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ISSUE

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Admire

Special Issue

The Traditional Beauty of Monkiri Paper-Cutting: Patterns Capturing the Spirit of Ordinary People's Lives

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Thin, Transparent Paper Entices Paper Lovers

Deepen

KPP ECOWORKS Recycling Business Creates
Environmental Value from Wood Waste

TSUNAGU is a public relations magazine published by KPP GROUP HOLDINGS CO., LTD. An exploration in rediscovering a fascination with paper, we link paper and culture, paper and business, and paper and people.

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The Traditional Beauty of Monkiri Paper Cutting: Patterns Capturing the Spirit of Ordinary People's Lives

Fold a sheet of paper, cut along the template, and gently unfold it. The pattern that gradually emerges in the palm of your hand will likely strike a chord. You might feel something like the glee this craft used to bring to the children of the Edo period (1603–1868) at *terakoya* schools for the common people. With *monkiri asobi*, a paper-cutting pastime enjoyed since that era, artist Nabo Shimonaka bridges the past and present, conveying the charm of patterns created and refined in Japan, the culture of Edo townspeople, and contemporary values of the time. We spoke with the artist, who continues to explore the workings of people's lives and culture, drawing on *monkiri asobi* as a starting point. We wanted to learn more about the special appeal of paper in the ways it is deeply intertwined with daily life.

“Patterns that take shape in the palm of the hand connect people across the ages.”

Creative Patterns Devised and Refined by the Japanese People

Fold a sheet of paper, make cuts in it guided by a template, gently unfold it, and a beautiful pattern emerges. There is real wonder and excitement in watching a simple, small, folded piece of paper transform into what seems an intricately crafted pattern as you unfold it. As you unfold it with your fingers, you feel the tactile pleasure and joy of unexpected discovery that can only be experienced with this kind of analog pastime. Nabo Shimonaka continues to work to rediscover and pass on to the present day the charm of *monkiri asobi*, a traditional Japanese paper-cutting game that, while once popular among the common people of the Edo period (1603–1868), had been largely lost to the tides of time.

Monkiri asobi developed through connections between Japan’s culture of *kamon* family crests and the creativity of Edo-period common people. The family crests used as designs are said to have originated in the Heian period (794–1185) as patterns used by nobility to mark their ox-drawn carriages and furnishings. Later, their use spread to the samurai class. During the Sengoku period (c.1467–1590), they served as symbols to distinguish enemies from allies on the battlefield, and by the Edo period, their use had come to permeate the common people’s daily lives. Everything from plants such as cherry blossoms, *ume* apricot blossoms, and *kikyo* (bellflowers), to living creatures like cranes and butterflies, and natural phenomena such as waves and snow — even implements like folding fans and wheels — were used as family crest motifs.

“*Kamon* crests have a pretty stiff, formal image, but when you look more closely into them, they really turn out to be a much freer form than that,” remarks Shimonaka. Just as she says, traditional Japanese *kamon* patterns indeed incorporate much humor that might bring a smile or laugh. Even more interestingly, the patterns were not merely decorative. “For instance,” she continues, “consider a couple of the patterns’ names: *Daki-myoga** means ‘hug of the *myoga* buds,’ and *Irechigai-myoga* means ‘intercrossing *myoga* buds.’ While they share the same *myoga* (Japanese ginger) motif, they feature contrasting configurations, and the names alone suggest their

* ***Daki-myoga*** (“hug of the *myoga* buds”) — A pair of *myoga* (Japanese ginger) buds face each other in an embrace; a representative *myoga*-themed crest incorporating a play on words referencing the homonymous *myoga*, meaning divine protection or favor.



Irechigai-myoga (“intercrossing *myoga* buds”) — A pair of *myoga* buds are situated in opposite directions vertically, forming a circular pattern with notable compositional beauty.



forms. People in the past used patterns like this much as they might use words or linguistic expressions.” Japanese patterns are a form of graphic design that abstracts complex forms to an extreme degree, using only simple lines and circles. They not only involve the pursuit of minimalist beauty, but also served almost like “words” used for conveying sensibilities and values among people.

A Classic Book Inspires the Artist’s Research

It was about 25 years ago that Shimonaka first encountered *monkiri asobi*. She came across the unfamiliar term, she says, in a book on games put out in the Meiji era (1868–1912) that she happened to pick up at the library: “We use the term *monkirigata* in Japanese in daily life to describe things that are stereotypical or that no thought goes into, similar to ‘cookie-cutter’ in English. Not exactly a flattering expression, but it made me wonder what its origin, this *monkiri*, might have actually meant to begin with.” The book she had come across was a reprint of *Sekai Yugiho Taizen* (“Comprehensive Book of World Games”), originally published during the Meiji era. Covering amusements like card games and table tennis, which had just been introduced to Japan from the West, the classic work even included mathematical formulas as a form of “play” — plus a quiet overview of *monkiri asobi*, a pastime enjoyed since the Edo period. “Wondering what in the world that might be like,” she says, “I decided to actually try it out myself. That was the beginning of it all.”

The basics of *monkiri asobi* are extremely simple. Thin paper such as *washi* is folded into prescribed forms — with 2-fold, 3-fold, or 5-fold patterns, for example. Cuts are then made along template lines drawn on it, using scissors or a craft knife, and finally the paper is gently unfolded. Through that simple process alone, though, geometric patterns of impressive beauty emerge from the palm of the hand. As she tells us, “As a child, it used to be exciting just to cut and unfold paper without much of a plan. What makes *monkiri* fundamentally different is that the cutting is done according to traditional pattern templates called *monkirigata* that have been carefully selected over long periods of time.”

Struck by the beauty of the intricate patterns that resulted from her experiments, Shimonaka began traveling around to antiquarian bookshops in Tokyo’s Kanda district and other places, collecting materials such as old family crest registers, pattern books, and design collections spanning the Edo, Meiji, and early Showa periods (1926 – c.1945). Through self-study she deepened her research. “The deeper I dig, the more I realize how much more there is to learn,” she tells us. Shimonaka found herself pleasantly immersed in the new and profound world of patterns, with motifs featuring everything from flora and fauna to even humorously mundane household items from everyday life.



