

kokoka Life In Kyoto

Life & Culture Information Newsletter

Series: **My Favorite Kyoto**

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My Flower Arrangement Life in Kyoto

Li Xuan (China)

There are countless forms of traditional art in Kyoto such as *sado* (tea ceremony) and *kado* (flower arrangement). As someone who aspires to be involved in traditional culture, I chose flower arrangement, because I was always interested in plants when I was growing up.

Speaking about flower arrangement, in some cases, people just

bluntly cut the plants, and freely bend them as their imagination flows. These plants can regenerate despite being cut, and cannot be broken easily, despite being bent. This vigorous power of life may be one of the reasons why people are strongly attracted to flower arrangement. At the same time, cutting at precisely the right length, and making the most of the plants' original features are evidence of mastery of the art.



Hiougi, Seika by Li Xuan



Li Xuan

Of course, the tea ceremony is also an important part of culture, but does not have any intimate connections with events throughout the year compared to flower arrangement, because flowers are certainly seasonal by nature. There are a lot of festivals in Kyoto, and every festival seems to have its own chosen flowers. For example, the *hiougi* (leopard flower) is an inseparable part of the Gion Matsuri Festival. It is truly enjoyable to learn about these kinds of facts—not to mention the joy of the actual practice of flower arrangement with my own hands. Building up through more than two years of training in flower arrangement, I am glad that I not only learned about the seasonality of plants, but also gained a thorough understanding of the events in Kyoto.

It is often said that opening the hearts of the natives of Kyoto takes a lot of time. It is not easy for international students to make friends with Kyoto people, and it goes without saying that the same is true for befriending Japanese people who are somewhat shy. Thanks to my training in flower arrangement, I got to know a lot of people and made many friends. At the flower arrangement practice site, the only people there are those who love flowers; it is similar to a *doukoukai* (a group of like-minded people). Thanks to this, people can forget about the strictness and stiffness in everyday life, and wholeheartedly focus on flowers.

In this kind of atmosphere, people naturally become closer to each other. This is why my teacher came up with the word *hoyukai*, which means “the people who meet for flower arrangement are the sweetest friends.” I want to cherish the flowers and the human connections that grew from these flowers.



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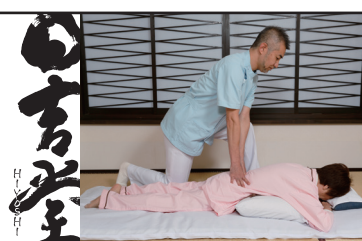
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Business hours 13:00~3:00 (L.O. 1:30)
Reception operates after 12:00

① Short course	60min	¥5,000
② Recommended course	90min	¥7,500
③ Long course	2hours	¥10,000
④ Very long course	3hours	¥15,000

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World of Bonsai (Part 2)

Continuing from the last issue, the interview with Mr. Masumi Tomohiro, owner of *Koju-en*, follows with additional questions. This time our questions focus on the wonders of *bonsai* itself.

Do foreigners enjoy *bonsai* differently than their Japanese counterparts?

Foreigners focus mainly on building a community through *bonsai*, but the Japanese treat it as a personal hobby. Many foreigners feel enjoyment through sharing each other's work.

How deeply connected are Kyoto and *bonsai*?

Bonsai and Kyoto are not directly related, but because both have a long history, they have a deep connection. *Bonkei* (miniature landscape) came from China, with multiple trees in one container, and that then changed to have one tree in one container, creating *bonsai*, which spread across Japan. The nobles first started the hobby, and broadened it to the general public.



Bonsai at Koju-en

What is the best way to start *bonsai* for beginners?

I often get asked this question, but there is no such *bonsai* that is beginner-friendly. After finding one that you like, you will want to take good care of it. Of course, you will also have to consider your budget.

When is the best season to look at *bonsai*?

The best season to look at them differs from the traditional point of

view and the general public's point of view. Essentially, the best season is winter from the traditional viewpoint. Since there are no leaves, you can see all the branches clearly. After a year of hard work making the branches look nicer, you will get to see the results in the winter. Then, you will repeat this process year after year, slowly refining your work. And, since *bonsai* are alive, there is no true finish. Continually changing is the world of *bonsai*; to do the best you can, right now, is part of the beauty of it.

