

# Japanese Kites

By Masami Takakuwa



## The Japanese kites

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Japanese kite has the valuable meaning not only as children's toy but also as an artificial, technological and ethnological products. Traditional Japanese kites have serious relations in folk belief and the tradition of the districts. The distribution of traditional kites extends to all over Japan. Some examples of Japanese traditional kites are introduced in the following.

Japanese kite is made with bamboo frame and Japanese paper 'Washi' fundamentally. A picture, Japanese character or geometrical pattern is painted on the sail. The white kite on which nothing is painted or drawn is called funeral kite and inauspicious kite. There isn't the custom that the kite on which nothing is drawn or painted is flied into the sky. A kind of kites is classified by the meaning of the kite, shape, imported course and the process of the outbreak. The classification is made by the meaning and the subject that each kite has.

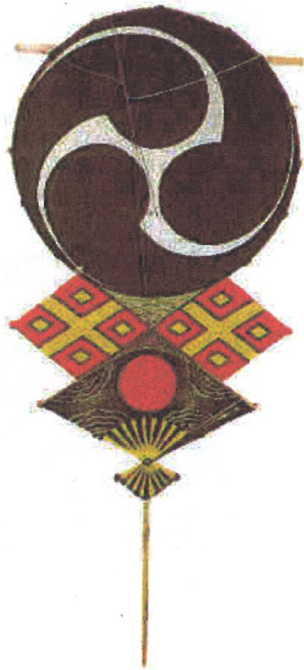
There are fields of kites concerning with the faith, the celebration and the the omen. There is the custom of kite flying for which the birth of a child, the future security in the house, business prosperity is prayed. These kites are distributed over a district of Pacific coast of Japan island and Shikoku. Tongari, Tomoedako, Sodedako, Iwaidako, Itsuwadako, Machijirushi, Atamakire and Sagara are included in the above kind of kite.

For example, Machijirushi kite which is flew in Hamamatsu is one of the celebration kites. The first boy who was born for past one year is celebrated by flying kite with his own name on the sail of kite and people celebrate with big shout highly by flying kite which is specially made for the child. The size of kite is 2msquare or more. A symbol of the town and a name of a child is drawn on this celebration kite. The price of this kite is about 170,000 yen or more.

Tongari



Tongari



Tomoe-dako



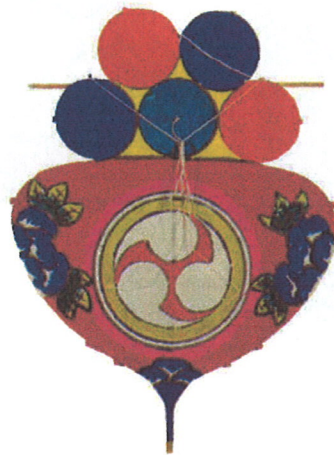
Sode-dako



Machijirushi



Iwaidako



Itsuwadako



Atamakire

Atamakire



Sagara

As the next category, there is a kind of the kite for which the talisman against evil or the prevention of an evil is prayed. An ogre or a ghastly apparition is drawn on the surface of these kites. These kite are flew with a pray of rejection of misfortune and fear. Typical kites of this category are Otokoberabo, Onnaberabo, Oniyouchou, Oniyozu, Onidako, Okidako, Managudako, Baramon and Aizu-tojindako.



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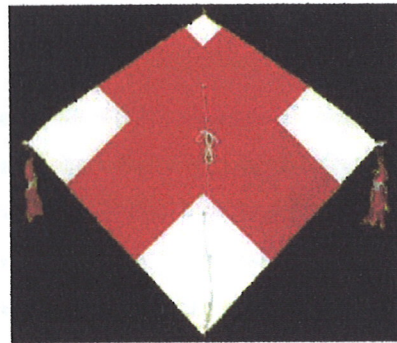
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- ① Onnaberabo
- ② Otokoberabo
- ③ Oniyouchou
- ④ Oniyozu
- ⑤ Onidako
- ⑥ Okidako
- ⑦ Managudako
- ⑧ Baramon
- ⑨ Aizu-tojindako

As a kind of the kite which received influence of a foreign county, there are Nagasaki-Hata, Karakuri-Kintoki and Tojindako. Nagasaki Hata has exotic shape and design comparing with the other Japanese traditional kites. This kite has a special flight performance and structure of a kite that other Japanese traditional kite do not have. This kite has the shape that closely resembled kite of Southeast Asia such as India, Nepal and Indonesia. It resembles a kite in Southeast Asia which has a flying line coated with glass powder for cutting other lines. Japan closed the door for foreign countries in the Edo period. For a foreign trade, Nagasaki was an only port which was recognized from government. It is thought that a model of this kite was imported through a Dutchman who visited Japan for the trade. Nagasaki Hata has three-color design such as red, blue and white and particular geometric design. The Netherlands national flag has the same color. It is thought that Netherlands national flag color became a color design of Nagasaki Hata. Hata in Japanese means "flag". It is thought that a Dutchman introduced the original kite from the ports at which he called at in the way to Japan. Karakuri-kintoki and Tojindako are said to be imported from China.



