

【A Cormorant Master's Attire】

Kazaori Eboshi

Q: Why do cormorant masters wear this meter-long cloth wrapped around their heads?

A:

This headcloth, called a *kazaori eboshi*, protects a cormorant master's head from the flames and sparks of the fire basket that hangs from his boat's prow. It is worn low over the forehead to guard the eyebrows, and the excess cloth is brought together on top of the head. This conical shape creates room for a topknot, which fishermen wore until the hairstyle was abolished in the late nineteenth century. The garment's shape is also the source of its name: *kazaori* means "bent by the wind," and *eboshi* are tall, conical hats that were worn by courtiers in the Heian period (794–1185).

Muneate

Q: What is the purpose of this garment? Why is it folded to create a double layer?

A:

The *muneate* is an apron-like outer garment that prevents sparks from entering the cormorant master's clothing. Like a kimono, the fishing jacket (*ryōfuku*) wraps around the body, leaving a gap below the neck. The *muneate* is worn over this gap and tied in place with cords at the back of the fisherman's neck. It is folded into a double layer that is open on one side, creating a pocket for small items.

Ryōfuku

Q: Why are fishing jackets colored navy blue or black?

A:

The first layer of a cormorant master's attire is the *ryōfuku*, a cotton jacket similar to a narrow-sleeved, unlined kimono. It is patternless and darkly colored so that the shape of the fisherman will not be seen by the ayu in the water. The dark coloration is also for the sake of the cormorants, which are said to be cautious around objects that are shiny or white. The *ryōfuku* is ankle length, but the lower part is tucked up so that it reaches only to the cormorant master's knees, allowing greater freedom of movement.

Koshimino

Q: What is the purpose of this straw garment?

A:

The *koshimino*, which resembles a straw skirt, prevents the cormorant master's lower clothing from being dirtied by fish oil and mucus from the ayu. It also protects him from being soaked and chilled by the spray as he leans from the boat to bring in the cormorants. *Koshimino* are woven from glutinous rice (*mochigome*) straw, which naturally repels water and is ideal for river work. In the course of a typical season, the cormorant master will wear out between three and five of these handwoven garments.

Ashinaka

Q: Why are these sandals only half the size of normal sandals?

A:

Full-length sandals function well on land, but when worn in a river, they catch the current and make walking awkward and inefficient. These half-sized sandals (*ashinaka*) have less drag but still allow the cormorant master to move without slipping on algae-covered rocks or in the water that accumulates in the bottom of the boat. The woven straw provides more traction than a smoother material would, further reducing the danger of slipping.

Preparation for the Coming Season

The cormorant-fishing season ends on October 15. During the winter, cormorant masters repair their equipment and make new attire for the next season. New *ashinaka* and *koshimino* are handwoven from rice straw using traditional techniques. Bundles of straw are first beaten with a mallet to make the fibers softer and easier to twist, then woven together. *Koshimino* are made by twisting together cut sections of rice straw and weaving thin cords of hemp palm between the twisted strands to bind them together. More strands of rice straw are added until the garment is wide enough to wrap around the waist with considerable overlap. A single *koshimino* takes about three days to make. Making *ashinaka* used to be a common side job of local farmers, so cormorant masters simply purchased them. Today, however, cormorant masters must make their footwear themselves.

A major part of the cormorant master's winter work is splitting pine logs to fuel the boat's fire basket (*kagaribi*). The firewood must be of the appropriate size and shape to burn quickly in the basket, and it needs to be dried for several months prior to use.

Each night's fishing consumes two or three bundles of wood, for a total of 300 to 350 bundles per season.