

Series: **My Favorite Kyoto**

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Life and *Shodō**

Paul Dinning
(Australia)

I'm 55 years old, and a student of *shodō* (calligraphy) in Chifumi-sensei's "Calligraphy Kyoto" studio. This is a special opportunity. When I was young, life was going to be different.

My family were building tradesmen for many generations. As I grew up I helped my father with his carpentry. When I was 17, I passed the exam to enter government service, so I didn't learn a trade or enter university. When I was 35, I transferred to the television industry; through my television work, I started my first university course when I was 42 years old. Still I simply worked and studied.

After turning 50, I realized life held other opportunities and time was short. I knew many people who found retirement was a sudden end to their working life. They often had no other ideas about how to live. Some work friends suffered dementia but had only known work. Why should they forget the office, when they could forget flowers and clouds? That wasn't going to be me.

So I started a Masters Degree in International Studies. By this time, I was working at a university, supplying television equipment to Media students. After working with international students, a new dream formed in my mind. Why not become an international student in my 50s? It was as simple as making a decision.

In March 2015, I came to Kyōto to complete my Masters thesis in 'Photographic Self-representation in Social Networking'. I don't understand what I wrote, but it got a good mark. The thesis was written in English. I wanted to get some Japanese language skills too, so next I tried a year in a language school. I'm sorry I wasn't a better student. I will try harder this year!

My university and the language school in Kyōto were wonderful. Everyone I met had a positive approach to life. I came to Japan, and now have friends from around the world. And those friends all give me constant inspiration. As an older learner, the classroom is always an interesting place. When I meet other older learners of Japanese, it's great to learn some of their fresh approaches.

But, why *shodō*?

Back in Sydney, Australia, one of my Japanese teachers held extra classes in cooking and *shūji* (brush penmanship). Her husband produced wonderful *shodō* work and he patiently helped us improve our knowledge of *kanji* (Chinese characters). I remembered the brushed characters from my favourite childhood television show in the 1960s, 'The Samurai'. *Shūji* was new and nostalgic at the same time. I felt meaning enter into the characters.

This was my first exposure to direct artistic practice. I was an active photographer from childhood, but

* Pronunciation tip: any vowel with a macron over it (ā, ī, ū, ē, ō) has a "long" vowel sound, 1.5 to 2 times longer than the regular vowel sound

Paul in the *shodō* studio

Valentine's Day and White Day in Japan

Perhaps you have already heard about how the Japanese celebrate Valentine's Day, February 14, and its unique companion, White Day. Most people in Western countries use Valentine's Day to express their interest (often romantic) in someone, for couples to show their love for each other, or to show friendship and caring among classmates, friends, or coworkers. Usually, sending or exchanging Valentine's Day cards and gifts, such as flowers and chocolates, are the preferred methods.



Valentine's Day chocolates

The Valentine's Day tradition in Japan seems to have started in the late 1950s, becoming well established in the 1960s, and was a major business for chocolate makers by the 1970s. At first, the sellers started the idea that on Valentine's Day, it was acceptable

for ladies to give chocolates to men, and that concept is now well rooted here in Japan. It seems that it was a way of honoring or admiring men and not necessarily a romantic gesture; this type of chocolate gift is known as *giri-choko* (obligation chocolate). These are given to bosses, male colleagues, or any non-romantic male that the woman knows, possibly even fathers or sons. Soon after came the *honmei-choko* ("favorite" chocolate), given to men to express or confess (*kokuhaku*) a romantic interest in a favorite one. This kind of chocolate is equivalent to a western Valentine's Day card, but here in Japan, is only given by a woman, with true feeling, to a husband, boyfriend, or potential soulmate. To show real affection, these chocolates or cookies are often handmade rather than bought in a store.

Currently, there are some other types of chocolates for Valentine's Day that have become popular. One is *tomo-choko* (friend chocolates), given to or shared among friends, usually but not always female friends; it is generally homemade or expensive, branded stuff. Another is called *jibun-choko* (self chocolates), this kind you make or buy just for yourself, to be eaten alone! Finally, there is *gyaku-choko* (reverse chocolates), which are chocolates given to females by males on Valentine's Day, just like in western countries.