Sekai Yugiho Taizen, a comprehensive volume introducing various games, pastimes, and their rules from across eras and cultures, originally published in 1907. Shimonaka’s library copy was a 1984 reprint.



Antiquarian books from the Edo and Meiji periods. Produced with *sumi* ink on *washi* paper, they are surprisingly durable. Accounts even mention such books being lowered into wells to protect them during fires.



Craft books for schoolchildren from the Taisho era (1912–1926). Their focus on nurturing creativity through *kirigami* and *origami*, reveals how deeply rooted in everyday life paper crafts had become at the time.

The Basic Process of Monkiri Asobi



Fold a square piece of paper such as thin *washi* in a prescribed manner (e.g. 3-fold, 5-fold, etc.)



Carefully cut along the lines of the template using scissors or a craft knife



Gently unfold the paper, taking care not to tear it, and a beautiful family crest or pattern will emerge



Connections Between People’s Lives and Paper Culture Revealed in the Patterns

In the late Edo period (c.1750–1850), a time when the intellectual curiosity and playful spirit of common people reached a zenith, patterns such as *kamon* family crests went beyond being mere designs, acting as a form of communication almost like words. People shared a common cultural literacy; they would exchange a knowing look just by observing patterns on actors’ costumes or designs that referenced word plays.

“Delving deeper into the world of patterns inevitably leads to the daily lives of people. Patterns exist having been devised, made use of, and passed on by people. Their backgrounds always reveal something about the values and ways of life of the people who lived through the period the patterns date to, so they provide an endless source of fascination,” remarks Shimonaka.

Her interest has extended abroad, as well. One example was encountering a paper-cutting culture still maintained in rural China. In the region she visited, a tradition still lived on in which local residents would repaper their screens each New Year and paste red paper cutouts called *chuanghua* (or *madohana* in Japanese; literally “window flowers”) onto them, offering experiences of the passage of time as their color would gradually fade over the course of the year.

“When I asked a woman in the village if I could take one of the paper cutouts home because it was so beautiful, she replied, ‘Why would you want to do that? It breaks down over the course of the year. And there is meaning in making them again with our own hands.’ It is precisely because of their ephemeral nature, they are so easily destroyed, that the technique gets passed down so persistently. The values inherent to the craft deeply impressed me,” Shimonaka tells us. This is a paper culture where paper cuttings are not displayed as pieces of art but used as a matter of course in daily life. Creativity born from people’s lives, honed through their daily routines, quietly persists still today.

Shimonaka would see the powerful potential of paper-cutting crafts, as they live within daily life, demonstrated back home in Japan, as well. On visits to temporary housing in the town of Minamisanriku-cho in the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, she brought *washi* and *monkiri* with her. Victims of the disaster, she says, used them as a form of communication. She observed them absorbed in the craft, cutting out templates by hand, and presenting *monkiri* gifts to delivery drivers who had helped them, for example, or other people in their community as tokens of gratitude. There was also a cultural tradition similar to what she had found in rural China that had been maintained in the region. Every year at the year’s end, Shinto shrines’ chief priest would cut white *kirigami* as decorations for *gohei* staffs, *kamidana* shrines, and so on, and parishioners would display them on household *kamidana* for visual experiences of the transforming power of the deities over the course of the year.

“No matter how challenging the circumstances, decorations of new, pure-white *kirigami* — known as *kiriko* — provide emotional support, signifying the arrival of another new year. That came as a surprise to me and gave me the realization that, still in the world today, there are places where paper-cutting crafts have genuine power,” Shimonaka remarks. Discovering a living, breathing paper culture found as part of everyday life had impressed upon the artist anew that paper exists not merely as a material, but as a medium that connects people.

Molds — or Templates — Can be “Broken” Because They Exist in the First Place

Shimonaka currently holds *monkiri asobi* workshops throughout Japan. One of her key principles is not to “over-explain” to participants. Rather than simply providing detailed, step-by-step instructions, she is careful to deliberately leave space for them to work through the process with their own hands and learn through trial and error.

“The books from past eras were not very user-friendly at all. They would simply include illustrations without instructions about how to fold the paper. That, however, left space for the reader to think for themselves, allowing them to make discoveries on their own, like, ‘Oh, I see how it works now!’ You have to take care not to be overly accommodating. Moments of realization like

that are something I value above all else in my workshops, too,” Shimonaka explains.

In the actual workshops, even participants who initially follow the template exactly begin, over time, to step outside the lines on their own. They start to wonder what might happen if they changed one part a bit and tried cutting it differently. Shimonaka believes that this process is the origin of a phrase like “breaking the mold” (expressed in Japanese as *kata-yaburi*, ‘breaking’ or departing from the template) — that it represents the sort of “soul-stirring foundation of crafting” that tends to get overlooked in modern education and creative expression.

“It is because molds — or templates — exist in the first place that we can talk about ‘breaking the mold’ as we do. It is precisely by appreciating the beauty of a form as it has been polished and refined over many years that we can take first steps

toward establishing our own unique expressive approach. That is the true essence of creativity, and of learning, as well. It can be difficult to know what to do when you are just told to express your individuality. I believe that, as you become absorbed in the process and keep at it, though, your true self will naturally start to shine through,” says Shimonaka.

The tools used in her workshops are extremely simple: just scissors, craft knives, and beautifully colored *washi* paper. Shimonaka uses Ogawa Washi produced in and around the town of Ogawa-machi in Saitama Prefecture’s Hiki District.

“I have preferred machine-made *washi* for many years, as its fibers are less likely to snag than handmade paper, and craft knife blades glide through it more smoothly. I feel that pleasing textures and beauty in the material inspires you to value and appreciate what you have crafted,” says Shimonaka with a smile.

Only Authentic Experiences Are Truly Retained in Mind and Soul

Recent years have brought rapid advances in digital technologies, including generative AI, ushering in an era where “answers” can be arrived at instantly without the need for painstaking research or hands-on engagement in the process. Shimonaka warns, however, that as a result of this convenience, humans may be losing sight of something essential.

