

THE NEW JAPANESE

By Rob Hudson (PA)

Before this year's convention, I was scared to death of the Japanese. I envisioned them as an elite group of passionless, scowling figures. Memories of childhood years spent watching Ninja movies didn't help either. Realizing that I couldn't ignore them forever, I finally summoned the nerve to approach their table. I faced quite an assembly of well-known giants: **Makoto Yamaguchi**, **Jun Maekawa**, and **Seiji Nishikawa** and the up-and-coming folders **Hideo Komatsu**, **Koshiro Hatori** and **Takuo Kobayashi**.

*June Sakamoto proudly displays her paper floral arrangement
Photo by Kay Eng*

June Sakamoto (NJ) agreed to act as a translator and cultural liaison. Sensing my nervousness, she whispered, "Don't worry, Rob. Many of these Japanese have been to America before, and are a lot more laid back." I soon realized that there was nothing to be nervous about, and that my earlier impressions were nothing more than myth.

Throughout the course of our interview, I learned that this Japanese contingent assembled before me were the "new wave," a break-away from traditional modes and patterns. The Origami Tanteidan (literally "Origami Detectives") was an informal group, complete with a Newsletter, for many

years, but they'd never had a formal convention. In 1994 **Makoto Yamaguchi**, **Tomoko Fuse**, **Fumaki Kawasaki** and **Jun Maekawa** attended an OrigamiUSA convention. They were so impressed by how the convention was organized that they patterned their own convention after it.

So what were the "new" Japanese doing at convention? Many, like **Naomi Honiden**, were learning new techniques and skills. She was amazed at the contrasts between American and Japanese folders. According to Honiden, artisans in Japan are extremely protective of any techniques they use in the art form. Such knowledge is kept within the family or business. In America, this information is not only freely given but volunteered. For example Honiden is a jeweler who formerly used paper that didn't require coating because she wasn't aware of techniques to do so. This year, **Mark Kennedy** (PA) happily gave her not only information on materials to use to preserve origami jewelry, but actually gave her a bottle of coating to use. "In Japan," says Mrs. Honiden, "this would never happen."

Others, like Yamaguchi, have a different mission. Yamaguchi's focus is on promoting newer folders. "I'm 53 years old," says Yamaguchi, "I've published my share of books. People are familiar with my models. I'm here at convention to introduce the next generation of

origami creators. I have made a personal commitment to myself to help the young people by giving them advice and the opportunity to show their work to as many people as possible."

When asked what they did in their spare time during convention, responses varied. "We went to a Mets game," some answered. Maekawa responded: "I slept as much as possible." His wife interjected, insisting, "You did not! You were on your computer every night posting convention news to the Tanteidan Web page." I guess some things cross all cultural boundaries.

All things considered, the Japanese folders have much in common with their American counterparts. As one member of the Eastern contingent explained, "Origami nuts are origami nuts no matter where they're from!" ■

*International guests at Convention '98
Photo by Joseph Wu*