The general public sees various *bonsai*, and feels the seasons expressed through them, similar to the spring flower viewing or the changing colors of autumn leaves. However, *bonsai* is not just about enjoying colors.

What was your reason for getting into *bonsai*?

My father was the owner of *Koju-en*. During that time, a foreigner came to visit, and they were passionately interested in *bonsai*, then I started thinking that I wanted to pass that feeling onto others.

The concept of *bonsai* has been changing, and I want to spread it to even more people. At the same time, I want to tell the Japanese people how popular *bonsai* is internationally. The amount of information available overseas is still insufficient, so what they are able to do is somewhat limited. Currently, foreigners are trying to imitate the traditional ways, and, once they achieve that, I believe they will start adding their own country's colors into *bonsai*.

People such as international students have a limited time to stay in Japan; what happens to the *bonsai* after they leave?

Since *bonsai* are living plants, they cannot easily be taken overseas. However, there are many ways to pass them on to others. You could either give it to someone or bring it back to the shop where you bought it. To sell a *bonsai* is a bit difficult, but if it has some value, there is a possibility. The reason for that is because *bonsai* are considered to be assets. Over long period of time, these works of art become prized possessions in the world of *bonsai*. As they get passed down, and change owners, each work of art creates its own history.

Is there anything else you want to share?

At our store we offer a monthly class on taking care of *bonsai*, and since we are also able to communicate in English, we welcome foreigners at any time. We also have a Facebook page, so please take a look at it. If you are interested in *bonsai*, please feel free to come to our store; it all starts with the first visit.

Website: <http://www.kyoto.zaq.jp/kojuen/0index.html>

Facebook Page: Search: Koju-en

Yoshinori TAKEDA

Internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese-Americans who lived in the western part of America were forced to relocate to primitive living camps. They had no choice but to sell their assets such as houses and businesses very cheaply, pack up, and move to one of the ten internment facilities to live out the rest of the war. In 1988, US President Reagan signed the “Civil Liberties Act of 1988” and gave a speech to an audience of those affected by discrimination. He said,

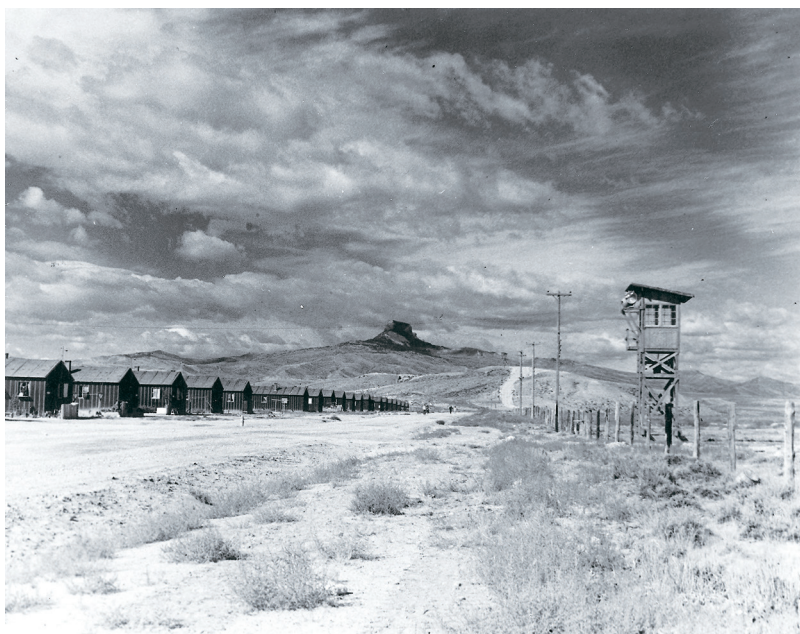
“...no payment can make up for those lost years...For here we admit a wrong; here we reaffirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law.”

On January 31 at kokoka (KICH), we had an opportunity to listen to a lecture titled “Fear and Prejudice: A Look at Japanese Internment during World War II” by Ms. Alice J. Wisler*. By using pictures she had collected from her research and interviews with internees she emphasized how much the Japanese-Americans suffered due to unreasonable prejudice and discrimination. From listening to the lecture, the most impressive part was her explanation that “fear” was one of the reasons for that prejudice. We would like to see fewer people suffer from discrimination by removing the fear from other people, since fear is the primary cause of all kinds of discrimination.

