

About the Title

The Japanese title "Nezu no Ban" literally means "sleepless night," and shares the same title as the original story upon which the film was based, written by Ramo Nakajima (1952-2004). The original English title of this film was "A Hardest Night!!", but AnimEigo decided to use a new English title, "Wakeful Nights," which is a more direct translation of the original Japanese title, and more aptly fits the film since there is more than one wake in the film. Also, one more pun in a movie like this won't be noticed.

Makino Family/100th Anniversary

The director of *Wakeful Nights* is Masahiko Makino, who is widely known by his acting name, Masahiko Tsugawa (see below). After making his first appearance at age 5, he became one of Japan's top actors, winning numerous awards as a leading and supporting actor. He is best known in the west for his performances in most of Juzo Itami's films, such as "A Taxing Woman". Along with his brother, Hiroyuki Nagato, he was one of the brightest stars of Nikkatsu's golden age.

His mother's side of the family has two renowned directors, Shozo and Masahiro Makino. Shozo Makino (1878-1929) is known as the father of Japanese film. His 1908 film, "Honnoh ji gassen," is considered to be the first true Japanese film. Masahiro Makino (1908-1993) was Shozo's son and Masahiko's uncle on his mother's side, and was also a very successful director. Commemorating the 100 year milestone of his grandfather and Japan's filmmaking, Masahiko took over his family's filmmaking tradition and took on the Makino family name for his directorial debut. This Makino family is one of the most successful show-biz families in Japan, and also includes the following, just to name a few:

Hiroyuki Nagato -- Appeared as the master, Kyokaku, in *Wakeful Nights*. Older brother of Masahiko Makino, the director.

Sadako Sawamura -- Actress. Mother side aunt of Masahiko. Appeared in over 100 films including many Ozu films.

Daisuke Kato -- Masahiko's father side uncle. One of Akira Kurosawa's favorite actors who appeared in *Rashomon*, *Seven Samurai*, *Yojimbo*, etc. Married to Kurosawa's daughter. Other great directors such as Yasujiro Ozu and Mikio Naruse used him on a regular basis.

Yukiji Asaoka -- Masahiko's wife. An actress who is more active on TV than in films.

Yoko Minamida -- Masahiko's sister-in-law and Nagato's wife. The top star of Nikkatsu's golden age.

Mayuko -- Appeared in this film as Miki (Kyoushichi's wife). Daughter of Masahiko.

Other main actors of the film include:

Kiichi Nakai -- The son of Kieji Sada (1926-64), who was himself a major star, has appeared in such films as "An Autumn Afternoon," directed by Yasujiro Ozu, which is arguably one of the best Japanese films ever made. Despite the pressure of being the son of Sada, Nakai became Japan's top young star. He is best known in the U.S. as the star of "When the Last Sword is Drawn." We hope that AnimEigo fans enjoy the diversity of his roles, from Irobe of "Kon Ichikawa's 47 Ronin" (serious mastermind Samurai) to Kyota of "Wakeful Nights" (who can sing incredibly perverse songs without blushing).

Yoshino Kimura -- Yoshino Kimura is an award-winning actress who has had a wide-ranging Japanese film and television career, even venturing across the Pacific to appear in the 2007 "Masters of Horror" entry "Dream Cruise". She also appears in Takashi Miike's new film, "Sukiyaki Western Django." She was born in London, spent several years in New York, and speaks good English. Ms. Kimura has won numerous awards such as the Newcomer of the Year award from the Japanese Academy, and is currently one of the most sought-after young actresses in Japan.

Sumiko Fuji (Shizuko) -- Widely known as Junko Fuji, she changed her stage name in 1982. She was discovered by Director Masahiro Makino, who came up with her original stage name, and helped make her Toei's top actress and the best female box-office draw of her generation. Her appearance in this film is

particularly appropriate given her relationship with director Makino (Masahiko's uncle), and Director Masahiko Makino insisted that for the role of a geisha, she was the best choice in all of Japan, having begun studying Japanese traditional dancing when she was only 7 years old. She married the Kabuki actor Kikugoro Onoe 7th generation and is now part of his Kabuki family. Therefore, her training and her private life has provided a perfect background for this role.

