

HIGHLIGHTING  
*Japan*

VOL.  
**191**  
APRIL  
2024



VARIOUS VARIETIES OF  
CHERRY BLOSSOMS IN JAPAN <PART 1>

# CONTENTS

VOL. 191, APRIL 2024

21



23



Yoshino, by Okumura Togyu, 1977, ink and color on paper, framed (1 piece), 108.6×184.4cm



7



18

## FEATURES

### 6 History of Japan's Unique Cherry Blossom Species and Flower-Loving Culture

Interview with Katsuki Toshio of the Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute of the Forest Research and Management Organization

### 10 Japan's Latest Blooming Cherry Blossom Viewing Spots

Discover Japan's latest blooming cherry blossoms, the Chishima-zakura, found in Nemuro City, Hokkaido

### 12 Pathway of Weeping Cherry Trees in Kitakata City, Fukushima Prefecture

Introducing a 3-kilometer avenue of weeping cherry trees, developed along a former railway line in Kitakata City, Fukushima Prefecture

### 14 Cherry Blossoms at Shogetsu-ji Temple: Adorning the Spring of the Historic Kanazawa City

Highlighting the cherry blossoms of Shogetsu-ji Temple, loved as a springtime attraction in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture

### 16 Kumano-zakura — A Newly Discovered Wild Species of Cherry Blossom, the First in 100 Years

Presenting Kumano-zakura, the first new wild species of cherry blossom discovered in 100 years

### 18 Rare Pale Green Gyoiko-zakura Cherry Blossom Trees

Introducing a Gyoiko-zakura cherry tree avenue, famed for its pale green blossoms, in Unnan City, Shimane Prefecture

### 20 Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura Cherry Blossoms, Beloved in Okinawa as an Early Sign of Spring

Explore the Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura cherry blossoms in Okinawa, found on the renowned 453-meter-high Mount Yaedake on Okinawa Island

### 22 Masterpieces of Japanese Painting Depicting Cherry Blossoms from Ancient Times in Japan

Introducing two works of Japanese painting highlighting the beauty of traditional cherry blossoms



## ALSO

- 24 POLICY-RELATED NEWS**  
Visualization and Labeling of Environmental Impact Reduction Efforts on Agricultural Products — Contributing to Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Biodiversity Conservation
- 26 SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**  
“The Infinite Potential of Nanofibers: Unveiled through the World’s First Mass Production Initiative”
- 28 MY WAY**  
Introducing Real Life in Japan, in Arabic
- 30 THE BEAUTY AND THE SPIRIT OF JAPAN: FROM THE JAPAN CULTURAL EXPO 2.0**  
“Go for Kogei” Hokuriku Crafts Festival — Sharing the Appeal of Crafts and Art from Hokuriku with the World

## THEME FOR APRIL:

### Various Varieties of Cherry Blossoms in Japan <Part1>

The cherry blossom—the iconic flower of Japan. The country is home to ten wild species of cherry trees, including the Yamazakura mountain cherry, which is said to climb to over 100 different species of wild variants and cultivars in total. In fact, the Somei-Yoshino cherry, the most popular variety in Japan today, is actually a relatively new cultivar introduced in the mid-19th century. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* goes beyond Somei-Yoshino, introducing famous sites known for specific cherry tree varieties from ancient Japan; the Kumano cherry, first new wild species of cherry trees discovered in 100 years “Kumano-Zakura”, and masterpieces of



Japanese paintings depicting ancient Japanese cherry varieties.

A Japanese white-eye perched on a fully bloomed Kumano-zakura tree

#### COPYRIGHT © 2024 CABINET OFFICE OF JAPAN

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

#### WHERE TO FIND US

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

#### PRODUCTION

FBI Communications, Inc.

#### MANAGING EDITOR

Fukuda Yasuhiro

#### EDITORS

Kato Naruho, Kimura Tetsuro, Kurosawa Akane, Koike Ginga, Hara Erika

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Kurosawa Akane, Tanaka Nozomi, Fukuda Mitsuhiro, Murakami Kayo, Moribe Shinji, Morohashi Kumiko

#### DESIGN

Azuma Terutaka, Sawatari Rumi

#### EDITORS' NOTE

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

FEATURES

# Various Varieties of Cherry Blossoms in Japan <Part 1>



Above left: Chishima-zakura produces light pinkish-red flowers as its leaves unfold. Above right: The cherry blossoms of Shogetsu-ji Temple, beloved as a symbol of Kanazawa

Below left: Shidare-zakura alongside the steam locomotive that used to operate on the Nicchu Line displayed along the three-kilometer-long cherry blossom walking path Below right: Gyoiko-zakura trees are characterized by petals that are light green with pink lines.

**T**he cherry blossom—the iconic flower of Japan. The country is home to ten wild species of cherry trees, including the Yamazakura mountain cherry, which is said to climb to over 100 different species of wild variants and cultivars in total. In fact, the Somei-Yoshino cherry, the most popular variety in Japan today, is actually a relatively new cultivar introduced in the mid-19th century. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* goes beyond Somei-Yoshino, introducing famous sites known for specific cherry tree varieties from ancient Japan; the Kumano cherry, first new wild species of cherry trees discovered in 100 years “Kumano-Zakura”, and masterpieces of Japanese paintings depicting ancient Japanese cherry varieties.



---

---

# History of Japan's Unique Cherry Blossom Species and Flower-Loving Culture

---

---

**C**herry blossoms, known as 'sakura' in Japanese, are iconic flowers of Japan, evoking a sense of the country for many people worldwide. Katsuki Toshio, from the Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute, has dedicated years to studying and conserving cherry blossoms. Here, he discusses the diverse varieties and unique characteristics of sakura found throughout Japan.

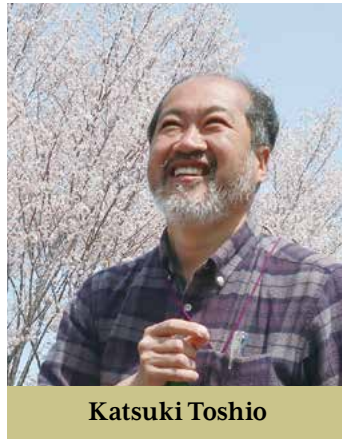
**What are some of the typical ancient species of cherry blossoms found in Japan? And does Japan have a greater species of cherry blossom species than other countries?**

There are 10 wild species of cherry blossoms native to Japan. Among them, the most common three species traditionally admired for their beauty include the Yama-zakura, followed by the Edo-higan, and the Oshima-zakura, which are representative of wild species.

There are approximately fifty to sixty species of cherry worldwide, primarily distributed in the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere, particularly in the cool temperate zone<sup>1</sup>. Actually, North America has only two species, and Europe has only three to four species. Overwhelmingly, the majority

of cherry species are found in East Asia, with approximately thirty species in China alone. Given this distribution, it is reasonable to assume that cherry are associated with being flowers commonly seen in East Asia by people in Europe and North America.

Interestingly, overseas, the term "cherry" often refers to the sweet cherry, cultivated primarily for harvesting edible cherries. Even in China, cherry are not as commonly admired as ornamental flowers. Due to this distinction, in English, "cherry" typically denotes the fruit-bearing cherry tree, while cherry trees cultivated for ornamental purposes are referred to as 'flowering cherry' and similar terms.



Katsuki Toshio

**The most commonly seen cultivar of cherry blossom today, 'Somei-yoshino', is said to be a relatively new cultivated breed. When was this cultivar born? Additionally, what types of cultivated cherry blossom cultivars exist in Japan, and approximately how many are there?**

First, let me explain the history of cherry blossom cultivars in Japan. While it's true that wild cherry blossoms can be admired in their natural habitat, with the passage of time, there arose a desire for cultivars that were both more exquisite in appearance and easier to cultivate. This demand led to the emergence of cherry blossom cultivars.

The oldest cherry blossom cultivar is 'Pendula' (weeping cherry), with records of its cultivation dating back to the 10th to 11th century. Even today, very old 'Pendula' trees, which have been cultivated since that time, can still be found in tourist spots across the country, likely dating back over a thousand years. I believe Japanese can be very proud of the fact that Japanese 'Pendula' has such a long history worldwide.

From the 13th century, there was a rapid increase in visually striking cultivars resulting from the hybridization of Oshima-zakura and Yama-zakura. At that



Photo: Katsuki Toshio

The Kumano-zakura (Kumano cherry) discovered by Katsuki Toshio



Left: The Yama-zakura blooms with white petals and red leaves simultaneously.

Center: The Edohigan blooms before its leaves emerge and is characterized by a swollen floral cup at the base of each flower.

Right: The Oshima-zakura has large flowers around 3 to 5 cm in size, and its leaves bud simultaneously with flowering.



Above: 'Somei-yoshino' grows quickly and can adapt to various environments. Today, it is widely planted across Japan as park and roadside trees. A distinctive feature is its tendency to bloom before the leaves emerge.  
Right: 'Albo-rosea'



'Sekiyama', a cultivated double-flowering cherry blossom variety.

---

---

time, cherry blossoms were mainly confined to the gardens of the upper class, with the public only able to admire them from afar. However, by the 17th century, a trend resembling today's *hanami* (flower viewing) had emerged, as people deliberately set aside spaces to plant cherry blossoms for the express purpose of enjoying them.

'Somei-Yoshino' originated in the mid-19th century when residents of Somei village in Edo (now part of Toshima City, Tokyo) began selling a cultivar they named Yoshino-zakura, inspired by Mount Yoshino, a well-known site for Yama-zakura in present-day Nara Prefecture. Believed to be a hybrid of the Edohigan and Oshima-zakura cultivar, the 'Somei-yoshino' has been in existence for approximately 200 years. In other words, compared to cultivar like 'Shidarezakura', which have a history of over 1000 years, or double-flowering cultivars like 'Sekiyama' or 'Alboprosea', which have been cultivated for over 400 years, 'Somei-yoshino' can therefore be considered relatively new.

Due to the affection for cherry blossoms in Japan, there are currently over 100 cultivars of cherry blossoms, including 'Pendula' and 'Somei-yoshino'.

**During the Heian period (late 8th to late 12th century), cherry blossoms make appearances in various**



'Pendula' at present-day Daigo-ji Temple

**classical literature works such as *The Tale of Genji*. Are these primarily referring to the Yama-zakura? In addition, while many renowned persons in Japanese history admired cherry blossoms, could you tell us what kind of cherry blossoms they preferred?**

The cherry blossoms depicted in classical literature, which people of that time would have seen, are likely Yama-zakura. However, there are accounts suggesting that Edohigan were also present during the historical cherry blossom-viewing party<sup>2</sup> held at Daigo-ji Temple by Toyotomi Hideyoshi<sup>3</sup>. I believe that during Hideyoshi's era, the Oshima-zakura was also present in Kyoto, so these three kinds were likely visible. Furthermore, in *Takekawa* ("bamboo river" in Japanese), the 44th chapter of *The Tale of Genji*<sup>4</sup>, cherry blossoms are depicted with white flowers and red leaves, suggesting that they are likely Yama-zakura. Moreover, in old paintings, if the depiction of the flowers and branches is accurate, we can identify the species of cherry blossom. However, in reality, distinguishing between them skillfully is quite challenging, and it can be difficult to identify the species from past literature and paintings.

