from *Oomisoka*, the final day of the year, through *Gantan*, New Year's Day, quietly awaiting Toshigami's visit.

Some regions even have customs of setting up altars called *Toshigami-dana* for the deity's visit. These altars are made with lengths of split bamboo tied together with straw cords and hung from the ceiling to form shelves that might be considered places where Toshigami is enshrined (see photo).

Kadomatsu is *Shogatsu* decoration of central importance, meant to welcome Toshigami. Pines have been long been considered to be associated with good luck: they are evergreen trees that seem to possess life force,

Photo: Collection of Yonezawa City Uesugi Museum

Left panel of the *Rakuchu Rakugai Zu Byobu* ("Scenes In and Around Kyoto"), Uesugi version (1574), depicts Kyoto, the capital of Japan at the time. In the lower right corner, rows of houses can be seen facing the street, each with pine branches set up in front.

and they also show surprising amounts of growth each year. The *Kokin Wakashu* (literally "Collection of Japanese *Waka* Poems of Ancient and Modern Times"),[4] which is thought to have been compiled in 905, includes poems in which pine trees appear as expressions of favorable fortune in the *Ga no Uta* ("Poems of Congratulations")[5] part (or chapter). From this, we can assume that by around the year 900, pines had already been incorporated into *Shogatsu* events with significance relating to celebration and hopes for long life.

There was also a custom of eating *toshitori-zen* on *Oomisoka* (New Year's Eve). This dish consisted of *toshitori-zakana*[6] fish, which might be salmon, yellowtail, or sardines, on steamed white rice. Next, eating *zoni* soup with *mochi* cakes in it the following day, New Year's Day, was how people celebrated adding a year to their age. The significance of this was that by eating the *toshitori-zen* with its steamed rice and the *zoni* with its pounded-rice *mochi*, one would undergo a sort of rebirth from the *toshidama* they had in the old year to their new self with its freshly granted *toshidama*.

Today, the most well-known New Year's cuisine in Japan is certainly *o-sechi ryori*. *O-sechi* originally referred to dishes served as offerings to deities on *sechi-nichi*, seasonal festival dates. These were meals including steamed white rice served with *toshi-zakana* fish and *O-suimono* Japanese clear soups to celebrate adding a year to people's ages, and were for people to consume as well.

At the same time, separately from that, we could probably also say another origin of *o-sechi ryori* was the festive and decorative combinations of foods associated with good fortune prepared in celebrating the New Year. This was called *horai* in the Kamigata region of western Japan centered around Kyoto, which was the capital of Japan at the time, and *kuitsumi* in Edo, which is known today as Tokyo. Both were served in the centers of *sanbo*[7] trays with pine, bamboo, and plum decorations and arrangements of foods including steamed white rice, *daidai* bitter oranges, dried chestnuts, dried persimmons, *yuzuri-ha* (leaves of the false daphne), *konbu* seaweed, and *Ise-ebi* spiny lobster. While the *horai* of Kamigata was purely decorative, the *kuitsumi* of Edo was meant for visiting New Year's callers to take a bite of in celebration.

Then, in the early modern period, we see homemaker-oriented magazines in metropolitan areas

Photo: SAKURABA Toshimi
Reprinted from photo published in *Aomori-ken-shi Minzoku-hen Shiryo Nanbu* ("Aomori Prefecture History: Folk Custom, Southern Region")

A traditional *toshitori-zen* meal set from Aomori Prefecture. The assortment of dishes include steamed rice, fish such as sardines and salmon referred to as *toshitori-zakana*, and a Japanese clear soup.
Ooshogatsu no Toshitori-zen ("*Toshitori-zen* Serving for the First Seven Days of the New Year")

begin to introduce an absolutely new arrangement, with appetizers on the first, simmered *nimono* dishes on the second, and vinegared *sunomono* dishes on the third layers of lacquered *jubako*. This is what led to the eventual spread of *o-sechi ryori* served in multi-layered *jubako*[8] nationwide.

Photo: FUJIN-NO-TOMO-SHA Co., Ltd.

An illustration appearing in a homemaker-oriented magazine in 1918 with the title *Shinshun Kaji Emaki* ("New Year's Household Picture Scroll").

Such a range of New Year's events are held in all parts of Japan. Are there any in particular that you might like to recommend to our readers?

Among the New Year's events, the one that deserves special mention is "Hatsumode" the event, first visits of the new year to Shinto shrines, and sometimes Buddhist temples. Each year, many visitors certainly crowd into the Meiji Jingu Shrine and Narita-san Shinsho-ji Temple.

That said, the custom of making visits to shrines during the first to third days of the new year actually only dates to around the 1870s to 1890s, when the process of modernization began even in urban areas of Japan. Phenomena associated with the modernization of Japanese society, including national and governmental encouragement of attendance at Shinto shrines' rituals and the new flourishing of railway operations, were influential, leading to the spread of attitudes where people hoped to make shrine visits and receive good fortune from deities before anyone else.

However, the good fortune and additional year of one's age granted by Toshigami, as I mentioned earlier, were traditionally given equally and evenly to all. I think that even if you make quiet visits avoiding the busy first three days of the new year, you can expect to receive plenty of benefits, including good fortune and blessings, in addition to charms against evil spirits.

Also, the *Raihoshin* rituals are something I would really hope for visitors to Japan from overseas to know about and experience. Observed throughout Japan, these annually performed rituals involve masked and costumed deities in truly outlandish forms making visits to people's houses, scolding the lazy and granting happiness and good fortune. I think the *Toshidon* ritual of the Koshiki-shima Islands is particularly fascinating. Here, the *Toshidon* visits houses with children between the ages of three and eight, decorated with materials from palm trees and sago palm leaves, wearing terrifying masks featuring long noses. Praising children for good behavior in the past year and scolding them for bad, they finally give large *mochi* cakes called *toshi-mochi* before leaving. Appearing in unusual forms beyond human control, the *Toshidon* seems a powerful deity that brings new life and *toshi-dama* life force in the New Year.

In Japan, welcoming the New Year means that each of us is reborn as a new person. That is the essential meaning of *Shogatsu* in Japan. We hope to make 2025 a good year by inviting good fortune with pure hearts.

Photo: Satsuma Sendai City

Toshidon pay a visit to a home on New Year's Eve.

1. A deity visiting homes from New Year's Eve to New Year's Day, bringing the good fortune of the new year. The visit of Toshigami was thought to add another year to people's ages.
2. A custom in which cash is given by adults to children in small bags.
3. The custom of cleansing spaces such as rooms, household shrines and altars of dust and other impurities. This practice also has the significance of purifying homes to welcome deities.
4. First imperial collection of *waka* poems compiled by four editors including Ki no Tsurayuki in 905, commanded by Emperor Daigo. The collection contains around 1,100 *waka* poems in 20 volumes dedicated to the emperor.
5. A category of traditional *waka* poems. It also refers to a *butate* (part or chapter) of a classical *waka* poetry collection like The *Kokin Wakashu* that contains celebratory poems, and many of them are poems praying for long life.
6. Refers to fish eaten at turning points in years. Types and names of fish vary from region to region.
7. A type of altar used for offerings to deities and Buddhas. Also, *tsuigasane* trays used for serving meals at banquets and other occasions.
8. See Food and Dishware as Landscapes in the January 2021 issue of *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*

Traditional New Year's Kimono: *Haregi* – Its Heritage and Modern Adaptations

Kimono, a traditional Japanese garment, holds special significance during New Year celebrations as *haregi* (formal clothing). We spoke with an expert in kimono studies to explore the history, traditions, and modern adaptations of this attire, particularly for women.

(Text: MOROHASHI Kumiko)

"In the past, Japanese people placed great emphasis on the kimono worn for New Year celebrations, to the extent of having new ones made specifically for the occasion. In Japan, special days such as New Year's and festivals are referred to as 'hare days,' (celebration days in Japanese) and the kimono worn on these days is called 'haregi.' These garments often feature traditional celebratory patterns (*kissho-moyo*)[1] created using techniques like yuzen-dyeing[2] or Japanese embroidery."

This explanation comes from OYAMA Yuzuruha, Chair of the Department of Decorative Arts at the Tokyo National Museum, an expert in the cultural history of Japanese and East Asian textiles, with a particular focus on early modern kimono.

Photo: ColBase

An example of a *furisode haregi*: Long-Sleeved Robe ("Furisode") with Clouds, Bamboo Curtains, and Tachibana Oranges (19th century, Tokyo National Museum collection).

Even today, it is traditional for unmarried women to wear the long-sleeved *furisode* kimono, which is considered proper etiquette, and among *haregi*, it is often the most elegant and intricately designed. The origin of the *furisode* dates back to the Edo period (from the early 17th century to the mid-late 19th century), with the longest sleeves reportedly measuring as much as one meter.

"For example, a 19th-century piece, *Long-Sleeved Robe ("Furisode") with Clouds, Bamboo Curtains, and 'Tachibana' Oranges* (see photo), is one of the representative examples of a *furisode* worn as *haregi*. The pattern features a courtly, elegant bamboo screen[3] swaying in the wind, with the tachibana (an evergreen tree symbolizing longevity) shown as a lucky motif using yuzen-dyeing and embroidery," explains OYAMA.

According to OYAMA, the origin of the *furisode* came from opening the sides of the kimono to allow for the addition of the long sleeves, known as 'furi,' which helped regulate the body heat of children, who are more prone to overheating. This practice began in the early 17th century and gradually became more widespread. By the end of the 17th century, the sleeves began to lengthen, and by the late 18th century, they reached about one meter in length.

