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Japan Video Topics 2008/2009 No.9 March '09 English Summary

***Donabe* - Most Versatile of Cooking Pots**

3'41"

The *donabe*, a type of earthenware pot used for cooking at the table, is one of the oldest and best loved Japanese kitchen utensils. Traditionally made from a special clay, a *donabe* retains heat even after the flame is turned off, cooking its contents gently and thoroughly. This versatile pot can be used for many different kinds of cooking, and Japanese families love to use it to prepare food at the table, serving themselves straight from the pot.

***Bonsai* - Nature's Beauty in Miniature**

3'42"

Bonsai artists aim to create miniature but completely convincing natural landscapes, pruning their tiny trees and training them with wire to grow into the desired shapes in a process that can take hundreds of years. It's a hobby with a huge following, and there is even an entire village of *bonsai* nurseries close to Tokyo. These living works of art, long popular among older Japanese, are now finding new fans in the younger generation.

***Iwami Kagura* – Ancient Ritual to Modern Folk Art**

4'49"

Kagura is an old tradition of dance and music that traces its roots to the most ancient of Japan's creation myths about the Sun Goddess *Amaterasu*. Historically performed at shrines by Shinto priests, in the 19th century it was taken up by the public and transformed into the vigorous folk art we can see today. Of all the types of *kagura*, the Shimane regional style known as *Iwami kagura* is the most lively, gorgeous and dramatically entertaining.

Green Revolution Transforms City Rooftops

3'43"

Japan's cities are controlling rising temperatures due to the urban "heat island" effect by planting greenery on building rooftops and walls. Rooftop gardens are dramatically cooler than concrete, and can now be added to most buildings thanks to new types of light, nutrient rich soil and special lightweight surfaces. Rooftop gardens are now a popular place to relax, and soon people will also be growing vegetables and rice on top of city buildings.

***Donabe* - Most Versatile of Cooking Pots**

3'41"

01 (Table & cooker)

The *donabe*, a type of earthenware pot used for cooking at the table, is one of the oldest and best loved utensils in the Japanese kitchen.

02 (Pan up on cooking *donabe*)

A *donabe* doesn't just make cooking simpler - it keeps the food piping hot until you're ready to eat.

03 (Selection of pots)

And it's not limited to stews and casserole type dishes. The versatile *donabe* can be used for many other kinds of cooking, from boiling to steaming and baking.

04 (Long view over town)

Iga City in Mie has an old tradition of making these pots, thanks to nearby deposits of specially heat resistant clay.

05 (Potter & wheel)

Pots made from this clay heat up gently, and cool down slowly.

This is why the *donabe* is so popular with cooks – the earthenware stores heat, cooking the contents slowly and bringing out all their flavor.

06 (Black pot containing rice)

When boiling rice, for example, the way the *donabe* gently transmits heat from the flame ensures that each grain is cooked all the way through.

07 (Hand lifts off lid)

And the heavy lid keeps the pressure high, bringing out the full flavor of the rice.

08 (Grey *donabe* from above)

The *donabe* is also ideal for steamed dishes.

Because it retains heat so well, food continues to cook gently after the flame is turned off. This saves energy, so using a *donabe* is ecologically-friendly too.

09 (Hand lifting lid)

Quickly steaming vegetables retains more nutrition and flavor.

It's also fun to eat straight from the pot.

10 (Shelves of pots)

Produced in many designs and shapes, a *donabe* makes a striking focal point for any dinner table.

11 (Zoom back from black)

This fine pot was designed with a lid that also lets you grill food at the table.

12 (Interview - M)

“It makes me feel good to think of families gathered round our *donabe*, enjoying cooking and eating together out of the same pot.”

13 (Pot with bread mix)

A new idea for using this traditional pot has recently become popular.

Place wheat flour fermented with yeast in a *donabe*, and simply heat in an oven for 15 minutes.

