

FEATURES

Asakusa, located in Taito City, Tokyo, retains the charm of old downtown Tokyo. The area is home to the veteran umbrella makers at Maehara Koei Shoten, which opened in 1948. Company president Maehara Shinji says, "Today, Japan's umbrella making process has been partially mechanized and incorporates mass production, but they used to be handmade, one-by-one, by professional artisans. We make it our goal to carry on the umbrella

making methods of the olden days, meticulously carrying out each production process."

Umbrella making is roughly divided into four processes: *kiji* (fabric), *hone* (frame), *temoto* (handle), and *kako* (processing (cutting and sewing)). For umbrella fabric, Maehara Koei Shoten uses fabrics woven in Fujiyoshida in Yamanashi Prefecture, a city located at the foot of Mt. Fuji that is famous for its textiles. Waterproofed fabrics woven on an old-fashioned loom

Venerable shop makes handmade dual-use umbrella-parasols

This Tokyo shop has been making umbrellas for 75 years. Their parasols and dual-use umbrella-parasols are especially popular.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)



Handmade umbrellas with beautiful glossy fabrics



Left: The *kiji* (fabric) is manufactured at a factory at the foot of Mt. Fuji. Pre-dyed yarn is used to weave the fabric.

Right: An artisan adjusts and cuts the woven fabric using a self-made wooden guide.

Photo: Maehara Koei Shoten



Photo: Maehara Koei Shoten



Photo: Adobe Stock

Above left: This parasol uses a wide original lace fabric.

Above right: The umbrellas are fastened by hooking a loop to a button, a traditional part called *wakan* (Japanese ring).

Below: One reason Japanese women often use parasols is to avoid sunburn.

are used. The *temoto* handle is heated depending on the quality of the material, put in hot water to soften and then bent to form a hook. The woven fabric is then cut and sewed, before being passed along with the *hone* frame to the processing artisan and assembled. This assembly is the most important process because it affects the umbrella's tension, the sound it makes, and the shape it has when opened.

In Japan, there is a custom of using parasols, something you don't see much in other countries. Japanese summers are intense, and many Japanese women habitually use parasols in seasons of strong sunshine to prevent sunburn. Parasols have also been used to counter heatstroke, and not only women, but also men are using them today in greater numbers. Maehara Koei Shoten says it is working to create parasols with

traditional designs that utilize Japanese hemp, lace and other fabrics, as well as dyed fabrics.

Their most popular umbrellas are all-weather types that can be used both as rain umbrellas and as parasols. These are selling quite well.

Maehara adds, "We get a lot of customers from overseas, but they too enjoy and select Japanese umbrellas made by Japanese artisans. Our traditional crafts and collaborations with other brands are also popular. For example, we reproduced the umbrella Totoro uses in the Studio Ghibli film *My Neighbor Totoro*, and in the past, our umbrellas using colors from the *Evangelion* anime series have also been popular. We also get a lot of orders for collaborations with apparel manufacturers." When you have a chance to visit to Japan, try one of these handmade umbrellas found only in Japan. 🇯🇵



Photo: Maehara Koei Shoten

These parasols are starting to become popular with men, and the company is now offering parasol designs that fit with men's fashions.