"Even after the late 19th century, when Japan's modernization was fully underway, many women in Japan still wore kimonos more regularly than Western-style clothing. So, on occasions like New Year's, they would wear *haregi*, which lifted their spirits. During


Photo: ColBase


Photo: ColBase


Photo: ColBase

From left:

Example of a *furisode haregi*: Long-Sleeved Kimono ("Furisode") with Peonies, Tachibana Oranges, and Nets (18th century, Tokyo National Museum collection). "In addition to the tachibana, which symbolizes eternal youth, the design also features peony flowers, a symbol of wealth and prosperity, creating a design full of happiness," says OYAMA.

Furisode with Blue Crepe Silk Ground, Floral Garden Landscape Pattern (20th century, Tokyo National Museum collection)

Example of a *tomesode* worn by married women: Robe ("Kosode") with a Paulownia Tree and Phoenixes (18th century, Tokyo National Museum collection).

the Taisho era (1912–1926), influenced by Western culture, *furisode* featuring vibrant synthetic dyes and Western-style patterns dyed using yuzen became popular. The example shown in the photo, Furisode with Blue Crepe Silk Ground, Floral Garden Landscape Pattern, features a landscape pattern of a flower field, almost like an oil painting, dyed with a vivid blue background. The kimono also bears a family crest, indicating that it was worn in formal settings (see photo)."

OYAMA explains that such vibrant, European-style landscape patterns would likely suit not only Japanese women but also women overseas. "For Japanese women, there is an awareness of the etiquette that *furisode* should only be worn by young women before marriage. However, for those who are not Japanese, I believe there's no need to adhere to that custom. *Furisode* often features more splendid and beautiful patterns than the *tomesode*[4], which married women wear, so I especially recommend them to women from overseas.

"Recently, there has been a movement in Japan to incorporate kimono more freely into daily life and to experiment with new styles. For example, YOSHIKIMONO, a line of kimono designed by artist YOSHIKI (leader of the rock band X JAPAN), offers kimono styles that can be easily worn by women overseas. The YOSHIKIMONO can be worn like a dress by reversing the front and back, making it suitable for both Western-style parties and formal ceremonies with ethnic dress codes, offering a modern take on traditional attire."

"In Japan, the tradition of buying new *haregi* for the New Year held cultural significance, representing a fresh and positive start to the year. While these traditional customs are gradually fading in modern times, it is essential to preserve the spirit and sentiments of the past regarding the New Year. At the same time, by embracing innovative kimono designs, we can celebrate the New Year with both elegance and freedom."


Photo: YOSHIKIMONO 2020 S/S COLLECTION

A modern adaptation of kimono, an example of YOSHIKIMONO. This kimono can be worn both as a traditional garment and as a dress by reversing the front and back, creating a Western-style look.

1. Patterns considered lucky, symbolizing prosperity and longevity. Examples include tachibana, cranes, turtles, wisteria, and fans.
2. A technique for dyeing kimono that represents Japan. It was perfected by Miyazaki Yuzen, who is said to have been active from the latter half of the 17th century to the 18th century. His fan paintings became popular, and the kimono patterns inspired by his artistic style spread widely during that period. See *"Furisode" (Kimono with Long Sleeves) Plum Trees, Standing Screens, and Falcon Design on Whity Brown Chirimen Crepe Ground* in the June 2023 issue of *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*.
3. A bamboo screen used in temples or noble residences.
4. Refers to the kimono with shorter sleeves worn by married women, in contrast to the *furisode*. Nowadays, it is often worn as formal attire for married women.

Herbal sake O-toso for Good Health and Longevity

O-toso is an herbal sake traditionally enjoyed in Japan during New Year celebrations. We spoke with an herbal medicine specialist to learn about its history, purpose, and how it can be enjoyed in modern times. **(Text: TANAKA Nozomi)**

Photo: PIXTA

An example of a traditional set of utensils for O-toso. The herbal sake is poured from the *choshi* (vessel) on the right into the *sakazuki* (sake cup) on the left for drinking.

"O-toso is an herbal sake made by infusing a blend of various *kampo*[1] medicinal herbs (or crude drugs), known as *toso-san*, into sake or original mirin (*hon-mirin*)[2]," explains OGATA Chiaki, a pharmacist at the Kitasato University Oriental Medicine Research Center. "It has long been cherished by Japanese people as a New Year's herbal sake. The act of drinking it reflects a wish for a year of good health and protection from illness, supported by the benefits of the medicinal herbs."

"Drinking O-toso at the start of the New Year, wishing for health and longevity, is a cherished tradition that continues to this day and has become a customary part of the New Year celebrations. The two characters in 'toso (屠蘇)' have specific meanings: 'to (屠)' signifies the removal of evil spirits, while 'so (蘇)' symbolizes the revival of the soul. O-toso is a drink filled with the wish to drive away negative energy and embrace the New Year with a fresh start."

The history of O-toso dates back to ancient China, from where it was introduced to Japan. It is said that in the early 9th century, Emperor Saga (the 52nd emperor, reigning from 809 to 823) drank *tososan* infused in *sake* at that time. This event led to the establishment of O-toso as a New Year's drink in the imperial court. Later, during the Edo period (from the early 17th century to the mid-late 19th century), as *hon-mirin*, a sweetened type of sake, became popular, the custom of drinking O-toso spread to the general public.

Here's a simple way to make and traditionally drink O-toso. First, prepare *tososan*, which is available in stores such as pharmacies and supermarkets. Today,

Photo: Kitasato University Oriental Medicine Research Center

Photo: PIXTA

Left: An example of the main medicinal herbs used in *tososan* for O-toso. Starting from the top and moving clockwise: Chinese bellflower, cloves, jujube fruit, Japanese pepper, hawthorn fruit, dried mandarin peel, with cinnamon in the center.

Right: Pouring O-toso into a *sakazuki* (sake cup).

it typically comes in tea bag form, so on the night of December 31st, simply place the tea bag in sake or *hon-mirin* and let it sit overnight. On New Year's morning, remove the *toso-san* bag, pour the infused liquid into festive sake cups (see photo), and, in traditional fashion, the family drinks it, starting with the youngest member. In many Japanese households, special foods for New Year's such as *osechi* (see page 14) are prepared, and traditionally, O-toso is enjoyed before the meal.

O-toso is traditionally consumed as part of New Year's customs. OGATA explains its purpose and uses as follows: "For example, one of the medicinal herbs used in O-toso, Japanese pepper (*sansho*), helps maintain a healthy stomach and promotes digestion. It is also a common spice used in Japanese cooking. Other herbs commonly blended in *tososan* include cloves, jujube, dried mandarin peel, and cinnamon. These are familiar cooking spices and fruits, which you can prepare yourself. Cloves promote digestive function, jujube relieves tension and boosts vitality, while dried mandarin peel and cinnamon help regulate the digestive system. Additionally, Chinese bellflower has a calming and anti-inflammatory effect, and hawthorn fruit helps with indigestion and regulates the digestive system, making it another good addition. These ingredients can be found at Kampo shops or stores that sell Chinese ingredients. Each of these herbs serves a different purpose, but together in *tososan*, they contribute to overall health improvement.

"Moreover, instead of using sake or *hon-mirin*, you can add *tososan* to red wine and heat it to make a hot wine, or try adding it to tea or milk tea to create a spiced tea. I recommend adapting it in a modern style not only for the New Year but throughout the year as well."

Photo: PIXTA

Japanese pepper berries, with the dried fruit peel used for *tososan*.

Photo: Kitasato University Oriental Medicine Research Center

Convenient *tososan* with blended medicinal herbs in a tea bag.

1. Kampo is a type of Oriental medicine that originated from medicine introduced from China long ago, but it has developed uniquely as a Japanese medicine to suit the Japanese climate and the constitution of the Japanese people. The medicinal herbs (or crude drugs) used in Kampo are called 'shoyaku.' These include parts of plants, such as leaves, stems, roots, as well as minerals and animals, that are processed for their therapeutic properties.
2. The *hon-mirin* used for O-toso is a seasoning made from steamed glutinous rice, rice malt, shochu (Japanese distilled spirit), or brewed alcohol, which is fermented and aged for 40 to 60 days. Originally, it was intended for drinking, but nowadays it is commonly used as a seasoning. Note that other types of mirin are not suitable for O-toso.

New Year's O-sechi Cuisine: Wishing for Happiness in the Year Ahead

Photo: Gyojishoku Association

An example of how o-sechi is served.

O-sechi, enjoyed at home, is the most common and traditional New Year's cuisine in modern Japan. We spoke with an expert on o-sechi to learn about its origins. (Text: TANAKA Nozomi)

O-sechi cuisine is typically prepared using ingredients that can be preserved, with a variety of colorful dishes carefully arranged in a *jubako* box[1]. These dishes are designed to last so those who usually prepare meals can rest during the New Year. We spoke with KOMIYA Rimi, an expert on o-sechi cuisine and the representative director of the general incorporated association, Gyojishoku Association, to learn more.

"When explaining o-sechi to people overseas, I describe it as a representative dish of Japan's special or extraordinary days. It is a celebratory meal that the Japanese enjoy on the first day of the New Year. Originally, o-sechi referred to food offerings made to the gods during one of the five seasonal festivals (*sechinichi*[2]) that occur throughout the year. Over time,

Photo: Adobe Stock

An example of o-sechi cuisine, beautifully arranged in a lacquered *jubako* box[1]. The three-tiered circular vessel on the left is a lacquered sake cup.

