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This is an example of a simple but informative exchange. Kanto International Senior High School initiated a small exchange with St Paul's School in early 1998. Mr. Toru Kurobane, the Director of the World School, is also a teacher of Japanese History at Kanto International Senior High School. A simple letter was written asking Ms. Grant's students to send our school some questions concerning Japanese History. The following includes excerpts from this exchange.

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PROJECT DISCOVERY

Japanese History



Sketch by Ms. Shan Wang 2nd year
Kanto International Senior High School

Kanto International Senior High School

Wednesday , July 15, 1998

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Dear Ms. Tonya Grant and the Students at St. Paul's School,

Hello. My name is Toru Kurobane. I am the director of the World School and an instructor of history at Kanto International Senior High School. I am writing to you because my third - year senior high school students would like very much get to know you and we thought the best way to do so was for us to invite you into our classroom.

Japan consists of four large islands together with a string of smaller islands in eastern Asia, east of China, in the Pacific Ocean. The total area is 377,688 sq. km. These islands are the peaks of underwater mountains. We have a total population of 125,107,000 people who are mostly concentrated in our major cities. Our history, which we place back to approximately 10,000 years ago, is a rich one, filled with many interesting characteristics.

My students and I are studying this history. We are particularly paying close attention to the period between the 12th to the mid-18th century because this period marks a very important time of transition in Japanese history; a period that underlines the foundations of modern-day Japan.

Our class wishes to answer any questions you might have about Japan, and its history in particular. Examples of the questions you can ask might be about topics such as: Japanese samurai, Shogun, Noh plays, Kabuki, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, living styles (for example, tatami room) and working habits.

The students in our class will form groups and will lead you on a brief tour through time to explain why we are the way we are.

We are looking forward to hearing from you!

Toru Kurobane
Director, Department of Foreign Language, English Course
Instructor, Japanese History
Kanto International Senior High School



Questions & Answers

1. When was the earliest kanji recorded? What was it and is it still used?

The oldest known Kanji character was recorded in China during 16 century BC We know that Kanji was brought from China and used in Japan during 3rd Century AD. While some Kanji used today have been brought over in the same form found in China others have been created in Japan or changed over time.

Kanji has many more characters than any other language in the world. The old Chinese dictionary is comprised of 46,200 characters, of which we use only 10,000 in our own language.

There are hieroglyphs which are particularly old in kanji history, for instance, those made by a symbol of a man or thing. Each character in kanji has a meaning and is made up of a combination of plural characters. For example, when the character “友”(tomo), which means companion, and the character for “人”(hito), which means man, are put together, the word 「友人」(tomodachi) is created, which means friend.

The kanji 「金」 has two meanings : money and gold . The kanji 「学」 and 「習」 both mean study . These examples illustrate the fact that one kanji can have more than two meanings and more than two kanjis can have the same meaning .

As mentioned in the beginning , there are so many kanjis, making it difficult to remember all of them . In Japan, people learn kanji from elementary school. There are kanji contests similar to your spelling contests at school.



Yumiko Matsumoto Kanako Shinbori Kyoko Sakurai
Yuka Murano Akiko Nomura

2. How did the tea ceremony develop and what is its significance?

Today, people only know the words “tea ceremony.” Even though many people prepare for tea ceremonies, most do not know what tea ceremonies are about. Although most Japanese houses are Western in style, there are still many with tatami floors. If you walk normally in a tatami room, you cause dust to rise and the tatami can be damaged. It is important to walk slowly and gracefully. This is a lesson learned through the tea ceremony. The tea ceremony also teaches us to carry things so as not to break them. We don't come in contact with the tea ceremony directly. However, without realizing it, it teaches us many lessons needed in various facets of our daily lives.

Although tea drinking started in our country as early as 729(Nara period), it became a popular custom after an envoy to the Tang Dynasty (Saicho) brought back tea seeds from China to be used for medicinal purposes.

In 894, the Japanese government stopped all imports into Japan. This drastically lowered supply, leading to a reduction in the consumption of tea.

