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# my blog.

Kaoru Nakazawa

## Gift as a greeting token 贈答品

June 19th, 2013

Today I received a box that was delivered by the *takkyubin*, Japanese home delivery service. It was a bunch of gift catalogues from a big department store in Tokyo since I asked them to send us a few days ago. The catalogues are for summer gift selection as mainly *ochugen*, Japanese midyear gift-giving. However, the aim to ask the department store to send them us was not for the order of *ochugen*, but to order the *koudengaeshi*: sending a present in return for a funeral offering. In early June, my father-in-law has gone, therefore, we had the funeral the next week, at his neighborhood Church. The attendees could bring their monetary offering to the departed soul that is called *okouden*: it means the price for incense; yet for the Christian, that is called *ohanaryou* that means the price for flowers. There are formal envelopes with symbolic paper strings to enclose cash, and each design has the meaning such as celebration or condolence, the degree of relations, or which religious styles. It always surprises me that such a small envelope can carry a lot of information, even only the exterior tells us many things. Gift in Japanese society is an intellectual exchange to stay in touch without meeting. It was the first time to know the way of Christian for me since my parents always did funeral ceremony

at the Buddhism temple. My personal impression about the Christian funeral style was more reasonable and simple, less tragic emotion than Buddhism style: because we sang many hymns based on idea of Heaven, probably. In Japan, though funerals and burials industry handles the process in detail such as selection of coffin types or the food menu for the guests, the bereaved has a lot of works. My husband and his younger brother worked together the whole procedure: from the transferring the body from the hospital, to the dining ritual at the church after the cremation. After the rituals, there are more works such as making the list of the guests to send *koudengaeshi* by selecting the card and the gift to deliver, or placing the ash at the tomb, etc. Usually, return gift costs a half price of the cost of the given. These days, many department stores have "catalogue gift" that the receiver can choose one from hundreds of goods or foods there. The letters or gifts to the deceased still keep coming from people without knowing about his death. The family has to inform them by writing letters. All such works seem to bond the social circle of the deceased even after one's death. For instance, the family knows the name and the address of people who visited the funeral because they are written on their envelope of *ohanaryou*. Although the funeral industry could manage most of rituals today, the bereaved does not have time to be in the grief since they have too many things to do. It may sound cold, but somehow maybe good.



[Photo: unused shuugibukuro envelop variation and the catalogue gift package]

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## Chounaikai (choukai) 町内会

June 4th, 2013

*Chounaikai* means a neighborhood association in Japan. Usually it is consisted of families in one block in same address numbers of unit such as 1 *choume* or 2 *choume*, or smaller unit group. They send a representative person called *hanchou* of each group to the annual autonomous town council, and the aim of *chounaikai* is promotion of mutual relationship. For instance, they plan social gatherings of the community such as town festival, or collection of donations for the community chests. The group leader of the year takes the role of the collector of the contributions and the dues per a year is taken, and in my town's *chounaikai* takes turns for being *hanchou*. In Tokyo, there are many multifamily housing such as large apartment; therefore, most of people do not have to take the role for the town community because the building owner could be the representative of the housings. However, the downtown we live has many small houses, and we also own small tiny house; therefore we have to join the *chounaikai* to work as *hanchou*. I had an experience to work as a *hanchou* some years ago. All members must take the role of *hanchou* every twelve years since the *chounaikai* group is consisted of about twelve families including a school and companies. The *hanchou* of this year visited our

[Photo: a receipt of payment for the due per a year of *choukai* ]



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house and collected the due per a year in June. That is the first work for her. Each *hanchou* introduces oneself when she is going around each house. Usually, such works to visit neighborhood are done by women. Probably, because men in traditional family are working outside in daytime, women work for the local community. When I have been very busy for my artworks for exhibition preparation, my rounds collecting was slowly done; and one elder woman became a bad mood and complained to my husband about it. I thought the collection work was enough early in the time of the deadline, but the elder woman might expect I could work fast. I learned that: for some people, local community is high priority in their life; maybe most important, central thing of life. I moved in only some years ago, so I never imagined such works of *hanchou* or the serious reaction of the neighbors. After that I became careful to pay attention for neighborhood than before. Since I worked much at abroad countries for my art exhibitions, life-style seems to differ from elder people's one. These days, young people moved into the area, and it is rejuvenated gradually. Small community is changing slowly, and smooth communicative manner is needed between the generations.