Photos: Gyojishoku Association

Above: *Kazunoko* (herring roe).
Below: *Tazukuri* (sweetly simmered dried sardines).

Above: *Kuro-mame* (Sweetly simmered black beans).
Below: *Tataki gobo* (burdock root seasoned with sesame).

however, the New Year's festival came to be regarded as the most special of these occasions, and the term 'o-sechi' itself eventually came to mean the food prepared for the New Year and New Year's Day," explains KOMIYA.

The origins of o-sechi, where dishes are arranged in a *jubako* box as seen today, are debated, but it is believed to have begun around the 14th century. However, lacquered *jubako* boxes were considered luxury items at the time and were not widely accessible. It is thought that the practice of using them became more common around the 17th century.

The ingredients and dishes used in o-sechi each carry special meanings. KOMIYA explains as follows: "The seasoning, presentation, and the shape of the *jubako* box can vary by region, giving each a unique style. However, dishes such as *kazunoko* (herring roe)[3], *tazukuri* (sweetly simmered dried sardines)[4], *kuro-mame* (sweetly simmered black beans)[5], and *tataki gobo* (pounded burdock root)[6] are commonly eaten throughout Japan. In fact, each ingredient carries a wish: *kazunoko* represents prosperity for descendants, *tazukuri* symbolizes a good harvest, *kuro-mame* signifies health, and *tataki gobo* stands for stability. All of these reflect hopes that family members and loved ones will have a happy and prosperous year. In addition to o-sechi, *zoni* (soup with mochi rice cakes) is also an important dish."

Zoni originated from the custom of cooking and eating the mochi and offerings that were presented to the gods during seasonal rituals. It is a dish that symbolizes receiving the blessings of the gods while wishing for a good year ahead, making it an essential part of New Year's cuisine.

"O-sechi is not only notable for its vibrant appearance but also for being a prime example of Japan's longstanding culture that values the meaning behind the dishes. Overseas visitors often express admiration for this, recognizing it as a dish Japan can be proud of, including its cultural significance. Moving forward, I hope to pass down Japan's traditional food culture that is tailored to the seasons and events, including o-sechi, to future generations," says KOMIYA.

Photo: Gyojishoku Association

An example of *zoni* eaten in Kyoto City and other areas. It features white miso-based soup with round mochi, vegetables such as Kyoto carrots, taro, and daikon radish, topped with bonito flakes[7].

1. A box-shaped container with a lid used for packing food. Traditionally, it is an elegant container made of black or vermilion lacquerware, often adorned with lacquer decoration (*maki-e*). The use of such containers symbolizes the wish for the accumulation of celebratory occasions, and they are commonly used on special days. *Maki-e* is a technique where patterns are drawn with lacquer on the surface of the container, and then gold or silver powder is sprinkled on top to adhere to the design.
2. Celebratory days held at the changing of the seasons are known as 'sekku.' There are five specific days: January 7, March 3, May 5, July 7, and September 9, collectively referred to as the 'go-sekku.' These events were established to pray for a safe and prosperous passage into the future, giving rise to various traditional rituals.
3. Salted herring roe. It symbolizes the wish for prosperity for descendants.
4. Dried young sardines that are roasted and coated in a sweet and savory sauce made with soy sauce and sugar. Since sardines were used as fertilizer for rice fields, it symbolizes a bountiful harvest.
5. Sweetly simmered black beans. The word 'mame,' which means 'beans,' is a homophone for another word that means 'strong' and 'healthy,' symbolizing health and the ability to work hard.
6. Burdock root, pounded to soften and make it easier to eat, then simmered. Since burdock grows deep roots in the earth, it symbolizes stability.
7. The bright red, slender Kyoto carrot is a vegetable beloved in Kyoto. Taro is a plant native to Southeast Asia, with the edible part being the enlarged underground stem. Additionally, the daikon used in Kyoto-style *zoni* is typically smaller in size.

Photo: Shitsurai Sanzen

An example of New Year decorations based on the concept of *shitsurai* in a Japanese home's *tokonoma*.[1]

The Significance and Spirit of *Shitsurai* in Japan's New Year

Japan has a rich tradition of seasonal events passed down through generations. The practice of beautifying indoor spaces during these occasions is known as *shitsurai*. We spoke with YAMAMOTO Michiko, a leading expert in the study and practice of *shitsurai*, to learn more about these New Year decorations in Japan. **(Text: MOROHASHI Kumiko)**

In Japan, seasonal events are observed throughout the year, such as New Year celebrations in January, Doll Festival (or Girls' Day)[2] in March, and Boys' Festival (or Tango no Sekku)[3] in May. According to YAMAMOTO, the Japanese have traditionally valued the practice of *shitsurai*, which involves arranging and beautifying indoor spaces for such occasions. "New Year's is a traditional event held on January 1, where families welcome Toshigami-sama (New Year's deity, see page 6 for reference) into their homes and offer sake and festive dishes. To greet Toshigami-sama with a refreshed and clear mind for the new year, *shitsurai* involves preparing the home and decorating with items such as *kadomatsu*[4]."

In Japan, traditionally, around December 13, people begin their major housecleaning[5] in preparation for the New Year. December 29 is a day off for rest, and on December 30, decorations are put up, which is the usual custom. Each of these dates carries its own significance.

"December 29 is avoided for New Year preparations because the pronunciation of '29' in Japanese includes the sound 'ku,' which is associated with the word 'kurushimu' (meaning suffering or hardship). It is customary to finish decorating for the New Year by December 30. Decorating on December 31, the day before New Year's Day, is considered too close to the arrival of the gods, which may lack sincerity and is seen as unfavorable. Specific examples of *shitsurai* include *kadomatsu* (New Year pine decorations) and *kagami mochi* (mirror-shaped rice cakes).

Photo: Shitsurai Sanzen

YAMAMOTO Michiko, a *shitsurai* researcher and the head of Shitsurai Sanzen.

Photo: Shitsurai Sanzen

An example of New Year decorations as part of *shitsurai*. The pine behind the mirror-shaped mochi (rice cakes) symbolizes a wish for longevity, and each decoration carries its own meaning.

Kadomatsu consists of two pine trees placed at the entrance or on either side of the gate, with traditional decorations made of straw[6] hanging from them. The word 'matsu' (pine) shares the same pronunciation as 'matsu' (to wait), symbolizing the anticipation of Toshigami-sama's visit. Also, because pine is an evergreen tree, it is often used in New Year decorations as a symbol of longevity and eternal life," says YAMAMOTO.

"*Kagami mochi*[7] are displayed in the *tokonoma* or entrance (see photo). The shape of *kagami mochi* is modeled after ancient mirrors, which were considered sacred in Japan as they were believed to house the gods. So, *kagami mochi* symbolizes the welcoming of Toshigami-sama for the New Year and is offered as a tribute to the gods. Stacking two mochi cakes represents the ideas of 'increasing fortune' and 'growing gracefully with the passing years,' while also symbolizing the balance of yin and yang, as well as the sun and moon."

In addition to *kagami mochi*, it is also considered good to decorate with special flowers or fruits to add a festive touch to New Year's decorations.

"For example, decorating with large citrus fruits[8] is a lovely tradition, as they symbolize a wish for good luck, linked to the Japanese term 'daikichi,' which means 'great fortune.' The red and white sprouting radish (see photo) also carries meaning, as it plays on the word 'omedeto-gozaimasu,' which means both 'congratulations' and 'sprouting,' symbolizing new beginnings and growth. Seasonal plants such as willow, pine, camellia, nandina, narcissus, lilies, and chrysanthemums are also used to celebrate the New Year and are considered symbols of good fortune."

YAMAMOTO says that when visitors from overseas have the opportunity to experience *shitsurai* in Japan, she hopes they will take a moment to reflect on the meaning behind each decoration and understand the spirit and intention behind it. "By tidying up the room, cleaning, watering the garden, and cleansing impurities, we prepare to welcome the New Year with a clear mind, alongside the gods. This practice has nurtured the Japanese spirit. *Shitsurai* carries the hope that the coming year will be a good one, a tradition that has been passed down through generations."

Photo: Shitsurai Sanzen

A *tokonoma* decorated with *kagami mochi* and a radish sprouting.

Photo: Shitsurai Sanzen

An example of decorating with a large citrus fruit called *buntan* (Left in photo). The larger the fruit, the more it is believed to symbolize 'daikichi' (great fortune). On the right is a decorative kite with a *shishi-gashira* mask design (see page 18).