About the Real-Life Rakugoka

SHOUMEITEI Kyoukaku -- Obviously, Kyoukaku was modeled after the real life master Rakugo performer SHOUFUKUTEI Shokaku the 6th (1918-1986), whose speciality was the "Rakuda" story. He truly contributed to the revival of the almost dead Kaimigata Rakugo (Kansai region Rakugo) and trained many apprentices. He is also known for his strong charisma, outrageous private life full of scandals related to parties, tax evasion, excessive drinking and financial embarrassment. One of his apprentices, SHOFUKUTEI Tsurube, appeared in this film as a celebrity visitor of Kyoshi's funeral, which represents his support of this film. Another guest at Kyoshi's funeral was KATSURA Sanshi, who is now the top leader of the Kamigata Rakugo society, which again represents his and his society's support of this film. Both Tsurube and Sanshi are widely known and very popular, not just as Rakugo performers but also for other activities, such as MC'ing TV shows. On the other hand, some Rakugo performers refused to support this film because of the "dead man dancing" scene, since it was truly disrespectful to the dead, particularly to the master of Rakugo on which it was based. The intention of the dead man dancing was clearly to commemorate his great performance, and everyone in his group knew the master would be happy to dance at his wake.

"Hey, this guy doesn't have hepatitis B, does he?"

The Hepatitis B virus infects the liver of hominoids and causes an inflammation called hepatitis. The disease was originally known as "serum hepatitis" and has caused epidemics in parts of Asia and Africa. Symptoms include liver inflammation, vomiting, jaundice, and rarely, death. The earliest record of a Hepatitis B epidemic was in 1885, in Bremen, Germany, though the virus was not discovered and identified until 1965. The infection is preventable by vaccination, which was first successfully tested in the 1980s. Possible forms of transmission of HBV include unprotected sexual contact, blood transfusions, re-use of contaminated needles, and transmission from mother to child during childbirth. In the continental United States and Western Europe, HBV is not as prevalent, with less than 2% of the population chronically infected. The prevalence of areas such as Japan, Russia, and Eastern Europe is anywhere from 2-7%, and high prevalence areas such as China have at least 8% of the population infected.

"You know, it's probably a faux pas to say this in the presence of the deceased, but he sure was an unlucky fellow."

A faux pas is a violation of commonly accepted social rules in the form of a blunder in etiquette, manners, or conduct. Because taboos and "good manners" vary from culture to culture, faux pas are also culturally dependent. For instance, in Japan, it is a faux pas to not bow lower than an elder or person of higher social status when greeting or thanking another person. It is also considered extremely rude to pass food from one pair of chopsticks to another or stand your chopsticks up in a bowl of rice. In fact, there are myriads of chopstick faux pas one should learn to avoid lest you inadvertently offend an Asian host and start a small war.

The term faux pas comes from French (lit. "false step"), though it is a formal expression in French and doesn't contain the figurative meaning used in English. Instead, the French would use a term like "gaffe" or "erreur" to convey the same meaning. So using "faux pas" in France is itself a "faux pas"...er, "gaffe."

"Rakugo: traditional Japanese comic storytelling."

Rakugo is a traditional form of Japanese comic storytelling in which a lone verbalist (called a Koza) remains seated on stage, and using only a paper fan as a prop, depicts a long and complicated comical story. The story always involves dialogue between more than one character, the difference depicted only through change in pitch, tone, and a slight turn of the head.

The rakugo monologue always ends with a narrative stunt known as ochi (fall), which is a sudden interruption of the wordplay flow. Cunning linguists have codified and recognized twelve kinds of ochi, ranging from the basic form to more complex variations which have evolved through time.

The origins of rakugo can be traced back to the 13th century in the form of humorous narratives. They eventually evolved into monologues, probably at the request of entertainment-starved Daimyo (one can only take so much Noh drama before you want to go out and start a war). Next, during the Edo period (1603-1867), with the emergence of the merchant class, an appreciation of rakugo spread to the lower classes. Before modern rakugo, which was developed in the 19th century, there were the kobanashi: short humorous vignettes ending with an ochi, which were enacted in small venues, on the streets, or printed and sold as pamphlets. A rakugoka is a practitioner of rakugo.

Kansai Dialect

The Kansai dialect (Kansai-ben) is a distinct group of Japanese dialects found in the Kansai region of Japan, typified by the speech of Osaka (Osaka-ben). It is characterized as being both more melodic and “harsher” by standard Japanese speakers, and, because it is the most widely known nonstandard dialect of Japanese, it has become a favorite with Japanese authors and manga/anime artists because it represents a somewhat “different” character from the norm. The use of the Kansai dialect is widely associated with manzai and other comedy forms throughout most of non-Kansai Japan. Many of the differences in the Kansai dialect comes from the use of unusual contractions. In this way, it is similar to Southern American English, and we'all at AnimEigo have traditionally translated Kansai-ben into this dialect.