14 (Removing pot from oven)

Bread baked in a *donabe* is as deliciously soft and fluffy as that baked in a traditional stone oven.

15 (Zoom back from pot)

Boiling, steaming, grilling or cooking rice – there’s no end to the versatile uses of this earthenware pot. The *donabe* is a beautiful, traditional utensil that still has a treasured place in every Japanese kitchen.

***Bonsai* - Nature’s Beauty in Miniature**

3'42"

01 (*Bonsai*)

Bonsai is the art of recreating natural landscapes in miniature. Pot plants are cultivated simply for the beauty of their flowers and leaves, but *bonsai* has a different goal. It aims for the effect of a full grown tree standing among realistic scenery, but all scaled down to a height of less than one meter.

02 (Red flowers)

Unlike other works of art, a *bonsai* tree changes with the seasons and the passing years. The tiny tree continues to mature, a masterpiece that is never completed.

03 (Pink flowers)

Many kinds of trees are suitable for *bonsai*, and they can often live for hundreds of years.

04 (Map)

Omiya *Bonsai* Village in Saitama.

In 1925, most of Tokyo’s professional *bonsai* cultivators relocated their nurseries here, seeking a better growing environment for their trees.

05 (Pan R over bonsai)

The opportunity to see so many varieties of the highest quality side by side attracts both *bonsai* enthusiasts and tourists to the village.

06 (Interview - M)

“There is an ideal angle for viewing a *bonsai*. Stand too high, and you feel that you are looking down on the tree; too low and it’s the opposite. It’s best if the mid point of the tree is a little lower than the level of your eyes.”

“The first thing to look for is thick roots swelling up from the earth, just as they would do in nature. Next you look at the trunk – it should be thick at the bottom, narrowing and becoming delicate as you go up. These are the points you look for to tell a good *bonsai* from a poor one.”

07 (Nursery entrance)

Cultivating your own *bonsai* makes a fascinating hobby.

The two major techniques are pruning and guiding the direction of growth using wires.

08 (Interview - M)

“Pruning is most important. If you just let the tree grow unrestrained, the overall balance is often soon lost. You have to prune the branches vigorously to prevent this. And then we determine the final shape it will become by using copper wires to guide the direction of its growth.”

09 (Hands winding wire around branch)

Various thicknesses of wire are used to shape the growing trunk and branches.

The more time and effort a *bonsai* artist puts into this work, the nearer the tree will achieve the ideal shape.

10 (Woman in room)

Bonsai was always a hobby for older and retired people. But recently it’s becoming popular with a younger generation, thanks to new ideas like these mini-*bonsai*, small and simple enough for even beginners to enjoy.

11 (*Bonsai*)

The *bonsai* artist aims to create a miniature world, a world designed to make us feel the wild natural beauty of the mountains and forests.

Iwami Kagura – Ancient Ritual to Modern Folk Art

4'49"

01 (Dancer)

The gracefully flowing *kagura* dance is as old as the creation myths of Japan.

02 (Fire)

These tell how, fleeing the violence of her brother Susano, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu hid in a cave, plunging the world into darkness.

The other gods used songs and dance to entice the sun back into the world, and this is the legendary origin of *kagura*.

Shinto priests performed *kagura* as a religious rite, but when this was forbidden by the modernizing 19th century government, groups of ordinary citizens continued the tradition. *Kagura* became a popular folk art, gained new life and energy and continues to evolve today.

03 (Map)

Many of Japan's ancient myths are set among the mountains and seas of Shimane, 900 kilometers west of Tokyo.

04 (Dance)

The western part of Shimane is the home of Iwami *kagura*.

Of all the many styles of *kagura*, this is the most exciting and entertaining. It features highly dramatic portrayals of the old myths, with dancers in gorgeous costumes moving to a lively, fast-paced rhythm.

Today, Iwami *kagura* is performed by groups known as *shachu*.

The tradition is most active in Hamada City, where there are 49 highly competitive *shachu* groups.

