Randoseru – The School Backpack

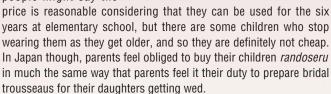
March is the month for graduation, while April marks the beginning of a new school year. In Japan, the school year starts just when the fresh leaves of plants and trees start to grow. The *sakura* cherry blossoms that bloom just around this time of the year add colorfulness to the season of parting and new encounters.

Japanese elementary school children, from the first to sixth grade, go to school wearing a traditional satchel called "randoseru." It is shaped like a rectangular box, and has straps like those on a backpack. It is made from cow or synthetic leather.

This bag has its roots overseas, but underwent a unique development in Japan, becoming part of this country's culture. The school uniform of Japanese schools is based on the Western military clothing that was adopted in the Meiji era (1868-1912), and *randoseru* is said to have originated from the back sack used by the army, called *ransel* in Dutch. The back sack, first used to carry military goods, evolved to become a school bag, and eventually became a satchel used nationwide by elementary school children. The color of *randoseru* is usually red for girls and black for boys, but it is recently available in a variety of colors. Elementary schools do not require children to carry these satchels to school, and there are no rules that limit *randoseru* to elementary school children. However, there are no students other than elementary school pupils who actually wear them,

and so the association between *randoseru* and elementary school children is firmly linked in the minds of Japanese people.

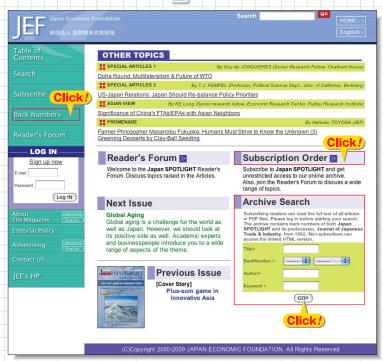
Randoseru costs about ¥40,000. Some people might say the



When a child becomes a first grader and leaves home for school wearing *randoseru* still a little too large in proportion to his or her small frame, the parents watch it with deep feeling. They are filled with gladness that their child has grown to be of school age, and memories of their own childhood might flash back. For the Japanese public, *randoseru* is not merely a bag for practical use, but an item laden with sentimental value.



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