

Profile ● Born in 1960. Certified as a Traditional Craftspeople of Tokyo, 2010. Contemporary Master Craftsman, 2019. Medal with Yellow Ribbon Recipient, 2023.

4-11, Nihonbashi Tomizawa-cho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo



Edo Kumihimo (Braided Cords)

Takashi Fukuda

“Make things as if you are gathering the wildflowers that bloom in the fields,” says the family motto: objects that people naturally absorb into their lives.

From *Kumihimo* (traditional) to KUMIHIMO (modern) Learning from its past, creating its future

You can't miss the huge cloth suspended impressively outside the shopfront, dyed with the Japanese character for “dragon.” This is Ryu-ko-bo (“Dragon Studio”), where fourth-generation owner Takashi Fukuda and his son Ryuta are bringing the ancient craft of *kumihimo* braided cord into uncharted territory.

Kumihimo has a 1,400-year history. From treasured *obi* bands in Nara's 8th-century Shosoin Repository, to *makihimo* binding 10th-century sutras, to cord wrapped around famous 13th-century swords, its supple strength and beauty has been an integral part of Japanese culture and the intricate craftsmanship a generational inheritance.

A book at his great-uncle's home set Mr. Fukuda on his life-path: it showcased the history and timeless beauty of *kumihimo*. “Of course, I'd seen *obi* bands

since childhood,” he recalls, “but I had no idea that it was such a vast world. It seemed natural to me to devote my life to this craft.”

Helping Mr. Fukuda delve into that rich history was Tomoyuki Yamanobe, a Tokyo National Museum researcher on dyeing and weaving, who showed him rare cultural assets, such as *kumihimo* discovered in the Tokugawa tomb at Zojoji Temple. Mr. Fukuda began to absorb their essence into himself. He later followed in his great-uncle's and father's footsteps, and even began reviving ancient braiding techniques that had been lost to history.

Among his clients are the leading guardians of traditional Japanese culture: the imperial family and practitioners of *sumo*. Most artisans adopt just one kind of *kumihimo* frame for cord-braiding, but Mr. Fuku-

da is adept with all of them.

Inheriting his skills and passion is his son, Ryuta, at age 29 the youngest-ever certified “Traditional Craftsman” (Chiba Prefecture). Together, they are taking *kumihimo* in new directions. Their collaboration with Tatehana Noritake, designer of the heelless shoes made famous by Lady Gaga, and the interior they created for a leading French fashion house (with 69 kilometers of cord!) have given *kumihimo* global stature.

Mr. Fukuda is a director of the Tokyo Traditional Craftsmen's Association. To “give back to Chuo-ku, where we have carried on our family business for so long,” he founded the Edo Sericulture Association. He gives lessons at four Chuo-ku elementary schools that raise silkworms in the classroom, dye the harvested silk thread with fallen leaves, and braid the silk into



Mr. Fukuda dexterously assembles the pieces of the *kumihimo* frame. The top of the stand is called a “mirror” because it reflects the maker's heart and soul.

cord. Over summer holidays, he goes to clean and feed the silkworms himself. Smiling, he says, “The children are timid at first, but then they take the silkworms in their palms, and name them, and become fond of them. We raise living creatures and part from them; with the fruits of life, we make objects for daily life. I want to help the children experience this cycle of life and the craft heritage of their Chuo-ku.”



It can take five days, eight hours a day, to make a single *obi* band (*objime*).

Kumihimo: Reverencing the heritage of Japan's enchanting braided cord

Left: Kumihimo Pens, made with a unique technique that hollows out the core of the braid. Double-Wrapped Kumihimo Bracelet for everyday wear. Right: Silkworm cocoons, silk thread. Chuo-ku elementary school students raise the silkworms and make the thread.