In Japan, the tradition of cherry blossom viewing, known as *hanami*, dates to the Heian period. However, in ancient times, there were many seasonal traditions, such as New Year's visits to shrines, Japanese apricot blossoms in early spring, and wisteria in early summer. The tradition of cherry blossom viewing began to stand out distinctly, possibly around the late 19th century. The groundwork for this was laid around the 17th century. During the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century), what we might now call mini-trips, where commoners in Edo (present-day Tokyo) ventured out together to famous cherry blossom viewing spots such as Ueno's Kaneiji Temple, Sumida River's embankment, and Asukayama



Park<sup>5</sup>, gave rise to a culture of communal gatherings and feasting. And in the mid-19th century, the emergence of ‘Somei-yoshino’ also contributed to this trend. ‘Somei-yoshino’ grow quickly, allowing for the creation of cherry blossom viewing spots with minimal effort, which greatly contributed to the popularization of *hanami*. Also, with the development of transportation networks such as railways, individuals could journey longer distances, facilitating large gatherings at cherry blossom viewing spots. *Hanami* gained widespread popularity from the late 19th century onward as a result.

**In 2018, the discovery of a new species called Kumano-zakura was published, marking the first such discovery in about a century. If you have any cherry blossom species that hold a special place in your heart, please share them with us.**

Certainly, for me, the Kumano-zakura stands out as the most beautiful and memorable cherry blossom species. My fascination with cherry blossoms truly began when I started studying them, and the encounter with Kumano-zakura left the deepest impression on me. I highly recommend experiencing the blossoms firsthand in the Kumano region (part of Wakayama and Mie Prefectures)<sup>6</sup>, where they were discovered. The petals boast a delicate pink color, and the flowers themselves are smaller than ‘Somei-yoshino’. They bloom sparsely, with slender and gently swaying branches. When describing them to others, I often liken them to a shrine maiden<sup>7</sup> deep in the mountains, evoking a sense of grace and elegance. In contrast, ‘Somei-yoshino’ resembles an urban superstar, radiating a sparkling and glamorous aura.

In the future, I would like to research the hypothesis that the renowned medieval poet Fujiwara no Teika<sup>8</sup>, who was active in Japan’s Middle Ages, actually admired the Kumano-zakura. During this era, pilgrimage to Kumano<sup>9</sup> was popular, so I believe there is



A large single cherry tree of Kumano-zakura growing naturally in the Kumano River basin

a strong possibility that when visiting Kumano dozens of times, Teika had the opportunity to see the flowers of Kumano cherry. It’s an idea I would like to look into.

**Please share some recommended locations where tourists from overseas can enjoy Japan’s traditional cherry blossoms.**

In Tokyo, I highly recommend visiting Shinjuku Gyoen<sup>10</sup> for its convenient accessibility. For people wanting to see traditional Japanese landscapes adorned with cherry blossoms, Mt. Yoshino in Nara Prefecture is an excellent choice. Until around the 17th century, it was customary for commoners to admire Yama-zakura in the mountains, making places where this tradition remains today particularly precious. Additionally, if you venture beyond the mountains of Yoshino, you’ll reach Kumano, where I also suggest experiencing the enchanting Kumano-zakura. Make sure to explore the Kumano area for an authentic cherry blossom viewing experience. Kumano-zakura earlier than ‘Somei-yoshino’, typically reaching full bloom in mid-March. **¶**

1. The climatic zone bordering on the subarctic within the temperate zone.  
 2. A cherry blossom viewing party held by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1598 at Sanbōin in Daigo-ji Temple, Kyoto, during his final years.  
 3. (1536 or 1537 – 1598) Born into humble beginnings, he ascended to become a military commander, later a regent and Grand Minister, solidifying the Toyotomi regime.  
 4. A long narrative tale written by Murasaki Shikibu comprising 54 chapters, it is a classic of Japanese literature and globally renowned.  
 5. Famous cherry blossom viewing spots in Tokyo. Ueno’s Kaneiji Temple is in Taito City, the Sumida River embankment is in Sumida City, and Asukayama Park is in Kita City.  
 6. The Kumano Sanzan, a set of three grand shrines (Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Hayatama Taisha, and Kumano Nachi Taisha), along with the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes leading to

them in the Kumano region, were registered as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2004.  
 7. A woman who belongs to a shrine, assists the priests, and serves in specific Shinto rituals.  
 8. Born in 1162 and died in 1241, and also known as Fujiwara no Sadaie, he was a poet, poetry scholar, and classical scholar of the early Kamakura period, which lasted from 1185 to 1333. He played a prominent role as a leader in the poetry world and is one of the compilers of the *Shin Kokin Wakashū*, an imperial anthology of waka poetry. He is famous for compiling the *Hyakunin Isshu*, a classical Japanese anthology of one hundred Japanese waka by one hundred poets.  
 9. Also refers to pilgrimage to the Kumano Sanzan (described in Note 7 above).  
 10. One of the national parks managed by the Ministry of the Environment located in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo.

# Japan's Latest Blooming Cherry Blossom Viewing Spots

In Nemuro City, the easternmost city on the Japanese mainland, the Chishima-zakura, Japan's latest blooming cherry blossoms, come into full bloom in May. We spoke with an official from Nemuro City to learn about the characteristics and charms of these cherry blossoms.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

Nemuro City faces both the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Okhotsk. It boasts tourist attractions such as the Nemuro Strait, where one can view drift ice during winter, and Cape Nosappu, known for being the easternmost site on the Japanese mainland. The seafood processing industry is also thriving, attracting many visitors for delicious seafood. Among the various attractions of Nemuro tourism, one highlight is the Chishima-zakura, which blooms later than any other cherry blossom in Japan. Shimizu Yudai from Nemuro City's Commerce, Industry, Labor and Tourism Division shares the following: "The Chishima-zakura, blossoming on the site of Seiryu-ji Temple<sup>1</sup> in Nemuro City, was initially transported from Kunashiri Island<sup>2</sup> in 1869 and then

transplanted to the temple grounds in 1903. These majestic trees, aged over 150 years, typically reach full bloom from early to late May each year. Compared to Somei-yoshino and other varieties, Chishima-zakura tends to grow to a shorter height of 1 to 5 meters, with branches spreading horizontally. As a result, visitors can leisurely enjoy observing the cherry blossoms at eye level."

The flowers of the Chishima-zakura bloom in clusters, appearing to nestle closely together, with each flower ranging from 2 to 4 cm in diameter. The tips of the petals slightly cave in. The flowers begin as a light pinkish-red when they start to bloom and gradually transition to white as they reach full bloom before returning to their original light pinkish-red color,



Photo: Nemuro City

Chishima-zakura blossoms in full bloom at Seiryu-ji Temple



Chishima-zakura produces light pinkish-red flowers as its leaves unfold.

Photo: PIXTA

allowing for enjoyment of their changing colors. They are also characterized by their strong fragrance.

“Each year, we prepare various events to ensure enjoyment for many people, such as lighting up the Chishima-zakura trees blooming in Meiji Park<sup>3</sup> in Nemuro City for a limited period,” says Shimizu. The Chishima-zakura trees in Meiji Park, along with old brick silos<sup>4</sup> designated as a tangible cultural property, make for a popular photo spot due to their picturesque appeal.

Perhaps due to global warming, Japan’s cherry blossom front<sup>5</sup> advances earlier each year. However, if you missed cherry blossom viewing in late March and April in other parts of Japan, it is often the case that they are yet to bloom in Hokkaido, the northernmost region of Japan, where Nemuro City is located. “Why not come and enjoy the gentle spring of Nemuro City in May, and view Japan’s latest blooming Chishima-zakura?” suggests Shimizu. “It’s sure to give you unforgettable memories of your trip.” 🍷



The Sapporo Clock Tower, a popular tourist spot in Sapporo city, also features Chishima-zakura trees.

Photo: PIXTA

1. A Buddhist temple of the Shingon sect near Nemuro Station in Nemuro City, Hokkaido.
2. An island located east of the Nemuro Strait, seen from the Shiretoko Peninsula in Hokkaido. Until the end of World War II in 1945, it was inhabited by Japanese residents but they were forced to evacuate. Currently, it is under the de facto control of the Russian Federation, and the Japanese government is demanding its return.
3. Meiji Park was established by developing the site of a ranch established in 1875.
4. Warehouses for storing grasses used as livestock feed during the winter in a state close to their natural form. The brick silos in Meiji Park are cylindrical tower silos constructed between 1932 and 1936.
5. The gradual northward progression of cherry blossoms blooming across the Japanese archipelago as spring arrives, resembling a weather front on meteorological maps. It typically begins its northward journey from Kyushu and southern Shikoku in mid-March, reaching Hokkaido by early May.



Chishima-zakura in Meiji Park

Photo: PIXTA

# Pathway of Weeping Cherry Trees in Kitakata City, Fukushima Prefecture

In Kitakata City, Fukushima Prefecture, there is a pathway of weeping cherry trees, or Shidare-zakura, stretching over 3 kilometers, which was developed on the site of a former railway line. It is one of the largest in the country and ranks high in popularity among cherry blossom spots on websites and other sources<sup>1</sup>.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

Left page

Above: The pathway, lined with approximately 1,000 weeping cherry trees (Shidare-zakura), forms an incredible tunnel of cherry blossoms.

Below: Shidare-zakura alongside the steam locomotive that was used on the final journey of the Nicchu Line

**K**itakata City in northwestern Fukushima Prefecture in the Tohoku region is home to a weeping cherry tree-lined walking and bicycling path, one of the largest in the country. This is a recreational pathway that has been constructed on the old tracks of the Nicchu Line railway operated by Japan National Railways. Stretching approximately 3 kilometers from the old Kitakata Station, it offers visitors the opportunity to admire about 1,000 Shidare-zakura trees along the route.

The Nicchu Line opened in 1938 and spanned 11.6 kilometers with a total of five stations from Kitakata Station to Atsushio Station, serving as the gateway to Atsushio and Nicchu onsens (hot springs). Steam locomotives operated along this route. However, in 1974, the steam locomotive operation came to an end due to declining passenger numbers. Moreover, in 1984, financial difficulties led to its official discontinuation. Kitakata City then renovated the former railway track, stretching approximately three kilometers from the old Kitakata Station to the adjacent Aizu-Muramatsu Station, into a dedicated pedestrian and bicycle path for the citizens lined with Shidare-zakura trees, and the pathway was opened in 1988.