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## Sekaiisan 世界遺産

### a world natural heritage in a sweetcake

July 19th, 2013

We drove to the tomb for funeral to place the ash of father in law near by Mt. Fuji. And on the way to go back to Tokyo, we stopped by an Italian restaurant at Gotenba. They served us a beautiful full-course lunch of stylish cooking. We noticed one strange shaped glass served for nonalcoholic beer: a trapezoid, conical shaped glass. Then, we recognized the glass was designed for the commemoration of registration for world heritage of Mt. Fuji, at their entrance showcase. This year 2013, Mt. Fuji was authorized as a world heritage. I did not pay attention for such news usually but everyday mass news informed how the process was going. Japanese people have been admired Mt. Fuji because of not only the highest mountain in Japan, but also the beauty of the symmetric long foot of the single peak mountain. We knew that how local people made effort for the campaign to expand the range of Fuji's value to be acknowledged as a world heritage, through the mass news. I went Mt. Fuji a few times: the mountain was volcano and bared the lava rocks, and the higher area was covered by ice and snow. Clear view and fresh air made the climbers feel good. I can imagine how the local residents are proud of the landscape, and it is reasonable that they wanted to make Mt. Fuji as the nature heritage. According

to the mass news, Fuji has been pending to be approved as the heritage because of the difficulty to keep the cleanness: many climbers threw trashes, moreover the garbage pollution caused by industrial waste. Some crooked dealer of industrial waste brought pollution to the mountain, and caused problem during many years. But this year people convinced The World Heritage Committee and Mt. Fuji became a world heritage, as a nature resource at last. I wonder how people overcame the waste pollution problem. They might solve the problem to keep cleanness of the mountain since Japanese really enjoy the landscape with worship for the nature, and it appears as various Japanese arts such as paintings or poems. For instance, woodblock printings of Hokusai, the artist who made "Fugaku-hyakkei" as a series of woodprints of the Mt. Fuji view in four seasons. The printing is very famous, and it is featured in tourist books or magazines to introduce Japanese cultures. After the driving, we arrived at the house of the deceased father in law, and ate *youkan*, Japanese sweet which brother in law brought to share for the special day. Usually, *youkan* is made from beans and sugar, but the summer *youkan* was made of blue jelly, *kohakukan*, for the sky part and green *neriyoukan* for the Fuji mountain part on the cut end. He sliced off the whole sweet of a rectangular parallelepiped into thin slice for each plate, then, we ate the thin slices with a cake-fork. It looks cool with transparency on hot day. The company of the Japanese traditional sweet cake makes the design of *youkan* illustrates four seasons of Mt. Fuji with different colors and materials. Both the beer glass and the *youkan* sweet are designed Mt. Fuji as the motif, and they prove how Japanese love the mountain landscape deeply in daily life.

[Photo by Hideki: Nakazawa: *youkan* of TORAYA, "Fuji four seasons" series]



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## Shochumimai 暑中見舞

June 6th, 2013

When I went to the post office, a woman worker mentioned me about they start to sell *shochumimai* card of the year. *Shochumimai* means a summer greeting card inquiring after a person's health. And Japan postal service offer new card design for the year for sale. They renew all postcard design every year. Usually, they started to sell it from early summer till *risshuu* August 8th, the day of the beginning of autumn according to the lunar and solar calendar because the duration for *shuchumimai* is limited from July 7th to August 8th. After August 8th, we have to change the content into *zanshomimai*, it means the lingering summer hear greeting.



I bought some *shochuumimai* postcards to send attendants

for ceremony for mother's memorial. This postcard includes a lottery numbers printed on the side of address, and the prizewinners will be announced in September, and the winners bring the card to post office to process their prizes. This year they design fireworks as summer scenery because Japanese enjoy fireworks on the riverside in summer night every year. The fireworks-display gathers thousands people, and many of them wear *yukata*: Japanese traditional cloth, casual cotton kimono and also *geta*, traditional wood sandals. We recognize that "today is *hanabi* night" to see the girls in *yukata* in subway or train, station or street. The set piece of fireworks and the sound make audience to be excited, somebody cries "*Tamayaaa*" or "*Kagiyaaaa!*": I think these are names of big famous firework factories in Edo period around Ryougoku in Tokyo. Fireworks festival brings Japanese the real feeling of summer, the crowd and street vendors for beer or ice creams are lined with stalls both sides. *Shochumimai* can bring such seasonal feeling as summer greeting. It is a good opportunity to contact with people in distance, especially if we must refrain new year cerebation in mourning since the family of dead does not exchange new year greeting in tradition. Instead, we send *mochu* greeting card at the end of the year to let people inform about death of family shortly to avoid the cerebation. Seasonal card can be one way for exchange greeting with person without seeing for a long time.