“No Mount Fuji! No Mount Fuji!”

Mount Fuji is the highest mountain in Japan at 3,776 m (12,388 ft.) Though the volcano is dormant and hasn't erupted since 1707, it's officially classified as active with a low risk of eruption. It is located near the Pacific coast of central Honshu, and is a well-known natural symbol of Japan frequently depicted in art and photographs, as well as visited by numerous climbers and sightseers.

Japanese Wake

A Japanese funeral includes a wake, cremation, burial in a family grave, and a periodic memorial service. According to 2005 statistics, 99.82% of all deceased Japanese are cremated. Most remains are buried in a family grave, though scattering of the ashes has become more popular in recent years. The average cost for a Japanese funeral is around 2.4 million yen (\$20,000), making Japan one of the most expensive places in the world to die, mainly due to the scarcity of funeral plots. However, a portion of these costs are offset by large amounts of condolence money given by the guests to the bereaved. Price gouging is also common at Japanese funeral homes, and relatives are usually hesitant to negotiate or compare prices.

Even though Japan has a mixture of Shinto and Buddhist beliefs, funerals are almost always Buddhist ceremonies. After death, the deceased's lips are moistened with water, and the household shrine is closed and covered with white paper, to keep out the impure spirits of the dead. A small table decorated with flowers, incense, and a candle is placed next to the deceased, and a knife is commonly put on their chest to drive away evil spirits. The body is typically placed on dry ice in a casket, and several items are also put inside, including a white kimono, sandals, and six coins for the crossing of the Sanzu -- the “River of three hells.” The body is placed with the head towards the north or, alternatively, towards the west.

In former times, only white clothes were worn for funerals, but nowadays all guests wear black. During a typical wake, the guests may carry a Buddhist prayer bead called juzu, and all guests bring condolence money (which may range from 5,000-50,000 yen (\$43-\$434)) in a special black and silver decorated envelope. The Buddhist priest reads a sutra while the family members in turn offer incense to the incense urn in front of the deceased, and once the priest is finished, the guests begin to leave. At this time, each departing guest is given a gift which is directly related to the value of their condolence money given, of which roughly 50% is returned in the form of high-value gifts, such as a can of expensive green tea.

The closest relatives may stay overnight to keep vigil with the deceased, as is seen throughout Wakeful Nights. During this “sleepless night” , the attendees of a wake pass the time reminiscing about the deceased to make sure he/she will not feel lonely. Often, it is a package deal with an all-night party. There are typically two cases: one is having the party next to the corpse and the other is having the party in a separate room while keeping a few people next to the corpse throughout the night. If the wake is taking place in a funeral house, this is not the case.

“It says he revived the nearly extinct Kamigata-style of Rakugo.”

Kamigata-style Rakugo is mainly found in Osaka, and is uniquely characterized by the use of musical instruments.

“Yeah... I hope he'll come back, even as a firefly... or even as a bug.”

Reincarnation is an ancient belief that some essential part of a living being survives death to be reborn into a new body. Though this essential part is often referred to as the soul or spirit, the Buddhist concept of reincarnation differs significantly because there is no “self” to reincarnate, and all compounded things are subject to dissolution, including all components of the human person and personality. What is reborn is not the person, but instead one moment gives rise to another in a continuing momentum, even after death. It's a much more subtle approach to the notion of reincarnation than the more literal Hindu-based or New Age beliefs.

“It'll be genetic atavism.”

Atavism refers to a tendency to revert to ancestral type. It is a real or supposed evolutionary throwback, such as traits reappearing which had disappeared generations ago. Atavisms occur because the genes of previously existing features are often preserved in DNA, even though the genes are not expressed in the organisms possessing them.

“Matsuda Seiko.”

Matsuda Seiko (March 10, 1962 - Present) is a Japanese pop singer and songwriter from Fukuoka, who rose to fame in 1980 as a teen idol. Seiko used to hold the record for the most number 1 singles (25 total) by a female singer until March 2006 when Ayumi Hamasaki finally dethroned her. According to some sources, nobody in Japanese history has gotten more news coverage than Seiko. The Madonna of Japan, she has resiliently bounced back from controversy, scandals, and set-backs, to garner the Japanese title of “Forever Idol.” She attempted to break into the North American market with an English-language, self-titled album in 1990. She scored a hit with “The Right Combination,” a duet with New Kids on the Block's Donnie Wahlberg, but album sales proved to be mediocre compared to her giant success in Japan.

