

# Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu

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Where ancient traditions thrive

## Pet Blessing Festival ペット清祓い

A procession of dogs, cats, birds, rabbits and hamsters went through the Chinowa ring on Sunday, June 1 for the annual Pet Blessing at the shrine.

Special prayers were also given for deceased pets and pets who are victims of inhumane treatment of animals.

Some pets hung around for

some “yappy hour” while others slurped Pet Shave Ice. As usual, all had a tail-wagging good time.

Mark your calendars for the next Pet Blessing Festival on Sunday, June 7, 2009.





## Mahalo for your generous donations

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Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha - Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu is a 501C3 nonprofit church.  
All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

## MAHALO



**hawaii pet**  
magazine



### GIVE 5 Campaign May Volunteers

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# Irezumi Tattoo

Recently throughout the Western World, there has been an increase in the popularity of body modifications. It is common for young people to pierce their ears, nose, eyebrows etc. and to tattoo themselves, a practice often referred to in Europe and the U.S. as neo-tribal or modern-primitive.

It is easy to see where these terms arose from in cultures with no indigenous history of tattooing and piercing. The first tattoos arrived in the West on the arms of sailors from Polynesia. The word tattoo comes from the Tahitian word *tatau* which mimics the sound made by a little wooden hammer as it taps small needles under the skin.

Tattooing throughout the world has become very popular with a diminishing social stigma attached to the act of being tattooed. The culture has also become more globalized than previously and many designs these days are borrowed from all around the world. In the front window of a tattoo shop in the UK one might easily see a Japanese Koi carp design next to a Celtic cross and a Hindu prayer.

This surge in interest in body modification, like punk culture and Western music before it, has also hit in Japan. However, Japan has a long and varied history of tattooing and traditional *irezumi* (insertion of ink) or *horimono* (engraving) has deep associations with criminals and the yakuza (Japanese Mafia).

In Japan, tattooing is not considered to be a foreign, primitive habit, it has been a part of their culture since 500 BCE and although it has long been frowned upon and has suffered several periods of prohibition, a properly executed Japanese tattoo is beyond comparison in complexity and history.

The Ainu women of Northern Japan were tattooed at the time of their wedding with an upward twirled "moustache" and different abstract-geometrical designs on their arms and legs. The implication being that the arms and hands must work for the husband and the lips must speak for him. Ainu women believed that there was no salvation after death without tattooed lips.

The Chinese and Japanese historically disapproved of tattooing, or any puncturing of the skin as it disrespected their Confucian ideals of filial piety. One should not pierce the body given to you by your parents. To tattoo the precious gift of a human body was considered heinous act that set them apart from the community.

In a country like Japan where the group is very important, social ostracism was the worst form of punishment. In the 1700s, criminals found guilty of an offense had their foreheads tattooed with the character inu (dog). In Southern Kyushu a circle was tattooed near the left shoulder, in Kyoto a double bar was tattooed on the upper arm and in Nara a double line encircled the biceps of the right arm.

Fire fighters of ancient Edo became one of the groups outside the yakuza to be closely associated with irezumi. It is still common today for fire fighters and construction workers to be heavily tattooed along with the yakuza.

Another tattoo, which was very popular among Japanese fire fighters for its protective qualities was the Koi carp. It is often portrayed swimming upstream on the river of someone's back and is considered to be one of the strongest symbols of bravery. A Chinese tale tells of a carp, which swam up a waterfall bravely to become a dragon at the top. The watery connections are of obvious appeal to fire fighters.

Another popular category of tattoo is that of religious deities. *Fudo*, a Buddhist deity is a particularly popular character. Fierce looking and surrounded by flames, he holds a sword to knock down his enemies and a rope with which to bind them. He is obviously attractive to young men who fancy themselves as fierce warriors but he is a force for good, a guardian of morals.

The most significant boom in irezumi happened in the period 1751-1800 during which time a Chinese book called *Shui-Hu-Chuan* (In Japanese; *Suikoden*, in English; *The Water Margin*) became popular in the capital city of Edo. It contained swash-buckling tales of an outlaw named Sung-Chiang and his 108 followers.

