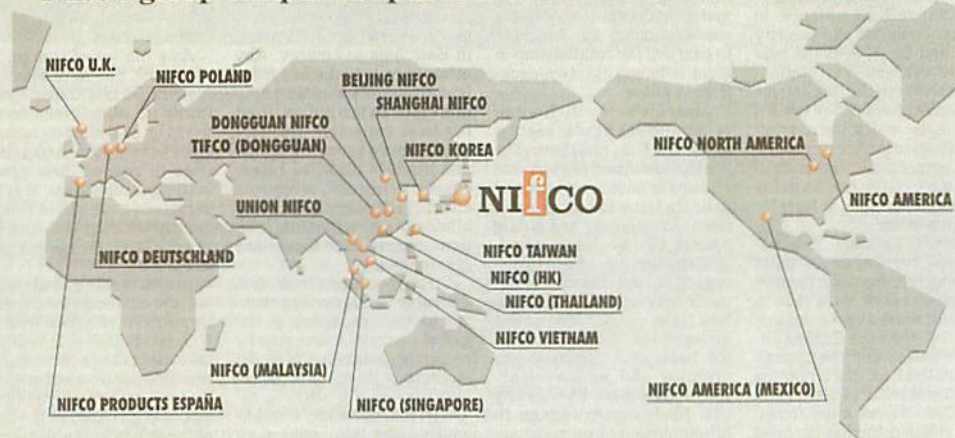


The Japan Times

new year special

business.

Nifco's group companies span industrial and national boundaries.



Nifco Inc.

Head Office: 184-1 Maioka-cho, Totsuka-ku, Yokohama, 244-8522 Japan
 Tel: (045)825-7900, Fax: (045)824-4781
 Tokyo Headquarters: 4-5-4 Shibaura, Minato-ku, Tokyo, 108-8522 Japan
 Tel: (03)5476-4850, Fax: (03)5476-4859

For more details...
**SEE OUR
 WEB SITE**

Official Sites: [Japanese] <http://www.nifco.co.jp/>
 [English] <http://www.nifco.com/>

The Nifco Group, domestic subsidiaries and affiliated companies:

JT Nifco Corp.
 Kyushu JT Nifco Corp.

The Japan Times, Ltd.
 Simmons Co., Ltd.
 NIFCO Advanced Technology Inc.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/>
<http://www.simmons.co.jp/>
<http://www.nifco-at.co.jp/>

designed to detect neutrinos.

'Goyotashi'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

fan of the Dulles bag and seems to be still using the one he bought in 1994, according to Noboru Wakabayashi, 66, chief of the product development division.

At a time when society is generally shunning top-class, traditional goods in favor of handier items, it is not easy for these crafts people and confectioners to continue with their often costly and time-consuming production methods.

Some maintain traditions and cherish those who have loved their goods while others reinvent themselves, and advance into new fields by taking advantage of the know-how and technologies they have accumulated in their long histories.

Kawabata Doki has passed its recipes from generation to generation and has hardly mechanized its production process because it knows that excessive automation will change the taste of its products.

The store is now run by Chikako Kawabata, the 55-year-old wife of the late 16th-generation master, with four part-time yet skilled confectioners, one of whom works with Ka-

wabata each day, meaning the daily workforce is only two.

"People may be stunned to see our shop is so small, but since our chimaki cannot be produced in a large volume, we will never get big," Kawabata said in the shop, where two people can barely sit, but added she believes that this uncompromising stance distinguishes the shop from all other Japanese sweet makers.

Like those at many other traditional businesses, the crafts people at Ginza Tanizawa are getting old. In most cases, their workshops have been inherited by members of their families, but the younger generations are increasingly shying away from taking over, according to Wakabayashi.

Ginza Tanizawa's sales have also recently been eaten away by the popularity of more casual nylon bags. But "we are a bag maker," Wakabayashi said. "We will not give in and will continue making superb, handmade bags." Hi-yoshiya has also seen lean times. When Kotaro Nishibori, 34, joined the business, run by his wife's family, a decade ago, the store only earned ¥1 million a year and the family was barely surviving on pen-

CLIO experiment at the Kamioka Mine in Gifu Prefecture. KYODO

sions. "It was about to close," he said.

But Nishibori, who was captivated by the charm of exquisite classical Japanese umbrellas, could not just let the business go and at a time when the Internet was not as widespread as today he quickly launched a Web site to attract potential customers.

In cooperation with an interior designer, Nishibori, who seems more a designer than a traditional craftsman, also worked on the development of covers for lighting that use the same materials — Japanese paper and bamboo — and structure as umbrellas.

Hi-yoshiya is now earning a solid reputation in the international arena of arts and design, and as a result its revenues are steadily expanding.

No matter how successful he becomes in the lighting business, however, Nishibori said, "Umbrellas will remain our core business."

