

Japan Concept 3

musubi

Japan Concept 4

awase

# Mixing Japan

Japan is intrinsically multi-faceted and multi-layered. At the heart of its culture pulses a standard of duality – heterogeneous players coexisting in harmony – as apparent in *wakon-yosai* (Japanese spirit-Western learning), *shinbutu-shugo* (syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism), Emperor and Shogun, and *wagoto/aragoto* (soft and rough style kabuki). Power sparks in the nodes which link diverse components. The art of Japan's editing manifest itself in the joining and mixing of boundaries – the *awase* of *kiwa*.

Japan is a “single-minded yet multi-faceted country”.

*Japan As Methodology* Seigo Matsuoka

# musubi

Mixing Japan



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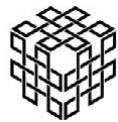


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① *Shimekazari* straw festoons invite visitation by the New Year spirit. ② There are more than 100 types of knots in Japan. Chopstick rests by Nousaku, made from 100% tin, celebrate traditional knot designs. ③ *Furoshiki* wrapping cloths can be tied in a variety of ways to accommodate almost any object. ④ Decorative *mizuhiki* cords, used for tying the hair of *miko* shrine maidens, express the pure heart of Shinto.



## Out of a knot, a culture is born



④



*Rain is falling. It is raining.  
How I wish to go out and play.  
But alas, have I no umbrella,  
And the red straps of my geta  
clogs are broken too.*

“Ame” Hakushu Kitahara

hotograph: Shinzo Ota



# musubi

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**Musubi is a state of imminent birth: its power, implied in a simple knot.**

## In the depths of Japanese mythology

While hairdressing and ribbon tying are components of cultures all around the world, no culture valued the act of tying (*musubi*) as much as Japan. The concept of *musubi* is implied in the furthest depths of Japan's mythological structure – the very first characters to appear in its creation story are *Takami-musubi* and *Kami-musubi*.

*Musubi* is composed of two words: *musu* (to birth) and *hi* (spirit). Accordingly, *musubi* refers to a state in which something is just about to emerge.

## Mizuhiki, Yokozuna, and Jangling Straps

The easiest example of *musubi* is surely the birth of a new child. Newly born boys are called *musu-ko*, while girls are called *musu-me*. The potential for the emergence of such life-giving power was manifested in the distinct forms of *musubi-me* (knots).

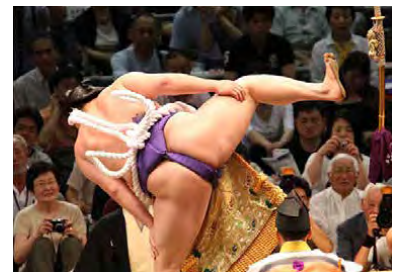
Emergence of the the divine was never expressed overtly, but instead, merely implied by the symbolic tying of knots. *Shimenawa* ropes or *nusa* paper streamers were tied to denote boundaries for areas or objects to which divine spirits would descend. Such practices of *musubi* were the origin of Shinto shrines.

In its simpler form, the *shimenawa* becomes the *mizuhiki* ties on gifts and special envelopes. Applied to the hair, it becomes a *chonmage* topknot. And, the ginkgo-leaf style topknot worn by sumo wrestlers is nothing but a living *shimenawa*. The concept and techniques of *musubi* can also be found in *omikuji* fortune slips and, in more contemporary times, the jangling strap charms lavishly hung by high school girls on their cell phones, or the *misanga* bracelets which symbolized prayers – whether they be for victory by the national soccer team or recovery from natural disasters.



### Kekkai: fixing the boundary

The *shimenawa* rope indicates circled space. The act of tying such a rope is believed to protect a place from evil spirits.



### Yokozuna

The Yokozuna appears in the final bout (*musubi-no-ichiban*) of a tournament day wearing a special rope, itself called *yokozuna*, displaying the power of *musubi*.



### Omikuji

Tying fortune slips carries the meaning of “firmly binding one’s wishes” or “forming a connection with the gods”.



### High School Girls' Key Chains

Key chain charms are modern day versions of the bells that people tied and carried to avert evil. They are mobile *shimenawa*.

Four photographs: Shinzo Ota

In Japan, beauty shifts from one thing to another, and is arrayed within large conjugations that envelop individual units.

Roland Barthes, "Empire of Signs"

## The Awase of Musubi and Kiwa



Provided by: the360.life - TEST,REVIEW and BUY

### Convenience store riceballs

Different franchises use different names for rice balls: Lawson calls them "Onigiri", Family Mart calls them "Omusubi", while 7-Eleven uses both expressions.