“So, the master said he wanted to buy some marijuana.”

According to the DEA, Hawaii is a national leader in the cultivation of high-grade marijuana. Hawaii is one of 12 states thus far which has approved and regulated marijuana for medical use. Though the federal government still enforces its prohibition, as of December 28, 2000, it is medically available to conditions it has been shown effective to treat through recent studies, including, but not limited to: cachexia; cancer; chronic pain; Crohn's disease; epilepsy and other disorders characterized by seizures; glaucoma; HIV or AIDS; multiple sclerosis and other disorders characterized by muscle spasticity; and nausea. Other conditions are subject to approval by the Hawaii Department of Health. More than 2,000 patients have been certified for medical use in the state.

“It was at a cafe called Java Java, on the 2nd floor of the Ala Moana Center.”

The Ala Moana Center is one of the largest shopping centers in the U.S., and is currently the largest open-air shopping center in the world. Located in Honolulu, Hawaii, Ala Moana is south of Makiki, east of Kaka'ako, and west of Waikiki. Though there are a few stores that cater to local residents, most of the Center's stores are specifically focused on the tourist economy, and in particular the needs of Japanese tourists. The Center boasts one of the world's largest food courts, and also has many high-end boutique stores of leading international fashion designers, such as Juicy Couture, Prada, Armani Exchange, and Christian Dior.

“For example, let's say that we perform the master's signature story: Rakuda.”

Rakuda is an antiquated alliteration of “rakugo”, and the official name of the story is “Rakuda no Souren” (Funeral of Rakuda). Rakuda is the speciality of Kyokaku in this film and the specialty of Shofukutei Shokaku, upon whom the character is based. The story was written by Katsura Bungo the 4th (1865-1915). Rakuda (Camel) is the nickname of the main character and when he appears in the story he is already dead. His brother wants to arrange his funeral but does not have any funds to do so. He negotiates with the landlord for

the funds, and in return promises that the dead man will dance the "Kankanoh", as seen in the film. The story goes on and on for about an hour.

"In that story is a scene called 'The Corpse Dances the Kankan.'"

"Kankan noh" originated from Shingaku (the songs from the Manchu dynasty in China (1636-1912)) in 1820. Later, this originally Chinese song was partially adapted in Japanese and turned into a strange nonsense song, so that now it is neither Chinese nor Japanese. Thus, it is impossible to subtitle the literal meaning of this song, since the song as it exists today doesn't have them, just lyrics that have been "translated" from Chinese by Japanese who do not understand Chinese. The best AnimEigo could do is to just put the meaning of the original Chinese song, which is about the Chinese linking rings. "Kankan" is not the same as the French high-kicking "Cancan".

"Shigeko, get the shamisen, the shamisen."

The shamisen (lit. three taste strings), also called samisen or sängen, is a stringed instrument played with a large pick called a "bachi." Though it's about the same length as a guitar, the neck is longer, slimmer, and without frets. The rectangular body, known as the do, is covered on both sides with skin, like a banjo. Though recently, some types of plastics are being tried, the best shamisen are typically made with cat or dog skin, and on some, the position of the animal's nipples can still be seen.

The three strings have typically been made of silk, though nylon is increasingly becoming the norm. The bachi was traditionally made of ivory or tortoise shell but is now usually wooden, and shaped like a ginkgo leaf. The shamisen has derived from the sanshin, which came from Southern Okinawa in the 16th century, and which itself evolved from the Chinese sanxian.

"Even more amazing was when he challenged himself to perform rakugo six days in a row. On the first day, there was a fire at the Hotel New Japan. There was a plane crash on the second day... and on the fourth day, Shimura Takashi died. And on the final day, Eri Chiemi died."

February 8, 1982: Tokyo suffered the worst fire in postwar history at the luxurious Hotel New Japan in Akasaka Mitsuke. Apparently, the owner negligently cut corners during construction, failing to install basic safety equipment. His thriftiness resulted in 32 deaths (burned beyond recognition), and 29 injuries, as well as his own imprisonment. From 1982-1995, the building remained in disuse, partly because of rampant reports of screams and shadowy figures emanating from the abandoned building. A new office block currently stands where the hotel once stood.