After her lecture, when we asked why she became interested in internment, she said that this was a problem that few people in America knew about because it was not widely taught in American schools, and American textbooks in the past did not have much, if any, information about the camps, so she felt that she had to tell this sad story.



Lecture by Alice Wisler at kokoka



*Heart Mountain Internment Camp in Wyoming
Barracks and a Watch Tower*

Her fictional tale, *Under the Silk Hibiscus*, is about a young boy's plight at Heart Mountain, a camp in Wyoming, and based on years of research.

* She was born and raised in the *Kansai* region (western Japan), and now lives in North Carolina in the USA. Her website is AliceWisler.com.

FURUTA Tomiyoshi, KANAYA Chinami

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Counseling Day for Foreign Residents

Do you have any questions or concerns regarding legal issues, visa problems, taxes, insurance, your pension, etc.? Are you worried about something? Professionals in those areas can discuss any of these with you. Interpreters will be available on request. Advanced reservations are required. We will protect your confidentiality.

When: Sunday, June 5, 13:00 – 17:00

Where: kokoka Kyoto International Community House, 3F, Conference Room and Counseling Room

Reservations: phone 075-752-3511

Flowery Spring, Flowery *Kagai* Performances



Gion Kobu - Miyako Odori

If you visit Kyoto in spring, other than enjoying the ancient capital decorated by the fully bloomed cherry blossoms, I highly recommend watching the spring time stage performance entirely cast by *geiko* and *maiko*. Usually inaccessible to the general public, during this time you can appreciate the professional *geiko* and *maiko*'s wholehearted performances.

Geiko and *maiko* are working in places called *kagai* (Flower Town), and there are currently 5 *kagai* in Kyoto: Gion-Kobu, Miyagawacho, Pontocho, Kamishichiken and Gion-Higashi. Teenage girls have to go through strict training as *maiko* for about 6 years. This includes Japanese traditional dance, musical instruments, and tea ceremony as well as the mannerism and etiquette to entertain



Ponto Cho Kabukai - Kamogawa Odori

guests. Every year from March to June, each *kagai* holds public stage performances, except for “Gion Odori” which is performed from November 1 to 10. These performances are splendid showcases for the *maiko* and *geiko* to have their efforts blossom. In addition, the collaborative performance by the five *kagai*, from June 25 to 26 this year, is a good opportunity to enjoy each *kagai*'s performance altogether.

Among all the performances, “Miyako Odori” from April 1 to 30 is the most internationally renowned. In order to revitalize Kyoto after the capital was relocated to Tokyo due to the Meiji Reform, the governor of Kyoto prefecture proposed to hold an exposition. He also suggested a public performance of tea ceremony, dance and singing by the *geiko* and *maiko* of Gion as additional entertainment, and “Miyako Odori” was established in 1872 as a result. Therefore, not only does “Miyako Odori” inherit the traditional culture, but it also incorporates modern elements. For instance, the innovation of changing the background without closing the curtain was very modern at that time, and it developed into a distinctive feature of “Miyako Odori”. Following “Miyako Odori”, “Kamogawa Odori” starts from May 1 to 24. The number of times it has being held is the highest among the five *kagai*.

In general, the performances consist of *buyogeki* (dance drama), *buyo* (dance), and finale, but they differ from each other in the composition and order. For example, the “Miyako Odori” takes the form named *so-oro-di*, which introduces the four seasons of famous scenic spots by *nagauta*, *jiuta* and *joruri* * with *betsu-odori* (a special *buyogeki*) as interludes. On the contrary, the “Kamogawa Odori” has only two parts, *buyogeki* and *buyo*. The “Kitano Odori” of Kamishichiken is famous for its *buyogeki* with many lines and theatric stories, which gave its other name “Kitano Kabuki”. Moreover, “Kyo Odori” of Miyagawacho from April 2 to 17 this year, is well-known for its stories originating from Kyoto and beautiful *buyo* choreographed based on Japanese old tales.



