

Contents

6 Foreword by Mieko Sawada

8 January

26 February

42 March

60 Transmitting a traditional art - Karakami Artisan Koh Kado -

62 April

80 May

98 June

116 July



134 August

152 September

170 Transmitting a traditional art - Hakuga Painter Takuro Noguchi -

172 October

190 Transmitting a traditional art - Bunraku Narrator Sakijudayu Toyotake -

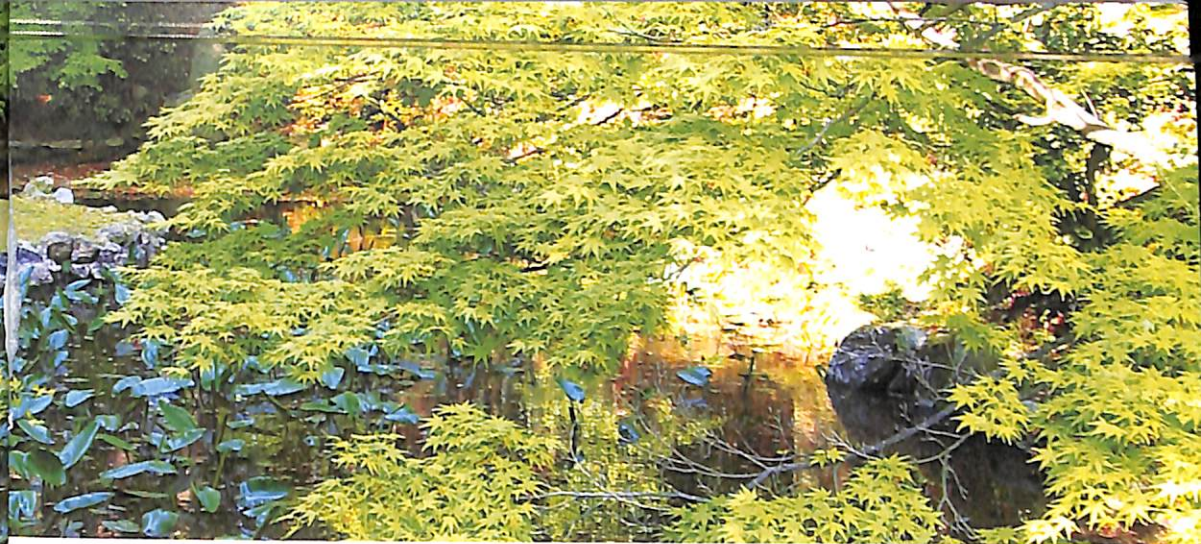
192 November

210 December

228 Afterword by Yoshito Nakano

230 Production notes

Foreword



This book is a compilation of columns published daily under the title “The four seasons of crafts” (text: Mieko Sawada, photographs: Yoshito Nakano) on the front page of the Kyoto Shimbun, a local newspaper distributed in Japan’s ancient capital, Kyoto, and neighboring Shiga Prefecture, between April 1, 2012 and March 31, 2013. I have revised and modified the text in preparation for its publication in book format and translation into languages other than Japanese, with the aim of making it understandable to foreigners.

It is not so widely known that Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist, visited Japan five times between 1977 and 1988 and conducted fieldwork with Japanese artisans. In 2014, the Japanese translation of a collection of his lectures, essays, and dialogs on Japanese culture, “L’autre face de la lune: Écrits sur le Japon” (“The other face of the moon: writings on Japanese civilization”) was published by Chuokoron-Shinsha. In one

of his conversations, he said the following.

“It is impossible to become convinced that humans are the masters, the creators, when we know that there is a kind of equilibrium between the human being and nature, between people and various sorts of nature, and that humans took part in the process of creation alongside other living creatures whom we ought to respect. In what age was this most accurate, most true? Possibly it was true in various ages, in various different ways. The one thing that I can say is that this age is not now!” (p.148)

I believe that there are only two things for which anyone living on this earth should hope right now. One is for people from different cultures to live together happily, without war. The second is to leave this beautiful earth for the children of the next generation.