At first, various cherry blossom varieties, including Somei-yoshino, were considered for planting along the pathway. However, ultimately, the choice of Shidare-zakura was made based on a proposal by the then-mayor, Karahashi Azuma. In Miharu Town, Fukushima Prefecture, there is a renowned weeping cherry tree known as ‘Miharu Takizakura’<sup>2</sup>. This cherry tree has been familiar to locals since ancient times, as it is depicted in the masterpiece, *Takizakura*, by the prominent Japanese painter from the same prefecture, Oyama Chusaku.

The pathway lined with weeping cherry trees is currently undergoing a project to be extended by volunteer citizens. Karahashi Osamu, chairman of the NPO Nicchu Line Shidare-zakura Project, an organization launched by volunteers in Kitakata City in 2013, shares the following: “The initiative aims to extend the Shidare-zakura pathway all the way to the former terminus of the Nicchu Line, the old Atsushio Station.

An example of weeping cherry blossom trees planted as part of the Nicchu Line Shidare-zakura Project. Mount Iide, capped with snow, is visible in the background



Photo: NPO Nicchu Line Shidare-zakura Project

The goal is to transform the entire 11.6-kilometer former Nicchu Line route into a weeping cherry blossom tree-lined pathway, creating a lasting tourist attraction for future generations.”

The Nicchu Line Shidare-zakura Project, established for over a decade, has recently planted an additional 258 weeping cherry blossom trees (as of March 31, 2024). The trees planted by the NPO are in the rural outskirts of Kitakata City. Even in spring, visitors can enjoy the blossoms while admiring the snow-capped Mount Iide<sup>3</sup> in the background.

The cherry blossoms along the pathway typically reach full bloom from mid-April. In Kitakata City, the annual Kitakata Cherry Blossom Festival is held during this time. In 2024, the festival will take place from April 5 to 24. “Throughout the popular festival period, visitors can enjoy the Shidare-zakura illumination along the pathway from 6:30PM to 8:00PM,” explains Karahashi. “The area where our NPO planted the cherry blossoms is in the outskirts, with enough space between the trees for activities such as cherry blossom viewing with picnic sheets spread out. We encourage you to come and savor the experience!”

A Shidare-zakura pathway stretching 11.6km will surely be a magnificent sight to look forward to. **■**

1. Ranked 1st in a list of must-visit cherry blossom and *hanami* (flower-viewing) spots in Tohoku 2024 by Walkerplus (KADOKAWA Corporation).
2. This weeping cherry tree is estimated to be over 1,000 years old. In 1922, it became the first cherry tree to be designated as a Natural Monument by the government.
3. The main peak of the Iide Mountain Range, spanning Fukushima, Yamagata, and Niigata Prefectures, with an elevation of 2,105 meters.



Photo: PIXTA

Shidare-zakura trees are illuminated as part of the Kitakata Cherry Blossom Festival

# Cherry Blossoms at Shogetsu-ji Temple: Adorning the Spring of the Historic Kanazawa City

In Kanazawa City, the capital of Ishikawa Prefecture, numerous historical buildings reflect the city's rich heritage, drawing visitors with their stunning views. Among them, the cherry blossoms of Shogetsu-ji Temple are especially beloved as a springtime highlight. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

It is said that Shogetsu-ji Temple, located in a corner of the Teramachi ('temple town') area in the heart of Kanazawa City, was established in its current location in 1615. "Inside the temple grounds, there is a cherry blossom tree standing at approximately 15 meters tall and around 400 years old. Some of its branches extend over the main street. This tree has been designated as a National Natural Monument of Japan and has long served as a symbol of Kanazawa," says a person in charge at the Kanazawa City's Cultural Properties Division. Due to its impressive size, this magnificent old cherry blossom tree is sometimes referred to by local residents as the 'Great Cherry Tree'

or the 'Goten Zakura (Cherry Tree from the Castle),' the latter name stemming from its original location on the castle grounds.

"Based on temple records, in 1648, Maeda Toshit-sune<sup>1</sup>, the third lord of the Kaga domain, who had retired to Komatsu Castle, gifted this tree, which was originally located within the castle grounds, to the head priest of Shogetsu-ji Temple, Shigan Osho, and it was transplanted to its current location." The beauty of this cherry blossom tree lies primarily in the strength of its large leaves and flowers.

"The variety is known as 'Shogetsuji-zakura,' believed to belong to the family of Yama-zakura cherry

The cherry blossoms of Shogetsu-ji Temple, beloved as a symbol of Kanazawa





Photo: Kanazawa City Hall

The cherry blossoms at Shogetsu-ji Temple have larger leaves and flowers than Somei-yoshino cherry trees.

Photo: Kanazawa City Hall

trees. Compared to Somei-yoshino and others, the distinguishing feature of this variety is its larger leaves and flowers, with the flower diameter ranging from approximately 4.0 to 4.5 centimeters. The sight of its branches stretching out to the main street conveys the depth of its 400-year history.”

The cherry blossoms of Shogetsu-ji Temple, beloved by many cultural figures since ancient times, have inspired literary works throughout history. In the early 18th century, the Confucian scholar Muro Kyuso<sup>2</sup>, renowned for his outstanding achievements, captured the essence of these cherry blossoms in *kan-shi* (traditional poetry form originating from ancient China). Additionally, Izumi Kyoka<sup>3</sup>, a modern novelist



The cherry blossoms of Shogetsu-ji Temple in bloom, extending over the main street

born in Kanazawa City, featured these cherry blossoms in his novel.

Although the best time to see the cherry blossoms at Shogetsu-ji Temple varies from year to year, it is generally around early to mid-April.

“Even travelers from abroad are fascinated by the strength of Shogetsu-ji Temple’s cherry blossoms and are often seen capturing photos. Fortunately, there was no significant damage caused by the Noto Peninsula Earthquake on January 1, 2024. In front of the temple’s main gate, multilingual signs in English, Chinese, Korean, and other languages are installed to introduce this cherry tree to foreign tourists. We hope to welcome visitors from all over the world to come and enjoy this cherry blossom tree up close.” 📷

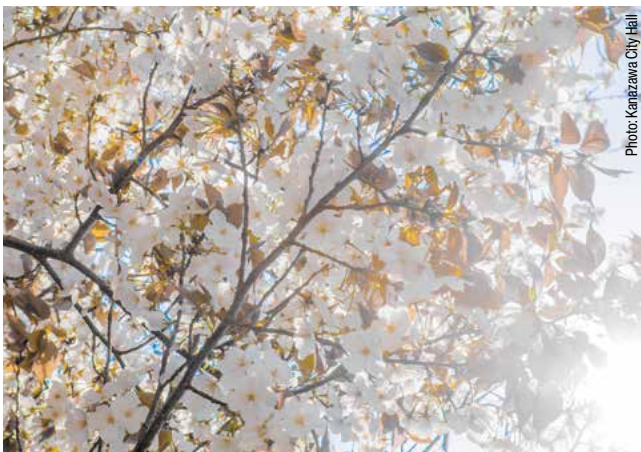


Photo: Kanazawa City Hall

Cherry blossoms in full bloom at Shogetsu-ji Temple

1. A military commander and daimyo, or feudal lord (1594 to 1658). He was the third lord in the lineage following Maeda Toshiie, founder of the Kaga domain.
2. Born in 1658 and died in 1734, he was a Confucian scholar who initially served the Kaga domain and later the Tokugawa shogunate. He left behind a Kanshi poem, *Cherry Blossom Viewing at Shogetsu-ji Temple*, regarding the cherry blossoms of the temple.
3. A Japanese novelist (1873-1939). Known for his fantastical works, he greatly influenced later novelists such as Kawabata Yasunari. The cherry blossoms of Shogetsu-ji Temple served as the inspiration for the sakura of Kougetsu-ji Temple depicted in the novel, *Sakura Shinjuu*.

# Kumano-zakura — A Newly Discovered Wild Species of Cherry Blossom, the First in 100 Years



Photo: PXTA

A Japanese white-eye perched on a fully bloomed Kumano-zakura tree

Emerging from the central region of Japan's Honshu Island and extending into the Pacific Ocean lies the Kii Peninsula, the country's largest. In the mountains of its southern region, a type of cherry blossom that was previously thought to be a variation of the Yama-zakura cherry blossom has been revealed through research to be a new wild species. The discovery of a new wild species is truly remarkable, marking the first such finding in Japan in a century. We spoke with individuals involved in conservation efforts to learn more about its characteristics and the circumstances surrounding its discovery. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