1. In Japanese architecture, a *tokonoma* is an alcove raised slightly higher than the rest of the room, where items such as hanging scrolls, ornaments, and flowers are displayed. It was developed during the medieval period with the evolution of *shoin-zukuri* (traditional style of Japanese residential architecture) and became an important feature of room decor in the early modern period.
2. A Japanese tradition celebrated on March 3 to wish for the happiness and healthy growth of girls. It is also known as 'Hina Matsuri' (Doll Festival) or the 'Peach Festival,' during which dolls are displayed and special foods are enjoyed.
3. *Tango no Sekku* (Boys' Festival, Boy's Day or Children's Day) on May 5 is a tradition to celebrate the birth of boys and pray for their healthy growth. It is customary to display dolls, armor, and carp-shaped streamers.
4. *Kadomatsu* is displayed at the gate or entrance as a marker to welcome the gods into the home for the New Year. It typically uses pine, bamboo, and sometimes plum, symbolizing prosperity and longevity for the coming year. *Kadomatsu* is often placed in pairs, with bamboo at the center, and the height and cutting style of the bamboo hold specific meanings.
5. Cleaning the dust and dirt from indoor spaces, *kamidana* (shrine), *butsudan* (Buddhist altar), and other areas to purify them. It also signifies purifying the home to welcome the gods.
6. Rice or wheat stalks that are harvested and dried.
7. Food made by steaming glutinous rice and then pounding it until it becomes sticky. The resulting mochi is divided into large and small pieces, rounded, and stacked to create the decorative mirror-shaped mochi known as *kagami mochi*.
8. Fruits like *buntan* and *banpeiyu* (types of pomelo), as well as *oniyuzu* (Japanese citron), are commonly used for decoration. All of these fruits are known for their large size.

Shishi-mai: A Lively Dance Performed in a Lion Costume

Performance of the New Year's Shishi-mai dance in the snow in Izumozaki Town, Niigata Prefecture

Photo: Izumozaki Town Tourist Association

The Shishi-mai dance, a Japanese folk performing art, is performed on occasions such as New Year's celebrations and *matsuri* festivals as a traditionally event for getting rid of misfortune or disaster (*yaku-harai*)[1] and offer prayers for sound health. (See Column for more background.) The dance is performed by mostly alone or a pair of dancers wearing a costume featuring a *shishi-gashira* mask which is modeled on the head of the *shishi*,[2] an imaginary creature based on ancient conceptions of the lion, an animal not natively found in Japan. This article will introduce Shishi-mai dances performed in Izumozaki Town, Niigata Prefecture, a particularly well-known example of the event held in conjunction with New Year's celebrations.

(Text: MOROHASHI Kumiko)

Niigata Prefecture is located in the northwest area of the Japanese archipelago's central section. Once home to a successful shipping industry, Izumozaki Town is located at just about the center of the prefecture's Sea of Japan-facing side in an abundant natural setting, surrounded by the sea and hilly mountains. We interviewed OGURO Osamu of the Izumozaki Town Industry and Tourism Division about the origins and special features of the town's Shishi-mai traditions.

"Izumozaki's Shishi-mai dance traditions are said to date to around 1680. Every year on the 2nd and 3rd of January, and then the 11th and 15th, youthful dancers playing the parts of *shishi* make their way through the town, performing ceremonial cleansing to the sound of *taiko* drums and traditional Japanese *yoko-fue* flutes. Starting from various shrines, they will go door to door through the town's rows of *tsumairi*-style houses with entrances at right angles to the roofs' ridges — a traditional event that has come to represent the local culture of Izumozaki."

"The *tsumairi* style is a feature of the local architecture, characterized by a narrow frontage[3] and greater depth. Around 1680, when Izumozaki had high population density, the style was commonly adopted to help increase the number of residents the town could hold. Another reason for the town's many houses with narrow frontages like this is said to relate to tax rates being based on properties' frontages at the time. In the town's limited space of flat land surrounded by hilly

Photo: Izumozaki Town Tourist Association

Shishi-mai: A traditional event carefully maintained by Izumozaki residents

Photo: Izumozaki Town Tourist Association

A *shishi-gashira* mask is placed on a performer's head

terrain and the Sea of Japan, the houses stand in rows, seeming to almost overlap one another. Still today, processions of Shishi-mai dancers weave their way through this town setting.

"Members of different communities take part in performing Izumozaki's Shishi-mai dances, as the town is currently made up of a dozen or so districts. Pairs of dancers working in unison perform together, with one wearing the *shishi-gashira* mask and the other forming the tail end. Besides these main performers, the basic makeup of a Shishi-mai procession includes one performer each accompanying the dance on the *yoko-fue* flute, *kane* bell, trumpet shell,[4] and *taiko* drum, an assistant pulling the cart for the *taiko*, and two or three carrying *o-saisenbako* boxes for accepting offerings of money."[5]

Photo: Izumozaki Town Tourist Association

The particularly gorgeous *shishi-gashira* mask of Ame-jishi

On January 11, a special *shishi* performer known as the Ame-jishi appears,("jishi" is a Japanese phonetic change of "shishi") wearing a special *shishi-gashira* mask decorated with gold accents and a body section dyed with different showy colors.

"They say markets selling salt once opened on January 11 in Izumozaki, and then during the Meiji period (1868–1912), markets offering candy (*ame* in Japanese) for sale then appeared in their place. This is the origin of the Ame-jishi, from the *shishi* dancers who once appeared at the candy markets."

The Ame-jishi dancers present an impressive spectacle, making a daring dance through the historic town setting with its rows of *tsumairi* houses. The dancer will offer prayers for household well-being and sound health, while giving a spirited performance accompanied by *taiko* drums, *yoko-fue* flutes, and other instruments.

Photo: Izumozaki Town Tourist Association

A baby has its head "bitten" by a *shishi-gashira* in an offering of prayers for the family's safety and good health.

"Having one's head 'bitten' by the *shishi-gashira* is said to provide getting rid of misfortune or disaster. Though the weather will be cold, with snow covering the ground, I hope many visitors will make their way to Izumozaki on days in January when Shishi-mai dances are performed to enjoy the benefits of this cleansing and find happiness in the new year."

1. In Japan, misfortune or disaster is called "yaku." The act of getting rid of such misfortune is called "*yaku-harai*" or "*yaku-barai*" (disaster prevention). This usually involves praying to gods and Buddhas.
2. While "*shishi*" generally refers to the lion in Japanese, the word can also refer to an imaginary creature based on ancient conceptions of the lion, an animal that was not found in East Asia. This imaginary *shishi* has traditionally appeared at temples, shrines, and other locations as a form associated with protection from misfortune.
3. The width of a house or property
4. *Horagai*: a type of large spiral seashell, also known as a conch. Characterized by the depth of its tone, it has been used as a trumpet-like ceremonial instrument in rituals and traditional events at temples or shrines.
5. A box used for accepting offerings of money. In Japan, they are often found installed in front of the main hall of a shrine.

JAPAN'S SHISHI-MAI DANCE

The Shishi-mai dance is a traditional performing art seen throughout Japan, involving dances by alone, in pairs or with several performers wearing a costume with a mask which is modeled on the head of the *shishi*, an imaginary creature based on ancient conceptions of the lion. Often performed on occasions such as New Year's celebrations and *matsuri* festivals, the dance signifies getting rid of misfortune or disaster (*yaku-harai*). Associated with good fortune, it is popular still today. It is believed that the dance originated in ancient India and was introduced to Japan as a form of *gigaku* dance, involving drama-dance performances performed by masked dancers with musical accompaniment, a genre thought to have been brought to Japan from continental Asia during the Asuka period (late 6th century to early 8th century).

One of the oldest surviving masks associated with the dance is a carved wooden *shishi-gashira* used in a *gigaku* performance for a ceremony held at Todai-ji temple (Nara City) in 752, for the newly constructed statue of Great Buddha's eye-opening. The mask is in the collection of the Shosoin.* The dance is thought to have gained widespread popularity in the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century), after performing arts teams called *daikagura* began performing it in locations throughout Japan.

* Shosoin: A storehouse for items of special importance, thought to have been built around the mid-8th century. Currently managed by the Imperial Household Agency, the Shosoin has over 9,000 items in its collection, including imperial relics such as personal items once cherished by Emperor Shomu (45th emperor of Japan from 724 to 749).

A 25-meter-long kite shaped like an octopus soars against the backdrop of Mount Fuji at the Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji.

Photo: PIXTA

Giant Kites Soar at the Foot of Mount Fuji at New Year

Kite flying, a traditional custom of the New Year, is considered a symbol of good fortune in various regions of Japan. We spoke with the organizer of a kite flying event held in the highlands at the foot of Mount Fuji to learn more about the tradition. **(Text: TANAKA Nozomi)**

Kite flying is a pastime where a kite, made by stretching paper or cloth over a frame, is lifted and controlled by the power of the wind. Kites have been a part of Japanese culture for centuries, with references to them found in a dictionary[1] from the 10th century. Around the 16th century, kite flying became widely popular among the general public. Although the timing of the activity varied by region and season at that time, it gradually became a cherished New Year tradition from the 19th century onward.

The Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji, where kites are flown with the towering Mount Fuji in the background, is an annual event held every January during the New Year period at the foot of Mount Fuji, specifically at the Asagiri Highlands[2] in Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture. We spoke with SHINKAI Takashi from the

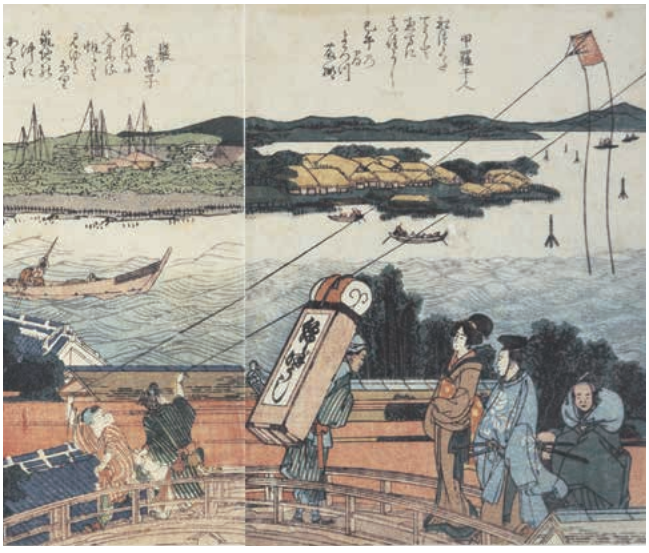


Photo: ColBase

A depiction of kite flying in Edo (modern-day Tokyo) around the early 19th century. From "Illustrated Book of Both Sides of the Sumida River" by Katsushika Hokusai, Part of the Classic Book illustrated by Hokusai.

event's organizing committee.