Of course, the follow-up to Valentine's Day is a uniquely Japanese custom known as *howaito dē* (White Day), always celebrated one month after Valentine's Day, on March 14. This was created in 1978, becoming popular in the early 1980s; it was likely another marketing strategy that took advantage of the Japanese cultural/social norm of *okaeshi* (return giving), where it is customary to give a gift in return for one received. One minor form of this is a custom called *sambai gaeshi* (triple giveback), meaning the man receiving chocolates is obligated to give the woman a return gift of three times the value of his gift. These gifts may be chocolates, cookies, flowers, jewelry, designer goods, and so on, limited only by the man's feelings, imagination, or budget.

So, now that you know something of the Japanese customs of February and March, whether you are male or female, enjoy these traditions by getting into expressing yourself with the gifts of sweets and sweetness of heart.

Traditional Industry Day

A chance to get familiar with Kyoto's artistic handicrafts

Since many types of traditional crafts, such as woven textiles, dyed fabrics, lacquerware, and ceramic ware are produced in Kyoto, it is possible to say that this is the center of traditional industries in Japan. The reason is that Kyoto was the capital of Japan for over 1,000 years, beginning in 794 A.D. Many different Emperors, many aristocrats, and many powerful *samurai* lived here in Kyoto, and a lot of beautiful *kimono* and top class quality household items were produced for them within the city. Since there were countless shrines and temples in Kyoto, production of: garments for Shintō priests and Buddhist monks, implements for their rituals, and religious altars and furnishings were needed. Additionally, traditional cultures, such as *chadō* or *sadō* (tea ceremony), *kadō* (flower arrangement), and *kōdō* (incense ceremony) were developed in Kyoto, and the specialized items used in those ceremonial practices, like tea bowls, were required.

To produce those high quality items, the techniques used in the traditional industries in Kyoto were thoroughly developed. The designs were carefully refined, and since that time have fully supported people's traditional lifestyles, traditional cultural expression, and their related rituals and ceremonies.

Currently, there are 74 kinds of traditional crafts in the city of Kyoto, as designated by the national government, Kyoto Prefecture, and Kyoto City. Some examples are: *Nishijin-ori* (specialized silk textiles), *Kyō-yūzen* (dyed silk fabrics), *Kyō-butsudan* (Buddhist altars), *Kyō-butsugu* (Buddhist altar fittings), *Kyō-shikki* (lacquerware), *Kyō-sashimono* (wood work), *Kyō-yaki/Kiyomizu-yaki* (ceramic ware), *Kyō-sensu* (folding fans), and *Kyō-ningyō* (costumed dolls).

The city government of Kyoto specifically selected *Shunbun no hi* (Spring Equinox Day), a national holiday in March, as "Traditional Industry Day", to expand people's appreciation of those superb craft pieces. Around that day various special events and exhibitions are scheduled at a number of places in the city. The highlight will be grand, lively events held at the *Miyakomesse* Exhibition Hall in Sakyo-ku Ward; many crafts enthusiasts, craftspeople, and others will be there.

In addition, as a benefit of Traditional Industry Day, if you are wearing a *kimono* on certain days, you can get free entry to various cultural facilities, including Nijō-jō Castle. Free tickets are required, so please look for the "Traditional Industry Day 2017" brochure at various city or ward offices and museums, or simply check the website shown below.

You should not miss this great opportunity to enjoy Kyoto's proud tradition of beautifully handcrafted works. You will definitely be fascinated by the elegant and sophisticated traditional designs and their remarkably elaborate craftsmanship.

"Traditional Industry Day" Event at Miyakomesse

When: March 18, 19, 20, 2017

Where: Kyoto-shi Kangyō-kan "Miyakomesse"
9-1 Okazaki-Seishōji-cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto-shi

Content: Exhibitions of Kyoto's traditional crafts by older, skilled craftspeople and young craftspeople, craft demonstrations, a crafts market, workshops, and traditional *maiko* stage performances.

Entry: Free of charge

Traditional Industry Day official website: <http://densannohi.com/>



Exhibition at Miyakomesse

Photo: Kyoto City



Kyō-yuzen dyeing process

Photo: Kyoto City



Kimono

Photo: Kyoto City

Yudōfu is good for winter!