In small villages in the mountains of the Tohoku region, which are completely cut off during the snowy season, there are

phrases which have been handed down for generations: “Make sure that the karamushi, of all plants, does not die out,” “Let the karamushi grow as it wishes.” “Karamushi” is a perennial plant of the nettle family, and is also the raw material for Echigo jofu, high-quality hemp cloth, and Ojiya crepe, which are items of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. Karamushi, which was produced as a cottage industry in such a harsh environment through an enormous amount of hard work, was truly a lifeline for the people of these villages. Their position of having made a living together with the karamushi, and of determination to go on doing so in the future, can be seen from these words which have been passed down. Many of the artisans producing the traditional crafts introduced in this book are able to communicate with their natural raw materials: they listen to the voices of the materials as they make their crafts. In Japan’s traditional crafts, both the makers and the users can catch a glimpse of a spirituality which listens to the voice of

nature, produces items without destroying the earth, and aims to use each one with care. However, even today’s Japanese, in the midst of their busy daily lives, are apt to forget this spirituality, and there are perhaps some who disagree with it completely. I hope that those who read this book and feel that it reflects an alien culture will perceive the meaning for the modern world of the cultural foundations underlying it. Furthermore, I hope that those who are in agreement with the relationship between the makers and nature will take the time to stop and think once again about how items should be manufactured from now on.

I believe that a hint of the answer to the question posed by Lévi-Strauss, who loved Japan, is still to be found in the world of Japan’s traditional artisans. I sincerely hope that this book will provide an opportunity for more people to take an interest in Japanese crafts.

Professor Mieko Sawada

Kyoto Institute of Technology

May

五月



青葉 輪挿

May 1

Overglaze enamel vase for a single flower, iris design

Pottery with overglaze decoration is known by the generic name of "iroe" ("colored picture"). In Kyoto, this tradition began with overglaze ceramics, and the depiction of a picturesque world on pottery dishes using vivid shades of color was passed from Ninsei Nonomura to Kenzan Ogata. Boys' Day is also known as the Iris Festival. This flower gives out a fragrant scent and purifies the air of noxious gases.

The life of fresh flowers is short: the bud swells, the flower blooms, and in the end, the petals fall and scatter. However, flowers painted on pottery never fade, but continue to bloom forever. The beautiful flowers which blossomed on the pottery of Ninsei Nonomura and Kenzan Ogata were copied faithfully by the artisan, and are still in bloom even now.

June

氷
無
月

鬼瓦

June 1

Demon roof tile

One of the varieties of decorative tile placed on the end of the ridge of a roof in order to ward off evil spirits and other dangers. The artisans who make these demon tiles are called "onishi." Even in Kyoto, such craftsmen have dwindled in numbers. Although these highly polished, handmade demon roof tiles have scary faces, somehow they seem friendly and dependable.

"May rain" is the long rain which falls around the fifth month of the old lunar calendar, and refers to the rainy season. Rain-soaked black Kyoto roof tiles are exceedingly elegant, and in rainy weather, the scent of incense becomes more pronounced. In rainy June, hydrangeas bloom in Kyoto's streets. "Those who take part in summer purification rites in June will live to a thousand years old." The rituals of the rainy season are fun, too.



涼爐

November 2

Stove for boiling water

When a stove for boiling water for the tea ceremony is depicted in a painting by the literati, it expresses their spirituality and even their world. Charcoal is placed into the stove, and the water is boiled. Unglazed mud and sand pottery is often used for these stoves because of its unsophisticated air, and there is a ventilation hole towards the bottom to permit the flow of air. The photograph shows a clean-cut white clay stove.



煎茶茶碗

November 3

Cups for green tea

Brewing green tea in a teapot used to be a daily routine, but now we have moved to drinking tea from plastic bottles. The photograph shows cups for green tea used in the tea ceremony. Small porcelain teacups are used in order to enjoy the color and aroma of the beautiful, translucent tea to the full. Culture is the treasure of human beings. I would like to pass these spiritually rich customs on to the next generation.

November 4

Teapot without a handle

A hohin is a type of teapot. There is no handle; the tea is poured from the spout while pressing down on the lid to keep the tea leaves in place. It is suited to the preparation of Gyokuro green tea, whose taste and aroma are best when the water is not too hot. The teapot in the photograph has a profound air, like that of a refined elderly gentleman.