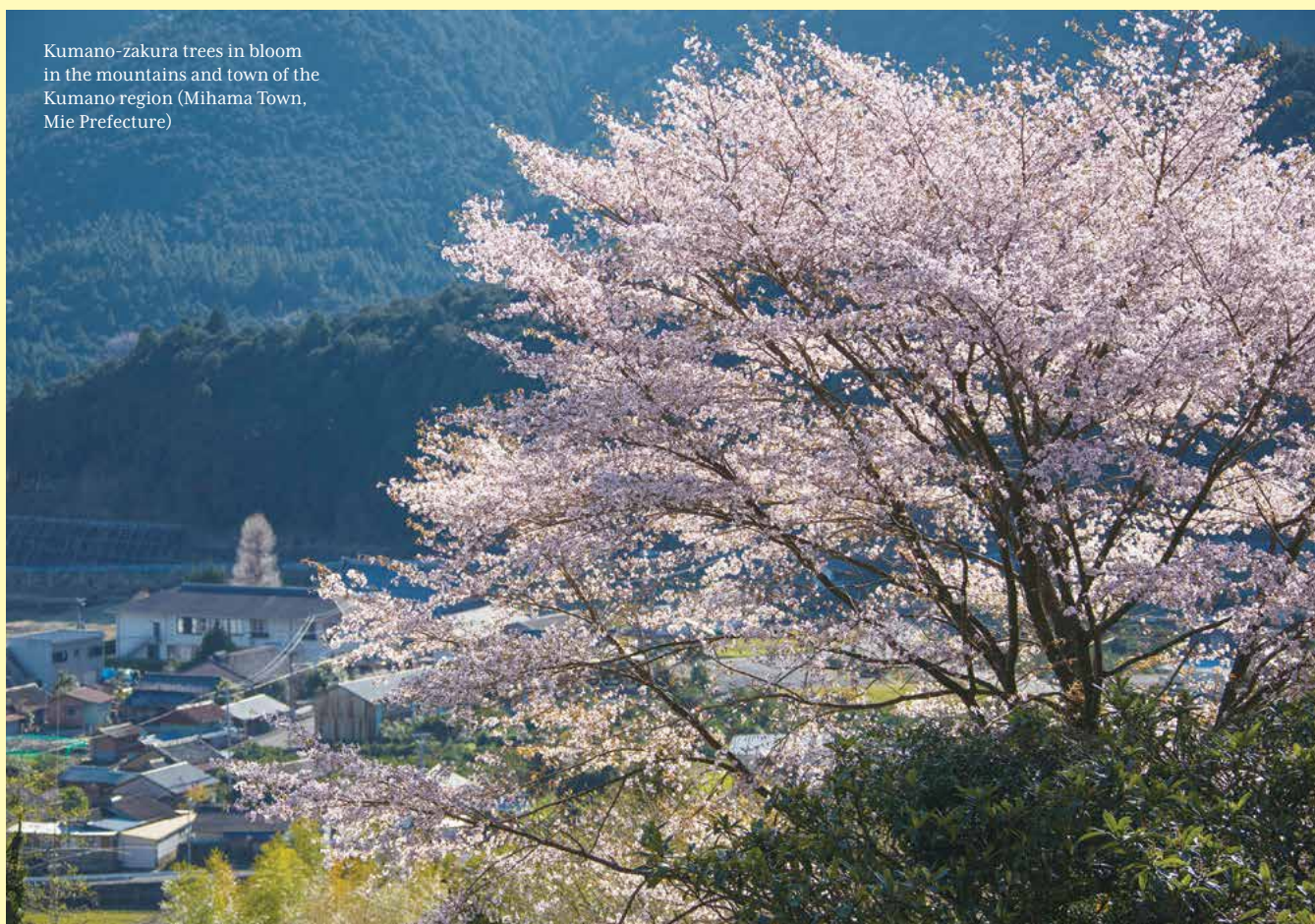


Photo: Japan Kumano Cherry Association

Kumano-zakura trees in bloom in the mountains and town of the Kumano region (Mihama Town, Mie Prefecture)





Photo: PIXTA  
Kumano-zakura displays soft, elegant colors

In 2018, a newly discovered wild species of cherry blossom was named Kumano-zakura, or officially *Cerasus kumanoensis*, after its place of origin. Katsuki Toshio, from the Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute, who made the discovery, spoke to us about its background.

“Firstly, due to the impact of global warming, there has been a rise in winter temperatures in Japan, resulting in ‘Somei-yoshino’ cherry blossoms, the most common cultivar in Japan, no longer blooming in certain regions. Originally, Somei-yoshino couldn’t grow in Okinawa Prefecture, and now a similarly serious situation seems to be unfolding in the southern part of Kagoshima Prefecture. In Okinawa, there is a famous species of cherry blossom known as the Kanhi-zakura (see pages 20-21), which differs from the ‘Somei-yoshino’ with softly pink-tinged white petals gently fluttering and falling gracefully. Looking ahead, it is anticipated that areas where ‘Somei-yoshino’ cannot grow will expand, even including regions in Honshu. So, research on cherry blossoms that can thrive even in higher temperatures has begun, focusing on varieties growing in southern regions.”

“As part of a major research theme to prepare for cherry blossoms to replace the ‘Somei-yoshino,’ the discovery of the Kumano-zakura occurred during the investigation of cherry blossoms in southern regions,” says Katsuki. The Kumano-zakura is found in the warm southern regions of the Kii Peninsula, span-

ning parts of Mie, Nara, and Wakayama prefectures. Its blossoms bloom in delicate shades of pale pink, slightly preceding the ‘Somei-yoshino,’ making it a sight of beauty. The decline of ‘Somei-yoshino’ has been noticeable in the native habitats of the Kumano-zakura. As a result, efforts are underway to promote the Kumano-zakura for tourism purposes as a substitute. “Local stakeholders and tree doctors are leading research on the cultivation, conservation, and utilization of Kumano-zakura saplings,” Katsuki explains.

Tao Yuji, vice chairman of the Japan Kumano Cherry Association, which was established under the leadership of Katsuki, shares his thoughts. “Given that the natural habitat extends across three prefectures, encompassing a vast area, we are hoping for collaboration across regions to conserve the Kumano-zakura and promote its use in tourism. In regions with an early onset of spring, blossoms start appearing as soon as February, displaying their delicate beauty. We plan to conduct seminars aimed at deepening the knowledge of Kumano-zakura among local residents, encouraging their participation in conservation efforts. Our aim is to nurture and protect the natural habitat of the Kumano-zakura.”

As research and promotion of the Kumano-zakura advance, it has the potential to become the Kii Peninsula’s iconic cherry blossom alongside the Yamazakura in Yoshino. ■



Photo: Japan Kumano Cherry Association

The community is cooperating to cultivate and plant Kumano-zakura saplings.



Photo: PIXTA

A magnificent mature Kumano-zakura tree in full bloom, displaying its beautiful pale pink blossoms (Kiwa Town, Kumano City, Mie Prefecture)



**FEATURES**

Gyoiko-zakura trees are characterized by petals that are light green with pink lines.

# Rare Pale Green Gyoiko-zakura Cherry Blossom Trees

In Shimane Prefecture's Umann City, there is a row of cherry blossom trees where one can enjoy the rare spectacle of green flowers blooming. We spoke with a person in charge at the Umann City Tourism Association to learn more. (Text: Kurosawa Akane)

Gyoiko-zakura cherry blossoms can be enjoyed near Mitoya Riverbed Park

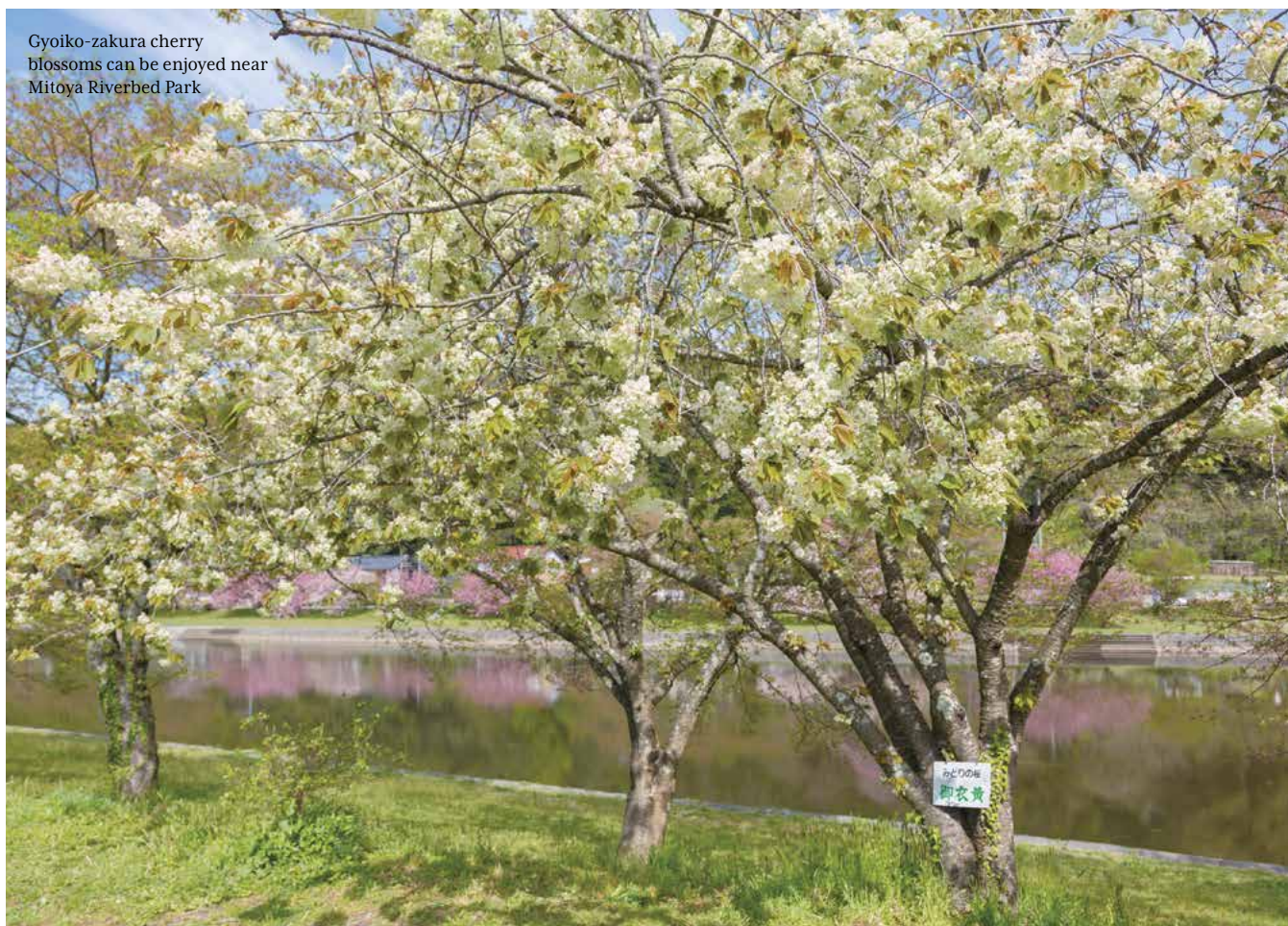




Photo: Uman City

With half-bloomed Gyoiko-zakura, the flower color remains a deep shade of green.

U nnan City, in eastern Shimane Prefecture's Chugoku region, features a picturesque two-kilometer cherry blossom avenue lining both banks of the Mitoya River, near the ruins of Mitoya Castle along National Route 54. Among these blossoms are the Gyoiko-zakura, known for their green flowers. The name comes from the color of this flower, resembling light green. In ancient times, the costumes worn by nobility were referred to as "gyoi." It is said that the name derives from a color similar to *Moegi*<sup>1</sup> light green, used for the "gyoi." Suyama Miho from the Unan City Tourism Association explains: "Approximately 70 years ago, the Gyoiko-zakura trees were transplanted from Yoshino Town in Nara Prefecture. This variety of Yae-zakura features light green petals with faint pink lines, with each flower typically bearing 10 to 15 overlapping petals. Approximately 120 of these trees are planted in the Mitoya Riverbed Park and the Mitoya Castle Ruins Park on the opposite bank, offering a rare opportunity to witness cherry blossoms exclusively in shades of green."

During the early stages of blooming, the flowers are a deep green, gradually lightening as they start to open, with pink lines appearing at the center towards the end before they fall. The best viewing time is typically around late April each year.

"Gyoiko-zakura, a late-blooming variety of cherry blossom, typically blooms about two weeks after the many Somei-yoshino cherry trees in the same area. In 2022, the combination of Gyoiko-zakura and Somei-yoshino cherry blossoms attracted around 30,000 visitors to this popular hanami (cherry blossom viewing) destination. Because the peak blooming period of the Gyoiko-zakura occurs later than that of the Somei-yoshino, visitors can enjoy a leisurely view-

ing experience. Additionally, the cherry blossoms are illuminated at night for added enjoyment," explains Suyama.

