

Paraguay National Day Special

Long-standing connection founded on trust

RAUL FLORENTIN
AMBASSADOR OF PARAGUAY



Paraguay and Japan, located 17,863 kilometers apart, are deeply connected by two important cultural aspects of our country. These are *nanduti*, a weaving technique that intertwines cot-

ton threads, carrying wisdom and hope, and the Paraguayan harp, a symbol of the national musical culture.

Japanese migration came to Paraguay in 1936 and settled in the La Colmena Colony, 132 kilometers away from the capital Asuncion. Later, in the 1950s, they began colonizing other areas of Paraguay. Currently, there are approximately 10,000 Japanese descendants in Paraguay.

The efforts made by the first Japanese immigrants to overcome the difficulties they faced under challenging conditions, made them appear as dedicated and hard-

working people in the eyes of Paraguayans, and they earned great trust for future Japanese immigrants.

That's how, in the 1960s, Lucia Shiomitsu, a Japanese woman from Fukuoka Prefecture, arrived in Paraguay for the first time at the age of 10 with her family, settling in the Yguazu Colony. Later, she moved to the capital to continue her studies, but had to return to Japan due to a serious illness her father had developed. As a memory of Paraguay, her father gave her a Paraguayan harp.

After a few years, she returned to Paraguay to dedicate herself to the study and improvement of the harp, and since then she has dedicated her entire life to promoting and teaching the instrument in Japan, making her known as the pioneer of the Paraguayan harp in Japan. She paved the way for the Japanese public to become passionate about the Paraguayan musical instrument and for other great musicians to follow the same path.

The popularity of the Paraguayan harp in Japan is such that for more than 30 years a biannual National Paraguayan Harp competition has been held in the city of Chiba, Asuncion's sister city. After starting as a cultural exchange event, the competition has drawn the attention of great harp masters, including winners Mika Agematsu, Yuki Shiomitsu, Arisa Matsuki, Nelson Suzuki, and the most recent champion Karin Matsuki.

In 2019, the year in which we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Paraguay and Japan, the concert "100 Harps for 100 Years of Friendship" was held in Tokyo's Odaiba waterfront district. One hundred harpists, mostly Japanese women dressed in *nanduti* costumes, achieved the historic feat of bringing together 100 harpists for a performance outside of Paraguay, thanks to

the collaboration of the great Paraguayan harp masters — Lucia Shiomitsu, Enrique Carrera, Arisa Matsuki, Mika Agematsu and Akihiro Shiga — residing in Japan.

Nanduti is not only present in the attire of the harpists; it was introduced to Japan by a Nikkei Paraguayan from La Colmena named Mie Elena Kanazawa de Iwatani.

Kanazawa, a nurse by profession, studied in Paraguay and acquired the techniques of *nanduti* before returning to Tokyo to open the first *nanduti* teaching academy with recognition from the Paraguayan Institute of Crafts (IPA).

Since 2010, she has taught embroidery techniques at the Mie Elena academy, which currently has more than 100 students, and has published two books in Japanese on the topic, including "How to make *nanduti* — traditional models" and "Nanduti accessories." Additionally, she annually organizes a Nanduti Tour, where more than 20 students travel to Paraguay to learn traditional techniques with Paraguayan artisans and explore the country.

In 2021, she created and officially registered the Nanduti Association of Japan, with the purpose of promoting the cultural value and attractiveness of Paraguayan handicrafts to Japanese society, supporting the improvement of the quality of life of artisans in Paraguay from Japan, as well as exchanges between members of the association and Paraguayan artisans. The association organizes various activities that generate economic and social benefits through *nanduti*, ensuring quality standards to protect *nanduti* as a Paraguayan cultural value, through certifications in coordination with the IPA.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



Left: A Paraguayan harp is shown with the logo celebrating 100 years of diplomatic relations between Japan and Paraguay. Right: Arisa Matsuki, Mie Elena Kanazawa, Enrique Carrera and Lucia Shiomitsu pose after an event in 2015.

EMBASSY OF
PARAGUAY



Handwoven flowers EMBASSY OF PARAGUAY

Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Paraguay
on the Occasion of
the Anniversary of
Their Independence

 Mitsubishi Corporation

Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Paraguay
on the Occasion of
the Anniversary of
Their Independence

 **SUMITOMO
ELECTRIC**
Connect with Innovation