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## My first *furo* brazier 風炉

March 17th, 2013

At the tea ceremony school that I continue to go weekly, I explained my teacher that I will try to have a tea ceremony for my friend from New York and for other student under the same teacher to celebrate her promotion. In May, the American from NYC planned to visit Tokyo, and she asked me about tea ceremony via email: I never met her before but a curator, who worked with me many years ago, recommended her to contact me. The American is a visual artist, and has an interest in tea ceremony. So I planned to visit some museum first, and next, reconsidered that drinking tea would be more fun. Always real experience is much true than read or watch things in the glass cases. But I thought café serves Japanese tea is not very best experience, so I decided to hold tea ceremony by myself. My teacher heard my idea and agreed with having tea ceremony for foreign artist, but she worried that cooking monk's food would be difficult for me. Then I said her I would do my best. Thanks for her, she could gift me her old *furo*, the brazier, for the ceremony in summer. Her *furo* has cracks at the bottom a little but I was so appreciated, and brought it to my house by car. The diameter is about thirty centimeters, and it is made of ceramic—very heavy, and japanned in black color. This utensil plays the central role in tea ceremony in summer because we put ash and charcoals



inside and make hot water. Without *furo*, no tea could be served. In winter, we put fireplace bottom of the floor nearer to the guest place to make them warm as a sunken hearth. But *furo* is placed on *tatami*, used for only summer. Why I needed the *furo* at home? Because I had to train putting ash inside in certain shape, and make charcoals in certain temperature. For the guests, I had to repeat the process to figure out the best condition for tasty hot water. The inside of my new iron kettle was painted a rust preventive lacquer, and I had to make hot water everyday to remove the odor. The kettle needs to be on *furo*, but not on the strong fire such as gas cooker in the kitchen. I had to learn prepare good hot water with simmer of charcoal; very slowly. Moreover, the way to place the ash has special design that was invented by Rikyu who started tea ceremony school four hundred years ago; he was inspired by the landscape on the distant view of mountain from the beach. Rikyu tried to liken the ash to the mountain landscape in *furo*. We tea servers have to build cliffs and valley at the *furo* bottom, using special tools of several shaped small spoons very carefully. Then put a *gotoku*, an iron trivet, and a ceramic disc. The ash is very fine and I need to be intensive to make it super flat surface. Lastly, I sprinkled white decoration ash a little, as liken snow, and drew the grooves as a divinatory symbol of water in four lines at the center with a thin stick. This symbol makes a balance with fire. I enjoyed the whole process to prepare my first *furo*, and made hot water for powdered tea.



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## Obon tour 盂蘭盆会

August 17th, 2012

The bon(obon) is Buddhist festival for the dead, usually a few days around July fifteen or August fifteen in Japan. People visit ancestral spirit or the dead, at cemetery or temple during these days or the close weekend every year. I went touring some cemeteries to visit spirits of dead. I noticed that there are several types in the tomb stone design in the cemetery. For example, traditional tomb stone in Japan is Buddhism type: vertical standing rectangular stone with family name, sometimes wooden stupas are standing behind.

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People offer flowers and incense in front of the tomb stone. There are another type, newer design for the tomb stones too. For instance, whatever religion is selected by the

dead, the square shaped cubic stones seem neutral, and they became common and popular these days. These stones are applied for any kind of religion, such as Buddhism, Christianity, or Shintoism, atheism. These

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type often does not have family name but some symbol character or picture on the surface. For instance, the kanji-character means "harmony" is engraved on the above example. And flowers and incense are offered in front of the stones. And also there is a unique design ordered by a geologist for his tomb. I designed his book of retiring his professor job teaching geology: His research theme includes mineralogy, and he selected his favorite stone. There are no letters on the stone; but the large beautiful column holding a sphere looks elegant. It welcomes people

quietly. The "new type" variation may increase among new generation since it does not seem to limit the visitors.

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## An electric wire 電線

May 30th, 2013

Putting electric wires is important for modern life. Without the wire, electricity does not come to us, and electricity is one of essential factors in human daily life. However, I noticed other countries do not have much wires in the sky, why? As far as I remember, in many other countries do not putting such much wires in the air. Some people say that electric wires are underground because it does not seem nice looking in the blue sky: they draw the striped pattern.



I agree with the idea to keep simple sky, without wires in landscape. Why Japanese electric company did not put the wires underground, and puts up the cable from the pole to pole? The poles may be disturbing landscape. Many of poles are made of concrete, with many small plastic parts to connect the cables. I think they are all necessity parts, but maybe underground is safe place to keep them because the weather condition cannot affect underground.