Travel entails risk, no matter the times. For the networkers of Middle Age Japan, tying their *waraji* straw sandals and their packed meals was a form of prayer – a way to apply the power of *musubi* for protection in their journeys. The word, *omusubi*, for rice balls, comes from the act of tying *furoshiki* cloths around *bento* packs.

Today, we subconsciously sense the power of *musubi* in the *omusubi* lined up on convenient store shelves. The plastic wrapping seems almost magical; it keeps the seaweed fresh and creates the most exquisite sensation as we bite through the crisp seaweed to reach the soft rice inside. It is a delightful combination (*awase*) of *musubi* and *kiwa* – Japanese style at its best.

## Japanese customs in the tying of knots

The essence of Japanese customs is expressed in *musubi*. And, among the many types of *musubi*, nothing is more representative of such customs than the dashing gold and silver, or red and white *mizuhiki*.

*Mizuhiki* originally referred to the act of peeling plant skin by steeping it in water. The practice of tying knots with such plant materials became an important feature in court ceremonies and other formal occasions such as weddings and funerals. Later, *mizuhiki* were made from starched paper strands, which were dyed in various colors.

These paper *mizuhiki* were knotted in their making, as they are today, and gained immense popularity among common folk for gift presentations. They are sold in a wide variety of knot designs, ranging from the standard reef knots to single bowknots, *aioi-musubi*, *awabi-musubi* and so on. Each of these knots come in the three variations of formal, semi-formal and informal styles.



### Gift money envelopes

*Mizuhiki* can be found today on gift money envelopes sold in any stationary store and comes in more than 100 different knot designs. The number of strands are usually five, seven, or ten, in accordance with the cosmic dual forces (yin and yang) and the five elements in Chinese cosmology. Colors are red and white, or gold and silver, for auspicious occasions. Black and white, or indigo and white, are used for bereavements.



# awase

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① The origin of Japanese play can be found in *awase*. The card game, *Hyakunin-Isshu*, where players compete to collect cards that match with “one hundred poems by one hundred poets”, is a representative example of *awase* and *kisoi*. ② In the special dishes prepared for New Years, colorful ingredients are assorted and piled in multiple layers. ③ The layered arrangement of colors in ceremonial robes is referred to as *Kasane*. Rules for color arrangement changes according to season. ④ In the *Yosakoi Soran* and other *matsuri* festivals, teams compete in coordinated dancing.



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## Mix, Layer, Compete, and Play

*We love, and we love,  
And in this feeling,  
We are one and the same.*

*You may be the white bush clover,  
I may be the white lily.*

Yosano Akiko, “Midaregami  
(Dishevelled Hair)”

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④



## From *awase* to *kisoi*, and then to *soroe*: the prototypes of Japanese play culture.

### Match, layer, compete, and arrange

*Awase*, *kasane*, *kisoi*, *soroe* is a four step concept that may be the most characteristic feature of Japan's editing style. *Awase* matches and compares two contrasting objects or ideas by positioning them apart on two sides of a partition – left and right, or east and west.

The act of taking the matched information (*awase*) and layering them on top of each other (*kasane*), naturally leads to comparison and competition (*kisoi*). This in turn, produces winners and losers. However, unlike a tournament in which losers are cast aside, entries on both sides are again, matched, aligned, and restructured (*soroe*) to create new values.

Each step considers the next. Thus, in Japanese culture, competition takes place with an eye to subsequent alignment, layering takes place with the following competition in mind, and the initial matching begins in consideration of that layering.

### *Kisoi* in the Global Market

The early part of the Heian Era saw numerous forms of *awase* popularized, including *uta-awase* (poetry contests), *senzai-awase* (gardening contests), *kai-awase* (clamshell contests), and *ko-awase* (incense contests). In *Uta-awase*, for example, court nobles would split into two teams and try to emulate each other in composing poems based on given themes. In any *awase* activity, emphasis was placed on displaying creativity, rather than winning or losing, while adhering to the rules of the gathering. *Awase* is the prototype of Japan's play culture.

From board games, such as *shogi* and *go*, to indoor amusements, such as the tea ceremony and incense-smelling ceremony, the Japanese developed small-scale entertainment forms with extreme degrees of elaboration. This is related to the fact that *awase* placed importance on portability.

Today, we can see the influence of *awase* in computer games. For example, one of the key concepts in developing the “Pokémon” series was that it be a “game of trades”. To this end, developers turned their eyes towards the Game Link Cable of the pioneering portable game device, Gameboy. The joy of playing “Pokémon” was further diversified by creating a system based on the core elements of collection, nurturing, and battling, rather than competition alone. The origins of Japanese play are packed with hints for creativity that arise from artful combinations.