"Fujinomiya City, located at the foot of Mount Fuji, enjoys good sunlight and favorable wind conditions due to the influence of the westerlies and its south-facing slopes, which create a natural environment ideal for mild winds and updrafts. As a result, it is a famous location for sky sports, including the annual national paragliding competition. Taking advantage of these natural conditions, a kite flying competition was started about 20 years ago to offer a fun festival experience for a wider audience."

SHINKAI points out that the highlight of the event is the giant kite flying performed by children, which takes place once in the morning and once in the afternoon. "Close to 100 children work together, holding the ropes of a giant 25-meter kite to lift it into the sky. The sight of the kite soaring with Mount Fuji in the background is stunning, and the joy on the children's faces is incredibly moving."

In recent years, kite flying locations have become limited due to issues like kites getting tangled in power lines, so the opportunity to fly kites in such a spacious area is especially appreciated by families. The event also features a kite-making experience corner and kite sales.

"The event is mainly attended by families, who account for around 70% of the participants, though in recent years, the number of international tourists has been steadily growing. Many people say they are deeply moved by the moment the kite lifts into the sky. What brings me the most joy is contributing to this traditional experience, where children delight in flying kites under the vast sky, powered by the wind. We hope to continue this event as a New Year tradition for many years to come," says SHINKAI.

1. The *Wamyo Ruijusho*, an encyclopedia and Japanese-language dictionary compiled around 931 to 938.
2. A vast grassland area located in the northern part of Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture, on the western slopes of Mount Fuji. It lies at an elevation of 500 to 1,000 meters.

Left: Kites of various shapes fly in the sky at the Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji. This photo shows a kite shaped like a stingray.

Right: The giant kite flying event, where about 100 children lift a giant kite into the sky. This photo captures a giant octopus-shaped kite.

Photo: Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji Organizing Committee

Photo: Octopus kite fly, in Mt. Fuji Organizing Committee

Vibrant Hagoita Decorations for the New Year

In Japan, one of the indoor decorations to celebrate the New Year is the *hagoita*. To learn more about its history and origins, we spoke with SHIMIZU Yumiko, who continues the tradition of *Hakata Okiage* craft techniques in Fukuoka Prefecture to create *hagoita*. (Text: TANAKA Nozomi)

The *hagoita* is a wooden paddle originally used in Japan for the New Year's game *hanetsuki*. It has a slender handle and a shape similar to a badminton racket. In *hanetsuki*, players use the *hagoita* to hit a shuttlecock-like object made by inserting bird feathers into seeds from the soapberry (*mukuroji*)[1] tree. SHIMIZU explains more about the *hagoita*: "The act of hitting the *hane* (feathers)[2] with the *hagoita* symbolizes the wish to drive away bad luck and prevent disasters. Around the 16th century, the *hagoita* gradually changed from a practical play item into a decorative piece with beautiful designs. Today, it is mainly displayed as a vibrant decoration during the New Year, symbolizing good health, protection from evil, and the removal of bad luck."

An illustration of playing *hanetsuki* with *hagoita*.

Photos: PIXTA

An example of a practical *hagoita* used as a toy, along with various types of feathers.

The decorations on *hagoita* originally featured paintings directly on the wooden paddle. However, in the 16th century, three-dimensional decorations were introduced using thick paper, fabric, and cotton. This allowed for the creation of *oshie* (raised cloth pictures), which depicted people, flowers, or scenes from nature. In Fukuoka, the technique of *oshie* is known as "*okiage*" and has been passed down as a traditional craft to this day. *Okiage* involves attaching fabric to thick paper or, alternatively, creating parts by wrapping cotton to add thickness to the fabric, which are then assembled to form a three-dimensional picture. It is said that luxurious silk fabrics, such as those in gold or vivid red, commonly used in kimonos, are incorporated for a rich, vibrant finish.

"By the 19th century, Kabuki[3] became immensely popular, and *hagoita* featuring famous actors began to serve a role similar to that of collectible photo cards, becoming beloved by the common people," says SHIMIZU. "The *oshie hagoita* also became highly popular."

SHIMIZU, the third-generation successor of the traditional *Hakata Okiage* craft, occasionally holds exhibitions of her works. These exhibitions attract many visitors from overseas who enjoy the displays.

"We often receive comments expressing admiration for the intricate craftsmanship and designs created by hand. Many also mention being drawn to the charm of the fusion between tradition and modernity, with some saying they would like to take the pieces home as souvenirs for their own countries," Shimizu explains.

Why not celebrate the New Year by decorating with Japan's vibrant *hagoita* as a wish for good health and well-being in the year ahead?

1. A deciduous tree that can grow over 15 meters tall. It produces fruit with black, hard seeds, which are used to make the shuttlecock for *hanetsuki* (a traditional game played with *hagoita*).
2. The seed of the *mukuroji* (*soapberry*) tree, with feathers attached, is struck with a *hagoita* in the game of *hanetsuki*.
3. A traditional Japanese performing art that combines music, dance, and drama. It is believed to have originated in Kyoto around the early 17th century.

Photo: Hakata Okiage

A *hagoita* (92 cm in length) created using the traditional craft technique of *Hakata Okiage*. It depicts scenes from Japanese dance and Kabuki performance[3]

Photo: Hakata Okiage

An exhibition showcasing *Hakata Okiage*, featuring some large pieces measuring up to 1 meter in length.

A *hagoita* (1 meter in length) created using the traditional craft of *Hakata Okiage*, with even the hair of the Kabuki actor depicted in three-dimensional detail.

Photo: Hakata Okiage

Photo: PIXTA

In Asakusa, Tokyo, the annual Hagoita Fair is held every December, where *hagoita* are sold as New Year decorations.

Initiatives to Further Deepen Ties between Japan and the Caribbean States and Regions: Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024

The year 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of the start of the Japan-CARICOM (Caribbean Community[1]) Consultations, as well as the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Jamaica, and Japan and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Here, we present an outline of the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024, an initiative established to commemorate these anniversaries, and the Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference.

The 8th Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chiyoda City, Tokyo)

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

Japan's relations with CARICOM countries

The CARICOM countries, which represent 7% of the United Nations membership, have a strong voice in the international arena through policy coordination. As island nations, Japan and the CARICOM countries share a common vulnerability to natural disasters. They have been global partners which have been working together to solve global issues such as environment, disaster prevention, and climate change, as well as issues of the international community based on shared values and principles such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. The year 2024 marks the 30th anniversary since the first Japan-CARICOM Consultation, as well as the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, respectively. The Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024 is an initiative implemented to commemorate these anniversaries.

Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024

As part of the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024, the second such anniversary initiative, following one in 2014, various commemorative events were held in Japan and CARICOM countries to deepen bilateral exchanges.

In Japan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a reception in February 2024 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Jamaica. In March, Dr. Carla Natalie BARNETT, Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community, was invited to visit Japan and attend the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year Reception hosted by the then-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan KAMIKAWA Yoko. The event was also attended by officials from the Caribbean region and Latin American countries in Japan, as well as young diplomats and government officials invited through "Juntos!! Japan-Latin America and the Caribbean Exchange Program."[2] It succeeded in deepening exchanges among a wide range of people from different generations. At the Children's Kasumigaseki Tour Day organized in Tokyo in August 2024, an event entitled, "Let's Get to Know the Countries of the Caribbean, a Region Both Far and Near," was held to introduce children to the attractions of the Caribbean countries and their similarities to Japan in an easy-to-understand manner. In addition, many other events were held throughout Japan to screen Caribbean films and showcase the music, cuisine, and culture of Caribbean countries.

JAPAN CARICOM
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The official logo of the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024

As for initiatives conducted in the CARICOM countries, in January 2024, a Japanese Ambassador's Cup, Karate Tournament was held in Jamaica, and the Embassy of Japan in the Bahamas hosted an anime screening and offered calligraphy, origami, and other cultural experiences. In February and March 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan hosted lectures on Japanese animation production techniques in Belize, Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. A number of other events to showcase Japanese culture have been organized by the Embassies of Japan in the CARICOM countries at the local level.

Commemorative photo at the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024 Reception held in March 2024 at the Iikura Guest House of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Minato City, Tokyo)

Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The co-chairs of the Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference, IWAYA Takeshi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan (right), and Dr.Vince Henderson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy of the Commonwealth of Dominica. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chiyoda City, Tokyo)

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

At the Children's Kasumigaseki Tour Day held in August 2024, visitors enjoyed a performance of Reggae Bon, a fusion of reggae, which is part of the Caribbean culture, and the traditional Japanese Bon dance. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chiyoda City, Tokyo)

Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference

The 8th Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference and related events were held in Tokyo from December 12 to 14, 2024, with a reception hosted by Foreign Minister IWAYA Takeshi on the evening of December 12. Minister IWAYA and Dr. Vince Henderson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy of the Commonwealth of Dominica, who co-chaired the conference, delivered remarks expressing their expectations for the outcome of the conference.