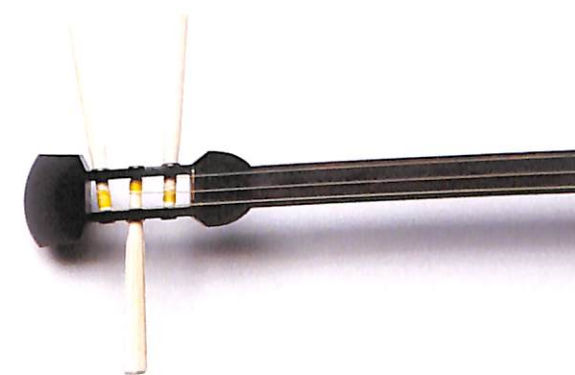


宝瓶

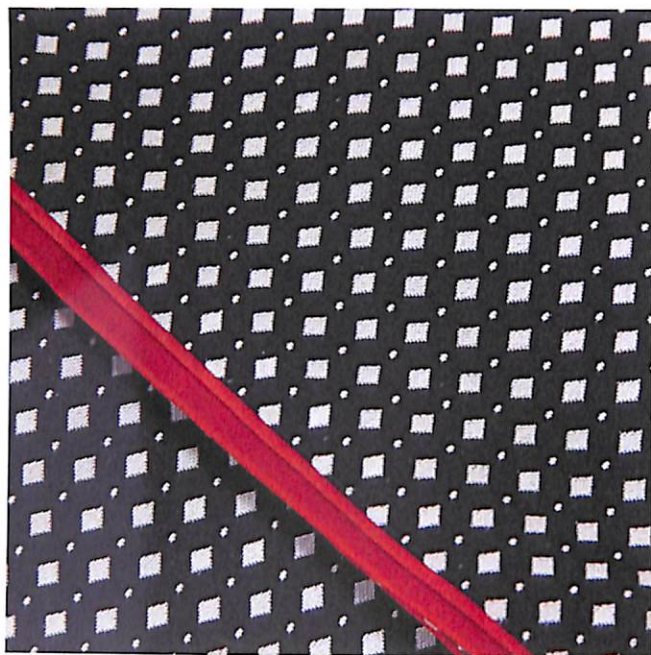
November 5

Shamisen

One of Japan's stringed instruments. Chinese quince, oak, ruby wood, or red sandalwood is used for the neck. The body is made from mulberry, ironwood, or Chinese quince, and cat or dog leather is stretched over both sides, although synthetic leather is also used in recent years. The instrument developed from the Chinese sangen, and is said to have been brought to Sakai via the Ryukyu kingdom in the latter half of the sixteenth century.



三味線



お竹し

December 22

Silk crepe

A fabric woven from scoured raw silk thread which has been dyed and twisted tightly to form the weft. There are many varieties of patterns and weaves, including crepes with family crests, stripes, and splashed patterns. The photograph shows a modern embroidered-style design. The fabric does not easily crease and feels comfortable due to the quality of the pure silk used and the skill which goes into making it.

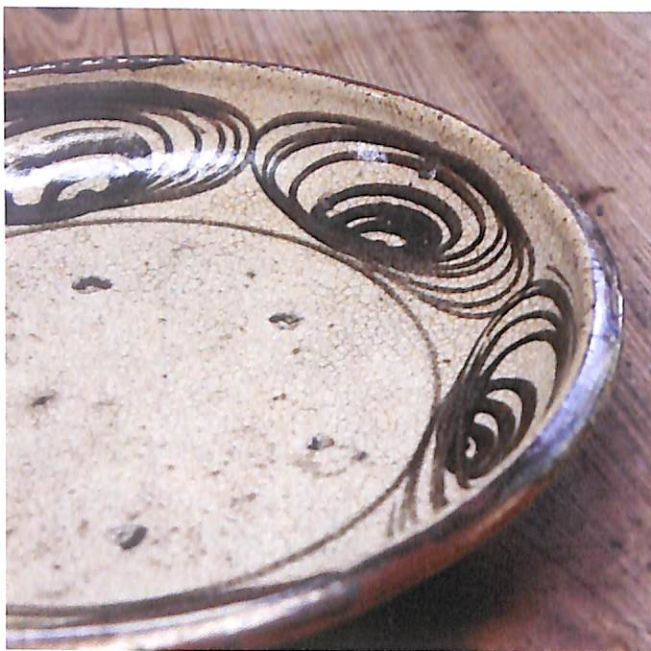
December 24

Hanafuda playing cards

Tensho karuta playing cards underwent a transformation into this set of 48 cards, four each of twelve illustrated seasonal plants, one for each month: pine, plum, cherry, wisteria, iris (rabbitear iris), peony, bush clover, silver grass, chrysanthemum, fall leaves, willow (rain), and paulownia. When the cards are placed in order, Japan's four seasons can be seen.



花札



馬の目皿

December 23

Plate, horse's eye design

The name has its origins in the resemblance between a vortex and a horse's eye. When you linger in Kawai Kanjiro's Memorial Museum, time passes slowly. Kawai is known for his participation in the Mingei folk craft movement, and the plate in this photograph is imbued with the profound, wholesome and simple beauty of folk craft.

December 25

Large blue and white porcelain plate

Today is Christmas, the festival celebrating the nativity of Christ. According to one theory, it has its origins in the winter solstice, the celebration of the sun's rebirth. The photograph shows a large blue and white porcelain plate. There are many occasions for people to gather together over the year-end holidays, and so such large plates are often called into service. Just like the winter solstice, blue and white porcelain is loved in China, Japan, Europe, and throughout the world.



大皿