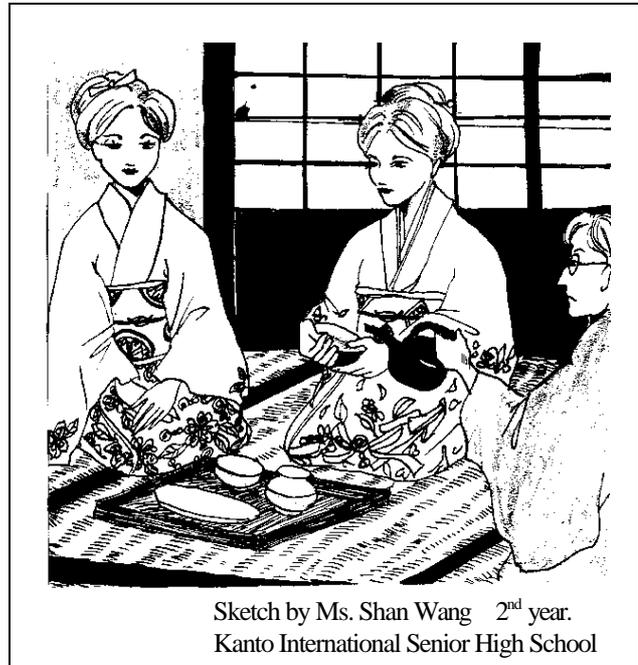
Towards the end of the Heian period (A.D.1192) a treaty was signed reviving trade between the two countries. Eisai (a priest who introduced the Rinzaï religion) was present at this important occasion and brought tea back to Japan, reviving the popularity of tea in Japan and increasing production. In the Kamakura period, utensils for tea making were imported from China.

During the early Muromachi period (14~16th centuries) tea was not so popular until a person named Jukou changed the form of tea drinking. At the end of the Muromachi period, Wabi tea, which was made by Takeno Jyo-ou, appeared. Takeno Jyo-ou's follower, Sennno Rikyu, inherited his spirit of “Wabi-cha”. He is the person who, under Lord Oda Nobunaga's leadership, played an active role in combining many different tea styles into one during the Azuchimomoyama era.. After Nobunaga's death, Rikyu served Lord Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi wanted comfort of mind which he experienced drinking Rikyu's tea. Rikyu and Hideyoshi made the tea ceremony popular throughout the land to quiet people's restless minds, to soften warriors' desolate spirits, and to keep a relationship between samurai and tradesman. Tea ceremony parties were also given in Kyoto in 1587, which helped develop Rikyu's tea ceremony techniques. The relationship between Rikyu and Hideyoshi grew stronger until 4 years later, when Rikyu made his own statue and put it in Daitoku-ji and angered Hideyoshi. Though the cause wasn't obvious, Hideyoshi ordered Rikyu to commit “harakiri” (suicide). Senno Rikyu passed away, leaving his spirit to “samurai” and tradesman.

After Rikyu's death, in the Edo era (17~19th centuries) “Senke tea ceremony” was made popular among the people. Although it was stopped temporarily by Hideyoshi, Rikyu's sons were helped by “daimios” (feudal lords), allowing them to perform the “Senke tea ceremony” once again. Rikyu's grandson, Senno Sotan, who formed the Senke-tea ceremony's foundation, built “Konnichian.” “Konnichian” is a tea ceremony room which is about 4 meters wide. It was in this way that he spread the tea ceremony to tradesmen and, as a result, tea ceremonies were well known among tradesmen in the Edo era.

After Sotan's death, his sons, Soushu, Sousa and Soushitsu, inherited and developed the “Senke tea ceremony.” It was divided into 3 schools: “Mushanokoji Senke, Omote Senke, and Ura Senke.” These

schools still exist. The reason why the Senke tea ceremony schools developed is that the followers had a



3. Where did geisha originate? Why do they wear so much white make up?

It is said that being a geisha requires skillful art . Long ago, it was not limited to elegant accomplishments. Nor was the position reserved only for females. Anyone with the ability to perform a special skill, including archery or swordmanship, was referred to as geisha which literally means “one who performs”. The geisha system that is still prevalent to this day emerged around the mid-Edo period (1600-1868). Today, geisha are traditional female entertainers who provide singing, dancing, conversation, games and companionship to customers in certain restaurants.

Geisha wear kimono which has a black crepe jacket , obi, which is wide on the back, and nail polish . It is said that geisha are called haori geisha because they put on rare haori (jackets).

The beginning of makeup comes from an earthen figure of the stone age or a clay image of the Tumulus period . The clay image had its cheeks painted with vermilion. In a Chinese history book, which was written in the 3rd century, it is said that Japanese did such a thing to look like the Chinese . Originally, white powder was thought to have made women look beautiful. Japanese makeup was introduced from ancient times. Women hid the weak points of their faces with powder. Facial powder was imported from China and was considered a popular product during the Edo period. Unfortunately, the powder contained lead, so some people died of lead poisoning.

