

## Wood `N Dreams – *Ban-ei* Collection

### Japanese Fountain Pens

In the early 1900s before WWII, there were around 500 fountain pen related firms in Tokyo alone; in addition to big makers such as Pilot, Sailor or Platinum, there were about 100 turneries and 60 each of gold nib makers and lacquerers. But today, all of these are gone, and there are only few artisans left still working on genuine ebonite eye dropper fountain pens by hand.

Mr. E. Sakai, the lathe turner; Mr. T. Kabutogi, the new nib maker just succeeded from his father; Mr. Z. Kitamura, the lacquerer and one of the prominent Maki-e artists in the country; and Mr. S. Tsuchida (he was 80 in 1997), the youngest among the quartet, the man who makes the ebonite feeder and completes the fountain pens. They are the only team making ebonite eyedropper fountain pens in Tokyo I know of and possibly the only team in Japan.

I talked with Mr. Tsuchida at his home in Tokyo in April 1997 and listened to his 60-year pen making history with my heart filled with deep emotion. Although, they are a nationally treasured class of artisans, they are also very humble human beings with generous hearts and a strong sense of responsibility for being good artisans. After 60 years of hard working in their tiny tatami places with dozens of worn-out tools surrounding them.

I was deeply moved by seeing that in this age of computers, there are still people like Mr. Sakai or Mr. Tsuchida, lonely but peacefully turning, lacquering and making feeders by hand. I felt I should do something worthwhile by introducing their works to the markets outside of Japan. I knew that they didn't need my help and they even asked me not to sell too many for them, because it took time to make those kinds of fountain pens.

When I held one of their pens, I felt its warmth, and there's something more than just a regular fountain pen for money to buy and write with. And it would be very sad to think that after they were gone, just any one of them, there would be no more genuine old fashioned artisans who would be willing to make this eye dropper fountain pen piece by piece, all by hand, so carefully and thoughtfully, letting you feel as if you were in an oasis when you write with it. Very sadly I was noticed that the nib maker passed away in the same year of 1997, and they could only use either nibs from Platinum or Sailor to replace the original nibs. As I don't know much about nibs, my humble opinion is that the new nibs are not as soft as the original ones. Or otherwise, this is truly a rare and valuable pen for serious writers or collectors.

**Bernard Lyn**

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