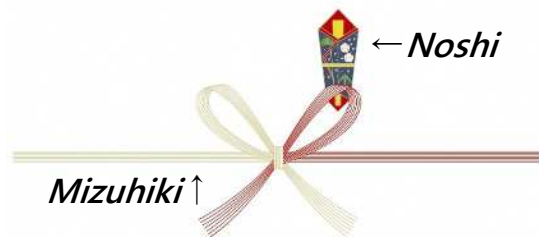


The style of Japanese gift-giving

A wrapping style of Japanese present is unique. It expresses the minds of a gift-giver.

A present is wrapped with a piece of paper called *Kakegami*, on which is written the reason for the present and the name of a gift-giver. The present is tied with *Mizuhiki* strings and attached a *Noshi* ornament to the upper right of the *Kakegami* paper. This style is said to be vestige of the offerings to the gods, which were tied with a thin *Shimenawa* rice-straw rope and accompanied fresh abalones. There are some traditional manners on the color of *Mizuhiki*, the number of *Mizuhiki* strings, how to tie them, and types of *Noshi*. Nowadays, I'm afraid few Japanese may understand properly these manners.



Mizuhiki

There are various explanations about the origin of *Mizuhiki*.

One of them, in the Asuka period (late 6th to early 8th century), when *Ono-no Imoko*, a Japanese envoy to the Sui Dynasty (present-day China), returned to Japan, return offerings the reply envoy brought were tied with red and white dyed hemp cords. This offering manner was said that the origin of tying offerings to the court with red and white hemp cords. It is thought that the name of "*Mizuhiki*" came from process of

soaking hemp cords in colored water, and pulling and squeezing them in the dyeing process after the Heian period.

During the Muromachi period (mid-14th century to mid-16th century), the Ming Dynasty (present-day China) attached red and white ropes to exports to Japan in order to distinguish them from others. The Japanese misinterpreted the ropes as a gift-giving etiquette. Since then, it is said that tying gifts with red and white cords became Japanese custom. Around this time, *Koyori*, made by hardening *washi* paper with glue, dyeing, and twisting them, began to be applied instead of hemp cord for *Mizuhiki*. This is the *Mizuhiki* we see today.

Mizuhiki not only ties and fasten gifts, but also is a symbol of unopened gift, warding off evil, and bringing people together. *Mizuhiki* also expresses the heart of a giver by the way of knotting, the colors, and the number of strings.

For happy events, an odd number of *Mizuhiki* strings (3.5.7; 10 for weddings only, 5 from each family) colored with red and white or gold and silver are used. *Mizuhiki* should be tied in “*Cho-musubi* (bow knot)” or “*Musubikiri* (reef knot)”.

For unhappy events, an even number of strings (2.4.6 strings) colored with black and white, twin silver, or white and yellow, etc. are tied with *Musubikiri*.

Musubikiri is tied on gifts for "events that should not be repeated" because the knot is tied so tightly that it cannot be untied.



Cho-musubi is tied on gifts for “events that can be repeated” because the knot can be untied and tied any number of times.

Although a wedding is a happy event of course, *Musubikiri* is applied hoping that the relationship of both families will last forever.

Noshi

The term *Noshi* is derived from *Noshi-awabi* (dried abalone). It is made by shaving an abalone into thin slices, stretching them flat with a *Hinoshi* (an old-fashioned iron), and drying them.

Abalone was offered up to the gods as an auspicious food that brings longevity, and to purify the place where the offerings were made. *Noshi* also has the meaning of "prolonging", so it is not attached to a sad occasion gift. It is not attached to a gift of perishable product as well, since an abalone was originally raw.



← *Warabi-noshi*

Noshi has some ranks and types. *Orinoshi* is attached for formal gifts, *Kazari-noshi* or *Chohana* are for semi-formal ones, and *Han-noshi* or *Warabi-noshi* are for casual ones.

A conclusion

The style of Japanese gift-giving may seem complicated. However, once you learn what the wrapping style symbolizes, you will perceive the thoughts of the giver at a glance. Today, we can send gifts with just one touch of a finger. Regardless of its merit, I believe that presenting a heartfelt gift in person is much meaningful in such an era of convenience.

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【QR】



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