At the meeting on December 14, Japan and CARICOM countries reaffirmed their commitment to continue cooperation under the "Three Pillars of Japan's CARICOM Policy"[3]. At the same time, they confirmed that they will work closely together to realize shared goals in today's challenges of the international community, such as maintaining international order in the increasingly severe international situation and resolving global issues, including climate change. These outcomes were also issued in the form of Ministerial Joint Statement. Details can be found on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan at "The 8th Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference, Working Lunch, Signing Ceremony and Joint Press Announcement" (https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_00839.html).

Minister for Foreign Affairs IWAYA (left) and Elizabeth Solomon, Assistant Secretary General, Foreign and Community Relations, CARICOM Secretariat, offered a toast at the Reception for the Eighth Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference. (Iikura Guest House of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minato City, Tokyo)

Photo: IMAMURA Keiko

1. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was established as a regional organization in 1973 by Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Guyana. It is composed of small island nations in the Caribbean Sea. Its current members are the 14 states of Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the British Overseas Territory of Montserrat. (Country names are abbreviated.) See website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/latin/caricom/index.html)
2. "Juntos" means "together" in Spanish. This program is for young people in Latin American countries who are expected to contribute to the strengthening of relations with Japan in various fields. It is implemented with the objective of increasing understanding of and interest in Japan, and thereby discovering and nurturing people who are both pro-Japanese and knowledgeable about Japan.
3. The three pillars of Japan's CARICOM policy, as stated by then-Prime Minister ABE Shinzo in 2014 are as follows: (1) cooperation for sustainable development, including overcoming the vulnerabilities particular to small island states; (2) deepening and expanding fraternal bonds of cooperation and friendship; and (3) cooperation for addressing challenges of the international community.

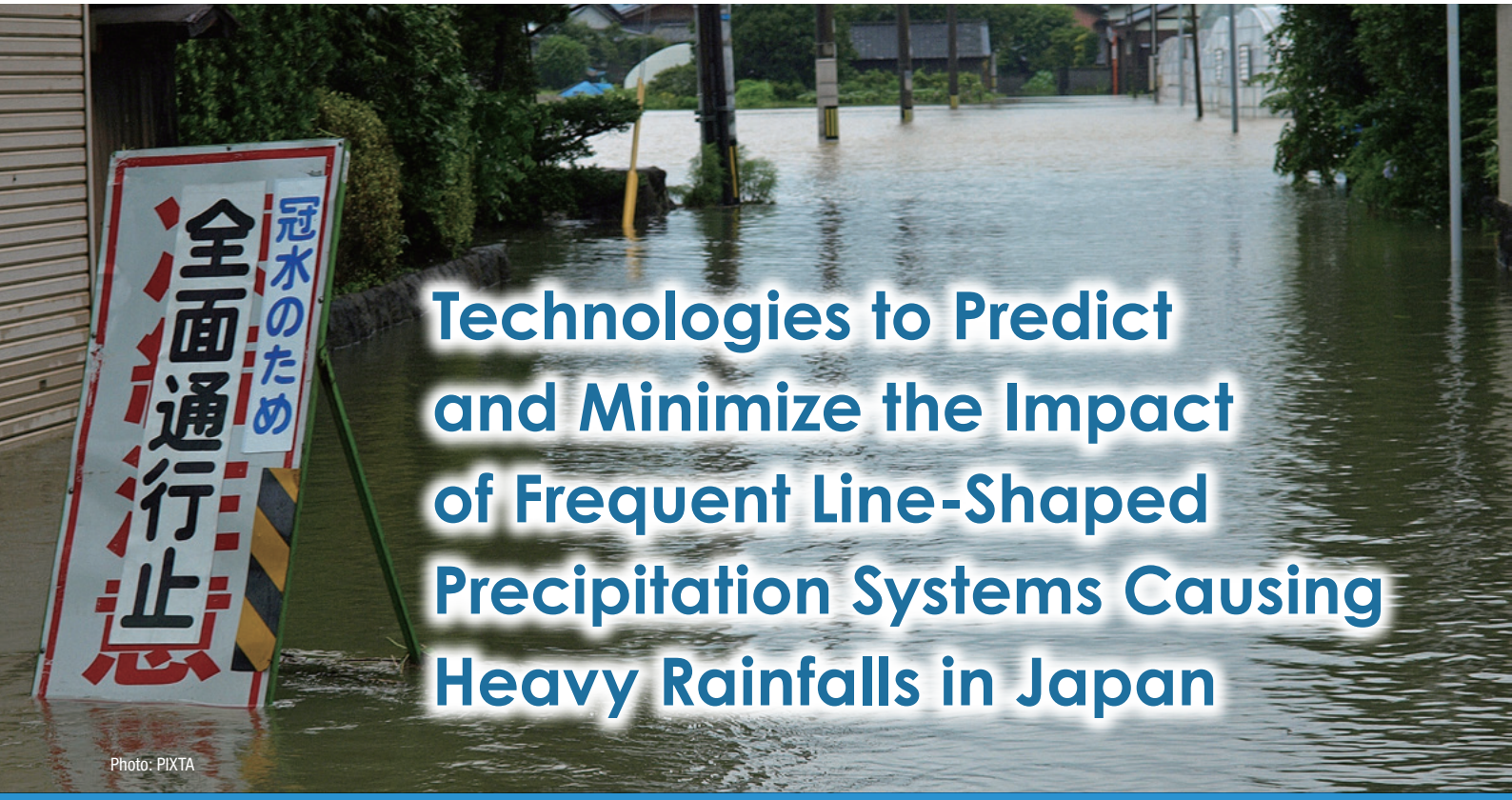


Photo: PIXTA

Technologies to Predict and Minimize the Impact of Frequent Line-Shaped Precipitation Systems Causing Heavy Rainfalls in Japan

In recent years, Japan has experienced a surge in heavy rainfall events causing severe disasters. However, accurately determining when, where, and to what extent these rainfalls would occur has long been a challenge. Approximately 60% of non-typhoon-related heavy rainfalls are caused by line-shaped precipitation systems (see diagram; definition provided in the main text). Recently, the National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Resilience (NIED), the Japan Weather Association (JWA), and the Meteorological Research Institute (MRI) have jointly developed an automatic detection technology for line-shaped precipitation systems. This technology aims to enable municipalities to issue more precise evacuation advisories based on the newly acquired data.

Images and materials: National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Resilience, SHIMIZU Singo

FUKUDA Mitsuhiro

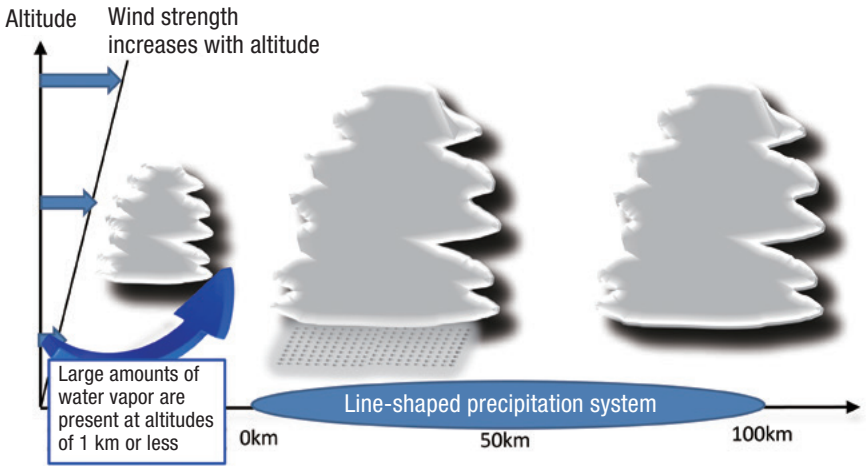
In recent years, Japan has seen a sharp increase in severe damage caused by heavy rainfall linked to a meteorological phenomenon known as "line-shaped precipitation systems," leading to river flooding and landslides. In 2020, MRI defined line-shaped precipitation systems based on three detection criteria: (1) a rainfall area with strong precipitation extending in a linear pattern 50 to 300 km long and 20 to 50 km wide (specifically, an aspect ratio[1] of 2.5 or more); (2) three-hour accumulated rainfall of a minimum of 80 millimeters that covers an area of 500 square kilometers or more; and (3) an area with accumulated rainfall exceeding 100 mm over 3 hours.

Line-shaped precipitation systems consist of clusters of cumulonimbus clouds that form in a row, producing localized heavy rain for several hours in the same area. Excluding typhoons, over 60% of torrential rain disasters in Japan are attributed to line-shaped precipitation systems.

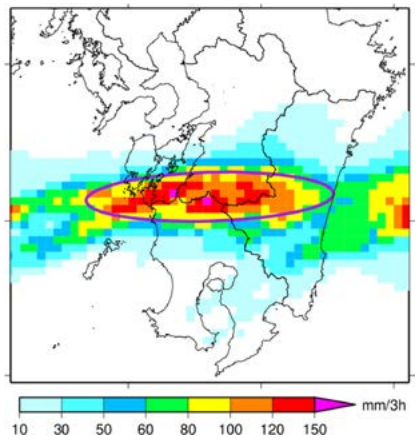
The recent increase in line-shaped precipitation systems is believed to be influenced by global warming, and research into their mechanisms and future projections is being actively conducted by MRI, as well as other research institutions and universities. In September 2023, a joint predictive simulation by six organizations, including MRI, revealed that in Japan, extreme precipitation events, including line-shaped precipitation systems, are expected to increase if global warming progresses further[2]. Moreover, such occurrences are not limited to Japan but have also been increasing across East Asia, where the resulting damage has been escalating in recent years.