“To experience the feeling that something ‘just clicks,’ as if it has become part of you, can only begin with experiences felt through your own hands and body, however small they may seem. Paper is a forgiving material, one that can be touched up, repaired, and even pasted back together if torn by mistake. However valuable the information provided by AI may be, it is those exhilarating moments of discovery through hands-on engagement, the feeling of ‘I did it!’, that truly take root in the human mind and heart.”

Shimonaka has restored or created over 500 *monkiri* templates to date. At her workshops, participants of different ages and nationalities gather around the same table, from three-year-olds to seniors in their 80s. As they look over the *monkiri* they have each made, they exchange sincere praise, commenting, “Very nice” and “Cool!” The space overflows with rich, human connection and the power of the moment, something that cannot be reduced to mere efficiency or logic.

“It feels as if we are being allowed to draw on the blessings of the rich, wonderful culture of template designs left to us by our predecessors,” she says.

“Or, you might say, to play amid the vast tapestry of history. I hope to continue sharing the joy of these meandering detours, which begin with this simple, hands-on craft form, with many more people in the future.”

In *monkiri asobi*, hundreds of years of accumulated time and experience, along with the down-to-earth yet endearing wisdom of humanity, are still very much alive today.



Chuanghua (“window flowers”), a paper-cutting culture preserved and passed down in rural China. Expressing wishes for happiness and abundance in daily life, the traditional decorations are put up in windows during the New Year and other celebrations.

Kiriko paper-cutting decorations for *kamidana* shrines, a tradition preserved in Minamisanriku-cho, Miyagi Prefecture. Imbued with prayers for the coming new year, they are replaced each year, giving people a tangible sense of the transforming power of the deities and the seasons’ cycles.



PROFILE

Nabo Shimonaka

Modeling artist. Born in Chiba Prefecture. She began researching and exploring cultural traditions involving patterns after encountering *monkiri*, an Edo-period paper craft. In addition to holding workshops and exhibitions in Japan and overseas, she publishes the *Monkirigata* book series. She also engages in the research and promotion of paper culture and folk culture. She organizes the Kyureki Cafe, holding events based on the traditional lunar calendar. She serves as Assistant Director of the Showa Era Lifestyle Museum and Chair of the Judging Committee for the Kirigami Exhibition at the H. C. Andersen Park Kodomo Art Museum (Funabashi City).

https://www.xpl.jp/en_shopping/ <https://explantae.theshop.jp/>
(ex-plantae/Uyuen) (Online store)



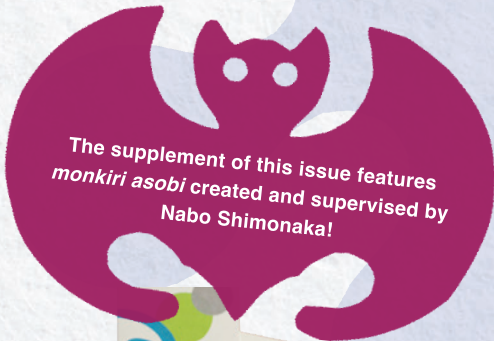
Monkirigata: Kaze no Maki
 (“*Monkiri* Templates: Blowing Breeze Volume”)
(ex-plantae)



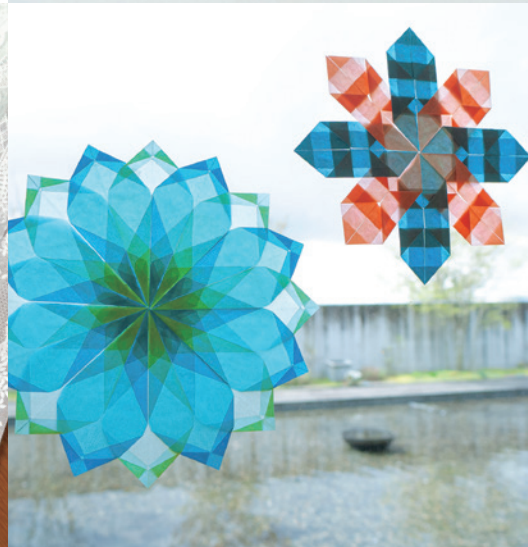
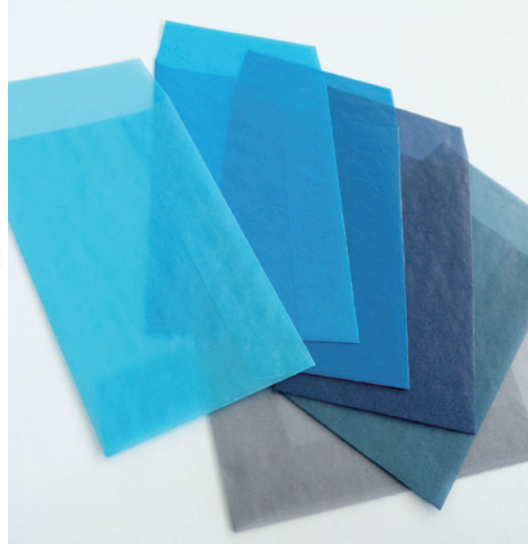
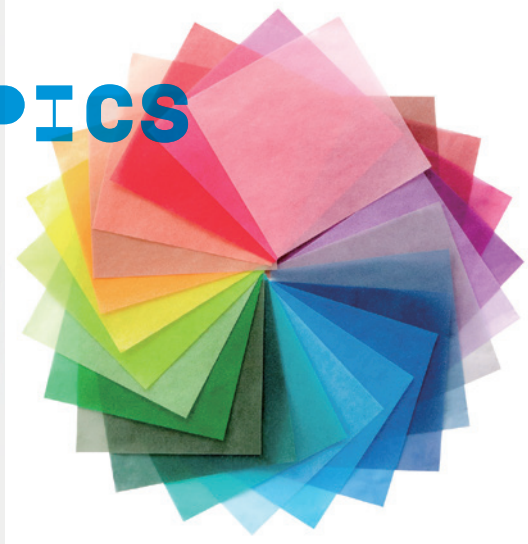
Kodomo Mon'yo Monogatari
 (“The Story of Children’s Patterns”)
(Heibonsha Limited, Publishers)

Bring Monkiri into Your Daily Life

Try incorporating the cut-out patterns you craft into your daily life rather than simply admiring them. Make Tanabata decorations out of them, paste them onto paper hand fans, or hang them as mobiles to enjoy them with the changing seasons.



