

**Arts in the Wind:
JICC Kite Collection List and
Supplementary Descriptions**



2017 6/12-8/18

Goryokaku: 1



This kite, designed by Hikocho Ohta, originates in Hakodate, Hokkaido and depicts Fort Goryokaku, where loyalists to the Shogunate staged their final resistance when the Meiji Restoration returned power to the Emperor. Today, the remains of the fort, in what is now known as Goryokaku Park, are a special Historical Site and popular cherry blossom viewing spot.

Noshiro kite: 2, 3, 8

This type of kite originated in Noshiro, Akita Prefecture. It is unique in that the frame has no diagonal pieces and no bottom.



Daruma: 7, 16, 39, 49

Bodhidharma, a Zen Buddhist mystic from the 5th or 6th century, is known as Daruma in Japan. The Daruma doll (left) is used to achieve an important goal. Upon undertaking a task, one eye is filled. The other eye is filled only when the goal is achieved. In one legend, he is said to have sat facing a wall in a cave near the Shaolin Monastery for nine years, neither moving nor speaking, as his legs atrophied. This is why the Daruma doll commonly seen in Japan has neither arms nor legs.



“Rashomon”: 11, 69

“Rashomon” is a Noh story which contains a depiction of the battle between a samurai and an oni at Rashomon. The samurai here is Watanabe no Tsuna, who is one of the four champions of Minamoto no Yoritomo - a revered samurai lord of the Minamoto Clan from the Heian period (794 - 1185.)

Kintoro/Sakata Kintoki: 21, 33

Contemporary to Watanabe no Tsuna, this legendary figure was also one of the four champions of Minamoto no Yoritomo. His childhood stories became the popular folktale “Kintaro,” who fought against wild animals like a bear and made them his subordinates.

Oni: 11, 43, 69



The image of oni varies wildly throughout the history and regions in Japan. Although often oni are depicted as unpredictable, elusive, and downright evil, many accounts also tell stories of oni that are gentle, caring, and humorous. However stories are told, all oni share the characteristics of a scary appearance, and superhuman strength and abilities.

Bunbun kite: 12

The Bunbun kite is specially constructed to make a buzzing sound. Bun bun is a Japanese onomatopoeia for this buzzing sound.

Crane, Pine tree, Sunrise, Bamboo and Waves: 9, 10, 15, 63, 68, 69

All of these are auspicious symbols. Japanese expressions of good fortune contain these words. For example:

Saying: “Crane lives for a thousand, and Turtle ten thousand years.”

Trees known for their usefulness: “Pine tree, bamboo, and plum blossom.”

Poetic description: “Blue Ocean Waves.”



Dragon: 17, 20, 67

In ancient times in Japan, when irrigation methods were not sufficiently understood, they thought of flooding rivers as angry dragons. Ideas of the dragon from China and Nagaraja of India converged in the history of Japan and became the symbol of natural, supernatural, and mystical powers.

Edo Yakko-dako: 19

The yakko-dako is a common type of Japanese kite. His feet are free from the bamboo frame, while the extra paper in his sleeves creates a billowing effect while he flies. This particular design originated in Edo (modern day Tokyo). A yakko was a servant who went ahead of processions of samurai carrying a lance. These kites were especially popular among the non-samurai classes possibly because they could be flown as a taunt to samurai. Flying the likeness of a commoner on high above samurai was said to be a way to gloat. Another theory says that because yakko - commoners privileged by their place among the samurai - often took advantage of their position by bullying the townspeople, flying the kite was a way of symbolically bullying back.



Edo-dako: 15, 16, 17, 18

These kites, known as Edo kites (Edo-dako), were developed in the Edo area (modern day Tokyo) during the Edo period (1603-1867). Much art, including kites, flourished in that period due to 200 years of continuous peace, during which the samurai class, having no battles to fight, occupied themselves and maintained their social status through the arts.



Feudal lords of the day were required to split their time between their own estates and Edo, the capital. As a result, the rectangular Edo kite is the most representative Japanese kite. Even the Japanese word for kites, *tako* (which is homophonic with the word for octopus) shows just how influential they were. Before that time, kites were called by different names in different regions across Japan.

In Miyagi Prefecture, kites are called *Tenbata* (天旗), which means the flag (旗) of Tengu (天狗), supernatural beings who live in the mountains. In Osaka, they call kites *Ika* which means squid instead of octopus. In Nagasaki, they call kites *Hata* - flag.

Legendary Samurai are one of the most common subjects of Japanese kites. During the Edo period, when the making of kites truly took off, laws of the Shogunate forbid any representations of living samurai, so kite makers turned to men of legend and history for their art. Some of these are shown here.

Benkei/Saito Musashibo Benkei (1155-1189): 22, 29, 32, 44

This loyal retainer to the great samurai lord Minamoto Yoshitsune is the subject of countless works of art. So tall were the tales of Benkei, as he is known, that most of what is known of him today is more the stuff of legend than of historical fact. Clever, crafty, and huge in stature, men quaked with fear in his presence. Large boulders in odd places are said to have been put there by Benkei. Once a robber and assassin of great reputation, he took up a post by the Gojo Bridge in Kyoto and there he relieved all passing samurai of their swords until he had collected 999 swords. The 1000th passing samurai was Minamoto Yoshitsune. Benkei had met his match. He did not win a sword that day, but instead pledged his loyalty to Yoshitsune.