Provided by: Mikawa Kobo

### Kai-awase (shell-matching game)

Players compete in composing poems based on pictures drawn on the inside of shells. Shape, picture, and word all play a role in this game of *awase*, *kasane*, *kisoi*, and *soroe*.



Photograph: Shinzo Ota

### Bull Fighting

Rather than a simple contest to decide the strongest, the unspoken rule is to choose two equally matched beasts to make the fight more exciting – a perfect example of the *awase* concept.



### Reds vs. Whites

Whether it be singing contests or sports festivals, the Japanese like to compete red and white teams. Caps are reversible, with red on one side and white on the other..



### Pokémon Trading Card Game

This monstrously popular game – 23.6 billion cards sold in more than 70 countries as of 2017 – is an evolution of the traditional *karuta* game. Fans are enthralled by techniques and settings which differ from the “Pokémon” video game.

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Japan stands before us, with both the great weight of good traditions and a youthful flexibility which allows a fair, straight look into new things.

Bruno Taut, "Nippon"

## Toward awase-waza: joining Judo Style and Sumo Style



### Judo Awase-waza ippon

Awase-waza ippon is the rule that counts two scores of waza-ari as an ippon victory. Once abolished in 2016, the rule has now been restored. At the same time, the IJF has eliminated the rule which allowed matches in extra time to be decided by the imposition of *shido* (instruction) against behaviors that violate the spirit of judo.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of globalizing Japan: one is judo style, and the other is sumo style. In the judo style, Japan transmits global rules outwards. To make judo an official Olympic event, its weight divisions and judging scheme were widened outwards to the world. In other words, judo evolved from a national sport into the international sport of JUDO.

In contrast, in the sumo style, Japan adheres to its own domestic rules. The ring and the stable system are maintained and traditions are preserved. Even so, starting with Takamiyama, the exploits of foreign wrestlers including Asashōryū, Hakuho, Kotoōshū, Baruto and others have gained massive public appeal. The international flavor of sumo is in no way inferior to that of the Olympic Games.

Then again, the International Judo Federation (IJF) has decided to restore *awase-waza ippon* as a new rule at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Doing this will lead to more *ippon* decisions and make the distinction between winning and losing clearer.

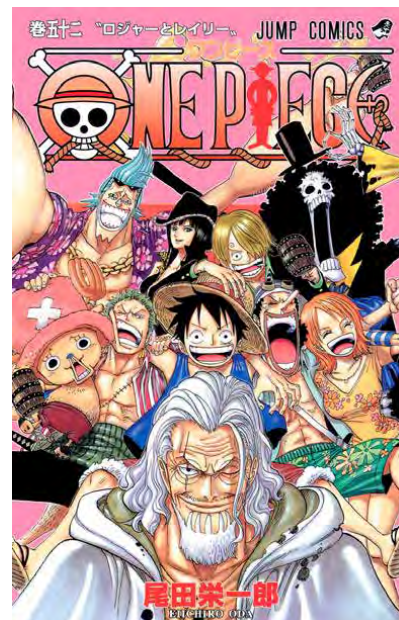
Both judo and sumo styles reflect how Japan approaches globalization. Instead of going for an either-or choice, both styles should be further refined in true *awase-waza* spirit.

## Combining strength: the reality of fellows and self

Japanese architectural thought contains the concepts of *uchi* (indoors), *soto* (outdoors), and *naka* (inside). The respective boundaries are ambiguous, and shift according to mood and context. The most obvious example is the *engawa* veranda, which can be considered as either *uchi* or *soto*. The situational nature of the space becomes fixed only with the appearance of a guest.

People who are allowed to go inside (*naka*) are called *nakama* (fellows), which implies that Japan's sense of fellowship and team unity stems from an awareness of space and placing. *Uchi* becomes constricting when its gravity is too strong; *soto* is isolating when refused from within. From the old tale of Momotaro (Peach Boy) to the contemporary adventures of ONE PIECE and Pokémon, the Japanese love stories of team collaboration – perhaps reflecting a wish for connection in *naka*, somewhere between *uchi* and *soto*.

Members carry out work for the team, according to their respective territory and status. And important here, is the concept of *Bun* – a person's capacity, role, or quality – most apparent in words like *ji-bun* (myself), *bun-zai* (social standing), *mochi-bun* (responsibility), *wake* (= *bun*)-*mae* (share) and so on. A person is stronger, more capable, when his or her *bun* is flexible and dynamic. Japan's teamwork is about the combining (*awase*) of *bun*.



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### Manga "ONE PIECE" (Eiichiro Oda)

This hit manga has recorded worldwide sales in excess of 400 million copies (as of 2017). The story which follows the adventures of Luffy and his band of Straw Hat Pirates has also been used for studying organizational and leadership theory.