PAPER TOPICS



Thin, Transparent Paper Entices Paper Lovers

Glassine is a semi-transparent, uniquely crinkly paper that has long been used for candy wrappers, pharmaceutical wrapping paper, record inner sleeves, and other everyday items. Recently, however, glassine has attracted new attention as more people are discovering the fun of expressing themselves with it in paper crafts and other ways.

People who love paper and stationery are driving this new popularity. Glassine can be enjoyed in so many ways, from decorating planners and notebooks to making collages, wrapping gifts, and crafting cards. Its unique sheerness, which lets light pass gently through, and, when layered, creates a sense of depth, offers an appeal that other types of paper cannot deliver. This is why glassine has so many fans.

Yoshida Printing Co., Ltd.'s glassine papers are helping to drive this renewed interest. Yoshida Printing did not, in fact, set out to commercialize glassine.

"We came across glassine as part of our efforts to improve our printing technology by testing just how thin a sheet of paper

we could print on," says Takashi Ogawa of Yoshida Printing. In refining the water management techniques essential to offset printing, the company gained expertise in printing on ultra-thin paper and then began exploring its potential.

In conquering these technical challenges, their consumer brand Sokana was born. The brand's extensive product lineup, from basic glassine paper suitable for crafting to decorative papers featuring hundreds of different designs, is available for purchase on their e-commerce site. Yoshida Printing has also gradually expanded its selection of stationery items to include envelope sets, notepads, and planners as well as wrapping items like ribbon and gift packaging. They all showcase the fun you can have with the paper's translucent quality.

Conversations with users drive the product development. "When we exhibit at events for paper enthusiasts like Bungu Joshi Haku and Kamihaku, for example, we hear directly from consumers about what they are looking for. We use that feedback to improve our products and develop new

ones." In fact, quite a few products have been created based on actual requests received at event venues.

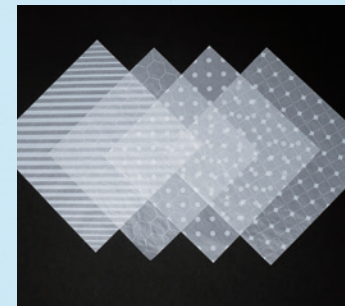
An increasing number of people are finding creative ways to use Sokana paper products purchased through the company's e-commerce site, Sokana. They use them to decorate planners and notebooks, make bookmarks and envelopes, wrap gifts, and create message cards. This creativity is also spreading on Instagram and other social media platforms, where people share original creations such as handmade gift envelopes for special occasions. These examples are inspiring new ways to use glassine.

"There is still so much untapped potential in glassine," says Ogawa. The unique translucency and texture of ultra-thin paper, along with the richness of expression that printing provides, generate infinite possibilities, limited only by the user's creativity. The joy that people find in devising small, ingenious ways to enrich everyday life will surely expand the new value with glassine.

Glassine's Charms Captivate Paper Lovers

Translucent to Diffuse Light

The appeal of glassine lies in its translucency, which lets light filter gently through. Subtly revealing the content inside, its elegant translucency adds a special touch to packaging and stationery. When layered, glassine creates subtle shadows and a sense of depth, effects that are unique to this paper.



Light, Crinkly Texture

The unique crinkly texture is another of glassine's charming features. Its light, airy feel sets it apart from ordinary paper and makes people want to pick it up again and again. This appeal to both the eye and the hand is one reason glassine has attracted so many fans.



Wide Range of Colors for Rich Expression

Yoshida Printing uses its advanced printing technology to reproduce a wide range of colors on glassine paper. From vivid solid colors to delicate gradations, the interplay of translucency and color creates rich expressive possibilities and gives each product a distinctive beauty.



Inspires a Love of Crafting

Whether using glassine in origami, paper cutting, collages, gift wrapping, or decorating planners, the possibilities are endless. Taking advantage of its translucency and array of colors to bring ideas to life sparks the creativity of so many paper and stationery enthusiasts.



Enhancing Corporate Brand Value as a Tool to Highlight Product Appeal

Corporate logos and designs printed on beautifully translucent glassine immerse customers in the brand's world from the moment they open the box. Yoshida Printing's glassine has caught the attention of a variety of industries and companies as a tool for enhancing corporate value.



For B2B

Sokana e-Commerce Site Suggests Practical Ways to Enjoy Glassine

The Sokana e-commerce site sells its branded products while also sharing ideas for using glassine for gift wrapping, craft projects, and art. The site serves as a gateway to the world of glassine, introducing new and enjoyable ways to use it.



For B2C

Sokana e-commerce site:
<https://sokana.shop>



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Information

Bungu Joshi Haku pop-up in Niigata 2026

Dates : Aug. 19 (Wed.) – Aug. 23 (Sun.)
Location : Niigata Isetan, 6F Event Hall (1-6-1 Yachiyo, Chuo-ku, Niigata City)

Admission : 890 yen Aug. 19 (Wed.), 20 (Thu.), and 21 (Fri.)
990 yen Aug. 22 (Sat.) and 23 (Sun.)

* Admission tickets are issued for a specific date and time.
* Admission tickets must be purchased in advance.

Website : <https://bungujoshi.com/event/pop-up-in-niigata2026/>



▶ Transforming Wood Waste Back into a Valuable Resource Introducing the Recycling Business of KPP ECOWORKS

In March 2026, the KPP Group acquired all shares of SINANEN ECOWORK from SINANEN HOLDINGS and welcomed KPP ECOWORKS Co., Ltd. as a new member of the KPP Group. KPP ECOWORKS is engaged in the wood waste recycling business and the supply of recycled fuel and raw materials. For the KPP Group, which has promoted resource circulation primarily through the sale, collection, and recycling of paper, it is playing an important role in further expanding the Group's business scope. Having wood waste recycling facilities (intermediate processing facilities) within the group will further strengthen its systems for making effective use of resources and accelerate our initiatives to help build a recycling-oriented society.