Meanwhile, Kambayashi Sannyu, 53, continues to serve customers with top-class green tea at a reasonable price, hoping they will learn firsthand what real Uji green tea tastes like amid the spread of brands that contain non-Uji tea varieties. "People need to discover 'the real thing' for themselves," he said. "Otherwise, Japan's traditional in-

dustries will collapse. What we can and should do as an established store is to protect, maintain and spread traditions."

The Imperial Household Ministry, the predecessor of the Imperial Household Agency, effectively started the so-called "goyotashi" official Imperial warrant system in 1891, in an effort to enhance domestic industries amid the increase in imports of overseas goods.

Only stores and merchants that had demonstrated excellent quality and performance in their products and services were authorized to supply the ministry, which became an agency in 1949.

The warrants were not permanent and the holders were required to go through inspections after a certain period of time to renew their permits. Those that failed to meet the standards were stripped of their warrants. The agency terminated the system in 1954 against the backdrop of advanced democratization and growing calls for equal business opportunities. There were 83 warrant holders at that point.

The agency allows former warrant holders to tout themselves as goyotashi but warns against too extensive advertising using the term.

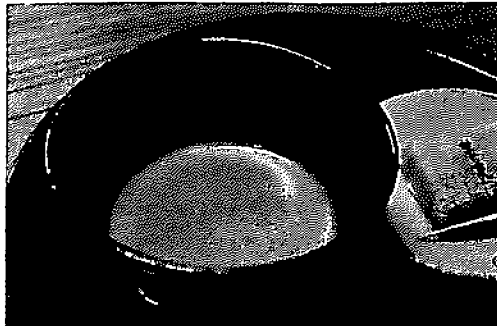
'Goyotashi': by appointment to the Imperial family

Mariko Yasumoto
KYODO

When the Kyoto Imperial Palace was in dire financial straits in the early 1500s following a civil war that lasted over a decade, one rice cake maker began delivering red bean-covered rice balls to the emperor every morning. This was the start of a tradition that continued for almost 350 years until the capital was relocated to Tokyo in 1869.

The rice cake maker, the first-generation Kawabata Doki, and his heirs won the trust of the Imperial court, and were commissioned to supply rice cake products for many Imperial rites and events throughout the year, including "osochi," or traditional Japanese New Year's dishes, and these were delivered to a special gate at the palace, which still bears the name Dokimon.

Stores that were or are authorized to supply goods or services to the Imperial family, like Kawabata Doki, are limited to those that have achieved certain standards in quality and performance, and spare no effort in pursuing even better products.

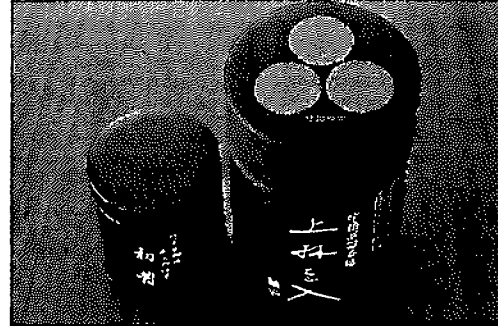


Bargain luxury: Mitsuboshi-en Kambayashi Sannyu serves top-grade tea at a reasonable price at its cafe behind the store in Uji, Kyoto Prefecture. KYODO

From 1891 to 1954, there was a strict Imperial warrant system commonly known as "goyotashi" and special permits were issued to such authorized stores. But before and after that period, crafts people and confectioners with distinguished products have enjoyed the privilege of supplying the Imperial court. The flagship product of Kawabata Doki is Doki "chimaki," or Imperial chimaki, a puddinglike cake made of arrowroot powder wrapped in five

bamboo leaves and bundled into a cone-shaped set of five. The cake, as clear as crystal, was created at the request of an emperor in the 1500s.

The family has inherited a host of picture scrolls showing its 500-year history. One of them shows that Doki chimaki has delighted not just members of the Imperial family with its delicate sweetness and smooth texture but also such notables as Akechi Mitsuhide, a famous 16th-century warrior.



Trademark: Mitsuboshi-en Kambayashi Sannyu's three red dots have become the symbol for tea fields on Japanese maps. KYODO

During Kyoto's Gion Festival, chimaki amulets, which are cone shaped like Doki chimaki but have no food inside, are always on sale, and they can also be seen hanging under the eaves of the entrances to houses in the city. But no exact explanation has been given as to why the shape of chimaki has been adapted into an amulet or how chimaki and the festival became related.

Kyoto is also home to many other goyotashi stores, such as Hiyoehya, which was established in the late Edo Period (1603-1867) and goes back five generations. It is now the only store in the prefecture dealing in traditional Japanese umbrellas and one of about 10 such stores nationwide.

One of its huge red umbrellas adorned the tea ceremony that Britain's Queen Elizabeth II attended in 1975 in a garden at the Katsura Imperial Villa during her visit to Kyoto. The store still occasionally receives an order for 20 or more Japanese umbrellas from the Kyoto Imperial Palace.