February 9, 1982: 24 passengers died when a Japan Air Lines McDonnell Douglas DC-8-61 crashed into Tokyo Bay, just short of the Tokyo-Haneda Airport runway. The plane crashed when the captain, Seiji Katagiri, apparently suffered some sort of mental breakdown and activated the thrust reversers on the two inboard engines. When asked about the mistake, he said "After I switched from auto to manual operation just before landing, I felt nausea, then an inexplicable feeling of terror, and completely lost consciousness."

February 11, 1982: Shimura Takashi was well-known for his many roles in Akira Kurosawa films, particularly as the protagonist in both "Ikiru" and "Seven Samurai." Though he was not as well-known as Toshiro Mifune, he appeared in more Kurosawa films, 19 in all. One of the most versatile character actors in the world, some of his other notable films include the original "Godzilla," "Rashomon," "Samurai III," "Throne of Blood," "Yojimbo," "Sanjuro," "Japan's Longest Day," "Samurai Assassin," "Samurai Banners," and "Zatoichi's Conspiracy." In total, he appeared in exactly 200 films, working hard until his final film in 1980, Kurosawa's "Kagemusha." He died in Tokyo from emphysema, at the age of 76.

February 13, 1982: Eri Chiemi, born Kubo Chiemi, is widely considered one of the greatest singers of 20th Century Japan. Though she had many hit songs in Japan such as "Sanosa" and "Sakaba-nite", she also introduced many American songs such as "Tennessee Waltz." She was married to Ken Takakura ("The Clint Eastwood of Japan") for 12 years. She also starred in 19 films, from 1953-1970. She died at the relatively young age of 45.

"So on the day the emperor passed on, he went on stage to perform."

Emperor Showa (April 29, 1901 - January 7, 1989) was the 124th Emperor of Japan. "Showa" is the name of the era that corresponded with the reign of the Emperor, and was made his official name upon his death, though he continues to be known outside of Japan by his personal name, Hirohito. His reign was the longest of any historical Japanese emperor, and his death from duodenal cancer ended his reign and brought about the Heisei era. A large number of world leaders attended his funeral, including U.S. President George H.W. Bush.

Since around September 19, 1988, when he became seriously ill, until he died on January 7, 1989, many events were voluntarily cancelled, from baseball victory parties and live concerts to celebrity wedding ceremonies or even ordinary people's weddings (and of course, many rakugo events). They were cancelled in order to prevent any inappropriate happy thoughts or celebrations in such a time of crisis. Needless to say, the day Emperor Showa passed away was a day in which the entire nation cancelled all sorts of events. So, you can imagine how both brave and crazy Kyoji was to continue with his rakugo performance on the day of the Emperor's death.

"I figured we'd go to a love-hotel."

A love hotel (rabu hoteru) is a short-stay Japanese hotel operated primarily for the purpose of giving a couple some privacy. In other words, it's the Japanese equivalent of a "No Tell Motel".

"And while he was telling me his story, our brother suffered a brain hemorrhage."

A cerebral hemorrhage is a bleed into the substance of the cerebrum which can lead to hemorrhagic strokes. There are four types of brain hemorrhages, but the one from which Kyoji suffers in the film is a subarachnoid hemorrhage. This type accounts for 5 to 10% of strokes, and is one of the deadliest kinds of strokes. Subarachnoid bleeds kill approximately 40% of their victims, disabling half the survivors. This hemorrhage occurs when a vessel in the arachnoid (web-like membrane) layer of the meninges bursts, and blood enters and contaminates the subarachnoid space where cerebrospinal fluid bathes the brain. The brain is very sensitive to changes in pH, so when the chemical balance of the cerebrospinal fluid is disturbed by the blood, extensive damage can result.

"A-chan was once a young geisha, from Imazato-shinchi."

Imazato-Shinchi is an area of Osaka known for its red-light districts, and which has been increasingly dominated by recent South Korean immigrants, informally classifying it as a new "Koreatown". However, this area was once known mainly for its large geisha population.

A geisha, or geiko, is a traditional, female Japanese entertainer, whose skills may include performance of various Japanese arts, such as classical music and dance. Though popular western belief may usually indicate that geisha are prostitutes, this is not the case. True geisha are strictly entertainers, though some prostitutes have marketed themselves as geisha over time. For instance, during occupied Japan, prostitutes that dressed like geisha, known as "geisha girls", solicited their services to American GIs, which may have carried the image of geisha as prostitutes back to the United States. Though true geisha definitely flirt with men and make playful innuendos, it is understood that nothing more can be expected. Because true geisha usually have an aide to help in the difficult process of dressing them in their elaborate clothing, which could take over an hour, a surefire way to recognize the difference between a geisha and a prostitute is to note the position of the bow of their sash, or obi. If the obi is in the back, they have been dressed by someone else, and are certainly not prostitutes. If the obi is in the front, and the clothes less complicated, they may be a prostitute, because the obi must be in a position for the ease of removal and replacement several times a day.