Unan City boasts numerous cherry blossom viewing spots, embodying a profound appreciation for these delicate blooms. Within the city, specialized professionals known as 'sakuramori' are appointed to oversee the care of cherry blossoms, focusing on the preservation of old trees and the cultivation of new growth. Additionally, the city actively supports cherry blossom preservation and cultivation efforts through the Unan City Sakura Association and various local community groups. Together with its citizens, the city is dedicated to creating a beautiful environment adorned with cherry blossoms.

The green color of Gyoiko-zakura is incredibly calming and a leisurely visit to this town during cherry blossom season is highly recommended. 🍀

1. A Japanese traditional color. Refers to a bright yellow-green color resembling the young leaves of sprouting plants in early spring.



Photo: Uman City

Gyoiko-zakura cherry blossoms with a refreshing and elegant feel

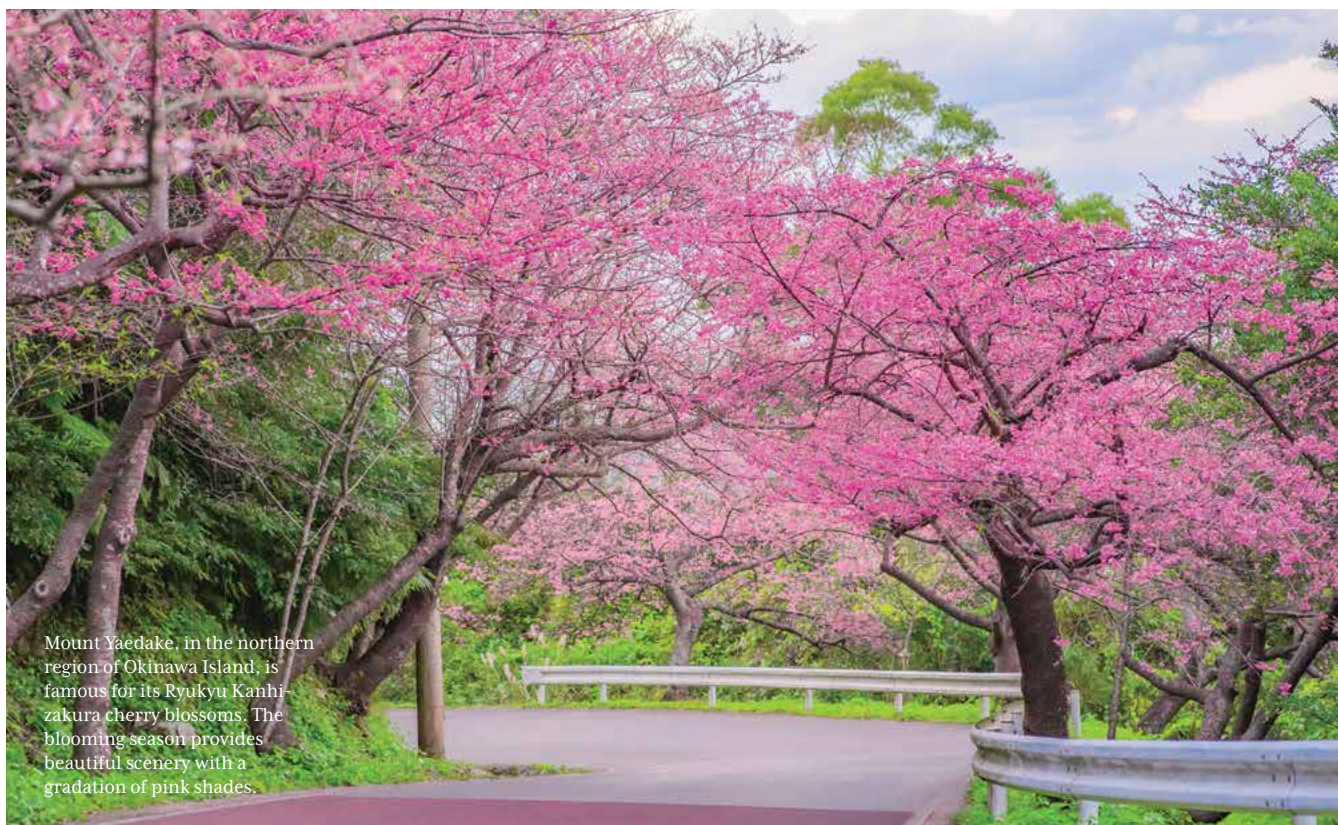


Photo: Motobu Tourism Association

Mount Yaedake, in the northern region of Okinawa Island, is famous for its Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura cherry blossoms. The blooming season provides beautiful scenery with a gradation of pink shades.

# Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura Cherry Blossoms, Beloved in Okinawa as an Early Sign of Spring



Photo: PXTA

Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura blooms in a downward direction.

In the warm Okinawa Prefecture, (hereinafter, “Okinawa”) cherry blossoms typically bloom from late January to February each year. In line with this flowering period, cherry blossom festivals are held at various locations throughout the prefecture. We spoke to an official from the Motobu Tourism Association, which holds the Motobu Yaedake Cherry Blossom Festival.

(Text: Kurosawa Akane)

The cherry blossoms (‘sakura’ in Japanese<sup>1</sup>), in Okinawa, located at the southwest of the Japanese archipelago, belong to a variety known as Kanhi-zakura. The name ‘Kanhi-zakura’ originates from the reddish scarlet (*hiiro*<sup>2</sup>) color of its blossoms, which bloom from the cold season. In Okinawa, it is known as Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura, named after Okinawa’s alternate name, Ryukyu. The renowned spot for Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura is Mount Yaedake, the second-highest peak on Okinawa Island<sup>3</sup> with an ele-

vation of 453 meters. Each year, from January, the Motobu Yaedake Cherry Blossom Festival takes place at Sakura-no-Mori Park on the slopes of Mount Yaedake. Renowned as Japan’s earliest cherry blossom festival, it is an event that many people enjoy.

“The base of the Mount Yaedake spans from the northern part of Okinawa Island, through the towns of Motobu and Nago. Approximately 7,000 Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura cherry trees lining the roadside for over four kilometers leading to its summit,” explains

Touyama Kiyohiro from the Motobu Tourism Association. “This area is the earliest blooming region in Okinawa. Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura cherry blossoms are known for their vibrant, deep pink flowers, which charmingly bloom in a downward direction.”

The Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura is beloved in Okinawa as an early sign of spring. These cherry blossoms can be enjoyed up close or admired from afar as they adorn the entire mountain. The contrast between their vibrant scarlet colors and the lush greenery of the primeval forest is truly a sight to behold. During the cherry blossom festival season, many people gather at Mount Yaedake to enjoy the cherry blossoms. They drive along the roadside, which stretches for over four kilometers, or take a leisurely stroll to admire the cherry blossoms.

“In 2024, the Motobu Yaedake Cherry Blossom Festival (held from January 20 to February 4) attracted approximately 150,000 visitors not only from Okinawa Prefecture but also from across the country. Additionally, it is estimated that overseas visitors accounted for roughly 10% of the total attendance,” says Touyama. “Mount Yaedake, the second-highest peak on Okinawa Island, experiences variations in elevation, resulting in delayed blooming at higher, cooler altitudes. As a result, visitors can enjoy the cherry blossoms for an extended period.”

In Japan, the tradition of *hanami*, or flower viewing, typically involves laying out mats under cherry blossom trees and enjoying outdoor small banquets with food and drinks. This iconic springtime activity is commonly observed in parks throughout Tokyo. Sometimes the banquet is the main event. “In the car-oriented society of Okinawa, people enjoy the cherry blossoms from the car while driving. There are numerous tree-lined roadsides with stunning cherry blossoms,” says Toyama. Cherry blossoms are an early sign of spring in Okinawa, offering an excellent chance to experience the beauty and arrival of the season for yourself. 📷



Photo: Motobu Tourism Association

The captivating contrast between the vibrant pink of the Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura cherry blossoms and the lush greenery of the mountain's primeval forest

1. The different varieties of cherry blossom often end in '-zakura' such as Kanhi-zakura, due to the phonetic change in Japanese.
2. One of the traditional colors passed down through Japan since ancient times, referring to a deep and bright shade of red.
3. In Okinawa Prefecture, there are 691 islands according to data from the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (as of January 2022). Okinawa Island refers to the largest, which is home to the central city of Naha.



Photo: PIXTA

Approximately 7,000 Ryukyu Kanhi-zakura cherry trees stand in full bloom along the road stretching for over four kilometers leading to the summit of Mount Yaedake.

# Masterpieces of Japanese Painting Depicting Cherry Blossoms from Ancient Times in Japan

There are numerous Japanese paintings depicting cherry blossoms. Here, we will introduce two works that particularly highlight the beauty of cherry blossoms from ancient times in Japan. We spoke with the directors of the museums where the paintings are held to learn about the characteristics and charm of these paintings. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

The first work is *Konohana-Sakuyahime* by Domoto Insho<sup>2</sup>. Miwa Akihisa, the director of Kyoto Prefectural Insho-Domoto Museum of Fine Arts, where it is held, describes the charm of this painting as follows.

“The figure depicted in this painting portrays a goddess as beautiful as the cherry blossoms, who appears in Japanese mythology<sup>3</sup>. *Konohana* (flower of the tree) refers to cherry blossoms in old Japanese. The model for the painting is said to be the youngest sister of Insho. Set against the background of fully bloomed Yama-zakura and Yae-zakura cherry blossoms,

beloved by the Japanese since ancient times, the ground is adorned with flowers like violets and dandelions, symbolizing the arrival of spring,” explains Miwa. “The gently flushed cheeks and eyes along with the supple limbs bring about modest sensuality with a sense of mystique, making it one of Insho’s most popular works. “By depicting a beautiful



Photo: PIXTA

The eye-catching exterior of the Insho-Domoto Museum of Fine Arts, it was established as a museum to exhibit Domoto Insho's own works.



*Konohana-Sakuyahime*, a Japanese painting by Domoto Insho, 1929, silk, pigments, 170.0×238.0cm, folding-screen. Collection of Kyoto Prefectural Insho-Domoto Museum of Fine Arts



*Yoshino*, by Okumura Togyu, 1977, ink and color on paper, framed (1 piece), 108.6×184.4cm. Collection of Yamatane Museum of Art

goddess seated beneath the fully bloomed cherry blossom tree, this painting encompasses elements that resonate deeply with the Japanese heart.”

The second piece is *Yoshino* by Okumura Togyu<sup>4</sup>. This painting depicts Mount Yoshino in Nara Prefecture, renowned since ancient times as a famous cherry blossom viewing spot and also considered a place of worship. Mount Yoshino is known for being the place where En no Gyoja<sup>5</sup>, the founder of Shugendo spiritual practice, carved the image of Kongo Zao Gongen<sup>6</sup> into a Yama-zakura tree in the late 7th century and enshrined it.