KPP ECOWORKS has recycling centers in Chiba and Saitama and works to turn wood waste back into raw materials. Both centers handle over 70,000 tons of wood waste a year, which is equivalent to an amount comparable to the timber generated by demolishing approximately 15,000 wooden houses each year, based on the amount of timber generated by the demolition of wooden housing in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

Both facilities are fully enclosed, with all processes—from receiving wood waste to processing and storage—carried out indoors. They incorporate measures to reduce noise and dust, prevent disasters, and minimize impacts on the surrounding environment, while also ensuring a safe and efficient working environment. In addition, their well-connected locations allow them to receive wood waste from a wide area.

Using KPP ECOWORKS' advanced resource-recycling technology, wood waste generated on construction and demolition sites and at logistics centers is transformed into resources with new value such as raw material for manufacturing paper or fuel for biomass power generation. These efforts make effective use of finite resources and expand the circular cycle that supports people's lives today. In partnership with KPP ECOWORKS, the group's new member, the KPP Group will make full use of this expertise and continue moving forward to help build a sustainable society.



Chiba Recycling Center
(223-9 Shinminato, Mihama-ku, Chiba-shi, Chiba Prefecture)
Equipped with large-scale crushing equipment, the Chiba Recycling Center efficiently turns large volumes of wood waste back into resources. The wood chips it produces are supplied to major paper manufacturers and biomass power plants.



Shiraoka Recycling Center
(888 Shimo-osaki, Shiraoka-shi, Saitama Prefecture)
The Shiraoka Recycling Center began operations in October 2018 and serves Saitama and the northern Kanto region. It efficiently processes and recycles wood waste and wooden pallets from construction and demolition sites and logistics centers, providing resource recycling based in the local community.

KPPエコワークス株式会社
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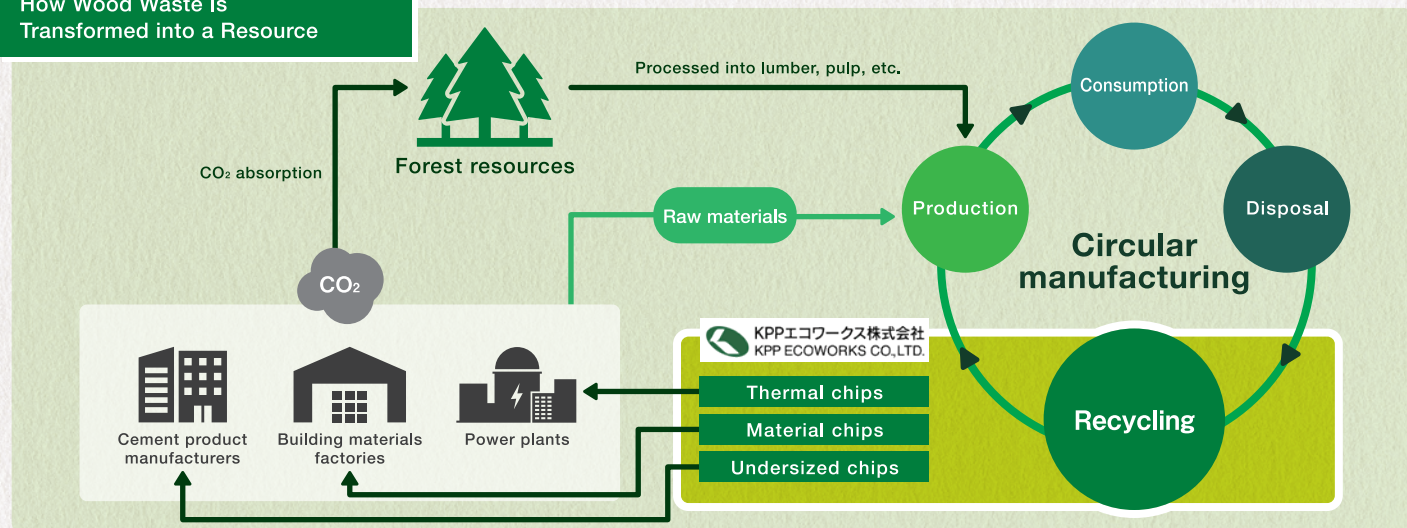
Address
Headquarters : 6-24 Akashi-cho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo
Regional Sales Office : NBF Matsudo Bldg. 8F, 18-4 Honcho, Matsudo-shi, Chiba Prefecture

Businesses
: Industrial waste disposal services, general waste disposal services, industrial waste processing support services

URL
: <https://www.kppecoworks.co.jp/>



How Wood Waste Is Transformed into a Resource



Wood Waste Recycling Process

Virtual plant tour
https://kppecoworks.co.jp/office/vr_recyclingcenter/



Processing Flow at KPP ECOWORKS



Green waste



Materials from housing demolition



Wooden pallets



Lumber remnants



Formwork materials



Other wood waste



(1) Receiving and weighing
Trucks arrive loaded with wood waste. They are weighed using a weighbridge (a large-scale measuring instrument) and unloaded.



(2) Inspection (removal of foreign objects)
After the wood waste is received and transported to the yard, any foreign objects that are mixed in are removed.



(3) Crushing
The wood waste is finely crushed using a hammer crusher.

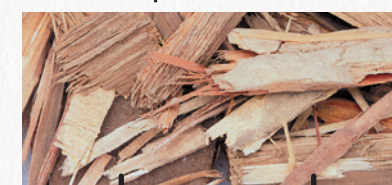


(4) Sorting using a sieving machine and magnetic separation
The chips are passed through a dedicated sieving machine to separate out chips that do not meet the specified size range. Off-specification chips are returned to the crushing process to ensure a consistent final product. Metal is then removed using a magnetic separator, and a metal detector checks for any remaining metal to prevent contamination.



(5) Storage and shipment
Once the wood waste has been processed into high-quality wood chips, the chips are stored on-site at the plant, loaded onto dedicated chip transport vehicles, and shipped to destinations such as biomass power plants, paper mills, and building materials factories.

