



The kimono is a traditional Japanese clothing item important in *Rakugo* as part of the professional costume. *Rakugo* storytellers typically wear shorter *haori* jackets decorated with family crests over ordinary (ankle-length *nagagi*) kimonos.

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office

What the Kimono and Japanese Accessories Mean to Me

KATSURA Fukuryu is a *Rakugo* storyteller originally from Canada who has lived in Japan for over 20 years now. Onstage in *Yose Rakugo* theaters, he plays the parts of a variety of characters in the traditional storytelling form, wearing a kimono and using accessories and props including *sensu* folding fans and *tenugui* hand towels. We asked him to share his thoughts on the special appeal of the kimono, Japanese accessories, and more, drawing on his extensive knowledge of traditional Japanese culture.

KATSURA Fukuryu

For *Rakugo* storytellers, the kimono is an important as part of the professional costume. When you become an apprentice to a professional *Rakugo* storyteller, you are first given thorough instruction by senior apprentices on how to properly wear and handle a kimono. This is not just about how to wear one yourself. It is also your job as an apprentice in training to fold the master's valuable kimonos. If you make even the slightest mistake in how you handle them, they will get very upset with you, so I did feel nervous at first.

Kimonos feature a wide range of designs and materials. Part of their

appeal is the way you can enjoy coordinating them with *obi* kimono belts. For me, I like pairing a kimono with a hat in different ways to take advantage of the fashion possibilities. Mixing Japanese and Western elements together can be fun.

For a lot of people from other countries, however, I think it can be challenging to learn to wear a kimono properly. With that in mind, I recommend the *yukata* for those who might be interested in a more approachable taste of Japanese culture. The *yukata* is a type of cotton kimono worn in the summertime, after bathing, and times like that. You might have seen one when staying at a *ryokan* inn. As light

and simple to wear as they are, I think they would be perfect as gifts and souvenirs from Japan. When you wear a *yukata*, I definitely recommend wearing *tabi* – traditional Japanese socks with split toes – rather than ordinary socks. While socks can have a feeling of tightness when you kneel on the floor *seiza* style, *tabi* are more comfortable, without that feeling of pressure.

A Japanese accessory I find particularly interesting is the *tenugui*, a long towel-like cloth made of cotton that is often used as a prop in *Rakugo*. *Rakugo* storytellers might treat them as letters or wallets in performances. In day-to-day life, they can be used for wiping one's hands, drying sweat, wrapping



KATSURA Fukuryu

He is a *Rakugo*¹ 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 region², 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

other accessories, and so on. Appealing aspects of *tenugui* include their practicality, of course, but also their colorful and varied designs. The way they not only give a sense of Japanese tradition, but can also be enjoyed for their artistic value, I feel like they would also be appreciated as souvenirs from Japan. I particularly love to use *tenugui* with tropical, southern island designs. Being born and raised in such a cold location as Winnipeg, Canada, the cultures of warm places like Okinawa tend to attract me.

For the same reason, I also really like *kariyushi* wear, which has come to be widespread as formal summer attire in Okinawa during the summer. You might think of it as the Okinawan version of the Hawaiian aloha shirt. The shirts have a relaxing feeling, and they feature such a diverse range of designs. I have been collecting them ever since I came to Japan. They are easy to incorporate into daily use, too. I really recommend them!

While we are on the theme of Japanese accessories, I would like to finish up by touching on some small furniture items we use in *Rakugo*. In *Kami-gata Rakugo*, a form of the performing art rooted in the Kansai region¹, there are a couple of small furniture items that *Rakugo* storytellers are responsible for providing on their own. One is a small desk called a *kendai*, and another is a board that hides the performer's knees from view, called a *hiza-kakushi*. While I had the ones I use specially made in foldable forms inexpensively, I learned recently that it can be quite expensive to have them made by craftsmen ordinarily. These are such valuable items, I plan to keep

using them with great care for years to come.

Japanese accessories are full of associations with Japanese traditions.

I think you can really appreciate their appealing aspects more deeply if you learn about their significance and the history behind them.



Colorful *tenugui* with tropical, southern island designs favored by KATSURA Fukuryu

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office



A set of Japanese accessories often used by KATSURA Fukuryu when he wears a kimono. He particularly recommends the split-toe *tabi* socks at bottom left for their comfortable, loose feel.

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office



The *kendai* (small desk) and *hiza-kakushi* (knee-concealing board) KATSURA Fukuryu uses in his *Rakugo* performances. The pieces' rare folding forms reveal the aesthetic sensibilities of Japanese craftsmen in the details of their constructions.

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office

1. The traditional Japanese storytelling art of *Rakugo* originated more than 400 years ago. For more information, please see this article in the May 2024 issue of "HIGHLIGHTING Japan."(=>https://www.gov-online.go.jp/hlj/en/may_2024/may_2024-11.html)

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