



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.

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**KATSURA Fukuryu**

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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