As a category of another kite, there is the workmanship kite which were made by the skillfulness of the Japanese craftsmen. This kind of kite is made with curved frames which were bent by using candle or other methods. The curved frames are assembled as precision kite such as bee, cicada, birds, butterfly and so on. This kite did not depend as a business because it took too much hours to make. Most of these kites were disappeared. The most famous kite in this category is Yakko dako. Yakko dako is the typical traditional kite which survived from the Edo era to now. It is said that the merchant who has been oppressed by the Edo government wreaked his vengeance by flying Yakko kite above the samurai residence and looked down at the samurai from the kite. It is thought a masterpiece of kite for its shape, color and simple design.

Sakazuki-dako, Ohgi-dako, Fukusuke-dako, Bekkakou, Yakko-dako are included in this category.



Sakazuki



Ohgi



Fukusuke



Yakko



Bekkakou

Bekkakou

As a kind of another Japanese traditional kite, there is the kite which entrusted form of a kite with a desire of man to want to fly in the sky. Tsubame kite, Semi-kite, Koryu-semi, Chou-dako, Fugu-dako, Tonbi-dako are included in this category. There are many kinds of kite such as many birds and insects in China. These kite are made from silk and bamboo material just like as real birds or insects. These kites are made from Japanese paper and bamboo frame in Japan and are designed as simple form.



Tsubame dako

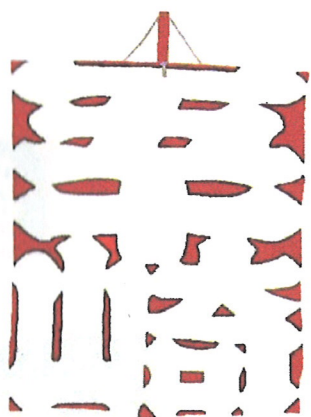


Semi dako



Chou dako

Next category of kite is Character kite on which Japanese character is written. The luxurious Edo kite which the famous artist painted has been popular. Those kite were too gorgeous and the governer prohibited sale of Edo kite because the kite became too luxurious. In the present age, the person who can make this color panted kite as business is limited. Almost of Edo dako is made by amateur kite lover. Because luxurious panted kite sale was prohibited, charactored kite became very popular. This lets the character rise by outlining the Kanji that is a character of Japanese in the whole surface of a kite. It is thought that the origin of the character of the kite became from the signboard of a store of the Edo period. Edo-kakudako, Ikazaki-dako, Rokkaku, Koma-dako are included in this category.



Ikazaki



Koma dako

The Okinawa region is the island which is located the southernmost edge of Japan. The culture of kite in Okinawa developed originally because the island is far from the Japanese main land. The most particular feature of kite in Okinawa is that the kite has geometric pattern on the face of kite. Comparing with that the kite in main land of Japan is painted with many kinds of drawing. It is one of the feature of kite in Okinawa that Futan climbs up on the kite line and when Futan reaches the kite, it comes down on the line. This is unique kite decoration which can be seen in Okinawa.



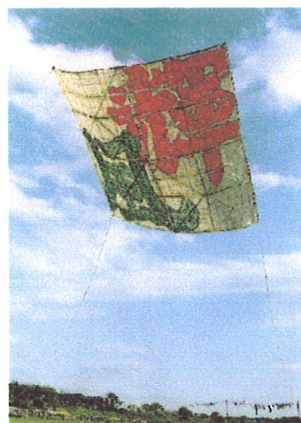
Mattaku

Mattaku  
This kite is made in Okinawa, Japan.  
The design of kite is novel and geometric pattern and unusual for traditional Japanese kites.

I will introduce the large famous kite festivals in Japan. The biggest and heaviest kite in Japan is Sagami kite. The size of this kite is 16m square. Weight of the kite including lines exceeds one ton. It needs two months to make this kite and needs a total 600 men hands to build the kite. The number of people to be necessary to fly it is more than 100. The size of flying line has 5cm in diameter. The wind velocity more than 7m/sec is necessary to fly this kite in the sky constantly. The shape that the huge kite flies to sky worths seeing bravely. This huge kite is made with only Japanese paper and bamboo frame entirely. Other famous kite festivals are Yokaichi, Zama, Showamachi and Wan-wan. Those kites have their own shape and size which were inherited from Edo era. There are many fighting kite festivals in Japan such as Hamamatsu, Shirone, Tawara, Ikazaki, Sanjo, Nagasaki-Hata. Fight is made by cutting other's flying line. The rule of the buttle is different by each festival.



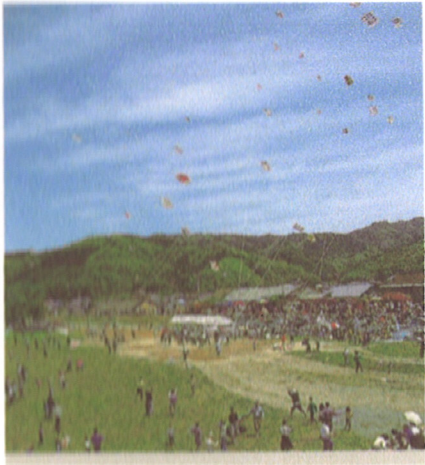
Hamamatsu



Sagamihara



Shirone



Ikazaki



Sanjo



Yokaichi



Showamachi

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