Gion Higashi - Gion Odori

The finale signals the end of the performance when the *maiko* and *geiko* in colorful kimono dance to the serenade of each *kagai*. Undoubtedly, you will be fascinated by the Japanese aesthetics of the spectacular stage.

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You can check the ticket purchasing information on each *kagai*'s homepage. The student ticket and special class ticket with green tea are also available. The latter one enables you to enjoy the *ryureishiki* tea ceremony** performed by *geiko*.

The performances by *geiko* and *maiko* reflect numerous facets of Japanese traditional culture, such as the Nishijin-ori *obi*, Yuzen-zome *kimono*, various styles of Japanese *buyo* and tea ceremony, as well as the unique and reminiscent *kagai* architectures. How about appreciating the flowerly *kagai buyo* of Kyoto during the flowerly spring time?



* *nagauta*, *jiuta* and *joruri*: Types of shamisen music, the first two are characterized by songs and Joruri is characterized by stories.

Kamishichiken Kabukai - Ryurei shiki Ocha seki

** Ryureishiki: Tea ceremony conducted sitting on chairs.



Miyagawacho Kabukai - Kyo Odori

Reference:

James R. Brandon, Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Darkness and Desire, 1804-1864*, Univ of Hawaii Pr, 2002/07

Earl Roy Miner, Hiroko Odagiri, Robert E. Morrell, *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature*, Princeton Univ Pr; Reprint, 1988/9/1

CHEN Muwei

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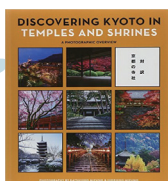
April • May 2016

Library Letter

kokoka recommends this book

“DISCOVERING KYOTO IN TEMPLES AND SHRINES”

Text : MIZUNO Katsuhiko et.
Publisher: IBC Publishing, 2014



April is the season when many people start a new life in Kyoto. During the pleasant spring time, let's try visiting the temples and shrines in Kyoto.

This book introduces 48 temples and shrines in total. How about starting with the temples and shrines in your neighborhood? After the visit, we think you will definitely be healed and revitalized.

We wish you good luck with your new life!

Are you interested in Japanese fine arts? The book Kyoto National Museum Collection (HASHIMOTO Mari, 2014, SHUEISHA Inc.) highlights 115 pieces of work exhibited in HEISEI CHISHINKAN of the museum. It may also be fun to compare them with the art pieces from your own country.

After you read this book, please try to visit the Kyoto National Museum in person.

It is not so far from kokoka either.

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 Japaneses 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.

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The Desire to Collect *Omake*

Omake is a free gift attached to drinks or packages of snacks at a supermarket or convenience store. *Omake* can be something related to the products brand such as stickers, cell phone straps, and clips. Other than that, it could be something very cute that you want to collect them, like cups, small towels, or toy cars.

Among the *omake*, there are ones related to events of the season: during examination season there are *omake* with the words *goukaku-kigan*, prayer for a successful examination; throughout Valentine's Day there are heart-shaped *omake*. We want to get the small *omake*, so we impulsively buy the product. In general, *omake* are sold as part of a series, and we want to collect the entire set. During the time of picking tea, a few years ago, I collected the entire set of sticky notes *omake* attached to the tea PET bottles.

In addition, there are *omake* inside snacks boxes or bags that you can not see without opening the box. You can tell what you might get from the list of possible *omake* in the series, on the corner of the package.

Although *omake* comes in various types, they share two things in common: one is giving the feeling of overwhelming excitement and the other, making people want to continuously buy the products. Not only just the snacks, but even the packaging of the products themselves are very elaborate. Do you sometimes buy products based on their cover? Have you ever bought something you did not need, instead you just wanted the *omake*? How about in your country? Do they also do something similar?



Omake

YAMASHITA Motoyo

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On March 13 (Sunday) "Global Marriage Match Making" or "*kokokon*" was held. In total, 92 people, Japanese and foreigners, participated in activities, such as dancing and martial arts. After everyone relaxed, they all enjoyed conversation. In the first half, the group talk, everyone chose five people they were interested in, and in the second half, the free talk, they chose their "*honmei*" or most interested person. Everyone was very earnest. As a result, nine couples were born! For those who want to meet new people, why not participate next March?



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