Thermal chips

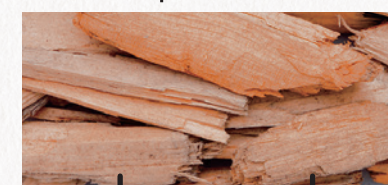


Power plants



Boiler facilities

Material chips

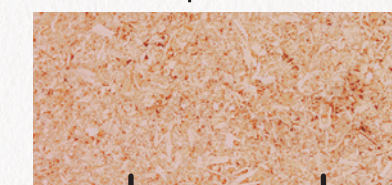


Paper manufacturers



Building materials factories

Undersized chips



Cement product manufacturers



Horticultural materials manufacturers

Making Letters Speak

Tomone Uemura

Humans are creatures who express their thoughts. I feel that letters are the most profound and noble form of human expression. When it comes to letters, hand-written letters are best. When we try to read between the lines, we can see the personality of the writer.

Vol. 45: Yoshihiko Honma

As I look toward my 90th birthday in another year or two, if I were to pick out the friends I have been closest to in my life, Yoshihiko Honma would be in the top three. “Tonko” we nicknamed him, and it was at Niigata High School that we first met. He died at such a young age, though, that I realize it was just thirty years that we knew each other.

I tend to be timid and have always just been average in my studies, my hobbies, my work. True to the saying, “Birds of a feather flock together,” I became close friends with three classmates who were much like me. Thanks to them, I was able to have fulfilling experiences in youth and in the prime of life.

I lived in what was then just about the center of Niigata City, toward the Sea of Japan, while Honma lived with his family in a neighborhood called Terao further to the west. His mother was cheerful, youthful, and beautiful. His father was a prominent figure in Niigata, although I cannot recall ever conversing with him directly.

Although we lived at some distance from each other, we frequently visited each other’s homes. Since my mother passed away at a young age, I had few opportunities to invite friends over for dinner, but we often gathered with other friends at the Honma family home in Terao. Back then, before cars were widespread, this meant

taking diesel trains. When the snow melted, tulips would bloom in the park nearby, and summertime brought watermelons ripening on the vines. After taking a swim at Ikarashi Beach, with views of Sado Island in the distance, we would go back to his house, where a freshly drawn bath and chilled watermelon awaited us. Afterwards, his mother would treat us to dinner, home-cooked. Those were our greatest joys back in those days.

Honma and I became particularly close after we both failed our university entrance exams. After admission, our opportunities to meet had actually decreased in Tokyo due to being in different faculties. Upon returning to Niigata, however, we spent our days going back and forth between each other’s homes.

The sociable Honma got along well with both my father and my younger sister. The day after a heavy snowfall, he rushed over to help clear the snow off our house, which looked near the verge of collapse. When my grandmother passed away while I was at university, he hurried over immediately to pay his respects. For some reason, I can still picture the way his fingertips trembled as he offered incense.

Honma graduated before me and found employment at a broadcasting station in Niigata, while I graduated a year later and took a job at a film company in Tokyo. He, my senior in the working world, presented me with an ivory *hanko* seal as a congratulatory gift for starting my career, telling me a bit bashfully, “You should be having plenty of opportunities to use one of these now.” I would use that gift from him as my official seal for the next six decades.

Honma married twice. It was not until the wedding reception that I met his first wife. Though I only found a few chances a year to return home to Niigata after starting work in Tokyo, I made it a habit to stop by the Honma household whenever I did make it back. I would pay them visits at their new home with friends and enjoy meals and pleasant conversations with them. Their marriage, however, did not work out. His wife made a trip to Tokyo to see me, pleading, “Yoshihiko is talking about divorce, and I don’t want that. I’d like you to talk him out of it, Uemura-san. You’re the only one who might persuade him now.” Though I conveyed her message to Honma, his mind was set on ending the marriage.

Some time later, Honma remarried and had two daughters with his new wife, Miyuki, a colleague from work. Following suit and getting married as well, I had

two sons of my own, and around this time, our families began spending some time together. Whenever a long vacation came around, Honma would call to invite me for a visit, and I had come to look forward to those calls.

That said, even when I did have chances to stay at his house, he was so dedicated to his work that he would often not return home until late at night, which made it difficult for our two families to spend much time together.

Once, as a group of three close friends with our families, we headed out to the Hiyoriyama Seacoast — a spot where I had enjoyed swimming often in my youth. The sight of the little children frolicking in the waves presented us with the mirror image of ourselves when we were their age, some twenty years past.

Another time, I was with Honma, our friend Otsu, who he looked up to, and Takasugi, another member of our little “Flunky Four” group. I will never forget this long-awaited golf outing we had been promising ourselves ever since joining the workforce, but had never managed to pull off. It was the summer of 1987, the 10th of August. The venue was the Shiun Golf Club. While none of us may have had scores worth bragging about, we simply had a wonderful time, the Sea of Japan glittering in the distance. That must have been the last such opportunity the gods extended to Honma and the rest of us.

Honma fell ill that October and underwent surgery in November. I made every effort to pay him visits as often as I could. I still have a postcard I received from Honma at the end of that year.

“Today, on a balmy autumn day that was unusual for this time of year in Niigata, I went out for the first time in a month and a half. I savored the city, which seemed to brim with life. I feel as though I have come face to face with life and truly realized its preciousness for the first time in all my 60 years. I have been rather careless, I feel, not just with my life, but with anything and everything up to this point. From now on, I intend to be a bit more careful to value both people and things.

