

Kumano Fude: The Harmonious Coexistence of Tradition and Modernity

By Kimura Taka

FUDE brushes, which are generally used in calligraphy, appear in scores of old Japanese proverbs and idioms. Very few people today, however, write with the traditional writing brushes and Chinese ink with the exception of expert calligraphers. Most people in Japan use ballpoint pens when writing letters or at work. In fact, they find it easier and faster to type on a computer keyboard than to use a pen. *Fude* are, however, the tool of Japanese traditional calligraphers and painters, and have been used for artistic expression for many centuries. *Fude* and traditional paintbrushes, *hake*, are used to color directly onto the silk fabric of Japanese kimono in the same way that an artist paints on canvas. Having grown up in Kyoto in a family of kimono artists, I would like to go into the details of the unique technique applied in this art, however, due to the space limitations, that will be a subject for a future article.

Makeup *fude* are also indispensable daily tools for women in general and actors in particular. Water-soluble face powder is used in traditional Japanese makeup, and *fude* and *hake* have been important tools for performing arts such as Kabuki and traditional Japanese dances. With fine, delicate brushes playing a crucial role in daily life in Japan, all types of sophisticated brushes have been created.

Hakuho-do Co., Ltd., a brush manufacturer in Hiroshima Prefecture, has been attempting to incorporate

the techniques used to create *Kumano fude*, an item designated as a Traditional Craft Product under the law for the Promotion of the Traditional Craft Industries, in a contemporary way. Based on the conviction that *fude* are tools for creating beauty, the company subsequently expanded its business into makeup brushes. With the successful opening of its flagship retail store in Beverly Hills (California, the United States) in 1996 and the subsequent launch of Internet sales, the company is now confident about its makeup brushes. Building on its marketing at special events held at department stores throughout Japan, Hakuho-do has launched original equipment manufacturing (OEM) exports of their makeup brushes to cosmetic brand manufacturers in France, the United States, Canada and other countries.

Hakuho-do has received a wide array of awards for its goods and services. The company received a Design Award from the Japan Inter-Design Forum in 2003, which marked the opening of the store in Torrance (Los Angeles), and was selected as one of the top 100 IT management companies by the IT Management for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) Support Project operated by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), in 2005. The company was also honored with the Prime Minister's Award for the traditional arts category in the *Mono-zukuri Nippon* (Meister Japan) Grand Award.

These awards represent Hakuho-do's efforts at the worldwide promotion of contemporary products that incorporate Japanese traditional artisanship. I have heard the president of Hakuho-do say that his artisans "carefully choose the material for the bristles, study its particular qualities, and select only the best individual hairs" in order to make the highest performing brushes. The artisans design a suitable outline for the intended purpose of the brush, which fits users' hands perfectly, and carefully select the amount of hair. The company sticks resolutely to the name "fude" for its makeup brushes because they are designed to live up to the high standards of the traditional Japanese brushes with each individual hair carefully selected to ensure that the tip will not be cut. During this rigorous process, half of the raw hair material is discarded. Eighty separate steps carefully conducted by individual experts are required to create a single *fude*. The raw hair used for *fude* comes from goats, squirrels, weasels, water badgers, and in the case of eyebrow brushes, horse hair is used. Since the tips of brushes are not cut off, they are extremely thin and gentle to



Kumano fude – traditional craft items from Hiroshima Prefecture



Photos: Kumano Town

Photos: Hakuho-do Co., Ltd.



Hakuho-do makeup brushes incorporate the traditional Japanese artisanship used to create Kumano fude

the skin. (Hakuho-do fude are of a completely different quality than brushes made from cut synthetic fibers that come with most cosmetic cases.)

“Kobo does not care about the fude.” This profound Japanese proverb from the Heian Period (794-1192) refers to Kobo-Daishi (774-835), an expert calligrapher, who created superior works with any kind of brush. However, it makes me think in a different direction. Hard work and practice are required to master anything. Giving life to expression through art requires tools that are easy to use, and fude are, of course, indispensable instruments for calligraphers and painters. Calligraphy brushes vary in size, and an expert calligrapher knows how to choose the best brush and make full use of it.

Selecting instruments properly is extremely important. I think people used to carefully select fude, when they were still used to express written characters in everyday life. Fude are the extension of one’s fingers as they move to express the soul.

Quality is also important when it comes to makeup brushes, and delicate hairs are paramount for brushes that

will touch the skin. Young women praise Hakuho-do makeup brushes, saying they “feel like angel wings fluttering on the skin.” Choosing the right makeup brush, which is used every day, is a tip for beauty and at the same time, respecting your daily life. I am proud that people in Hiroshima are still committed to creating makeup brushes as high in quality as fude to help promote women’s beauty throughout the world.

I believe excellent products will certainly be recognized. Traditional instruments cultivated through history have stood the test of time and are still used today. Such instruments may be turned into new innovative instruments as well. Therefore, instruments that are accepted all over the world regardless of language are the genuine instruments. **JIS**

Kimura Taka is a textile designer and has had solo exhibitions of her textile pieces every year since 1954. She used to work for the *Kyoto Shimbun* newspaper, and is the author of *Iro no Na no Monogatari* (Tale of Color Names) and *Monyo no Na no Monogatari* (Tale of Design Names).

Practical Advice

Hakuho-do makeup brushes will last three to even five years, becoming easier to handle the more they are used. Brushes should not be left uncleaned because this can damage the hairs. Liquid foundation or lipstick can be removed from blush brushes by using cornstarch. (Do not use cornstarch that contains sugar for cleaning.) Pour the cornstarch into a plastic bag, place the brush inside the bag and shake well. Once the hairs of the brush are covered in starch,

remove the brush and shake off the cornstarch. Repeating these steps will remove the oil content from the hairs. Finally, it is important to shake the brush to remove any remaining starch.

Since these brushes are used daily, I would like to pay attention to the color of the handle when selecting a makeup brush. These brushes eventually become a natural extension of one’s hand, so I feel that a makeup brush chooses me, when I select my own brush.