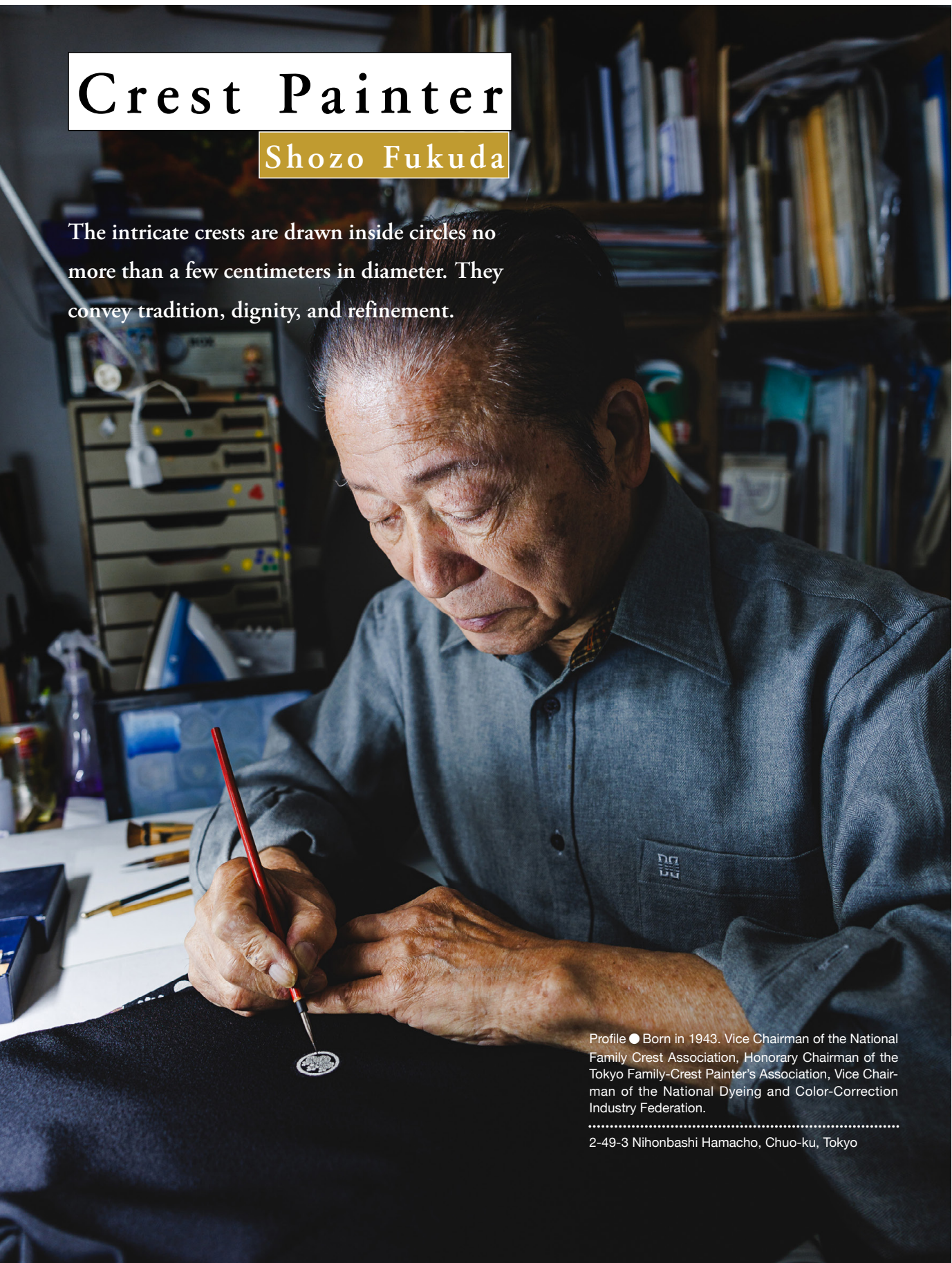


Crest Painter

Shozo Fukuda

The intricate crests are drawn inside circles no more than a few centimeters in diameter. They convey tradition, dignity, and refinement.



Profile ● Born in 1943. Vice Chairman of the National Family Crest Association, Honorary Chairman of the Tokyo Family-Crest Painter's Association, Vice Chairman of the National Dyeing and Color-Correction Industry Federation.

2-49-3 Nihonbashi Hamacho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

In the footsteps of a great master

Shelves cover an entire wall, filled with files holding stencils of family crests that Shozo Fukuda has resist-dyed over the years. There must be thousands of them in this room alone. Japan is said to have some 6000 varieties of family crests in use. Only a small number of artisans can dye them on *kimono*. Shozo Fukuda is even rarer, as a dyer of crests for the Imperial family. "I entered this field thanks to my junior high school homeroom teacher, who was also the art club advisor. He gave me assignments every day after school, and one day he said, 'Since you clearly love it so much...' and introduced me to a relative who ran a Tokyo dyeing shop." That relative, Shigeru Fukuda, became Shozo's master and later his father-in-law.

At 15, Shozo moved to Tokyo from his hometown of Yamagata to become an apprentice. He delivered finished kimono to customers

and took new orders, while training by painting family crests on stationery. He says he was always incredibly happy with a brush in his hand.

But it could be hard, too. "I actually thought that traditional family crests were unfashionable and outdated, but I was so busy I barely had time to sleep. My master worked until around 3:00 a.m., so I stayed up, too, practicing. When I finally got to sleep, I had to be up again at 6:00 to prepare for the day's work before he woke up. I couldn't find time for more than two meals a day. That was the hardest part — after all, I was in my growing years. I was so discouraged that I wrote a letter to my grandmother asking her to come bring me home."

Then, one morning, he heard someone calling his name. It was his grandmother, Shun, who had rushed to Tokyo on the night train. "I ran happily out of the workshop,

but she walked right into the middle of the room. All at once, there in front of my master, she stopped and said, 'Shozo, what nonsense is this! Don't give up!' and then she turned around and went back home. My master didn't scold me. He just said, 'Hanging in there?' — that was all. I remember it to this day."

After persevering for five years, Mr. Fukuda was finally entrusted with work on crests. He trained just over a decade with Shigeru before Shigeru passed away at age 48. "He was more skilled than anyone else. Other artisans omit the finer details, even when making the standard, fixed-pattern crests of the *kabuki* world. Customers might not notice, but we professionals can tell at a glance. My master would say, No deviations, precisely because it's a 'fixed-pattern,' and he'd produce a perfect rendition, not a single omission."

The *Bokashi Mon* crest has vibrant color gradations,



The *Bokashi Mon* (Gradation Crest) devised by Mr. Fukuda. The vibrant gradation subtly enhances the wearer's attire. After Mr. Fukuda traveled Japan giving demonstrations, many aspiring apprentices came to him, including from Kyoto, the heartland of the kimono industry.

a technique devised by Mr. Fukuda himself. He also invented a method for removing oil-based marker stains, long considered impossible. He has generously shared both these techniques with his fellow craftsmen. "My current dream is for the tradition of family crests and this profession to continue into the future. I will keep working at it," Fukuda smiles.



Some of Mr. Fukuda's work tools. He made the compass himself.

A pioneer in his craft, spurred by his grandmother's words

Left: Looking at the stencil, you can see that complex patterns are drawn within a circle of just a few centimeters' diameter. Learning to draw it without looking at the stencil is the first step in the training. Right: The family crests of the Imperial Family and the Akishinonomiya family, created by Mr. Fukuda.

