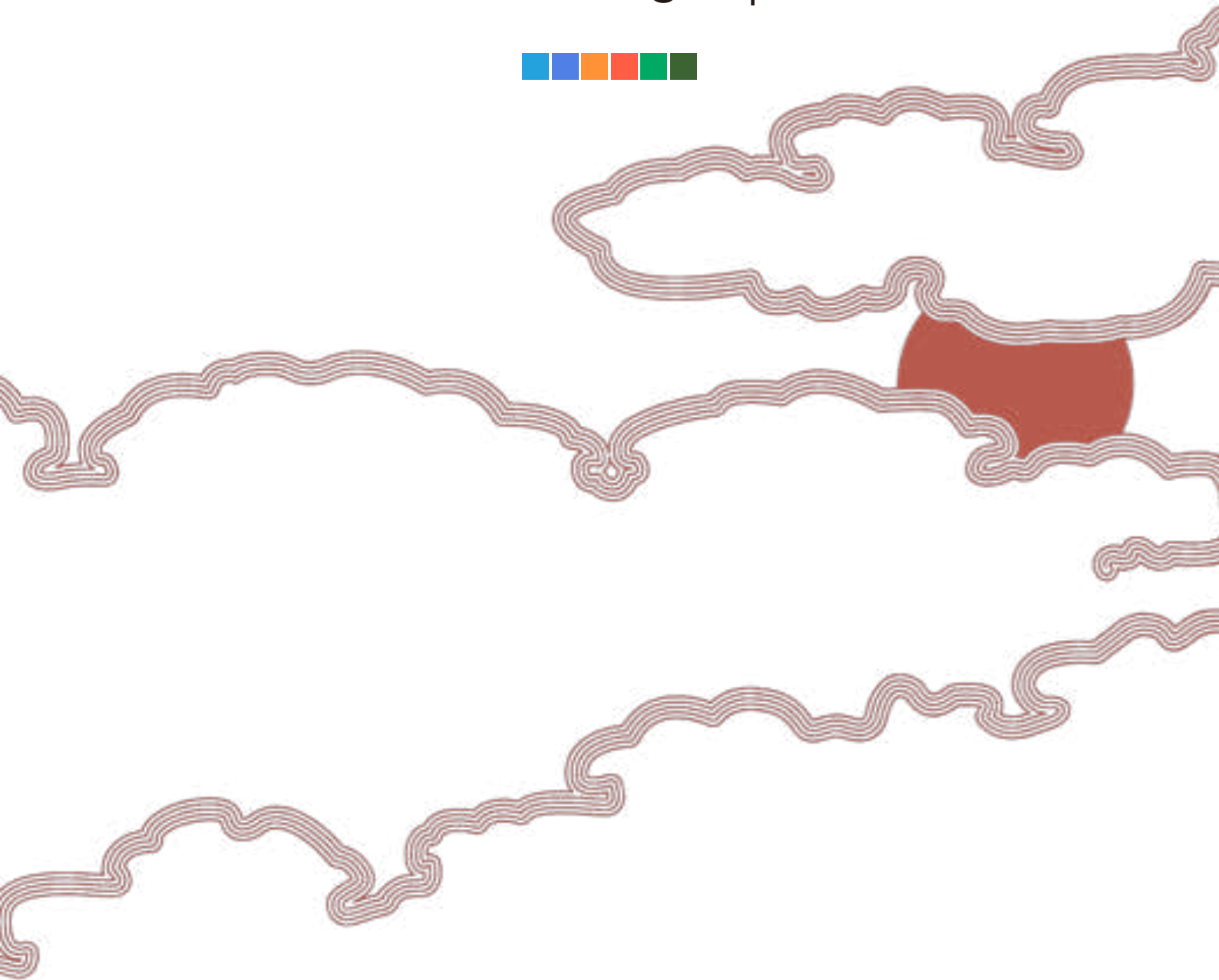


NIHON-GATARI-SHO

日本語り抄

Guidelines for Narrating Japanese Culture



Project Consigned by the Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters,
Cabinet Office, The Government of Japan

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“Nihon Gatari” : An Introduction

Forgotten Japan

All things Japanese—its technology, its performing arts, and cultural content—are underpinned by a latent cultural context that has been passed down since early times. Until the modern era, Japan imported wisdom from overseas and cultivated a unique culture which was passed down through generations. The lofty cultural awareness, which formed the backbone of the country for such a long period, however, was superseded by military and economic growth in line with modernization and became increasingly invisible as the nation sought to follow the lead set by the outside world (Europe and America). Buffeted by the waves of postwar economic growth and Heisei era globalization, Japan’s cultural structure is still struggling to become entirely manifested. Without possessing awareness of its own cultural structure, where will Japan derive value, and how will it communicate that to the outside world? To convey the appeal of Japan beyond its shores, it is necessary to first look closely at the vivid cultural context that runs in its background, as well as the unique methods and styles that pulse through it.