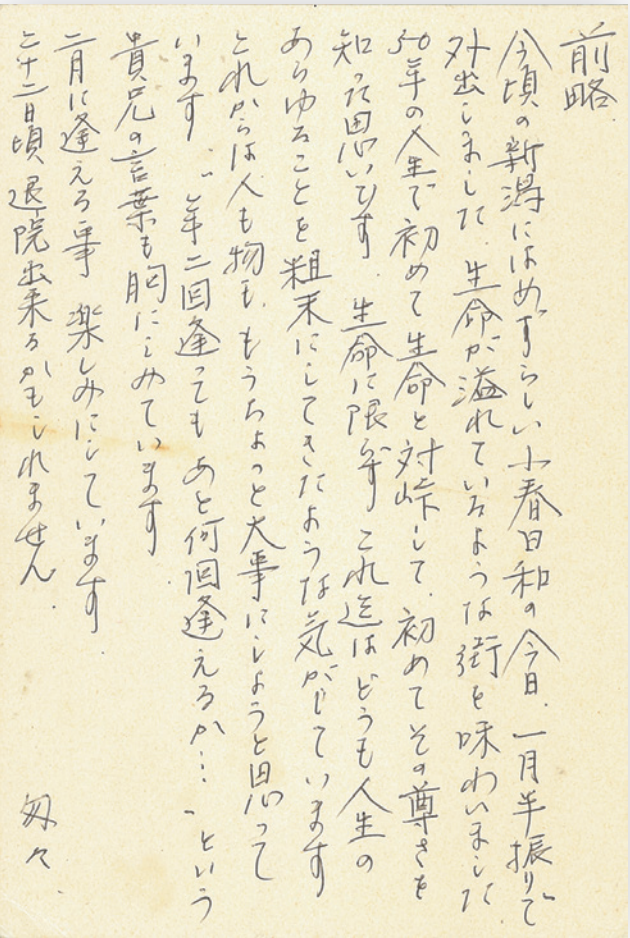
‘Even if we get together twice a year,’ you wondered, ‘how many more meetings might be left for us...?’ Those words have really struck a chord with me.”

It was in September of the following year that Honma passed away. My last visit to see him had been at the end of August, just before heading out on a business trip to the Soviet Union. He had wasted away to a shadow of his former self. His throat hurt after the surgery, and it seemed to give him pain just to speak.

“I can’t just let myself slip away like this,” he said. “I know,” I replied. It was clear that his thoughts were with Miyuki and their two daughters, Miki and Aki. Then he continued, “Uemura, do you know what my greatest wish is right now?” He paused for a moment before continuing, “To drink down a glass of cold water, just like in the old days.”

Thinking of his pain, so severe he had trouble even swallowing his own saliva, I chided myself for my own daily arrogance and conceit. We shook hands as I was

about to depart. For a while, Honma held my hand without letting go of it. As he said, I’d like to see you once more, but... I could hear what he left unspoken: “We may never meet again.”



Author
Tomone Uemura
Essayist

After graduating from the Department of History, the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Sciences at Waseda University in 1962, he worked at Toei Co., Ltd. before entering TV Tokyo Corporation, where he was later appointed to managing director of TV Tokyo and president and representative director of PROTX.



Yoshihiko Honma

Radio and television producer
1937 - 1988

Born in Niigata City in 1937. After graduating from Waseda University, he joined the Broadcasting System of Niigata Incorporated (BSN). He was involved in producing and directing radio and television programs and received numerous awards from the Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association (JBA) in both the Television and Radio divisions. After meeting the author of this essay, Tomone Uemura, at Niigata High School, they maintained a close friendship along with their families for the next 30 years.

In 1988, he passed away at the young age of 51.

Presenting the KPP Group's Diligent Efforts toward Realizing a Sustainable Society

KPP Sustainable Times

The circulation and regeneration of finite resources and energy are among the highest-priority issues facing society today. With the mission to “contribute to the realization of a recycling-oriented society,” the KPP Group strives to build a sustainable society and enhance corporate value through its business activities. In this issue, we introduce a real-world application of Paper Turf®, an outdoor artificial turf made of paper, and a Sendai Tanabata Festival exhibition that showcases the charms of traditional Japanese paper culture.

01 Outdoor Paper Turf® Installed at Shinagawa Public Facility ECORU Togoshi

Paper Turf®, the outdoor artificial paper turf developed by KPP Group company Oji Fiber Co., Ltd., has been installed at the outdoor playground at ECORU Togoshi, a public environmental learning and exchange facility in Shinagawa City. Paper Turf® is an artificial turf with pile made from Paper Yarn OJO+, a fiber derived from abaca. In addition to helping reduce the amount of microplastics released into the ocean, the low thermal conductivity unique to paper helps maintain lower surface temperatures than conventional artificial turf made of plastic.

The outdoor Paper Turf® installed at ECORU Togoshi is more durable and weather resistant than previous indoor turf products, while still providing the same environmental performance and safety features. In addition to meeting the high safety standards required of OEKO-TEX® STANDARD 100 Annex 6 Product Class 1 products for babies and children up to 3 years, its flame-retardant performance and other features mean this product can be used with confidence even in public facilities frequented by large numbers of people of all ages.

Paper Turf® is both environmentally friendly and designed to feel comfortable. Product applications are expanding to include both indoor and outdoor settings, and it is gaining attention as a new alternative in building a sustainable society.



This environmental learning and exchange facility opened in May 2022. With approximately 250,000 visitors a year, the facility is popular with people of all ages who visit to have fun learning about the environment. ECORU Togoshi itself boasts high environmental performance. It was the first public building in Tokyo to receive Nearly ZEB (Nearly Net Zero-Emission Building) certification, has attracted nationwide attention as a pioneering facility and receives many visitors on study tours.

Address : 2-1-30 Yutaka-cho, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo (in Togoshi Park)
Hours : 7:00 – 21:30 (Exhibit area/kid's space 9:00 – 18:00)
Admission : Free (Open to all visitors, regardless of residency.)
Closed : New Year's holidays (Dec. 29 – Jan. 3)
URL : <https://ecoru-togoshi.jp/e.apj.hp.transer.com/>



For more information on Paper Turf®, examples of real-world application are also featured on the Oji Fiber Co., Ltd. website.

<https://www.ojifiber.co.jp/en/index.html>



02 Experience the Colors and Paper Culture of the Sendai Tanabata Festival

The Tanabata Festival celebrates the legend of star-crossed lovers able to meet only once a year, an occasion when people write their dreams and wishes on colorful strips of paper. KPP Group Holdings showcased Sendai Tanabata Festival decorations produced by Narumiya Kami Shoji Co., Ltd. (Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture) at Ginza Shochiku Square (Chuo-ku, Tokyo). The exhibit featured giant streamers, approximately 6 meters long, which have come to symbolize the Sendai Tanabata Festival, as well as bamboo decorations adorned with strips of paper, on which children from Chuo City have written their wishes. Visitors were invited to write their own wishes on strips of paper, allowing them to experience firsthand this traditional Japanese cultural celebration.

