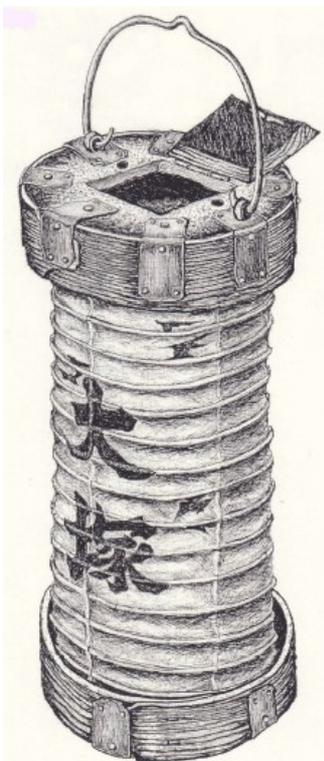


The Edo Mingu Times

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The essay was originally written in Japanese with illustrations by Tatsuo Akisawa, the director of the antique museum "Edo Mingu Kaido", which was translated to English by his son, Masaru Akisawa

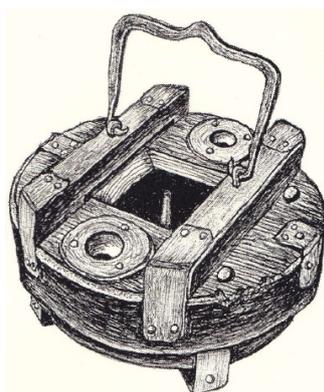
Odawara-chochin (Foldable Paper Lantern)- Part I



Drawing 1:

Odawara-chochin

Diameter 16.5cm, height 31cm
At the End of the Edo Period



Drawing 2:

Kagoya-chochin

Width 14.4cm, height 28cm
(7.4cm when folded)
At the end of the Edo Period

I tried to find historical records of the Odawara-chochin (a foldable paper lantern in column shape originated in Odawara) but only the record I could find was a description of it as a souvenir paper lantern of Odawara, one of the post-towns of the Tokaido road, in the book titled "Culture and Geography of Sagami Province" published in 1841. Though, the Odawara-chochin could be seen in some of Ukiyo-e woodblock prints created in the Edo period. The Kagoya-chochin (a paper lantern for palanquin) resembled the Odawara-chochin in its shape and size but differed in usability and durability; the origin of the Odawara-chochin preceded the Kagoya-chochin which I presume resulted in disparity in quality.

Tradition said the Odawara-chochin had three benefits. First, it was said that holy Japanese cedar trees from Saijo-ji temple (Doryoson) located in Daiyuzan (Mt.Daiyu) near Odawara that keep evil spirits away were used for ring like components on the top and the bottom. What a fantastic expression it was, which should have been encouraging to travelers in the old days when the travel in the dark was uneasy. Secondly, it utilized thin sticks whittled from pieces of bamboo with a plane surface, instead of ordinary thin sticks with a curved surface having a round cross section, allowing paper to be pasted on to the accordion style mid-section frame efficiently, giving it durability. I was quite impressed when I noticed this unrecognizable work. Thirdly, it was very convenient to carry around as the mid-section frame in bellows structure could be collapsed and stored inside the top component along with the bottom one.

Some Odawara-chochin were called "Futokoro-chochin" or "Tamoto-chochin" meaning a pocketable paper lantern capable to carry in the bosom or a sleeve of kimono, which were very compact, had nice touch and smoothness to fold and unfold and came with different material for the top and bottom components. Some came with a spare candle holder made of bamboo which could be hooked to a girdle of kimono when unused. Light source other than candles was used and some are designed to be placed on the floor in spite of its original design to be handheld. Until electrical flashlights got popularized, the design and usability of the Odawara-chochin progressed, in which I found ingenuity of ancient time, similar to the gando as a universal direction candle search light.

(*To be continued to Part II)