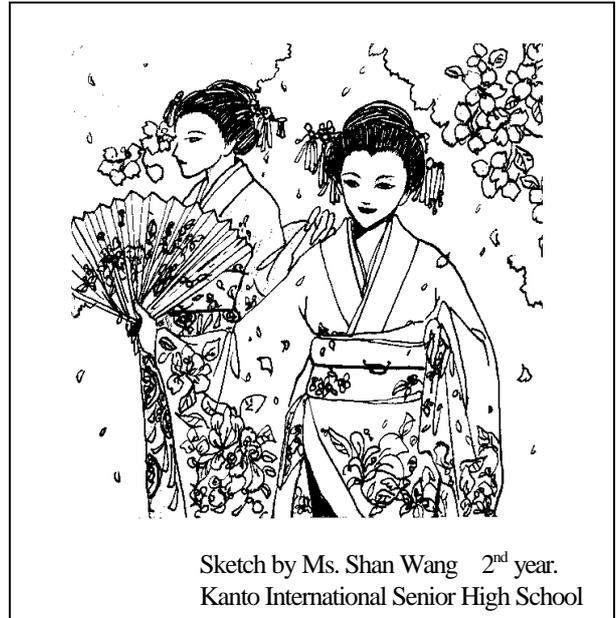
The color white signifies purity and youth in Asia. White makeup also symbolized high standing. Having suntans is now the latest fashion in Japan. However, people with suntans were looked down upon long ago, it symbolized low standing because a person of low standing worked outside.

Long ago, people started to learn the art of being a geisha from the age of ten. While studying, they also had to do household chores. These days not so many people want to learn to be a geisha. In the early 1920's , the total number of geisha was 80,000; in 1980 the number fell to only 10,000.

Our impression of geisha is terrible. Nowadays, the job of a geisha is considered inferior; they don't exist in our world. Most of us can only see them in kabuki and some old pictures, such as ukiyoe. At present, geisha's entertainment is only enjoyed by a very few people. Geisha exists in another facet of Japanese life that most people are not exposed to and thus have no interest in. They do, however, exist and deserve our appreciation because of their contributions to our country's living culture.

We also had to learn about geisha like you, thanks to your question. We only had three or four days, so perhaps we were not able to answer your question so thoroughly.

Ayako Yamamoto Taeko Mulamoto Kaoru Yoneyama
Nozomi Fujii Mai Yoshida



4. What was the significance of wearing kimono in traditional Japan?

We are going to answer the question, “What was the significance of wearing kimono in traditional Japan?” giving three major reasons.

As for the first reason, we would like to tell you about the sense of reigi. Reigi is a style of manners which was established by Koshi, who was a famous philosopher in China. Reigi means “The promises and rules for the realization of moral society and the protection of society’s order.” For more than one thousand years, these manners have influenced us in various respects - such as language, law and clothing, - in a distinctive Japanese sense. In respect to clothing, kimono expresses the manner of reigi very well. The styles of kimono are determined by place, people, and the marital status of women. You must obey these rules in wearing kimono. Not obeying the rules would be impolite and you would be looked down upon by society. In other words, by maintaining reigi, we express politeness to each other and a relationship of mutual trust is realized. For this reason, kimono has taken root in the present as the most formal style of Japanese clothing.



A long time ago, there were two kinds of days, called “hare” and “ke”, on which people wore different clothes. But now we have only a superficial understanding about hare and ke. Instead of wearing kimono on these traditional days, we now wear kimono at various formal events.

We are going to explain in detail about when and how we wear the different kinds of kimono today. On formal occasions, such as in weddings, we wear formal kimono. As we told you before, it’s on this occasion that the kinds of kimono are different for married and single women. The formal kimono is called “kurotomesode”. Kuro means black and tomesode means short sleeved, which married women wear. Five family symbols are painted on the kurotomesode. On the other hand, single women wear “furisode”. Furisode means long sleeved, and single women’s colors are brighter than married women’s colors.

Also, when we are invited to a party, we wear “homongi”. Recently, there are few people who wear kimono to parties because of Westernization, but at a high-level party a few people still wear homongi. Homongi is the kimono we wear when we visit someone and one big picture is painted all over homongi.

The custom of wearing kimono in Japan has declined. These days it’s the “yukata” that maintains the relationship between the Japanese and kimono. Yukata is popular among all generations, and it is often worn to summer events. It’s cheap since it is made of cotton rather than silk and therefore easy to get, and does not have strict style rules as does the kimono, so many people wear it by choice. In the summer, we can see young people wearing yukata on the train and so on.

Finally, kimono has a great artistic value in Japan. The kimono is made of silk which was originally sent from China. They are beautiful, so even now there are some people who want to wear them. Also, there are many kinds of colors and designs. For example, there are “eba” which are of classic design, and “pine”, “bamboo”, and so on.

For such reasons, kimono is also close to us, who live in the present. It expresses the Japanese spirit from time immemorial and remains in our minds..

Namiko Sekine

Kayoko Izumitani

Yukari Akiyama

Atsuko Adachi

Masayo Takase