Nabe-ryōri, which means cooking a variety of ingredients in a *nabe* (pot) filled with hot water, is one of the specialties of winter. Among those, in this article, I will introduce *yudōfu*, *tōfu* cooked in a *nabe*. The origin of *yudōfu* is said to come from the *shōjin-ryōri* (vegetarian food) that the priests of Nanzen-ji Temple used to eat. At that time, it looked like a type of *oden* which is made today from baked *tōfu*, different from the current *shōjin-ryōri* dish. Since *tōfu* contains a high percentage of water, a lot of good underground (well) water is needed to make it, which is one reason why many *tōfu* dishes are offered in Kyōto. Even now, there are many *yudōfu* shops lined up in the areas near Nanzen-ji Temple and Tenryū-ji Temple. The recipe for *yudōfu* is: put water, kelp, and *tōfu* in a *nabe*, put it on a stove, heat to boiling, and continue heating for five to ten minutes. After checking to see that the *tōfu* is fully cooked, take it out of the *nabe* and eat it with soup and *yakumi**. Recently, stores are selling soups to be eaten with *yudōfu* at home. However, with respect to workmanship, the cooks in the shops prepare it with skill and know-how, taking much time and effort.

Since *tōfu* is a light food, it has drawn much interest from people overseas, especially in Europe and America, and a lot of foreigners visit Kyōto to taste it. Since it can be made using simple ingredients sold at supermarkets, let's cook some, eat it, and warm ourselves up with it!

**Yakumi* is a spice garnish sprinkled on top of *tōfu*; it is typically made from: dried bonito shavings, toasted and seasoned seaweed, grated ginger, and chopped spring onion.



Yudōfu
(Photo: Yachiyo)



Dengaku - a type of baked *tōfu* dish
(Photo: Yachiyo)

MARUYAMA Toru, translated by FURUTA Tomiyoshi

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3rd Global Session

- Creation of regional communities for residents with multicultural backgrounds -

“One's place”, a situation where a person can be himself or herself, and have relationships with others is so important. Recently, because of urbanization and changes to the family structure, not only in schools, at places of work, and within the family, the necessity of having “one's place in the local community” is being questioned. We take the viewpoint that “one's place in the local community” is more important for foreign residents who are easily isolated even within their local community, and for people who have roots in foreign countries. This event will look at that from various perspectives: for men, women, the elderly, youths/ children, and people with disabilities. We will discuss the “development of multicultural local communities” for the future.

Organizer: Kyoto Multiculture Support Network / Kyoto City International Foundation

Date and Time: Feb. 26, 2017 (Sun), 1:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Venue: kokoka Kyoto International Community House, Special Conference Room

Participants: anyone (50 person limit, advance reservation required)

Participation Fee: free

Content: lecture presentation and breakout meetings (Japanese language only)

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holding a brush is different than holding a camera. Between heart and paper, there is hand, brush, and ink. Terrifying! I wanted more. In school I continued with *shūji* classes while I searched for a *shodō* teacher. Throughout life, I had always ‘just worked’ in a sensible way. I was now surprised by my own search for an artistic alternative. Can the heart of an ordinary worker become artistic? I don’t know. But I picked up a brush and will find out for myself.

Chifumi-sensei is now guiding me and the other students as we produce our works for the New Year Exhibition. Please come along.

My large *shodō* work is 清風動脩竹, read as *sēfū shūchiku wo ugokasu*, meaning ‘the fresh wind stirs the tall bamboo’. It feels refreshing, and the flutter of bamboo leaves reminds me of the many friends and experiences that Kyōto’s spiritually refreshing breeze have brought to me.

My small *shodō* work, on a *shikishi* (fancy square cardboard) is あしたがある, read as *ashita ga aru* (there is a tomorrow). It’s a joke on my lazy habits, and a reminder of a popular singer from the 1960s, Sakamoto Kyu. For a while he was popular in Australia. He seemed like a great guy. I’d love to see his movies too one day. The song keeps us living for today. If we lose a chance because we are scared, there really is tomorrow. Today is better of course. But if there’s no tomorrow, today’s problems are meaningless anyway.