The second generation of the family moved to the present location in the city's Kamigyo Ward to make use of the spacious premises in Hokyoji Temple across the street for drying the oil-coated umbrellas.

Miyawaki Balsenan, a Japanese fan maker founded in Kyoto in 1823, supplied a small fan to the Imperial Household Agency for Empress Michiko, in mid-1970, when she was Crown Princess, to give to her

the occasion of the "Shichi-Gosan (7-5-3)" Festival to celebrate her growth.

In 1981, the two princesses visited the store and watched the fan-making process, Shozo Miyawaki, the 81-year-old adviser of the store, recalls. "I heard it was their first visit to a commoner's store." When the store refurbished its main shop in 1992 it asked 48 well-known painters from the Meiji Era (1868-1912) such as Tomioka Tessai each to paint a fan-shaped picture on the ceiling. The ceiling is deemed so precious that it is designated as one of Kyoto Prefecture's official cultural assets.

Also in Kyoto is Jusanya, a boxwood comb shop with a 130-year history. It is located on Shijo Street in the heart of the city, where various specialty stores create a major shopping destination for tourists.

The small shop, which can only accommodate four or five customers at once, supplied about 120 special combs to the Imperial Household Agency ahead of the Daijosal Shinto rite in November 1990 in line with the enthronement ceremony for Emperor Akihito. The combs are for a woman's hairstyle called "osuberakashi," which is created when women in the Imperial family and court ladies wear a special 12-layer ceremonial "junihitoe" kimono.

Mitsuboshi-en Kambayashi Sannyu, which supplied green tea leaves and powdered tea to the Imperial family in the Meiji Era, was Japan's first tea



Royal style: About 120 of these special combs were supplied to the Imperial Household Agency for female members of the Imperial family and court ladies to wear at the Daijosal Shinto rite. KYODO

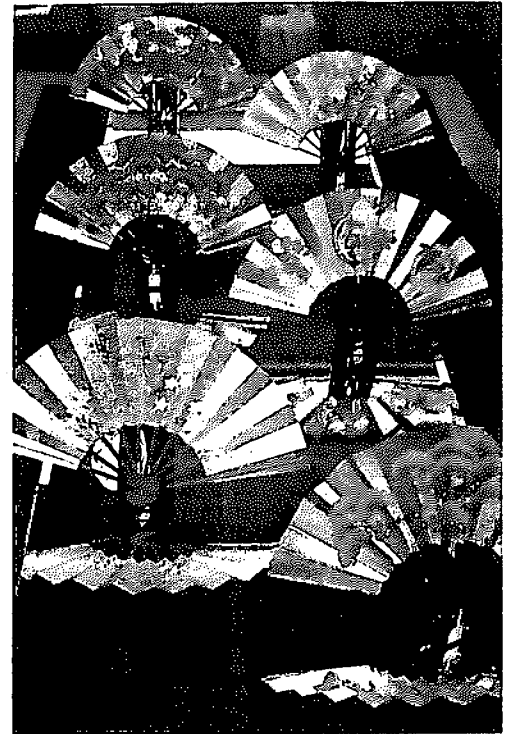
in the late 1500s in the city of Uji, Kyoto Prefecture, where one of Japan's most famous tea fields is located.

The first Kambayashi Sannyu became tea leaf master for the Tokugawa Shogunate during the Edo Period. Every time the store received orders, it organized a mission to carry a huge pot containing tea leaves over 500 km to Edo (Tokyo), a journey that took about two weeks.

According to the 16th-generation master Kambayashi Sannyu, the size of the Uji tea field has shrunk to about one-twentieth of what it was during the Meiji Era because of land development, and his store is probably the only one that continues offering 100 percent genuine Uji green tea.

You will find goyotashi stores not just in the ancient capital, but almost everywhere across Japan. In Tokyo, Ginza Tanizawa was the first shop in Japan to make and sell Western-style leather bags.

In 1953, the store supplied about 10 bags to Emperor Akihito, who was then Crown Prince, and about to make his first overseas trip to Europe and the United States, including attending the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Each was made to order to pack such special items as a silk hat or a



For all occasions: Miyawaki Balsenan makes various types of fans, including those for tea ceremony teachers and students, kabuki performers and "rakugo" storytellers. KYODO



Traditional methods: After being coated with oil, Miyoshiya's umbrellas are dried on the premises of Hokyoji Temple in Kyoto, just across the street from the shop. KYODO

The store also gained nationwide recognition with its so-called "Dulles bag," also known as a doctor's bag, named after John Foster Dulles who was carrying this type of bag during a visit to Japan in 1951 as a special envoy for negotiations on the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Dulles lat-

state. The bag, which hit the shelves under the slogan "Symbol of Peace Dulles Bag," ended up being a blockbuster, despite its ¥5,000 price tag at a time when the average monthly salary was around suppliers ¥8,000.

Crown Prince Naruhito is a



Best-seller: Ginza Tanizawa introduced the Dulles bag in the 1950s and its regular customers