

Entrance and Graduation Ceremony in Japan



Spring in Japan is not only famous for cherry blossom (*hanami*) but also for culturally embedded entrance (*nyugakushiki*) and graduation (*sotsugyoshiki*) ceremony. It is an emotional period for students as they part from their old classmates and teachers, and move to a new environment. In 1921 the Education Act was enacted. From then onward, all the schools and universities start their academic year on April 1st and end it on March 31st according to the relevant provisions in the Act. *Nyugakushiki* is the solemn and formal welcome ceremony of new students in schools and often held in the beginning of April. *Sotsugyoshiki* is held in mid to late March and is also a formal event. *Nyugakushiki* has a series of programs which is followed by almost all schools. First of all, new students enter the school hall and sing the national anthem. Names of new students are read out, then the principal makes a speech, a representative of the new students takes an oath, and in the last, all the senior

students sing the school song. New students meet their homeroom teacher and classmates after the ceremony. On the other hand, parents attend the ceremony of Parents-Teachers Association (PTA). Most of the parents wear formal suit but some mothers wear *kimono*, the traditional beautiful Japanese attire, to attend the ceremony. Many grandparents present a *randoseru* to their grandchildren when they get into an elementary school. Even if they don't, the parents will buy one for their child. *Randoseru* is an interesting and unique feature of elementary school system. It is a beautiful colored backpack made of stitched firm leather, perfectly designed for textbooks, notebooks and other stationery items. All elementary school students carry it to school every day for six years. They fall in love with it and feel proud to carry it. They keep and protect it like their treasure. For most of the kids, it is one of their best memories of childhood.

Sotsugyoshiki at the end of elementary, junior high, high school as well as university, is also a very solemn event for students. Graduating junior high school is a grand event as it is the last year of the



diploma / uniform button

compulsory 9 years of education in Japan. On this occasion, first of all the principal presents the students their diplomas, followed by a number of speeches, first by the principal, then teachers and other juniors. One very interesting and unique custom of junior high and high school graduation ceremony is the 'second button'. After the ceremony, girls will confess their love to the boy of their choice by asking for the second button of the school uniform, as this button is closest to the heart. Graduation ceremonies of universities in Japan are more like a celebration of graduates with their friends and professors. Most graduates wear formal suit, but for ladies, the most popular dress is *hakama*, which used to be a school uniform for girls during the Meiji Era and is inherited today as a graduation costume and a symbol of learnedness. *Hakama*, worn for the graduation ceremony, are generally in bright colors and beautifully designed, befitting the graduates' charming youth and the popular *hanami*. University graduates often go to drinking parties after the ceremony to celebrate their graduation.



venue prepared for a ceremony



randoseru (school bag)



student in kimono with her diploma