



JAPAN INFORMATION  
AND CULTURE CENTER  
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

# TEACHING TUESDAY

## CELL PHONE STRAPS

One thing that really stands out to visitors to Japan are the number and variety of cell phone straps. From little kids to professional businessmen, most people will have at least one small charm on their phone, ranging from anime characters to good luck charms. The primary use of cell phone straps is to help differentiate one's belongings, as well as to display one's hobbies and personal taste. One popular form of charm is the "netsuke," (根付) a small doll or figurine, about the size of an adult fingertip, attached to a string made of a tight braid. One of the first popular netsuke was a Hello Kitty netsuke released in 1998. But the origins of netsuke go back as far as 300 years.

Before Western clothes became the norm in the 1800s, most Japanese people wore kimonos and yukata in daily life. Traditional Japanese clothing does not have any pockets, which makes it hard to carry money and other items. Therefore, people used a small bag called a sagemono (提げ物) as a makeshift pocket. The sagemono was attached to the obi sash with a netsuke, a miniature sculpture on cords. The netsuke stuck out from the top of the obi belt, so they often had decorations resembling small dolls. These decorations became trendy, and an art form of their own. The more the designs varied, the more netsuke became a way of personal expression.

As sagemono were phased out, netsuke had no practical purpose, but were still widely adored. So as cell phone became widely used, the netsuke transformed into the cell phone straps and charms we see today.