

# Tokyo Hyogu Kyoji Naiso Bunka Kyokai

An association that passes *hyogu*, indispensable craft for Japanese daily life, to the next generation

## Information

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## Sharing, developing the traditional techniques and culture of *hyogu* with the next generation

The art of *hyogu*, or papering, is an indispensable technique in Japan that covers the techniques of preserving and repairing works of art such as *kakejiku* (hanging scrolls), calligraphy, and illustrated scrolls, and elements of interior decoration such as walls, floors and ceiling beams. While the craft relies on the simple tools of glue, water, brushes, and *washi* (Japanese paper), it is said to take at least 10 years to become a fully-fledged *hyogu* craftsman who has mastered the various sophisticated techniques of the craft. It is no exaggeration to say that with its use of slender strips of paper and delicate brushstrokes of glue to create supple expressions of beauty, the craft of *hyogu* papering itself has reached the level of fine art.

The craft is made up of three distinct techniques all of which share the common basic elements of paper and glue. *Hyoso*, a word combines *hyogu*, framing, with *hekiso* (wall decoration), covers *kakejiku*, sutras, illustrations, frames, illustrated folding screens and sliding doors. The *kyoji* craft focuses on mounting illustrations, folding screens and sliding doors, while *naiso* is the art of decorating interiors by papering the walls and ceilings and coating the floors with a film-like material such as *washi* paper.

The member craftsmen and workshops of the Tokyo Hyogu Kyoji Naiso Bunka Kyokai (The Tokyo Hyogu Paperers' Association) all share these three common techniques, but each also possess their own specialized crafts and fields, focusing on everything from works for museums to individual collectors made by a variety of artists, from masters to young up-and-coming creators.

The Association primarily focuses on enhancing the skills and knowledge of its members, and constantly reinventing the craft by promoting creative originality. The Association also runs a training school, and is designated as the managing organization of the *hyogu* papering certification exam. In this way it is an organization passing down the traditional techniques and culture of "Edo *Hyogu*" to young generation.



## The role of the association amidst the changing needs and purposes of *hyogu* through the ages

Let us first take a brief look at the history of *hyogu*. There are several opinions of how it began in Japan, but the most leading theory is that the *hyogu* craft came to Kyoto in the 8th century along with Buddhism and paper. At that time Kyoto was where the imperial court positioned, site of many shrines and temples, thus there was great need for the papering craft to frame sutras and Buddhist images. The humid, continental climate of Kyoto, which also had ground-water and rain, was also well-suited to the development of the papering craft, which cannot tolerate extreme dryness. Japanese *Hyogu* made its unique development through Japan's architectural history and the rise of tea ceremony culture. After the establishment of the Edo shogunate in 1600s, *hyogu* craftsmen began to frequently migrate from Kyoto to Edo, as the new city began to thrive, and the building of villas for *daimyo* (feudal lords) and samurai generated abundant work. The culture and economy blooms even more after Genroku era started. During this period, *hyogu*, which were previously only held by temples, became affordable by rather wealthy common people, as artwork and illustration also expanded beyond ranks of only the rich and powerful. This made the Edo period a time when the foundation of *hyogu* became firmly established in the lives of the common people.

The strong economy that continued from the late 19th century to the early 20th century also spurred the development of the arts, such as Japanese paintings and calligraphy. In accordance with the changing lifestyles and needs of the people, the craft of *hyogu* also became more diversified, and this provided a fertile environment for the development of the craft as its practitioners increased.

Around 1910, competitions and exhibitions of *hyogu* started being held, and craftsmen who previously only demonstrated their mastery behind the scenes were brought into the spotlight. This period also represented the peak of demand for the *hyogu* craft.

After the end of World War II, the lifestyle of Japan has become increasingly westernized, and people no longer encounter illustrated sliding doors, papered screens, illustrated partitions, and *kakejiku* during their everyday lives. To that end, the Association has taken on the vital mission of preserving and protecting the techniques of the *hyogu* craftsmen still living today, and sharing the beauty of the craft with young generation.





A technique handed down for Japanese art,  
premised on long-term preservation

The Association was originally a small organization that gathered together the *hyogu* craftsmen in each local region, and served as a venue for them to support each other and share work while developing their various specialties. The scale of these regional associations grew, and in 1946, the Tokyo *Hyogu* Union was formed to create a bond between these many groups, and serves as the prototype of today's the Association. When the Tokyo *Hyogu* Union was first established, each neighborhood had its own papering workshop. Today, the Association consists of 193 independent workshops. Each workshop now handles a wide variety of work. The Association staff, Ms. Nakamura, is devoted to leading activities that carry the *hyogu* craft to the next generation.