Human needs electricity to consume a lot everyday. It is good idea to become conscious about environmental landscape too: artificial things are overflowing in civilization, but some of them can be better appearance. I saw some pictures of foreign landscape: they try to dissolve the electric poles by painting similar colors to the background view. For instance, the pole in the forest is painted into brown or green to be looked like a tree of the forest. In the city area, it may be difficult to paint them but putting underground maybe better solution, because the city view is always crowded with many signs and buildings. While Japanese old roads are too narrow to reconstruct but new city plan promotes underground construction of the electric poles and wires. According to the website of Ministry of Land, ([http://www.mlit.go.jp/road/road/traffic/chicyuka/jirei\\_01.htm](http://www.mlit.go.jp/road/road/traffic/chicyuka/jirei_01.htm)) there are several examples of the underground constructions since twenty years ago. They do not spoil the appearance of the streets, therefore, the plans are effective to keep clear view especially for the historical, touristic landscape to be preserved. Civilization is great but sometimes not beautiful as nature, and we can consider the best presentation to harmonize in the landscape.

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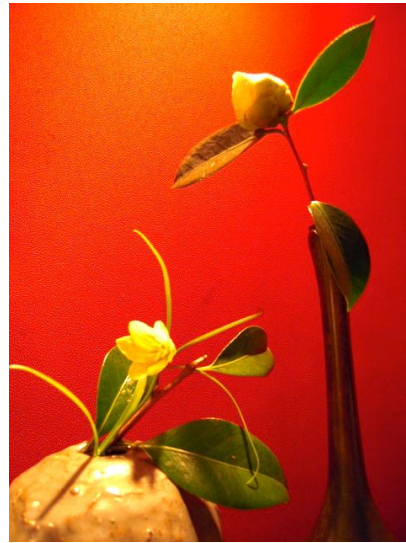
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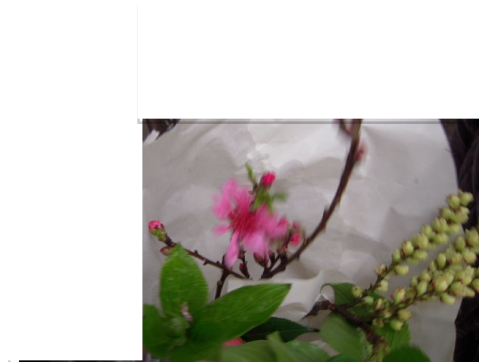
## Chabana 茶花

March 30th, 2013

I made *Chabana* for tea ceremony after a long time. *Chabana* is one of *Ikebana*, Japanese flower arrangement, but it is prepared for only tea ceremony. *Chabana* must be smaller than usual arrangement, and it is made of a few (maximum five) plants in a small container. In addition, there are several rules to follow. For example, flower with strong scent should not be applied for *chabana*, such as Casablanca lily or Cape jasmine. Usually the *chabana* should be wild Japanese natives plants. Therefore, they are small, humble arrangement. They should resemble a wild landscape. The flower designer must consider how it look natural as if it is borrowed from the wild mountain to bring to the tea room. Such simple small flower arrangement but it has many methods to deal fragile plants, such as how bend branches without any harm or to select the best angle of the plants to show. The seasonal choice is important factor to entertain the guests in tearoom. Japanese mountain changes the plants being the best each season. And these short-living plants are not dealed at most of



flowershops in the city area. Therefore, when we prepare *chabana*, we must go to mountain, or visit the apciality stores. For the tea ceremony, I bought several plants at the specialities shop. In addition, a guest



could bring fresh wild flowers such as *kikumomo*, *ryoubu* or *cameria* from Oshima, an island some hours away from Tokyo bay.

The combination of flowers and a container is also where to show skill and knowledge. Since *chabana* is one item of the whole tea ceremony, always the sense of balance is important. Not only the plants but also the detail of the container is asked by the guest at the tea ceremony such as the material or the artist' s name. Because *chabana* is only one "living" item at tea ceremony, the arrangement must be prepared blessed the life and nature essence. Touching living plants is comfortable. It is special to touch the plants to compare with other utensils of tea ceremony. I enjoyed the preparation, remembering the delicate tangible sense.



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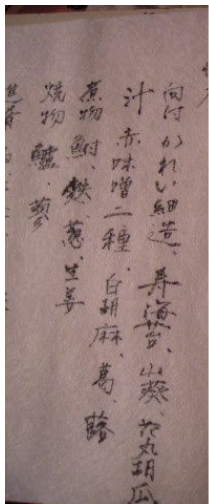
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## Kaiseki cooking 懷石料理

May 17th, 2013

I cooked *kaiseki* for tea ceremony. *Kaiseki* is Japanese monk's foods, and original *kaiseki* is simple cooking, yet they are served as stylish sumptuous meal these days. In tea ceremony, *kaiseki* serves seldom, precious materials for the gourmet, however, the plates do not look splendour at all. Primarily, zen monks limited their eating rituals in the morning and noon, not for afternoon. When they feel hunger, monks hold a warmed stone: therefore, it came to be called "*kaiseki*" means "stone-holding inside the kimono." They could not eat much but the monks staved off their hunger with a warmed stone. Thus so, *kaiseki* should be a simple minimum cooking originally. The *kaiki* paper recorded the detail.