As a testament to this faith, believers have continued to plant primarily Shiroyama-zakura trees, creating a unique landscape with approximately 30,000 trees planted. Regarding the artwork depicting this mountain, according to Yamazaki Taeko, director of the Yamatane Art Museum, where it is held, “It was a long-awaited dream come true when Okumura Togyu first visited Mount Yoshino at the age of 83. He completed the painting when he visited again. In describing Mount Yoshino, Togyu expressed that he perceived the mountain as possessing a sense of saintliness and proud independence rather than splendor. He shared that while working on the painting, he was deeply

moved, feeling as if he was capturing a historic scene. The painting may have been created while feeling the weight of Mount Yoshino’s history. Togyu’s work features a distinctive warm, magnificent style created by layering thin layers of paint, resulting in soft tones. I hope as many people as possible have the chance to see the actual piece when it’s exhibited at the museum.”

It is definitely worth taking the time to admire these masterpieces featuring cherry blossoms while enjoying the arrival of spring. 🌸



Yama-zakura in full bloom in Yoshino. Yoshino’s unique feature lies in its varied elevation, terrain, and soil conditions across different regions, leading to staggered blooming periods, allowing for about a month-long enjoyment of cherry blossoms.

1. One of the goddesses featured in Japanese mythology. Her name is said to symbolize the beauty of cherry blossoms.  
 2. Born in 1891 and died in 1975, Domoto Insho was a Japanese painter from Kyoto active in the Kyoto art scene. He left behind a diverse body of work that transcended the boundaries between Japan and the West, as well as between figurative and abstract art. He designed the Insho-Domoto Museum of Fine Arts himself while he was still alive.  
 3. Stories surrounding gods and goddesses that have been passed down in various parts of Japan since ancient times. The *Kojiki*, compiled at the beginning of the 8th century, is Japan’s oldest book containing Japanese mythology.

4. Okumura Togyu (1889-1990) was a late-blooming Japanese painter who entered his first public exhibition for Japanese painting at the age of 37 but continued his artistic production throughout his life. He is considered one of the leading Japanese painters of the 20th century.  
 5. The founder of Shugendo, who was active in Nara Prefecture from the 7th to 8th centuries. Shugendo is a native Japanese religion that originated from ancient mountain worship, blending influences from Buddhism and esoteric practices. It is characterized by ascetic practices performed in mountainous regions. It represents a unique form of faith and spiritual practice in Japan.  
 6. Kongo Zao Gongen is revered as a Bodhisattva, representing the highest object for worship in Shugendo.



Vegetables sold in a market with the Visualization Label. Photo: MAFF



Presentation of the Visualization Label by Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Sakamoto at a press conference. Photo: MAFF



The new Visualization Label formally launched in March 2024



For rice, contribution to biodiversity conservation can also be evaluated and indicated on the label in accordance with the guidelines (the bottom half of the label).

# Visualization and Labeling of Environmental Impact Reduction Efforts on Agricultural Products — Contributing to Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Biodiversity Conservation

In order to build sustainable food systems, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) has initiated an initiative to visualize farmers' efforts to reduce the environmental impact in their farming practices, with the aims of raising public awareness of the issues and reducing such burden food systems as a whole pose on the environment. Through the initiative, farmer's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to address global warming, as well as their efforts for biodiversity conservation, can be visually indicated on the agricultural product by the designated label. The label indicates the degree of farmer's contribution by the number of stars (1 to 3 stars) and communicates farmer's efforts to consumers. These labels help consumers choose agricultural products. This article presents an overview of this labeling scheme.

## Background to the initiative

In May 2021, MAFF launched the MIDORI Strategy, a strategy for Sustainable Food Systems as a new policy direction to enhance both productivity potential improvement and sustainability in the food, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries industries through innovation. In 2022, the MIDORI Act came into effect, positioning the visualization of environmental burden reduction efforts as a policy for the Government to take measures. It is expected that all stakeholders involved in the food systems (from procurement to production, processing, distribution, and consumption) will have a sense of ownership on addressing environment-related matters, such as contribution to GHG emissions reduction and consideration of biodiversity conservation, and take practical actions to reduce impact on the environment.

## “Visualization Labeling” — the scheme and the progress to date

MAFF commenced the labeling scheme with the above-mentioned background. The label is designed to clearly indicate the degree of farmer's efforts to reduce environmental burden with the number of stars on the label, by comparing them to average farming practices in the region. A designated calculation tool is available for farmers or relevant stakeholders to calculate GHG emissions/Carbon sequestration using their farming data, such as chemical fertilizer and pesticide use, fossil fuel consumption, biochar application, and for rice paddy field water management.

Following a first pilot project in fiscal year 2022, targeting three products (rice, tomatoes, and cucumbers), the scope of the second pilot project was extended to include





Photo: PIXTA

An example of farming practices for biodiversity conservation is winter flooding in paddy fields. For rice, the degree of farmers' contribution to biodiversity conservation is evaluated based on whether biodiversity conservation farming practices in paddy fields (such as the reduction of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, winter flooding, and creation of biotopes) are implemented.

### Visualization of Environmental Burden Reduction Efforts

The reduction of environmental burden by farmers' efforts is evaluated and communicated to distributors, retailers, and consumers through labeling.

★★★

★★★★★

GHG Emissions Reduction	Biodiversity Conservation								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction of chemical pesticides &amp; fertilizer use</li> <li>Application of manure and biochar</li> <li>Extension of mid-season drainage (for rice) &gt; <small>This effort can lead to a 35% reduction in methane emissions!</small></li> </ul>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Farming practices (examples)</th> <th>Score (pts)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Chemical pesticides &amp; fertilizer reduction</td> <td>1~2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Winter flooding in paddy fields</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Herbicide-free field margin vegetation management</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Farming practices (examples)	Score (pts)	Chemical pesticides & fertilizer reduction	1~2	Winter flooding in paddy fields	1	Herbicide-free field margin vegetation management	1
Farming practices (examples)	Score (pts)								
Chemical pesticides & fertilizer reduction	1~2								
Winter flooding in paddy fields	1								
Herbicide-free field margin vegetation management	1								

This labelling expresses "avoided emission rates" compared to average cultivation in the region

- ★★★★: avoided emission rate ≥20%
- ★★★: avoided emission rate ≥10%
- ★★: avoided emission rate ≥5%

※for rice, vegetables, fruits, tea (23 crops)  
※Considering adding livestock products

This labelling expresses the total score of farming practices

- ★★★★: 3 points or more
- ★★★: 2 points
- ★★: 1 point

※for rice

This labelling scheme seeks to promote **consumers' understanding, behavioral changes, and farmers' actions for the environmental impact reduction!**

Poster explaining the Visualization Labels

23 products (rice, vegetables, fruits, and potatoes, etc.) in fiscal year 2023. In March 2024, a full-scale implementation was launched, introducing a new label design along with guidelines for its use. Additionally, biodiversity conservation efforts were added as an evaluation target for rice.

Since 2022, in cooperation with various stakeholders, including retails, restaurants, and other businesses across the country, the pilot project was implemented in more

### GHG emission reduction

$$100\% - \frac{\text{GHG emissions from individual farming practices}}{\text{GHG emissions from average farming practices in the region}} = \text{Avoided emission rate(\%)}$$

- ★★★★: Avoided emission rate ≥20%
- ★★★: Avoided emission rate ≥10%
- ★★: Avoided emission rate ≥5%

Calculation method for avoided GHG emission rates

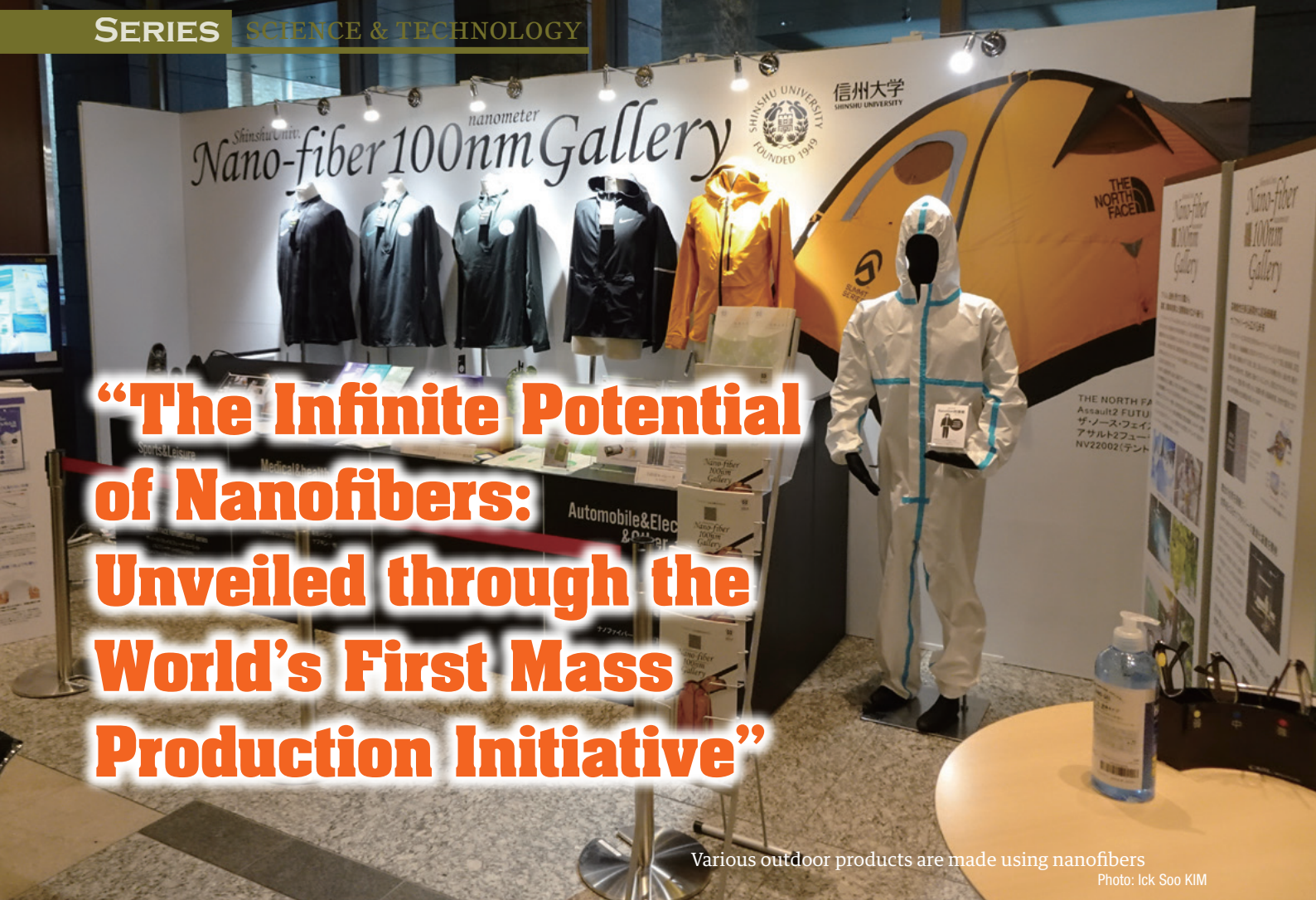
than 700 places. Consumer surveys conducted during the pilot project in fiscal year 2022 and 2023 revealed that 95% of respondents had a favorable impression of such stores that sell agricultural products with the Visualization Label. This result indicates consumers' significant interest in environmental friendliness.

