

The Hon-Minoshi Makers

Making Hon-minoshi is laborious, painstaking work. To make each feather-light sheet of blemish-free paper, artisans spend long days bent over clumps of bast fibers, picking out impurities; they spend hours on their feet screening pulp slurry to form sheets of paper. They carry the drying boards that each weigh around 20 kilograms to stand them in the sun. *Kozo* (paper mulberry) branches are harvested and processed in winter, and papermakers wash the inner bark fibers in icy river water or outdoor water tanks.

It takes at least 10 years for an apprentice to a member of the Association for the Preservation of Hon-minoshi Papermaking to qualify as a certified Hon-minoshi maker, and there are currently just six registered Hon-minoshi ateliers. Traditionally, papermakers in Mino passed their skills down through generations, and children would join the family business after high school. In recent years, aspiring papermakers have been welcomed from all over Japan. Some of the new Hon-minoshi makers left previous careers to devote their time to paper.

Mino City has established the Nurturing Successors of Hon-Minoshi Initiative, using public donations to help fund the training of new apprentices. Most artisans start their training at the Mino Washi Paper Museum, which offers a month-long course in making washi. After that, they need to find a qualified Hon-minoshi maker to start their apprenticeship.

Current members of the Association for the Preservation of Hon-minoshi Papermaking are the Sawamura family, Mino Takekami Workshop (the Suzuki family), Kano Takeshi, Ishihara Hidekazu, Kurata Makoto, and Ieda Minako. Ateliers are generally not open to the public, but visitors can purchase Hon-minoshi at Mino Washi Paper Museum and shops in Mino.