In response, numerous research institutions, including NIED, have been working to predict heavy rainfall and minimize its impact, with a particular focus on understanding the meteorological conditions that

Mechanism of Line-Shaped Precipitation System Formation



Cumulonimbus clouds form when warm air containing a large amount of moisture near the surface rises through strong updrafts and cools at higher altitudes. When a line-shaped precipitation system forms, the cumulonimbus clouds move with the wind, but new cumulonimbus clouds continuously form in the same area, leading to prolonged heavy rainfall.



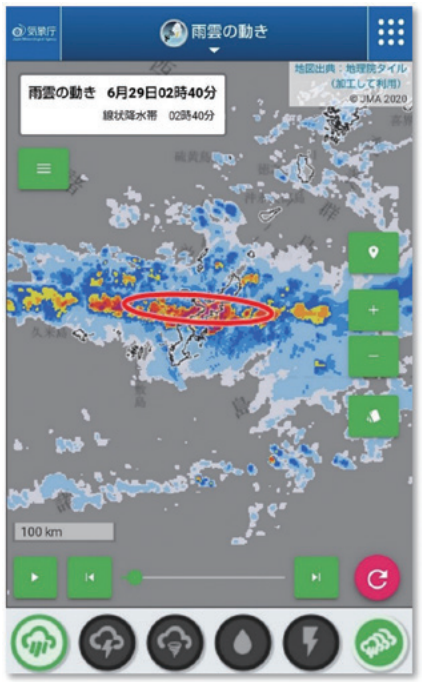
The three-hour accumulated rainfall and the automatic detection result (purple ellipse) as of 2:00 AM on July 4, 2020 (Japan Standard Time). By representing the line-shaped precipitation system with an ellipse, it becomes visually clear, making it easier to overlay and verify with other information, such as the areas where heavy rain warnings were issued on the map.

precede the formation of line-shaped precipitation systems. As a first step, NIED, JWA, and MRI collaborated under the framework of the Cabinet Office's Strategic Innovation Promotion Program (SIP)[3] on a project to enhance national resilience. This collaboration resulted in the development of an automatic detection technology for line-shaped precipitation systems that cause disasters.

The technology makes it possible to identify line-shaped precipitation systems in areas where the risk of disasters is rapidly increasing (specifically, areas classified as Risk Level 4[4] where evacuation orders have been issued). Additionally, to effectively communicate the occurrence of line-shaped precipitation systems, a visual representation using elongated ovals has been incorporated to indicate the affected areas.

In June 2021, the detection technology enabled the first operational release of information about line-shaped precipitation systems to the public through the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA)'s "Heavy Rain Information." This information is issued when a disaster is imminent, such as when local governments issue evacuation orders, requiring evacuation to be completed swiftly before the disaster strikes. As this information can be released at night, rapid evacuation can sometimes be challenging. Ongoing research aims to improve the accuracy of line-shaped precipitation systems occurrence predictions, supporting safer evacuations and enabling daytime evacuations.

As the automatic detection and prediction technologies for line-shaped precipitation systems advance, they will become crucial not only in Japan but globally, allowing for early forecasting of heavy rainfall and providing essential information for issuing accurate evacuation orders. These advancements are expected to play a significant role in minimizing the impact of heavy rainfall disasters both in Japan and around the world.



In June 2021, for the first time in Japan, line-shaped precipitation system occurrence prediction information was released to the public as part of the "Heavy Rain Information." In 2021, a total of 17 instances of "Heavy Rain Information" were issued, primarily in western Japan, following the initial announcement.

1. The aspect ratio refers to the ratio of the lengths of the long side to the short side of an image or object. In this case, it refers to the ratio of the length to the width of the rainfall area.
2. In September 2023, the Meteorological Research Institute and other institutions jointly announced this. (https://www.mri-jma.go.jp/Topics/R05/050919/press_release050919.pdf) (Japanese only)
3. A national project led by the Cabinet Office's Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation, promoting research to address social issues, transcending the boundaries of government ministries and fields. It focuses on advancing scientific and technological innovation through collaboration between industry, academia, and government.
4. A five-level warning system for the potential risk of water-related disasters or landslides caused by heavy rainfall or typhoons, with level 1 representing the lowest risk and level 5 indicating a critical situation where a disaster has already occurred.

Japanese Home Cooking Connects Hearts and Minds

Soy sauce in a small dish. Soy sauce is made mainly from soybeans (top right photo).

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

MOE is an influencer who promotes Japanese home cooking to the world under the name Kimono Mom. In this month's issue, we asked her to talk about Japanese home cooking.

Kimono Mom

I'm working to make Japanese home cooking more popular around the world. I do this because I think home cooking can help people rediscover their own roots and lead strong lives in today's world. I also want to ensure the next generation connects with the culture of the Japanese food that I grew up eating.

No matter where in the world you may live, home cooking has the power to heal the soul and connect families and cultures. For me, I felt this power most strongly through the home-cooked meals my mother made for me when I was little. Of course, it was mainly Japanese food. In both happy and sad times, my mom encouraged me and supported me with her cooking. The day before a test at school, she would make pork cutlets to cheer me up, and when I endured hardships as a *maiko*,[1] she would sneak me my favorite dish—curry and rice. Even now, I can still remember eating it, tears streaming down my face. My mom's cooking was always infused with a love that words can't fully convey. For me, home cooking is a key element that makes me reaffirm my family ties and my own identity, and that's why I want to pass on this precious culture to the next generation.

When making Japanese food, I believe that the key element for preserving the food's "Japanese-ness" is the combination of soy sauce[2] and *dashi* (soup stock), which is full of *umami*.[3] As long as you have these two items, you'll be able to experience a flavor typical of Japanese cuisine no matter where you are in the world, even if the other ingredients are different. *Oden* and *chawanmushi* are two typical examples of Japanese home cooking that use soy sauce and *dashi*.

Oden

Oden consists of a variety of items you can enjoy, all of which are simmered in a broth of soy sauce and *dashi*. *Daikon* (Japanese radish), konjac, eggs, *chikuwa* (tube-shaped fish paste cake), and other ingredients are boiled together until they completely absorb the *dashi* stock. People often eat *oden* during the cold weather months, enjoying it at home or at a street stand. Since it's easy to prepare—all you have to do is simmer the ingredients together—you can easily make it outside of Japan, too. The flavor of the

MOE (Kimono Mom)

An influencer who promotes Japanese home cooking to the world. After retiring from her work as a *maiko* and *geiko* in a Kyoto's *kagai*, traditional entertainment district, she launched her YouTube channel "Kimono Mom" in February 2020. Her videos mix in English and include introducing Japanese home cooking while wearing a kimono.

* See "From Maiko to Influencer: The Charm of Kyoto's Gokagai," in the November 2024 issue of HIGHLIGHTING Japan.

Kimono Mom

Japanese *dashi* (soup stock). *Dashi* made from *kombu* (kelp), *katsuobushi* (dried bonito flakes), and other ingredients is used to create the typical flavor of Japanese food.

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

Oden, a cold weather favorite in Japan.

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

A bowl of *chawanmushi* (steamed egg custard). This one features shrimp and shiitake mushroom, with a garnish of *mitsuba* honeywort.

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

soy sauce is nicely emphasized, and the taste of the dish is characterized by the soup, infused with the *umami* of the ingredients. Soup stock made from *kombu* (kelp) or *katsuobushi* (dried bonito flakes) gives it a particularly deep flavor.

Chawanmushi

Chawanmushi is a soft steamed dish made from a base of egg and *dashi*. You make it by mixing eggs with *dashi* and soy sauce, adding other ingredients, and then steaming it in a steamer. You can put in things like chicken, shrimp, gingko nuts, and shiitake mushrooms. Each household makes its own version. *Chawanmushi* is distinguished by its soft texture and mild flavor, and it highlights the delicate *umami* of the *dashi* and the texture of the ingredients. *Chawanmushi* can be prepared without special implements, by using a steamer or a pot, so it's an easy dish to try outside of Japan.

I believe that, in the future, even if we are beset with a global food crisis and ingredients become limited, we can keep Japanese food culture alive as long as we have soy sauce and *dashi*. They will continue to support the essence of Japanese food and play an indispensable role in handing down our culinary culture.

From now on, I'll keep sharing the appeal of Japanese home cooking with the world. I will link people all over the world to the power of home cooking and connect the next generation to Japanese food culture.

1. MOE used to work as a *maiko* (apprentice *geiko*) and as a *geiko* in Kyoto.
2. A liquid seasoning made mainly from grain such as soybeans and wheat and fermented by adding *koji* (malted rice) and salt.
3. Considered one of the basic flavors along with sweet, sour, salty and bitter. Chief components of *umami* are glutamic acid, inosinic acid, and guanylic acid.

Anime: A Subculture That Gives a Sense of Japanese Values and Culture

Massimiliano Sgai, an Italian who lives in Japan, has been fascinated by Japanese anime since childhood, and he studied Japanese literature at university. We interviewed him about the appeal of Japanese anime, which enjoys international popularity, and the anime works he would recommend to people around the world.