The Government of Japan has set goals of reducing GHG emissions by 46% by fiscal year 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. MAFF will continue to support environmentally friendly producers and businesses by assisting in calculating GHG emissions and providing marketing materials related to the scheme.

Be sure to check for the Label on agricultural products in stores, and take steps toward sustainable consumption by making selective purchases.

### Reference URL

[https://www.maff.go.jp/j/kanbo/kankyo/seisaku/being\\_sustainable/mieruka/mieruka.html](https://www.maff.go.jp/j/kanbo/kankyo/seisaku/being_sustainable/mieruka/mieruka.html)



# “The Infinite Potential of Nanofibers: Unveiled through the World’s First Mass Production Initiative”

Various outdoor products are made using nanofibers

Photo: Ick Soo KIM

The emergence of mass production technology, once considered daunting, has now unlocked limitless possibilities for ultrafine nanofibers measuring a mere 100 nanometers (nm)<sup>1</sup>. When utilized in the production of masks, these fibers signify a revolutionary material capable of blocking over 99% of pollen and viruses. Their versatility extends across diverse sectors, spanning from medical and food to clothing and even energy industries.

## Fukuda Mitsuhiro

Nanofibers are extraordinarily thin fibers, with a diameter 1/500th that of a human hair. Masks made from these fibers provide exceptional breathability while effectively protecting against moisture, viruses, pollen, PM2.5 particles, and other particles as small as 0.3 $\mu$ m (micrometers)<sup>2</sup>, which could potentially harm the human body. These masks boast a filtration efficiency of over 99%.

Under the leadership of Professor Ick Soo KIM, the laboratory at Shinshu University has achieved a remarkable milestone by successfully enabling the mass production of nanofibers, a task

long considered difficult. Shinshu University holds a unique position in Japan as the sole institution boasting a Faculty of Textile Science and Technology, with roots tracing back to 1910. During that era, Nagano Prefecture served as a prominent silk-producing region, and Shinshu University originated as the Ueda College of Sericulture, a government-run technical college. However, in 1949, following educational reforms, it transformed into the Shinshu University Faculty of Textile Science and Technology. Throughout its 114-year journey to the present day, the Faculty of Textile Science and Technology has remained steadfast in its commitment to advancing scientific techniques for yarn spinning, fabric weaving, and

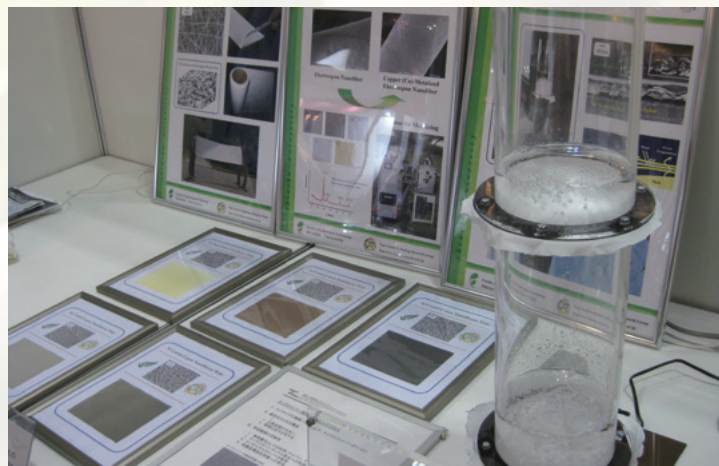
product refinement.

In 2010, Professor Kim achieved a groundbreaking milestone by successfully developing the world’s first mass production plant for nanofibers. He credited the inspiration for this production method to the *shishi-odoshi*<sup>3</sup>, a traditional Japanese garden device. Rather than employing nozzles akin to injection needles, this technique involves flowing various polymers<sup>4</sup> through the tip of an angled “needle” while applying a high voltage. This method causes the polymers to stretch under electrostatic forces, leading to the creation of extraordinarily thin fibers. Such an innovative breakthrough has been compared to the invention of rockets during an era dominated by bows and arrows.



A *shishi-odoshi*, which served as the inspiration for the mass production of nanofibers

Photo: PIXTA



Development in progress for the nanofibers for the mass production of nanofibers

Photo: Ick Soo KIM



Nanofiber masks are lighter than a single sheet of A4 paper

Photo: Ick Soo KIM

The inaugural product leveraging nanofibers from this production line was a mask intended to ease the discomfort of hay fever (pollinosis) sufferers. Its effectiveness was demonstrated during the 2011 Tokyo Marathon, where runners reported enhanced breathability. In 2014, following the eruption of Mount Ontake<sup>5</sup>, Professor Kim's team supplied nanofiber masks to local elementary schools to protect against volcanic ash. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the laboratory innovated further by producing N95 masks with superior virus-filtering features, donating over 56,000 masks to the Nagano Prefectural Office and the Japanese Nursing Association<sup>6</sup>. Their significant contributions were recognized in 2022 when research group was awarded the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology Award for Sci-

ence and Technology in the Development Category, celebrating the vital role of nanofiber masks in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The utilization of these highly breathable nanofibers is not limited to medical applications but spans across a variety of sectors, including sports apparel, outdoor equipment, vehicle ventilation systems, and fruit protection bags that improve sugar concentration and pre-harvest risk. With the establishment of a mass production system, Professor Kim's laboratory is now handling an increasing volume of requests for collaborative projects from diverse companies.

Nanofibers are closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) thanks to their washable and reusable nature, significantly minimizing product waste. The mass produc-

tion technology for nanofibers harbors considerable potential to improve our daily lives and stands out as a cutting-edge innovation poised to shape a more promising future.

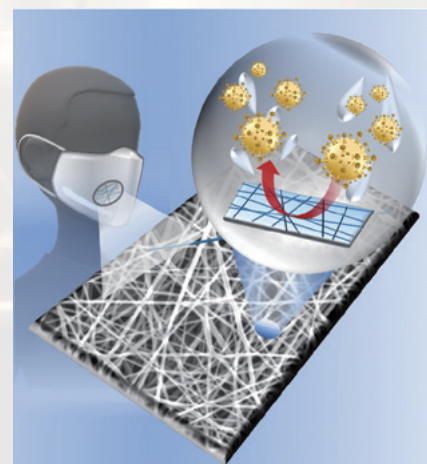


Image of a mask that blocks over 99% of pollen and viruses

Photo: Ick Soo KIM

1.1nm = 10<sup>-9</sup> meters (m) = one billionth of a meter

2.µm corresponds to one millionth of a meter.

3.The mechanism involves pouring water slowly into a bamboo tube. As the water fills the tube, its weight causes the bamboo tube to tilt and spill the water.

When the bamboo tube becomes lighter and returns to its original position, it hits a stone or another object, creating a loud sound or vibration. Originally, it was used to scare away animals such as deer.

4.Molecules with high molecular weight whose scientific structure is essentially a polymer (composed of regular repeating structural units).

5.An active volcano located on the border between Nagano Prefecture and Gifu Prefecture. During the eruption in September 2014, the disaster resulted in 63 deaths and missing persons.

6.The largest professional nursing organization in Japan, operated by individuals with nursing qualifications who voluntarily join.

# Introducing Real Life in Japan, in Arabic

Megumi posts videos on her own YouTube channel.

Photo: Yaso Megumi

**Yaso Megumi came to Japan from Egypt in 2016 after getting married. She runs a YouTube channel introducing Japanese life and culture in Arabic, and also currently has another channel that communicates Middle Eastern culture in Japanese. She is very active as a bridge-builder between Japan and the Middle East.**

**Murakami Kayo**

An Egyptian born in Kuwait, she fled the country with her family when the Gulf War<sup>1</sup> broke out when she was two years old. She and her family made their way to Egypt via Iran and Iraq. In Egypt, they settled in Hurghada<sup>2</sup> on the Red Sea coast where she grew up. Her father was a judo coach, and she has been familiar with Japanese culture from childhood. Then, while working in Cairo, she met the Japanese man she would marry, coming to Japan in 2016. Apart from her Egyptian name, the name she registered on her family register in Japan is Megumi.

After coming to Japan, Megumi was feeling down because she couldn't

find a job. A friend suggested that she make a YouTube video.

“At that time, in Egypt you could get information on Japanese anime and tourist attractions, but there was almost no content that introduced actual daily life in Japan or Japanese people’s values. As a result, many Egyptians still had limited, old-fashioned images of Japan. Because of this, I wanted to make people more aware of Japan’s appeal, and decided to post videos that introduce the appealing aspects of life in Japan in the Arabic language.”

The YouTube channel Planet NIHON, which she launched in 2017, has videos showing how to make Japanese food, including ramen and



Yaso Megumi

Photo: Yaso Megumi



Taking videos that show real life in Japan

Photo: Yaso Megumi



She also uploads videos introducing child-raising in Japan.

Photo: Yaso Megumi

*kyaraben*,<sup>3</sup> as well as videos introducing useful items that are not available in Egypt. In particular, a video of the birth of her daughter and a video introducing Egyptian restaurants in Japan have had many views. “I also got great responses to videos introducing child-raising in Japan and the differences in Japanese and Egyptian values,” says Megumi. Eight years have passed since she started posting videos, and she senses that changes in the circumstances have occurred.

“Recently, it feels like the number of Egyptian tourists coming to Japan has been increasing. It makes me very happy that many of them have got interested in Japan after watching my videos. There are Japanese events in Egypt organized by the Japanese Embassy and other local organizations, but often the people who attend them are people who are already interested in Japan, and the number of participants is limited. I feel that YouTube has a lot of potential because

it enables me to convey the charm of Japan to a large number of people. A lot of Egyptians are interested in foreign languages, so in the future I want to make videos that teach Japanese.”

In 2021, Megumi started a Japanese-language channel that introduces Egyptian culture, and it also introduces the charm of Japan as seen through the eyes of an Egyptian.