Japan’s Deep, Middle, and Top Layers

An effective approach in re-presenting Japan’s true nature is to revisit the country’s cultural facets in terms of their deep, middle, and top layers. In the depths of all that appears on the surface lies a continuing historical narrative. Thus, the cultural significance and value of Japan’s present can be more meaningfully established by tracing its course and features through their middle and deep layers. Our job is to re-edit Japan’s true story in such a way as to permit a look into its future.

First, the deep layer comprises the natural environment and origins of history. In a country beset by frequent natural disasters and limited in natural resources, the Japanese developed a sense of recycling-based values, wherein singular resources such as rice, wood, and paper were modified and re-used in a variety of different forms. The unique styles, methods, and concepts (e.g. *mochi*, *sake*, *shoji*, etc.) which emerged from this backdrop can then be regarded as Japan’s middle layer and, once recognized as such, can help clarify the underlying context of a wide range of current cultural phenomena.

Consider the arts of *haiku* poetry, *ikebana* flower arrangement, and classic cuisine served on separate small trays. Each emerged from older art forms, previously accepted as authentic and mainstream. Specific fragments or functions were emphasized, or cut out, from the original arts, giving birth to entirely new sets of values, as well as a host of new communities (*ba* and *za*) in which to share them. Concepts such as *chodo* (procuring appropriate devices and furnishings for an event), *shitsurae* (arranging and curating a space), and *omotenashi* (the art and spirit of hospitality and care) developed as methods for managing such communal gatherings. Cultural devices used to pass down these methods included: *Yusokukojitsu* (the study of traditional ceremonial codes) prepared by the court nobles; *matsuri* (local community festivals); and the *dojo* (training halls for practicing arts such as tea ceremony, martial arts, and calligraphy). From all this, developed the conventions and formalities—expressed in the three levels of *shin*, *gyo*, *so*) that ultimately formed the basis of Japan’s cultural education and etiquette, its customs, skills, and spirit.

What we see in Japan today, are manifestations on top of a much deeper historical background. Cosplay, J-pop, and kabuki may appear disparate at a glance. Once re-examined through their middle and deep layers, however, we realize that all three stem from the same narrative thread.

Japanese Creativity and the Original Cool Japan

Throughout its history, Japan incorporated systems and mechanisms from overseas and churned them into its own unique blend. As foreign codes were refined into domestic modes, minority groups and nameless innovators would deconstruct mainstream forms to derive new styles. It was in the inter-exchanging between a foundation of tradition and cutting-edge innovation that Japanese culture was nurtured. The *ko-uta* ballads and short-sleeved kimono of Fukagawa *geisha* were the J-pop of the Edo age, while *kabuki*—now regarded as a traditional performing art—was a counter-cultural phenomenon instigated by the unconventional folk called *kabuki-mono*.

The media vehicles chosen to express such innovations included poetry, ukiyoe paintings, the tea ceremony, *noh* and *kabuki* theater, and artisan crafts. To take these numerous facets of culture, born out of entirely new sets of values achieved by a handful of creators and innovators (Zeami, Rikyu, Kenzan, Utamaro, etc.) and simply referring to them as “Japanese tradition” is not enough. Only when viewed within their historical context and freshly re-presented can “Cool Japan” emerge in its vivid reality.

For the Re-narration of Japan

“Nihon Gatari-Sho” presents a model for discussing “Cool Japan” from the perspective of “Japan Concepts” comprising various values that continue to live and breathe in Japan’s middle layer. As a new approach to re-editing the story of Japan, we would like to give a partial introduction to the techniques and resources of “Japan Editing”, which bridges Japan’s top, middle, and deep layers.

For Japan Editing

Japan ● Concepts

Marginal Japan

kiwa

marebito

Linking Japan

Contextual Japan

Analogical Japan

Mixing Japan

musubi

awase

Implicit Japan

Transforming Japan

Flattering Japan

Imaginative Japan

Extreme Japan

kabuku

wabi