Maiko are geisha apprentices, and their white make-up and elaborate kimono and hairstyles have provided the stereotype of a geisha to westerners, rather than the true geisha. Though in the 1920s there may have been upwards of 80,000 geisha in Japan, today it is estimated that there are only 1,000-2,000, mostly in the resort town of Atami. Many geisha are reserved in 30 minute or hour-long segments, and some traditionally offer their services in the time it takes to burn a stick of incense. High class geisha such as Shizuko would probably charge a minimum of \$500/hour, which would explain how numerous visits could drive the cab driver into financial ruin.

Singing Competition

According to director Makino, he interviewed real-life retired geishas from Imazato Shinchi, where Shizuko was from, and took notes about many songs. These songs have rarely been written down, since they are so erotic and usually perverse. He found that 3/4ths of the songs were too offensive to include in the film, so only the cleanest 25% appear in the film. The ones which we do hear are songs that have actually been performed at Geisha parties in Imazato-Shinchi, Osaka. This geisha town, along with many other geisha towns, were practically shut down or at least dramatically downsized after WWII, due to a stricter enforcement of child labor laws. These laws make it difficult for aspiring geisha to get proper training, which must begin at an early age, and may be the main reason why geisha are becoming an endangered species.

13th Night (dead Shizuko's song)

In the scene where Shizuko suddenly appears during the song competition wearing a geisha kimono, the song which she sings is a parody of a song titled "13th Night" performed by Misae Enoki. The original concerns a woman who bumped into a man she adored, and the song ended with the words "13th Night", just like in Shizuko's song.

"13th Night" is the term for a moon viewing custom. Typically, devotees of the moon would view the first 15th night (a real full moon) in the Fall, probably in September. Then, about one month later, they view the 13th night (2 nights before the full moon). In the old days, when a man and a woman dated on the 15th night, it was regarded as an ill omen not to date again on the 13th night -- sort of a buy-one-get-one-free date deal. So, after the 13th night date, there was no guarantee to see the loved one after that. The 13th night moon is called "Nagori no tsuki" (Hard to say farewell to moon) as it was the last chance to see a beautiful moon during the moon-viewing season.

Shizuko's song is totally modified from the original except for the ending of "13th night". In her song, after 13 "times" (boy! somebody is energetic!), she still misses the partner. Another subtext is that she is expressing her feelings to her rakugo family that "it's tough to say goodbye" (since she is departing to the other world).

"Choito! Choito!"

"Kakegoe" refers to the act of shouting in performances of traditional Japanese music, Kabuki theatre, and in some martial arts. In folk music, the words are sometimes nonsensical, and are often inserted in parts of songs as words of encouragement for the musicians or singers. One of the most common kakegoe is "sore!" (lit. "that"), which is meant as "that's the way!", or "just like that!". The words "Choito! Choito!" have no inherent semantic component, but are commonly used.

"When I die... bury me by the roadside..."

This climactic group-song is a modern variant of a popular traditional Japanese folk song called "Itsuki no Komoriuta", lit. "Lullaby of Itsuki Village", which originated from the small mountain village of Itsuki, which is in Kyushu. The village is well known for its beautiful natural habitat and clean river, and the song was written by young nursemaids lulling their babies to sleep while singing about their own misfortune and distress. It is a "min'yo" song, which is a genre of traditional Japanese music connected with work or trade in the tradition of folk songs. In modern Japan, singers who can sing genuine min'yo are very admired, because they are difficult to sing and require great vocal control. Many Japanese feel that min'yo touches on their deepest spirit by evoking nostalgia for home towns and family.

"I'll lead off with Kusatsu-bushi."

Kusatsu-bushi is a well-known folk song in the natural hot springs area of the Kusatsu highlands, and tells the story of yumomi, which is the traditional method of cooling hot spring water to bathing temperature by stirring the water with large wooden paddles. Water is cooled this way because diluting it with cold water would decrease its "curative powers." This process is usually accompanied by the singing of traditional songs, particularly Kusatsu-bashi. If you ever find yourself in Kusatsu, you can see the yumomi and dance performance for only 500 yen, and may even have the opportunity to participate in yumomi yourself!

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