

Birth of “Master on Icemonster” and activities of “Association of Icemonster”

*Naoko Domon¹, Fumitaka Yanagisawa², Yukiko Ohtomo²

1. Yamagata 4th Junior High School, 2. Yamagata University

1. Introduction

Icemonsters are made up of huge masses of trees such as *Abies mariesii* (Aomori todomatsu) that are covered in ice and snowflakes. Icemonsters are produced under certain special weather conditions. Icemonsters result from the accretion of both ice and snow together.

The area around Mt. Zao features a special natural environment that allows icemonsters to form. In winter, many tourists come to see the large icemonsters that grow here. Icemonsters are called *juhyo* in Japanese, as established by the International Meteorological Conference in 1896. This term is used beyond meteorology and in many other fields, such as glaciology, literature, and science, although icemonsters are often incorrectly referred to as snow monsters.

2. The Icemonster Association

When Professor Emeritus Fumitaka Yanagisawa retired from Yamagata University in 2021, he donated the research materials on the icemonster that he collected to the Yamagata City Library. To use these materials, a group was formed for people having an interest in Mt. Zao, Icemonster, and related topics. In 2022, the Icemonster Association (chairman: Fumitaka Yanagisawa) was established under the Zao, Icemonster, and Volcano Comprehensive Research Group of Yamagata University. Currently, study sessions, led by Fumitaka Yanagisawa, are held once per month for about two hours. About 30 people participate in the study sessions. Some had previously taken the Mt. Zao Meister course and the Gassan Meister course under the auspices of the Yamagata Science Blooms project run by Yamagata University; after being certified, some of these have volunteered for lectures and experimental classes inside and outside the prefecture. The participants are diverse, including graduates of Yamagata University's Faculty of Science who have been involved in the study of frost-covered trees, while others are school teachers, mountaineering instructors, junior and senior high school students, and others. In addition to using materials on icemonsters, the association also trains instructors and assistant instructors who can pass on accurate knowledge and information concerning the icemonsters and train the Icemonster appraisers.

Over the past 10 years, instances of the icemonster in Mt. Zao have undergone various changes.

There is an increasing impact of global warming and pests on ice trees

As new information and facts about the icemonster are discovered, new, different images of it are being created.

A huge amount of information is available on Icemonster, including on the behavior of snow and ice, weather, the natural environment, the mountains, tourism, and film, but there had previously been no one place to collect all of it. However, Fumitaka Yanagisawa has donated several thousand items to the Yamagata City Library, and efforts are underway to register and compile the materials into a database. In the future, we hope to establish the Yamagata City Library as the site of the largest amount of materials and information on icemonsters in Japan.

The Icemonster Association has also been holding study sessions.

3. Birth of the Master on the Icemonster

Over the past four years, beginning in 2021, the Society for the Study of Rime has held various study

sessions and training workshops, focusing on the data analysis and research results of Fumitaka Yanagisawa. Additionally, on October 13th and 20th, 2024, we planned a field survey session to observe the Wasagoya ruins on Mt. Jizo, as well as the *Abies mariesii* (Aomori todomatsu) near the Zao Sancho Station on the cable car. Masters on the topic of the icemonster are certified after the attendance of more than 15 study sessions and field survey sessions. On October 28th, the first group of four masters was born. There are also members who are associate masters, so we hope to continue this with the second group and beyond.

Keywords: Juhyo(Icemonster), Master on Icemonste, Course, Mt. Zao