Nasuno Yoichi (1169 – 1232): 30, 34

Before becoming a Buddhist monk, Nasuno Yoichi was a famed samurai who fought with the Minamoto clan during the Genpei war. It's said that during the battle of Yashima in 1184, the enemy clan put a fan atop the mast of their ship and, claiming it protected the ship from arrows, challenged anyone to shoot it down. Though the waves rocked the ship and made his mount unsteady, Nasuno Yoichi's skill with a bow was so great he was able to shoot down the fan.

Kato Kiyomasa (1562-1611): 31

This legendary samurai was one of "the seven spears of Shizugatake," after he fought so bravely under Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the battle Shizugatake. But he is best known for his part in the Seven Year War in Korea. Author and translator William Scott Wilson, a foremost scholar of samurai history, has said he was "a military man first and last, outlawing even the recitation of poetry, putting the

martial arts above all else. His precepts demonstrate the warrior's first duty in the early 17th century was to 'grasp the sword and die.'"

Uesugi Kenshin (1530-1578): 27

A warlord from Echigo, present day Niigata prefecture, who was active in the Warring States period (Sengoku-jidai) from mid-15th to late 16th century. He is famous for his rivalry with Takeda Shingen through the battles of Kawanakajima, which consisted of five campaigns of battles between the rivals. Kenshin is dubbed "War God," and he worshipped a Buddhist war deity Bishamonten or Vaiśravaṇa. He never lost a single major battle.

Shirone Big Kite Battle Festival: 27, 28, 29, 30, 31

This 300 year old Kite Battle Festival takes place in the beginning of June every year in Shirone, Minami ward of Niigata prefecture. There are over a thousand kites flown in a 5 day festival. The kite battles are fought over Nakano-river from both river banks. There are two types of kites that are used in the battles. One is called Oh-dako, big kite, and the other is called Maki-dako, rolled kite. Oh-dako is constructed as large as 16.5 x 23 feet. Mikai-dako is in a hexagonal shape and about 10 feet in between two opposing points. It takes a year to make an Oh-dako starting from splitting the bamboo to finally painting on the kite. It takes three months to make the main rope, the diameter of which is about an inch and is over 400 feet in length. This rope is made with Japanese hemp, which yields long and strong fibers.

The battles are fought between two kites at a time. Each kite is towed by tens of strong men. The procedure of the battle is: Both kites are flown in the air from the two banks. They are manipulated so the ropes attached to the kites get tangled in midair. The kites fall into the river. The team and residents of each bank play tug of war to cut the opponent's rope. The number of ropes each team collects from their opponent determines the winner.



Fukusuke/The Good Luck Doll: 38, 50

The Fukusuke doll is regarded as a good omen that brings prosperity, success in business, good luck, longevity, and fortune. Fukusuke first appeared in the mid-Edo period, and is usually rendered as a kneeling man with a huge head and a



topknot. Although there are several potential real-life origins of the doll, every theory centers around a man of short stature who was blessed with good fortune and success in business. Fukusuke made his international debut on the jacket cover of the “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” album from the Beatles. (From *Meet Netsuke! Story tellers of Japan.*)

Cicada: 47, 52



In Japan, the Cicada, especially the sound that is made by them, is one of the most commonly cited phenomena in literature to demonstrate the season. Hence, the sound made by the cicada is not heard simply as noise but is rather poetic. Matsuo Basho, a famous traveling *haiku* poet from the 17th century in the Edo period, for example, made a very popular *haiku* mentioning the sound of the cicada.

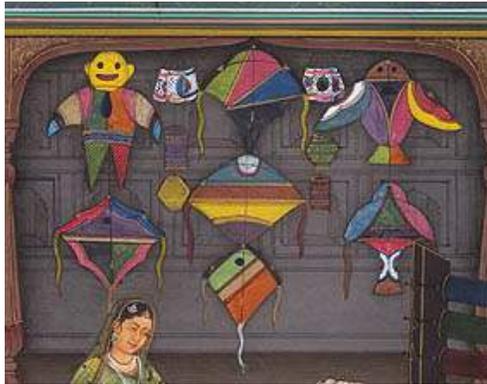
閑さや岩にしみ入る蟬の声 (Shizukasa ya Iwani shimi iru Semino

koe)

Stillness Sinking into the rocks Cicada's cry
From Barnhill, Bashō's Haiku, 94, #392

Baramon Kite: 63

This type of kite is said to be brought by the Dutch traders who came to Dejima in Nagasaki. It is not hard to imagine that the traders picked up kites in India and introduced this style of kite to the people of Kyushu. In modern India, much simpler design dominates; however, we can find kites whose designs are more complex (and similar to Baramon style in Japan) in Mughal miniature paintings.



The name Baramon comes from Indian Brahmin, Hindu priests and protectors of their sacred teachings. When the kite was first introduced in Japan, it was flown in Buddhist religious rites. The name Baramon (Brahmin) may have been used to honor where this style of kite came from, and because of its religious context to bring in good fortune.