Massimiliano Sgai

Originally from Italy, Massimiliano Sgai now lives in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture. He graduated from the Department of Japanese Language of the faculty of Letters at the Graduate School of the University of Turin, and moved to Japan in 2007. After gaining experience as a Japanese-Italian interpreter, he went on to work as a food and lifestyle writer. He is the author of the book, *Italia-jin Massi ga Buttonda, Nihon no Kami-gurume* ("Japan's Divine Culinary Treats That Astonished the Italian, Massi") (KADOKAWA), as well as a number of magazine articles and serialized columns. He writes about the fascinating differences between Italian and Japanese culture, the appeal of Japanese food, and delicious food arrangements from an Italian's point of view. His long-selling series *The Complete Guide to Saizeriya* (note) has over 1.5 million page views. Currently, he is involved in a variety of activities ranging from writing serialized columns and essays to planning and copywriting.

Massimiliano Sgai

Massimiliano Sgai

One of the images that comes to mind when people around the world hear "Japan" is the spectacular robot world depicted in anime.[1] Back home in Italy, I used to watch Japanese anime from the 1970s and 80s, with robots flying through space and fighting desperately to protect human freedom. I still have strong memories of the excitement I felt watching those anime. There were many titles I watched, including *Mazinger Z*[2] and *Mobile Suit Gundam*,[3] but the one that had the strongest impact on me was *Mobile Police PATLABOR* (see column).

Although this work appears to be a sci-fi (science fiction) story far removed from the real world, it develops around various social issues that exist in daily life. Japanese police and Labors, which are walking work machines based on robotic technology, protect the safety of the city. As you watch, you will begin to get a sense of what the real Tokyo may actually look like in the near future. In addition, this work allows viewers to experience daily life from the perspective of a Japanese person and to learn about the mindset of the Japanese people, including their way of thinking, social manners, and diligence, which may otherwise be difficult to see when simply visiting Japan as a tourist.

In this anime, viewers can also learn about the characters' personalities and deep-seated concerns, thus better understanding Japanese ways of thinking. Knowing the core values of the Japanese people is important for communication, and I feel that this knowledge has helped me in my actual interactions here. In Japan, as illustrated by the concepts of *honne* (true feelings and desires) and *tatemae* (behaviors and opinions displayed in public), words and actions sometimes do not seem to match. I think this is due to the typical Japanese cultural trait that each person has a variety of faces, and the face

©Go Nagai/Dynamic Planning

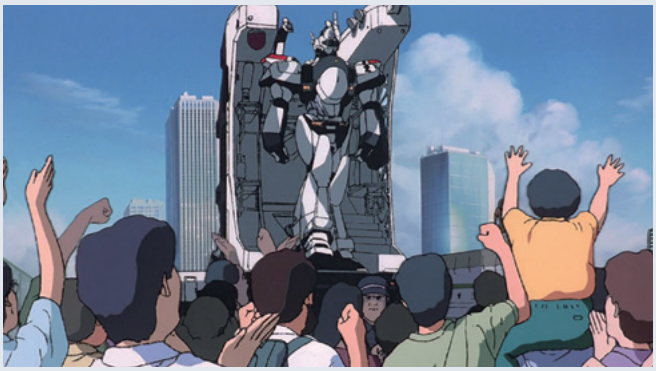
The manga *Mazinger Z* pioneered the genre of giant robot anime.

they play changes depending on the situation. The opportunity to learn about such national characteristics of the Japanese people through this anime is another aspect of its appeal.

In addition to the interesting story, another great thing about *Mobile Police PATLABOR* is that such Japanese cultural elements are hidden throughout the anime. If you have visited Japan before, this anime will make you nostalgic.

There are many Japanese anime works similar to *Mobile Police PATLABOR* that make you think and learn at the same time, offering a realistic lesson about Japan. Works such as *Akira*,[4] *Ghost in the Shell*,[5] and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*[6] are not just anime, but an invitation to experience Japanese technology and imagination, Japan's past and future, and an evolving Japanese culture in real time. And that is something profound beyond words.

If you travel to Japan after watching these anime works, you will surely feel like you are in a magical space where the world of anime is connected to the real world. I would be very happy if this experience reinforces your desire to learn more about Japan.



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A scene from the feature animated film *Patlabor: The Movie*. In the center of the photo is a humanoid robot, the lead machine in Patlabor.

Mobile Police PATLABOR

Produced by Headgear, a creative unit consisting of five manga artists and filmmakers, *Mobile Police PATLABOR* began with the release of a series of six original video animated films and a serialized manga, and has expanded to include feature films, TV animation series, novels, and games.

Mobile Police PATLABOR is set in Tokyo at the end of the 20th century, when rapid advances in robotic technology have led to the widespread use of giant, pilot-controlled humanoid robots called "Labors." The fast spread of Labors has created a new type of social threat in the form of accidents related to Labors and crimes involving their exploitation. To combat this threat, Second Special Vehicle Division is established in the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, resulting in the formation of the Patrol Labors Fleet under the Second Special Vehicle Division, also known as "Patlabors." In addition, the Metropolitan Police Department introduces a new type of humanoid robots for police missions and establishes Second Platoon as a new unit under the Second Special Vehicle Division to operate them. The story revolves around the activities of the unique characters assigned to Second Platoon, who look and act nothing like police officers.

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The *Mobile Police PATLABOR* franchise has expanded to include an original video animation series, manga, novels, games, etc. The photo is of the cover of the original video animation series.

1. A term used to refer to Japanese animated films. In recent years, it has become part of the English vocabulary.
2. A manga work that pioneered the genre of giant robot anime. In it, the main character pilots a giant humanoid robot. It has also been adapted into an anime television series.
3. A sci-fi anime featuring the fictional robot weapon Gundam.
4. Set in Neo-Tokyo in 2019, this manga follows a battle between psychics, the military, and guerrillas. It has been adapted into an animated film, and was also included in the Agency for Cultural Affairs' ranking of Japan's Media Art Top 100.
5. A sci-fi manga depicting the *Ghost in the Shell*, an offensive unit led by a cyborg main character with superior abilities in cyber warfare and combat, as they fight against increasingly sophisticated and complex violent crimes. It has expanded into a broad franchise of feature animated films, TV animation, and video games.
6. A sci-fi anime that follows the story of teenage boys and girls who, as pilots of giant Multipurpose Humanoid Decisive Weapon, Artificial Human Evangelion, fight against the Angels, a mysterious enemy, in a world after a global cataclysm known as the Second Impact.

Short sword signed Yoshimitsu (celebrated Atsushi Toushirō)

National Treasure: Short sword signed Yoshimitsu (celebrated Atsushi Toushirō) (Blade length 27.6 cm)
Photo: ColBase (https://colbase.nich.go.jp/)

The National Treasure "Short sword signed Yoshimitsu (celebrated Atsushi Toushirō)" is a 13th-century work by the swordsmith Awataguchi Yoshimitsu, who was active in Kyoto during the Kamakura period[1].

Awataguchi Yoshimitsu belonged to the Awataguchi School, a group of swordsmiths who worked in Kyoto from the late Heian period[2] to the middle of the Kamakura period.

"Yoshimitsu, commonly known as Tôshirô, was […] An expert craftsman, he is known for his short blades (J. tantô). This particular example has been famous since the Muromachi period (1392-1573). While the overall dimensions of the piece are quite small, the blade is unusually thick; hence the name the "Thick (J. Atsushi) Tôshirô." The metal finish and tempering pattern are both of outstanding workmanship."[3]

"This blade was handed down through the house of Ashikaga Shoguns. It then passed through the hands of such notable figures as […] Toyotomi Hideyoshi,"[3] before eventually being handed down to the Tokugawa shogunate[4]. It is currently housed at the Tokyo National Museum.

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1. The Kamakura period refers to the period from the late 12th century, with various theories regarding the start date (such as 1185 or 1192), to 1333.
2. From 794 to the late 12th century (Until the beginning of the Kamakura period, as stated in [1])
3. Quoted from e-National Treasures:
(https://emuseum.nich.go.jp/detail?langId=en&webView=&content_base_id=100183&content_part_id=0&content_pict_id=0)

<<About Terminology used in the quoted passages>>

- J. : Abbreviation for "Japanese"
- Please note that the English spelling of Toushiro is as per the source.
- Blade: The part of the sword that fits into the scabbard.
- Metal finish (*jigane*): Japanese swords are forged by repeatedly folding and hammering the raw material, *tamahagane* (high-quality steel made from iron sand), to enhance its toughness and strength. This process is known as folding and forging. As a result, patterns appear on the surface of the blade, called *jihada*. The steel itself, with its distinctive texture, is referred to as *jigane*.
- Tempering pattern (*hamon*): A white, wave-like pattern that appears on the blade of a Japanese sword. It is created during the quenching process, one of the steps in sword-making, where the steel is rapidly cooled from a high temperature to harden it.
- (About the Muromachi period) There are various theories about the beginning and end of the Muromachi period, so some caution is required.
- Ashikaga Shoguns: A family lineage that held the position of shogun, the supreme military ruler of Japan, from the first half of the 14th century to the late 16th century, a period of approximately 240 years.
- Toyotomi Hideyoshi: Born in 1536 or 1537 and believed to have died in 1598, Hideyoshi was a military leader who achieved the unification of Japan during the Sengoku period, a time of civil war and regional division.

4. Tokugawa Shogunate: The samurai-led Tokugawa regime, established by the Tokugawa family, held the position of shogun, the supreme military ruler of Japan, from the early 17th century to the mid-late 19th century, for a period of over 260 years, during the Edo period.