“Introducing the charm of Japan in Arabic got me thinking that, on the contrary, very few Japanese know what Egypt is really like today. Egypt is a country with diverse ethnic groups, and even has areas that get snow. I want to share the charms of Egypt that Japanese people don’t know about.”

While raising her daughter, Megumi also works as an Arabic interpreter and as a model. Although some things can be difficult to get accustomed to, due to cultural differences, she says, “Japanese people are always so kind and helpful.”

Megumi adds, “As more people

travel between Japan and Egypt, mutual understanding will deepen and mutual exchange will become even more active. I want to help make that happen.” From now on, she will continue to use her unique perspective to create videos that connect the two countries.

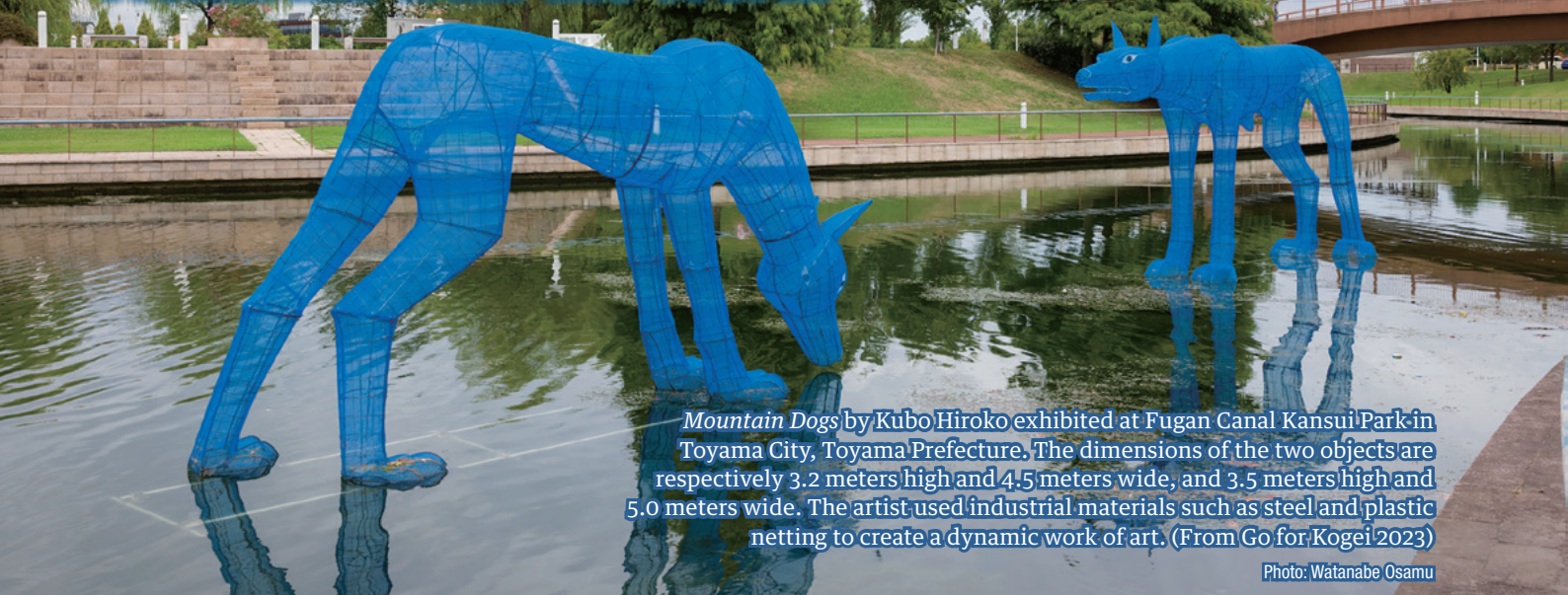


Megumi also works as a model.

Photo: Yaso Megumi

1. A war that was touched off by the August 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. A multinational force went to fight Iraq in January 1991. The Iraqi military withdrew from Kuwait at the end of February, ending the war.  
 2. A city in eastern Egypt. Along with Sharm El Sheikh, it is a well-known beach resort area facing the Red Sea.  
 3. A character bento (*kyaraben* for short) is a box lunch that uses polished rice and side dishes to represent cartoon characters, animals, etc.

# “Go for Kogei” Hokuriku Crafts Festival — Sharing the Appeal of Crafts and Art from Hokuriku with the World



*Mountain Dogs* by Kubo Hiroko exhibited at Fugan Canal Kansui Park in Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture. The dimensions of the two objects are respectively 3.2 meters high and 4.5 meters wide, and 3.5 meters high and 5.0 meters wide. The artist used industrial materials such as steel and plastic netting to create a dynamic work of art. (From *Go for Kogei* 2023)

Photo: Watanabe Osamu

The Japan Cultural Expo 2.0 aims to build momentum for the upcoming Expo 2025 (World Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai), to support renewed interest in inbound travel to Japan, and to encourage further demand for domestic tourism. It also features a focus on “The Beauty and The Spirit of Japan,” promoting Japanese cultural arts and spreading awareness of their diverse and universal charms within Japan and around the world. This is a large-scale project with Japanese cultural facilities, arts organizations, and many others hosting and participating in a diverse range of projects and events. In this article, from among these participants, we will focus on the “Go for Kogei” Hokuriku Crafts Festival.

Moribe Shinji

## A platform for promoting crafts and art, with Hokuriku on stage

“Go for Kogei” is a festival established in 2020 to promote the appeal of crafts and art with the three Hokuriku prefectures of Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui, and it serves as a stage for various events.

The three prefectures of Hokuriku are home to numerous workshops for traditional crafts such as ceramics, lacquerware, *yuzen* dyeing,<sup>1</sup> glass art, casting,<sup>2</sup> and *washi* Japanese paper, as well as arts and crafts universities and research institutes that refine traditional skills and nurture the next generation of creators. There are also many outstanding art museums with

extensive collections and exhibitions of fine works of art. This environment has given rise to initiatives to create and promote new types of art and crafts that are not bound by the concept of traditional crafts.

One specific entity that promotes such initiatives is the nonprofit Organization Syuto Kanazawa, which brings together artists, designers, cultural figures, business people, citizens, and others. Every year, it organizes the KOGEI Art Fair Kanazawa, the rare art fair even in Japan specializing in contemporary crafts, in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture, and engages in activities to create new craft markets. In addition, the organization has expanded the scope of these activities

to the three prefectures of Hokuriku, advancing efforts to promote Japanese art and crafts to the world at distinctive venues in Hokuriku, and providing new opportunities to refresh the appeal of this region and reinvent crafts. One of its main programs is “Go for Kogei”, which was planned as part of the Japan Cultural Expo in fiscal year 2020.

## “Go for Kogei” attracted about 110,000 visitors in 2023

With Akimoto Yuji<sup>3</sup> as Executive Director and Exhibition Curator, in 2021 and 2022 “Go for Kogei” hosted special exhibitions introducing artists in the fields



*Ogi no mai*, a fabric installation by textile designer Sudo Reiko. The passages of Shokoji, a temple in Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture, whose Main Hall and other buildings have been designated a National Treasure, were transformed into corridors of colorful Japanese fans. (From Go for Kogei 2021)

Photo: Masahiro Katano



*Ssanyong*, a work by Hayama Yuki, decorates the doors of the Masuda Sake Brewery in Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture. The work is based on patterns he drew on porcelain as a ceramic artist. (From Go for Kogei 2023)

Photo: Watanabe Osamu



Nakajima Lock Area, one of the venues for Go for Kogei 2023

Photo: Watanabe Osamu

of crafts, contemporary art, and Art Brut.<sup>4</sup> Shokoji Temple (Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture), Natadera Temple (Komatsu City, Ishikawa Prefecture), and Otaki Shrine and Okamoto Shrine (Echizen City, Fukui Prefecture) served as exhibition venues.

In fiscal year 2023, “Go for Kogei” participated in the one of the Japan Cultural Expo 2.0 projects with the exhibition *Material Imagination and Etiological Narrative – Material, Data, Fantasy*. The exhibition was held in the Fugan Canal area of Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture, from September 15 to October 29, 2023. The organizers provided bilingual Japanese-English guidebooks to visitors and held tours for visitors from overseas as well as an international symposium. The diverse program attracted about 110,000

visitors.

Although the actual exhibition of the Go for Kogei 2023 already ended, details are presented and explained in both Japanese and English on the event’s official website, and the exhibits can also be enjoyed online (see URL in the column). Some artworks can be viewed year-round and the 2024 edition is planned to be held in Autumn. Interested parties are invited to browse the online content.

### Impact of the Noto Earthquake

On January 1, 2024, a magnitude 7.6 earthquake struck the Hokuriku region (the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake). Many artists had their workshops and galleries damaged by the earthquake. Future reconstruction

efforts are expected to ensure the continued development of crafts and art in Hokuriku.

#### “Go for Kogei” website

<https://goforkogei.com/en>



An installation of imaginary wooden dragons created by sculptor Komuro Takahiro. From left to right: *Dog Dragon, Savage Dragon, Bat Dragon, and Demonic Dragon*. All of the sculptures are approximately 149-150 cm tall. (From Go for Kogei 2023)

Photo: Watanabe Osamu

1. A traditional Japanese pattern dyeing technique. Delicate patterns are drawn by first applying paste to the outline of the pattern (because of the outline doesn’t get colored) and then dyeing the fabric. Well-known varieties of this technique are Kyo Yuzen in Kyoto and Kaga Yuzen in Ishikawa Prefecture.
2. A craft in which objects are created by pouring molten metals such as iron and copper into molds. Casting has become a local industry in Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture.
3. Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University of the Arts, Special Director of 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. Worked on Triennale of *Kogei* in Kanazawa, and has served as Executive Director of Go for Kogei since 2021.
4. A French term that translates as “raw art.” It is often used to describe artistic forms of expression that are not influenced by existing trends.

# Etopirika

Tufted Puffin



Photo: PIXTA



Photo: PIXTA

The *etopirika* (tufted puffin) is a seabird with an overall length of 35-40 cm. The birds used to inhabit the islands east of Hokkaido, but today their numbers have greatly decreased, and they are known to inhabit only two small islands off Nemuro City, Yururito Island and Moyururito Island. Etopirika means “beautiful beak” in the language of the Ainu, the indigenous people of Hokkaido.

In summer, the feathers around their large beaks and on their legs become a gorgeous reddish-orange color, and long yellow ornamental feathers hang down over their eyes. The feathers in winter are dark brown all over, giving a different impression. The *etopirika* like to dive and feed on small fish. They breed in groups on these small coastal islands, and they dig deep nests in grassy areas on cliffs, where each pair lays and raises a single egg.

HIGHLIGHTING

## Japan

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

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



HIGHLIGHTING JAPAN



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



ALL PAST ISSUES available online

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



JAPAN GOV  
THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

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

KIZUNA



The official magazine of the Government of Japan