As part of our community outreach efforts, this project is designed to show children the appeal of paper by letting them write on and decorate with it. The Tanabata decorations on display are made of the same papers as those used at the Sendai Tanabata Festival, offering a rare opportunity to experience the atmosphere of a Sendai summer, but right in the heart of Tokyo.

We also presented an exhibit on the origins of Tanabata decorations and the *nanatsu-kazari* (the seven traditional paper ornaments for the festival) at Kyobashi Tsukiji Kindergarten and Elementary School, located near our headquarters. The children wrote their wishes on slips of paper, which were later displayed in Ginza Shochiku Square during the exhibit, delighting the event's many visitors.

Through activities that convey the cultural value and potential of paper, the KPP Group will continue to focus on connecting people, communities, and the future.



Narumiya Kami Shoji Topics



Sendai Tanabata merchandise is available for purchase at the Rakuten online store.



Company introduction video now available on the KPP Group official YouTube channel.

Sendai Tanabata Exhibition (1) Ginza Shochiku Square

1,000+ Wishes on Tanzaku!

Along with the Sendai Tanabata decorations, the activities of the C.W. Nicol Afan Woodland Trust were introduced with a panel display. In addition, back issues of TSUNAGU were distributed, and paper craft works were on show.

We also presented an exhibit on recycling paper resources. The exhibit explored both the cultural and environmental value of paper from the unique perspective of the KPP Group, whose businesses revolve around paper.



Dates : Jul. 17 (Fri.) – Aug. 7 (Fri.)

Venue : Ginza Shochiku Square (1-13-1 Tsukiji, Chuo-ku, Tokyo)

Access : 2-minute walk from Higashi-Ginza Station on the Tokyo Metro Hibiya Line or the Toei Asakusa Line

Sendai Tanabata Exhibition (2) Kyobashi Tsukiji Kindergarten and Elementary School

As part of our local educational activities in the neighborhood of our headquarters, we presented an exhibit featuring Sendai Tanabata decorations at the school. Along with panels explaining the origins and history of Tanabata decorations, the exhibit also featured actual *nanatsu-kazari* (seven Tanabata ornaments) and slips of paper for Tanabata wishes. This display provided an opportunity for the children to deepen their understanding of traditional Japanese culture.



Dates : Jun. 19 (Fri.) – Jul. 17 (Fri.)

* Not open to the public

Editorial postscript

In addition to my daily work at the KPP Group, I am also pursuing graduate studies. I find that in most of my classes the use of AI-powered chatbots on reaction papers and other assignments is expressly prohibited. At the same time, because we are free to consult AI about almost anything, it is easy to repeatedly run my ideas past it, receive affirmation, and gradually become convinced that my opinions must be correct. Even when my thinking is objectively mistaken, discussing it with other people and hearing their views can help correct

distortions in my thinking. By contrast, I have come to feel that the more I talk with AI, the more closed off my thinking becomes. The latest research* also raises a similar issue, namely, that AI tends to cater excessively to human wishes. Experiences like these have led me to regularly ask myself, "Is this thought or feeling truly my own?"

AI is a wonderful tool that can provide an answer in mere seconds. However, as the answer does not come from thinking for yourself, it is also, in a sense, fake.

When I interviewed Nabo Shimonaka for this issue's Special Feature, I shared the idea that it is perhaps through our own lived experiences that we make such answers genuinely our own. She shared many insights with me on what it means to make something authentic. (See relevant section on page 6.)

Authentic experiences will be carried on by people in the future whose faces we will never know. And so, through authentic experiences, paper culture will continue to be passed on.

Tomoka Kato

* Myra Cheng, et al. "Sycophantic AI decreases prosocial intentions and promotes dependence." Science 391,6792 (2026).

Lanterns

A culture of light wrapped in paper connects people

As dusk approaches, quietly glowing lanterns emit soft light. This sight is a nostalgic and comforting one for so many. Paper lanterns are so often seen at festivals and memorial services, and their purpose is more than merely to provide light. It is in the beauty created by paper and light that people's wishes, prayers, and local cultures are carried to the future.

The history of lanterns is a long one, and they are believed to have come to Japan with Buddhism. The original lanterns were mainly made of metal or stone. With the introduction of *toro* and *andon* lanterns (made by covering wooden or bamboo frames with *washi* paper) in the Muromachi period (1336-1573), however, light suddenly became a part of the lives of everyday people, and *washi* played a key role in this. *Washi* not only blocks the wind; it also softens and diffuses the intense light of the flame within, transforming it into a "warmth" that envelops the entire space.

As with *shoji* paper screens, *washi* on lanterns creates a pleasant barrier that softens direct sunlight and diffuses harsh light. Rather than completely dispelling the darkness of night, the uniquely Japanese "beauty of transmitted light" fosters a rich, evocative way of life in which darkness and light coexist. As exemplified by the *toro nagashi* floating lantern ceremony during Obon, when Japanese people honor their ancestors, the role of the lantern is more than a mere device for providing light. The lantern also serves as a spiritual vessel for honoring the soul of the deceased and conveying prayers and wishes. Perhaps it is the very softness of the paper enveloping the flickering light that gives *washi* the ability to hold people's sorrows and hopes.

In recent years, lanterns have undergone a whole new generation. The shift from candles to LEDs as the light source has made lanterns safer and more durable. In addition to *washi*, lanterns are now also made from specialty

papers that biodegrade after being used at outdoor events, as well as functional papers that are durable and water-resistant enough to be reused even in rain. Incorporating the latest LED technology and the Internet of Things (IoT) continues to create new possibilities for what can be expressed with paper and light. These include interactive paper lanterns that change the way they glow in response to movement and surrounding sounds. By incorporating modern technology while preserving their traditional form, these lanterns create wonderful new value.

Whether in the bustle of a festival or a quiet place of prayer, lanterns serve as a bridge connecting people to one another, to their communities, and to the future. A single sheet of paper bathed in light enhances the space it is in and enriches the hearts of the people present. Lanterns have woven a history of light that will continue to gently illuminate us all as we move into our shared future.



We have adopted a bookbinding method free of staples, paste and heat, taking into consideration recycling and the risk of injuries.



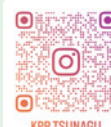
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