

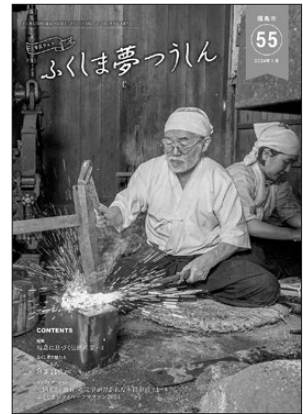
Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JANUARY 2024

Thank you for picking up this quarters' "Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City".

In this issue, we hope that you will learn more about, and be moved by the various charms that Fukushima City has to offer.

With a population of around 280,000 people, Fukushima is surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is a famous fruit production area: producing many varieties through the seasons, including cherries, peaches, Asian pears, grapes and apples.

We hope that through this edition, you'll come to appreciate even a little of what Fukushima City has to offer.



P. 2, 3

① Japanese Traditional Industries Thriving in Fukushima City

The Beauty and Depth of Tradition Residing in the Craftsmanship of the Makers

② Traditional industries, nurtured by history and culture and handed down from generation to generation, are our assets. Driven by both innovation and renewal, handicrafts born out of the wisdom, ingenuity, and persistent challenges of our predecessors and their successors add color to our daily lives and also serve as sources of spiritual support. In this issue, we will introduce some silk products and swords that embody the passion of their makers from among the traditional Japanese industries that still thrive in Fukushima City.

③ Mulberries, Silkworm Seeding, Sericulture, Silk Spinning, Silk Weaving — Passing on the Wisdom of Our Ancestors to the Next Generation through Handicrafts

④ Head of dyeing and weaving workshop Oriori

Misako Suzuki

⑤ The Great East Japan Earthquake Made Me Focus on Silk and Sericulture in Fukushima.

I was 42 years old when I set up my workshop Oriori in Fukushima City, where I had been dyeing and weaving textiles using natural materials such as silk and wool. And I was following my late husband's advice to "Keep doing what you have been doing." I think that's how it was.

I began to focus on Fukushima's silks because I felt a sense of crisis that perhaps these natural products might disappear. I thought about what I could do about this, and I ended up making silk fabric. The history of silk is the history of sericulture. In Fukushima, it can be traced back to the Edo period. I have been excited by this history many times. The Shindatsu region (in the present-day northern part of Fukushima Prefecture) was one of the most prosperous silk producing areas in Japan, with a flourishing sericulture and weaving industry.

Silk fabrics are made from raw silk produced by silkworms. The Shindatsu region, through which the Abukuma River flows, is said to have ideal conditions for growing both silkworms and mulberry trees, the leaves of which are fed to silkworms. I heard that merchants from all over the country used to come to Shindatsu to buy high-quality silkworm "seeds" (silkworm eggs), which were of the highest quality due to substantial improvements in breeding. It seems that there are very few areas in Japan where the various processes, from silkworm seeding and sericulture to silk spinning, wadding, and weaving, are all gathered in one place.



I Also Became Involved in Silkworm Farming to Convey the Message "Only in Fukushima."

Fukushima is a place where many techniques that were handed down by our ancestors remain, but I noticed that the people involved in sericulture these days are mainly older people. I was worried that once the industry stopped operating, it would disappear. So, I started working on sericulture as well. I didn't like silkworms very much at first, but after three years of silkworm farming, I began to grow fond of them. Last year, I raised silkworms through the spring, summer, autumn, and into the late autumn. And thanks to the help of the surrounding people, I managed to get 50 mulberry saplings planted. I got my silkworm seeds from the Tomita Silkworm Seed Factory in Date City. Mr. Tomita runs what is currently the only privately-owned silkworm seed manufacturing business in Japan. Temperature and humidity control are very important during the hatching process. The breeding farm in Tamura City is the only one in the Tohoku region that raises silkworms from eggs to the third instar. There are so many things that are unique to Fukushima, and it would be a shame not to know about them.

P. 4, 5

① Making Silk More Accessible with Facial Cleansing Puffs and On-site Classes

In order to connect the culture and technology of sericulture and silk weaving in Fukushima, I began to think that something needed to be done to make it more accessible to people. One thing is product development. The silk lotion and silk soap that I had made and used myself were really good, so I thought if I commercialized them, people would understand their good qualities. I also thought of a tea made from dried silkworm droppings. In China, this tea has been drunk as a herbal medicine since ancient times. The Mawata Bijin 100% silk facial cleansing puff is also given as gift in return for hometown tax payments. I would be happy if everyone could use Fukushima's silk to make their skin shiny. Another thing I do is to give on-site training sessions and on-site classes. After a practical training session, I always try to talk about the culture of sericulture in Fukushima. I am also an instructor in general studies at elementary schools, and I have talked about Fukushima silk to about 1,500 students over the past four years. In general studies, the program begins with the distribution of silkworms to be raised. In a face-to-face class, we put the cocoons into hot water and turn them into threads using stranding machines that are about 100 years old, to teach the students that they are drawing on the lives of the silkworms. At this point, some of the children cry, saying "the silkworms are going to die." Afterwards, I show them stoles and kimonos and tell them, "This is what happened to the lives of the silkworms." I intend to continue to do what I can do steadily and diligently, and I hope that others like me will grow up wanting to do what I do.