Many of the heroes themselves were tattooed. Shishin's back was covered with nine dragons, Rochishin was decorated with flowers and Busho was tattooed with a tiger.

It is interesting to note, however, that the recent surge of interest in body design in Japan does not seem to be continuing the Japanese traditions. In a similar way to other cultural activities, like bonsai, calligraphy and tea ceremony, young Japanese are bored by the ritual and the time taken to perfect irezumi, and instead are buying into American culture and tattooing history. However, it seems that foreigners are fascinated by the ritual aspect and the unique style of irezumi and are hurrying to receive it.

Rather than meticulously hand-pricked large, flowing, Japanese designs, young people in Japan, particularly those involved in *bosozoku* (speed tribes) or other anti-establishment youth groups are opting to be tattooed with small Western style designs such as Disney characters, skulls and crossbones, bleeding hearts or modernized versions of Japanese designs.

They call these decorations, "irezumi" or "tatu" using the Western word but never "horimono" which is a word reserved for traditional hand-pricked designs by horishi (master tattooists). They also refer to these decorations as "wan-pointo" (one point) because instead of using the whole body as a canvas these small tattoos cover only one point

on the body.

Choosing a tattoo should be a thorough process. They are intended to be forever, and removal is expensive. The more planning that goes into your design of choice, the more likely that you will enjoy your tattoo later in life. If you're planning on an Asian character tattoo, be sure to find a bi-lingual, bi-cultural person that you trust to review your design before it's tattooed permanently.

Below are some rather strange Japanese kanji character tattoos. Many are literal translations which do not make sense in Japanese. Remember - think before you INK !!!

Reference: Helena Burton



Koi itai - literally, love hurts. Sounds a bit strange in Japanese. Lost in translation, perhaps?



White arm?



Baka gaijin - (stupid foreigner) Oh my !



Yukiko, a girl's name with the wrong Kanji character for "ko"



Broken, defeated ?



Huh? This looks Japanese, but is just gibberish



Imoto-san or younger sister?



Cat, Mother, Father, love ?



"Forever family honor" - too bad it's upside down. Wonder if "family" refers to biological family or to gang "family"



Kazoku or family. Nice brush strokes, but the kanji stencil was placed backwards, making it unreadable

## SHRINE CALENDAR

### 神社スケジュール

#### June 六月

- 14 Clean-up & Preparation 掃除と準備
- 15 Dazaifu Tenmangu Sukei Kai Festival  
太宰府天満宮崇敬会大祭

#### July 七月

- 6 Tsukinami-sai Monthly Service 月次祭
- 5 Clean up 掃除
- 11 Preparations 準備
- 12 Chinowa - Ring of Renewal 茅の輪くぐり

## Honolulu Shinto Renmei Memorial Day Service



Priests and members of the Honolulu Shinto Renmei attended the annual Memorial Day service at Punchbowl National Cemetery of the Pacific, Makiki Cemetery and Moilili Cemetery.

# Small Miracles

Birds' nests are temporary structures, often abandoned once the young have left. It would be easy enough to pass it by, however, if we pause to look closely, it becomes more intriguing.

We may never know what kind of bird built the nest, because there are several species that nest at the shrine. But it inspires a sense of wonder beyond mere questions about identification.

Somehow a small bird knew how to gather the materials for this structure. Somehow this bird arranged strips of the tassel from the shrine's bell, weaving them together with such precision that the nest is still sturdy and secure after being exposed to the daily rain and wind.



Nest made by birds with the shrine's bell tassel

Most birds are opportunistic when it comes to building materials, and will readily incorporate manmade items into their nests if they fit basic requirements of size and texture.

In many cases, though, the materials chosen must have specific properties. Studies have found that birds were selecting certain plants, such as wild carrot and yarrow, containing chemicals that would inhibit the growth of mites and other parasites.

The great crested flycatcher often adds a piece of shed snakeskin, to help deter predators or other intruders.

Considered in the proper light, this little bundle of dried hemp from the tassel is really a small miracle and the sheer ingenuity of these miniature marvels of architecture.



Shrine's bell tassel stripped by the

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