"In recent years there is an increasing number of young people who want handle the papering to restore older works of art. Two sorts of people come to training schools, those who are looking to enter the craft, and those who wish to improve their existing skillset. While our training school is tailored for experienced professionals, we also see many applicants who have no experience, but wish to try their hand at *hyogu*. I sometimes have to turn these individuals down, as they might not be able to find the work they're looking for even if they learn the techniques, there is no doubt we see many applicants. When I talk with these applicants, I can sense their strong desire to restore works of art."

Traditional Japanese *nihonga* paintings are reinforced from the back with *washi* Japanese paper, and the glue dries over a period as long as 50 to 100 years, allowing this backing paper to be removed and replaced. In other words, the paintings are designed to be repaired repeatedly without hurting them. Sometimes, a second generation *hyogu* craftsman repairs the artwork which his father did in the past. The applicants mentioned earlier may have been intrigued by *hyogu* as a craft that inevitably "passes down" not only the technique but art itself.





### Reversing traditional perceptions and combining with modern expressions

"*Kakejiku* are widely known as works of art, known even by those not involved in the papering craft. The true purpose of the *hyogu* craft, though, is to repair and maintain articles of our daily life, in addition to these precious works of art. The contents of our work are extremely varied, and most of it is behind the scenes. I want people to understand that we are the unsung heroes that work behind the scenes."

Ms. Nakamura tells us that it is essential to use new materials that match modern lifestyles while also making use of existing materials to truly fulfill the *hyogu*'s mission of repairing articles close to people's daily lives. For example, if people of the younger generation, which has experienced fewer and fewer Japanese rooms, are shown a sliding door painted with an exquisite picture of bamboo, they will not understand its worth. This is a place where *hyogu* craftsmen must change their fixed outlook that *kakejiku* are for the tokonoma alcove and sliding doors are for Japanese rooms, but maybe a new essence for Western interior design.

To adapt the long-preserved techniques of *hyogu*, it is essential to fuse the techniques with modern expressions to allow the products to be used by people who are unfamiliar with the traditional forms of such techniques. While they might be "known to a certain degree," *kakejiku* are a very unique item to modern Japanese people. In recent years, many Japanese paintings are done using thick applications of *iwa-enogu* (simple mineral paints), framed upon heavy paper that is akin to a panel. The first challenge towards this was to adapt Japanese painting to *kakejiku*, a project run by a voluntary group of young *hyogu* craftsmen. The paintings were done by students majoring in Japanese painting at art universities of Japan.





### *Kakejiku* as a casual interior decoration in modern Japanese living

These *kakejiku* art works were shown at an exhibition called “*The future of kakejiku and paint*” from June 19th to 24th, 2018 (Sponsored by Edo Hyogu Study Group Hyousuikai, Supported by The Tokyo Hyogu Paperers’ Association).

“When the young craftsmen spoke to these students, many had never painted an illustration for *kakejiku*. I was a bit surprised, because they were all majoring in Japanese painting. The students, however, undertook this new technique seriously, and they produced wonderful works.”

Because *kakejiku* must be rolled up for transportation, you must use thin paint and thin paper, which has an entirely different feel than painting upon thick panels. Displaying *kakejiku* illustrations by themselves can sometimes be unpleasant to foreigners who are used to seeing framed works of art. The appeal of *kakejiku*, however, lies in their compact form and portability, making them a perfect complement to interior decoration.

“When I look at recent compilations of Japanese artwork, *kakejiku* are often not displayed as a complete piece, but rather with just a focus on the illustration itself. While the illustration is of course the center of the piece, the *kakejiku* itself plays an important role in presenting the illustration in the most appealing manner possible. For example, a springtime illustration would of course use a complementary backing paper, which speaks to the taste and pride of the *hyogu* craftsman. That’s why I would like these compilations to at least present the entire *kakejiku*. If we can gain understanding of the purpose and mindset behind this presentation among people overseas, *hyogu* art including Japanese illustration might just gain the spotlight once more.”

Japanese artwork gained widespread attention in Europe with the advent of the World Exposition in the mid-19th century, and Vincent van Gogh was an avid collector of *ukiyo-e* illustrations. The inspiration brought by these illustrations can be seen in many of his later works. Monet also painted a portrait of his wife dressed in an exquisite Japanese *kimono*. As the world once more pays renewed attention to Japanese culture, there is a good chance light will once again shine on Japan’s traditional crafts built upon long and storied traditions.