② The Source of the Great Power of the Sword Lies in its Life Force.

Conveying the Essence of the Sword through the Reproduction of Old Swords

③ Swordsmith

Masahira Fujiyasu

④ Occupying the Pinnacle of Japanese Sword-making, Ancient Swords Represent the Aesthetic Sense and Spirituality of the Japanese People

It all began when I read a book written by my master entitled Tocho Ichidai (A Master Swordmaker's Life), and I wanted to see how he made swords. I became his apprentice at the age of 19 and I became independent at the age of 29. I opened a swordsmith shop in Tatsugoyama in Fukushima City, through a connection made by the sister of one of my classmates. The location is on high ground and the humidity is low, and there is bedrock beneath the ground surface. I thought it was a good place, so I decided to open a swordsmith's forge there.

Most of the 110 or so swords that are designated as National Treasures in Japan today are ancient swords made from the late Heian period through the Kamakura and early Nanbokucho periods. Not a single one was made after that time. In the Edo period (1603-1867), mass warfare was eliminated, and swords began to be made based on new values. In short, what is a sword? The Japanese are the only people in history who have polished their weapons so beautifully. If we trace the origins of the sword, we discover the idea that it is not just a weapon, but that by carrying it on their person or placing it in their home, people can be protected by the great power it possesses. It is the sword that protects our children, our homes, and our country. The source of the sword's great power is its life force. We have the idea that it cannot fulfill that role unless it is polished without a single blemish, and the idea that a god resides in it. This is the reason why I continue to follow my master's thoughts and try to reproduce ancient swords, which I consider to be at the pinnacle of Japanese sword-making.

⑤ **Women Who Express Themselves Saying "I Welcome this Sword" Realize That a New Era Has Arrived.**

Reproducing an ancient sword for which there is no documentation is not something that just anyone can do. I would like to think that the ancient sword chose me. In my research over the past half century, the characteristics common to ancient swords have finally begun to appear here and there in the modern swords I make. This is a sign of evolution. This year as well, I plan to start tatarai iron making. This time, I plan to use charcoal from sawtooth oak. I am also expecting to expand my production range again. Thankfully, in recent years, some of the things I have been saying about the essence of the sword have finally been getting through to the public, and more and more people have come to share my ideas and want to own one of my swords. Coinciding with the ongoing sword boom, some women have entered this world through the video game Touken Ranbu (Wild Dance of Swords). When they receive the sword that they asked for, they say "I welcome this sword" and they dote on it as if it were their own child. This makes me feel that the world surrounding swords is finally returning to its original state. The swordsmith's forge has also entered a new era. Two of my three apprentices are now women, and since the autumn of 2019, the administrative office, which is in charge of scheduling, planning, and sales, has also been under the control of a woman named Kaori Iwatsuki. She provides me with lots of suggestions about how to convey my passionate thoughts and feelings. One of them is the sale of wooden models of swords made to actual size from Japanese bigleaf magnolia or Japanese cypress, so that young people who cannot afford to own a real sword because they are too expensive can feel a little more familiar with them. This is also the case with the gift items sent to taxpayers in return for hometown tax payments. These include amulet swords that protect their owners, paper knives (small swords), and tsugas (sword bridges) with gold embedded into the wrought iron using a technique called nunome zogan (inlaying) to create patterns. Last summer, we also held a monitoring tour of the forge.

My dream for the future is to write a technical book. A sword is a bundle of technology, and I would like to compile this information for the next generation.

P. 6, 7

① Tsuchiyu Onsen, which is covered in pure white snow in the wintertime, is nationally famous as one of the three main birthplaces of Japanese kokeshi dolls, the other two being Togatta and Naruko. Kokeshi dolls were originally created in the late Edo period (1603-1868) as a seasonal handicraft that could provide work during the harsh winter months. At Tsuchiyu Onsen, these dolls have been handed down from generation to generation and are filled with the history of the area and the spirit of their makers. Kunitoshi Abe started out on his path of making kokeshi dolls at the age of 19 with the aim of keeping alive the 200-year-old tradition. He studied woodworking under Yukinori Jinnohara in place of his father, who was busy running a souvenir shop. He learned the Abe family's traditional art of byosai (coloring) from his grandmother and father. In this article, we introduce Mr. Abe, who has continued to pursue both the traditional style and his own original style since that time.

② Kokeshi doll craftsman, head of the Tsuchiyu Traditional Kokeshi Doll Craftsmen's Association, maker and seller of Tsuchiyu traditional kokeshi dolls (Jisuke type), sixth-generation descendent of the Matsuya family under the Tsuchiyu lineage Kunitoshi Abe

③ Traditional kokeshi dolls steeped in history, climate, and the spirit of their makers I make the idols of Tsuchiyu, which are profound and endearing.



