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SPOTLIGHT

Hanabi (fireworks): an awesome, gorgeous feature of summer in Japan

Foreign visitors to Japan around the end of July to the middle of August are very lucky. Although Japan's hot and humid summer may distract some, including the author of *Asian View* from Malaysia, *hanabi* (fireworks) are a major attraction because there are many fireworks festivals all over Japan at this time of the year.

Fireworks were first introduced by a merchant from the Ming dynasty of China in 1613. He showed Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa *shogunate*, a simple fireworks demonstration. As Ieyasu unified the country after a long warring period, many pyrotechnics started producing fireworks in lieu of guns and bombs and sought new technology for it. The import of new chemical technologies from the West in the Meiji era also led to the development of brand-new fireworks.

Japan's most time-honored fireworks festa is known as the Sumida River Fireworks Festival in downtown Tokyo. It began on the opening day of the river season of 1732; a total of 20 fireworks were set off to comfort the spirits of famine victims a year earlier. The festa has continued since then except on unquiet days such as the Meiji Restoration and World War II. Only peace has helped nurture the fireworks industry – to the benefit of the Japanese people, too.

Like the author of the *VIEWPOINT* column, or of the report on wedding business in China, "*Made in Japan*" still catches the fancy of people around the world and Japanese fireworks are no exception.

If you want to see fireworks in comfort, please make sure to go to any of the local fireworks festivals where you will find a smaller crowd. **JS**



Fireworks: fusion of East-West technology & culture

"Fireworks festival on the opening day of Sumida River at Ryogoku Bridge, Tokyo" (1890)
 by Nagashima Syungyo (Sumida Heritage Museum)