



Geimon crest created by KATSURA Fukuryu for use as a *Rakugo* storyteller. The design features a dragon, which appears in his stage name, a maple leaf inspired by the national flag of his home country, Canada, and a *hanabishi* diamond-shaped flower motif in the center – the crest of the Katsura School.

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office



KATSURA Fukuryu wearing a kimono adorned with his own crest

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office

The Charms of Japanese *Monsho* Crests: Simple Designs Infused with Traditional Beauty

Rakugo storyteller KATSURA Fukuryu, originally from Canada, designed a crest of his very own, featuring motifs based on his stage name, when he was still performing as an amateur. In this issue, he shares his thoughts on the appeal of Japanese crests, including *kamon* family crests and *geimon*¹ artistic performers' crests.

KATSURA Fukuryu

In Japan, most families have crests (*kamon*) that have been handed down from generation to generation. You can see them featured on kimonos worn by members of the extended family on ceremonial occasions like weddings and funerals, for example. While the family crests found in the West are often colorful and complex, with images of lions, unicorns, and so on, Japanese *kamon* tend to feature simple black-

and-white designs. Many have motifs based on flowers, plants, birds, the moon, and so on, with easily recognizable forms. There are said to be over 30,000 designs, and it seems really fascinating that each of them has some significance related to the family's roots.

Each school of *Rakugo* actually has its own crest, called a *geimon*, too. These crests are handed down from teachers to generations of their disciples and displayed on their own kimono, as well. In my case, though,

I was familiar with that culture from the time I was an amateur *Rakugo* storyteller, so when I had my kimono made, I designed my own *geimon* crest for it.

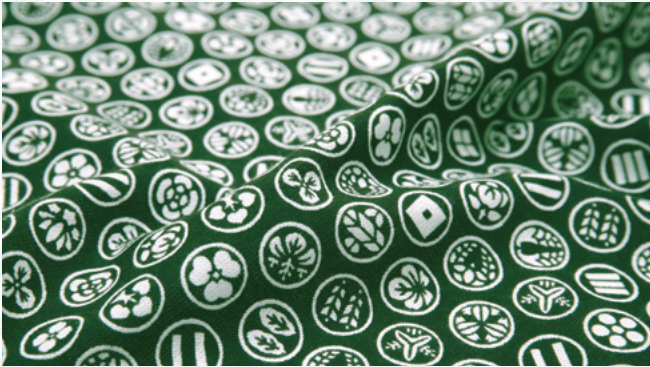
At the time, I was using the stage name Duke Canada, picking out kanji characters for it that could be read with similar pronunciations: Ryuku Kanada, written as “龍来彼方”. The first two characters mean “dragon” and “come,” and the last two together would ordinarily be read as *kanata*, meaning a distant direction or foreign



KATSURA Fukuryu

He is a *Rakugo*² storyteller originally from Canada. In October 2016, he joined the KATSURA Fukudanji Ichimon (House), and became the 11th disciple of KATSURA Fukudanji. He is based in the Kansai region³, and performs at *Yose* (*Rakugo* theaters) throughout Japan. With the goal of showing the charm of *Rakugo* to the world, he has appeared in shows in Las Vegas, San Francisco, and Hawaii in the United States, as well as in Canada and the Philippines.

 KATSURA Fukuryu



Tenugui hand towel decorated with a variety of different Japanese *kamon* family crests. Each features a simple design consisting of a motif based on items like a flower, plant, bird, or the moon in the small circular space of the crest.

Photo: PIXTA



Kamon crests can also be seen adorning *yane-gawara* roof tiles used in Japanese structures, including castles, temples, shrines, and houses built with traditional techniques. Shown in the photo is a *kiri-mon*⁴ crest.

Photo: PIXTA

land. By voicing the T as a D, I made it refer to Canada specifically, so all together, the name suggests “A dragon from Canada.” The dragon here also relates to my family’s Scottish origins and the lizard featured in my ancestors’ family crest. I designed my own *geimon* crest based on this name that I made up. The way the dragon holds its tail in its mouth to form a circular arc expresses the concept of eternity. I also placed a maple leaf, as featured on the Canadian flag as well, in the middle of it. While it was challenging to incorporate these humorous and complicated double meanings with a simple design, it was also fun.

Later, I became a disciple of *Rakugo* master KATSURA Fukudanji, seeking to become a professional *Rakugo* storyteller. Then, I was given the stage name KATSURA Fukuryu, with Fukuryu written as “福龍,” combining *fuku* (good fortune) from my teacher’s name with *ryu* (dragon) from my original amateur stage name. The *geimon* crest for our school of *Rakugo* features

a *hanabishi* pattern with a flower petal pattern arranged around a diamond shape. My teacher took a liking to my original crest design, though, and I was given approval to use a crest combining my original design with the official crest of the *Rakugo* school after I became an apprentice. So, at this point, I revised my original design to include a *hanabishi* flower pattern in the middle of the maple leaf. When I perform together with others from our *Rakugo* school, I wear a kimono featuring the *hanabishi* crest to show unity with the group. When I give solo performances, however, I wear a kimono adorned with my own original crest.

When you live in Japan, you might notice various crests all around the cities and streets. These include not only *kamon* family crests, but a variety of other crests as well, associated with prefectures, schools, companies, and so on. I like how, even without Japanese language skills, you can seem to imagine something about



Blossoms and leaves of the *kiri* (paulownia or empress tree), the basis of the *kiri-mon* crest’s design

Photo: PIXTA

their significance by considering the motifs they use.

For anyone thinking it would be fun to design an original *kamon* crest of their own, I might recommend considering designs that express something about your home country or your family’s roots. It can be challenging to create designs that incorporate multiple motifs in a small round space, but you will be sure to end up with a totally unique crest.

1. In Japan, *monsho* (crests) are also referred to as *mon*.

2. *Rakugo*: Traditional storytelling art of Japan created over 400 years ago. For a more detailed discussion, see the May 2024 issue of “HIGHLIGHTING Japan.” (⇒https://www.gov-online.go.jp/hlj/en/may_2024/may_2024-11.html)

3. Kansai region: The area roughly around Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, and their neighboring prefectures

4. Typical example of a Japanese *kamon* family crest, featuring a design with a motif based on the blossoms and leaves of the *kiri* (paulownia or empress tree)