④ **Every Step Is Handmade, and the Traditional Colors and Forms Tell a Story**

Mr. Abe has been a kokeshi doll craftsman for more than 30 years. "When my grandfather Shouei passed away, and it seemed as if the tradition would disappear with him, I began thinking about how I might preserve it. My father was busy with running his store at the time, so I took lessons in woodworking from Yukinori Jinnohara." To paint the dolls in their traditional colors and facial styles, he studied under his grandmother Shina and his father Toshimichi to learn about the traditional colors and faces that have been handed down in the Abe family, also taught himself by examining some remaining Jisuke-type dolls. He appears to have kept looking at the different facial expressions captured by each of these dolls. "Traditional kokeshi dolls are basically made by one person," Abe told us. His daily work varies from time to time, with some days just making the wooden bases and other days just drawing faces. Since every process is done by hand, it is difficult to make a large number of dolls, and it is only natural that each one is different from the others," he went on. And since no two are exactly the same, discovering your favorite one is another attraction of kokeshi dolls.

The "Smiley Face" that Brings a Smile to Your Face

When putting a rokuro pattern on a doll's body, Mr. Abe applies the red lines first. After that, he adds another color in between, depending on his feeling at the time. He continues to pursue traditional fine brush strokes. On the other hand, he says that he freely creates his own original patterns while drawing heavily on tradition. He created Hohoemi Gaeshi (Smile-Back) kokeshi dolls 15 years ago, at a time when traditional kokeshi dolls were still very much the mainstream, because he wanted to "somehow arouse public interest in kokeshi dolls." First of all, I wanted to make the head moveable. But that would make the body unstable, so I also made the torso triangular. I kept the head and hair decoration the same as before, but made the face smile. When I exhibited this kokeshi at the 2005 exhibition of the Mirokukai (an association of kokeshi artisans from throughout the Tohoku region), it was well received and won first place in a popularity contest for new kokeshi dolls. Since then, these smiling dolls have won the hearts of legions of customers, and orders for them continue to come in.

Kokeshi Dolls that Can Be Enjoyed by a Wider Audience Against a Background of Tradition

When asked about his future goals, Abe said, "Since I started as a traditional kokeshi doll craftsman, I would like to use the tradition as a foundation for creating kokeshi dolls that can be enjoyed by a wider range of people." He says that he sometimes paints the body and face in different colors than usual, creating a completely new impression. "But it would be pointless if the dolls were to lose their traditional characteristics and no longer be recognizable as kokeshis," he says with a wry smile.

Another goal is to train the next generation. There are currently five kokeshi craftsmen in Tsuchiyu. They are all currently talking about wanting to train their successors. After the snow melts and the season of fresh green foliage arrives, the Tsuchiyu Kokeshi Festival is held every year in early June in Tsuchiyu Onsen. Why not visit Tsuchiyu Onsen and experience at first hand the charm of Kunitoshi Abe's Hohoemi Gaegashi dolls as well as the traditional kokeshi dolls of the Tsuchiyu lineage?

P. 8

① **A First in Japan! A Wooden Tablet Bearing the Word Chinpei Was Unearthed in Fukushima!**

② At the Nishikubo Ruins in Fukushima City, a mokkan*1 bearing the word 鎮兵 (Chinpei)*2 was unearthed for the first time in Japan. This is also the first time that a mokkan has been excavated in the city.

*1. A wooden tablet bearing an inscription

*2. Pacification soldiers dispatched to defend Mutsu Province and Dewa Province, as described in the Shoku Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan)

This mokkan contained a letter from Dewa Province to the governor of Shimotsuke Province, who was in the vicinity of the Nishikubo site, informing him that the people of the area around the site were not at fault for the deaths of the soldiers. The circumstances are assumed to have been as follows.

- (1) The governor of Shimotsuke Province and a troop of soldiers departed Shimotsuke Province for Dewa Province.
 - (2) Some soldiers died in the vicinity of the Nishikubo site.
 - (3) The governor of Shimotsuke Province sent a letter to the Dewa Province informing them of the death of the soldiers.
 - (4) A reply letter was received from Dewa Province (the mokkan excavated this time).
- The national and county governments had certain responsibilities in dealing with the medical treatment or the death of guards and defenders. This wooden letter indicates that the chinpei were treated in the same manner as guards and defenders.

③ **To Be Held on May 19!**

On Your Marks, Run to the Future, Fukushima!
Fukushima City Half Marathon 2024 — We're Looking for Participants Now!

④ Fukushima City's new half marathon event will be held again this year! When the event was held last year for the first time ever, 4,418 runners ran through the streets of the city. In addition to runners, we are also seeking to recruit volunteers and runner support teams! Please join us and take part!

⑤ Application deadline: Thursday, February 29