The menu was: I made sashimi of a flatfish with seaweed, wasabi, cucumber silices, soy source. Miso soup of two pastes with sesame tofu, and rice. And I served a shredded butterbur, seasoned sea bream fish with onion and ginger. A grilled sea bass with herb vinegar, wild chicken with herb grass, soup with wild berries. Sea cucumber, beans and bracken. Pickled vegetables and Japanese rice wine, hot drink of roasted rice too. And some more: this time, I cooked coursed *kaiseki*. Sweetcake and tea followed. I had to learn cooking by myself for one month. I did not know why *kaiseki* costs so much, but now I understood that some materials are really seldom, such as *iwanashi* (berries) or *konoko* (sea cucumber). Yet the menu does not look luxurious but the precious materials are not easy to obtain such as *koi* (carp) or *uzura* (quail). I felt as if I was cooking food in Edo-period by time-slipping, but they were delicious and healthy. I am almost vegetarian but the *kaiseki* cooking tasted good. It was a small adventure for me but was great studies. I was busy to serve the full course for three guests going back and forth. The following tea ceremony parts were also hectic a little, but we were happy with the new experience.

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## Clog thong はなお

May 20th, 2012

When I go to tea ceremony class, I often need to wear *kimono*, Japanese traditional cloth. It means I have to wear *zouri* or *geta*, Japanese traditional clog: if I wear the sneaker or shoes for western cloth with *kimono*, it will seem strange. I have several *zouri* and *geta* for *yukata*, for several different occasions such as season or purpose. Usually, the combination of *yukata* with *geta* is more casual than *kimono* with *zouri*. The materials are: cotton for *yukata*, silk for *kimono*; and wood for *geta*, cloth covered for *zouri*. The set of *geta* and *yukata* is summer dress. I noticed my *geta* needs to repair the *hanao*, the clog, when I made ordering my summer wears and shoes. Then I had to go to shoes shop to ask a new one. I visit several shops to search the person who can replace the thong of my clog. And I asked that for an old shoeshop selling Japanese clogs; they had many *hanao* of different colors and materials. I enjoyed to watch and select one. My selected thong is designed pattern of the feathers of an arrow in black and white. The clog is painted in blue-gray, and the black sole. So, the feather patterned seems good suit for the clog color, with the red joints. I received my *geta* clog with a new thong



attached at the shoe shop a while after I have brought my *geta* in. It looked new clog with new *hanao*. I appreciated them, and I was glad that I could find the shop and *hanao* material to repair. There are many shoe shops, but not all of them can renew *hanao*. We do not wear traditional *kimono* cloth everyday, but many rituals or special events need it. Workmen for traditional things are decreasing in Japan, but the quality of their works seem good to survive.

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## Life companion 異種共生

May 26th, 2013

Today is the anniversary of our dog's death, our family member "Poncho," he died three years ago. Actually, another dog "Pugcho" also has died about one month before. Both were pug dogs: Pugcho was fourteen years old, Poncho was thirteen years old. They were old and slept almost whole day long and did not eat much anymore before their death. We brought them to an acupuncture veterinary weekly. But I did not foresee their death. Since I was away to study abroad that year, I could not attend to their funeral. But my husband could give the deceased dogs good funerals. The funeral was held in accordance with Buddhism rites that is most popular in Japan. The body was carried to the crematorium, and the funeral ceremony was held by Buddhism monk. Today they are sitting in our house as two cinerary urns. All procedure was similar to human funeral, but shorter time. They were the first animal companions for us, and we loved them so much. For us, they were family members, therefore, selection of such funerals is natural for us. I could not attend but I prayed for them in abroad. Even today, I miss them a lot. We talk about them almost everyday. Somebody asked us about having next dogs, but we will not: because they were so special, nobody cannot be replaced.



However, some "other kinds" often come to live to our house. For instance, some butterfly came to blow on leaves of citrus fruits in the planters. When I saw little larvae, I kept them inside to watch their metamorphoses. In general, they stay for a few weeks; after eating incredibly large quantities of citrus leaves, they metamorphose. Then, a butterfly emerges from a chrysalis. They were released in the sky early morning.