Living in Kyōto, I often feel like the luckiest person alive. My friends here and in Australia are very supportive. My home address is on the well-known Tōkaidō Road. I have the chance to explore the country and to self-reflect through my brush.

For Japanese readers who have been to Australia, did you feel like this when you first dived into a wave at the beach? There is an Australian poem called “The Swimmer” by A. L. Gordon; maybe through *shodō* I can explore some of its ideas one day.

Gambarimasu!

YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/ZdTodBP7OcE>



Paul's *shikishi shodō*:
"ashita ga aru"

kokoka Kyoto International Community House Library

February - March 2017

Library Letter

 kokoka recommends this book

“Planetarium Guide”

Supervisor:

Japan Planetarium Association

Publisher:

Kouseisha Kouseikaku, 2015



Hey everyone, did you know it is said that, “Japan is an advanced country for planetariums”? After the United States, Japan has the second-highest number of planetariums.

In this book, the staff members of the planetariums all across Japan, in their own words, introduce the attractions and appeal of their planetariums.

In this cold winter season, why not try to get some “romantic” appreciation for a nearby planetarium?

Winter is best for hot-pot dishes! “Hot-pot Dishes of the World - Not the usual delicious recipes, 29 special selections” (Author: HATTORI Naomi, Publisher: Joho Center Publishing, 2009), introduces recipes of hot-pot dishes from 29 places around the world.

Additionally, the book not only focuses on hot-pot cooking, but also on the “hot-pot” itself, in the “Hot-pot Collection” sub-chapter, and also introduces seasonings from around the world.

This is the kind of book you can warm up with just by looking through it.

The following items are also available

Books for foreigners to help their daily life in Japanese, study Japanese, learn about Japanese law, visas, Japanese culture and sightseeing in Kyoto.

Books for Japanese to learn about foreign countries, overseas travel, extended stays, studying abroad, working holidays and volunteering.

Newspapers and magazines from all around the world.

Books are not available for check-out

[Hours] 9:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Closed on Mondays & last day of every month

[Tel.] 075-752-1187 [Fax.] 075-752-3510

[URL] <http://www.kcif.or.jp/en>

Kyōto Cherry Blossom News



Photo 1: *shidare zakura* tree



Photo 2: *someiyoshino* tree



Photo 3: *yamazakura* tree



Photo 4: *yaezakura* tree

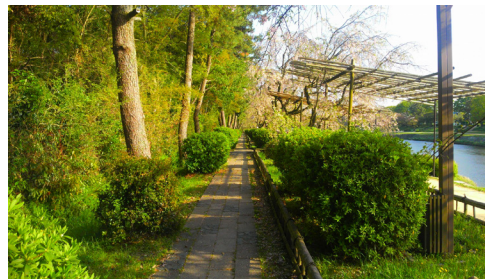


Photo 5: late-blooming *shidare zakura* tree

Taking the *someiyoshino* (*yoshino* cherry) as an example, blooming starts here in Kyoto around the end of March, and is full in early April; the blossoms may last only a week. Although this is true for the *someiyoshino* cherry tree, if you look at some of the other varieties of cherry tree, you can enjoy their blooms for as long as a month. You can see them not only at the famous sight seeing spots, but also at many, more convenient places in Kyoto. Please look at the photos, taken when they were in full bloom in 2016. The names of the cherry trees and their locations are listed below.

Photo 1: March 25, *shidare zakura* (drooping cherry), in the northwest corner of the *Gosho* (Imperial Palace)

Photo 2: April 5, *someiyoshino* (*yoshino* cherry), north of the Demachi-bashi Bridge over the Kamogawa River

Photo 3: April 12, *yamazakura* (mountain cherry), at the top of Mount Daimonji

Photo 4: April 14, *yaezakura* (double-flowered cherry), in front of the Kenrei-mon Gate at the *Gosho*

Photo 5: April 15, *shidare zakura* (late-blooming drooping cherry), west of the Kyoto Botanical Gardens

The start date of the blooms can come sooner or later, depending on the weather, but it only varies by several days. Why not enjoy the blooming of cherry blossoms for a whole month?

FURUTA Tomiyoshi

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