05 (Dancer in gold from behind)

The groups accept performers of all ages, and rehearsals go on throughout the year.

There's no shortage of young children applying to train, hoping to become future stars.

06 (Interview - M)

"My father does it, and I think he looks very cool. I like it a lot."

07 (Dancer)

For these children, their heroes are the ancient gods played by their fathers and elder brothers.

08 (Interview - M)

"Watching the *kagura*, children become enthusiastic and ask us to train them. This is why our performers have such a passion – it comes from the heart."

09 (Costume on wall)

Iwami *kagura* depends on the existence of local craft industries.

Some of spectacular costumes weigh more than 30 kilograms, and every one is made by hand.

10 (White material with red threads)

This method of using rolled up paper to add depth to costume designs is typical of Iwami *kagura*.

11 (Pan R - tables)

Despite the skill and time required, the younger generation are still eager to learn the old techniques of costume making.

12 (Pan L – masks on wall)

Iwami *kagura* is also famous for its unusually expressive masks.

13 (Interview - M)

“Since the beginning, Iwami *kagura*, and Hiroshima *kagura* too, have always been fashionable among young people. Older people might think our dances and costumes are a bit flamboyant, but the drama and excitement are the reasons we have always had lots of enthusiastic children coming to our performances too.”

14 (Painting mask)

Maintaining a delicate balance of tradition and innovation keeps Iwami *kagura* fresh and exciting for each new generation.

15 (Man with snake body)

This giant snake costume is crafted from locally-made paper.

16 (Interior with snake)

In this play, the god Susano, banished from heaven for his violence, comes to earth in Izumo-no-kuni, the old name for Shimane. Here he meets a monstrous eight-tailed serpent that is devouring young maidens every night.

17 (Performance on stage)

This is “Orochi”, the most popular of all Iwami *kagura* plays. It tells how Susano makes the giant serpent drink poisoned *sake* and then slaughters it.

18 (Dancer’s back)

Blending an ancient tradition with high entertainment value, Iwami *kagura* is one of the rare traditional performing arts that continues to appeal to audiences of all ages.

Green Revolution Transforms City Rooftops

3'43"

01 (Aerial view of city)

Global warming is an issue for the entire world, but especially so for our great cities, where the heat island effect is causing rapidly rising temperatures.

A promising measure being used to help counter this effect is to plant greenery on building rooftops and exterior surfaces.

02 (Infra red photos)

These infra red photos show the dramatic difference in temperatures between buildings with concrete rooftops and those with greenery. Rooftop gardens result in greatly lower temperatures.

03 (Pan R on roof)

Many problems confronted the rooftop garden designers.

Surfaces had to be devised that would retain water where needed for plants, and also provide the necessary drainage.

04 (Man laying sheets of white material)

These sheets made from recycled polyethylene trap water in the sunken portions, while allowing excess water to drain away through tunnels underneath.

05 (Aerial view of building roof)

Earlier rooftop systems added over one ton of weight for each square meter of greenery. This meant that many types of building were not strong enough to support rooftop gardens.

06 (Man lifting brown plastic panel)

The construction of these new lightweight expanded polystyrene pallets reduces weight while still providing the necessary soil depth for plants to grow. Now, gardens can be made on rooftops that couldn't support older systems.

07 (Garden from above)

New technology is allowing more types of plants to be grown, so today's rooftop gardens are becoming very varied and colorful.

08 (Children in play pool)

As people realize the technology is available to create pleasant rooftop gardens that also help the environment, green spaces are appearing on top of condominiums and other private residences too.

09 (Wall with green panels)

Demand is also growing for greenery on exterior walls.

In addition to helping reduce the heat-island effect, green walls are a simple and highly visible way for corporations to advertise their environmental commitment.

10 (Pan L over group of people)

This project has taken the concept a step further, and is promoting vegetable cultivation on rooftops.

11 (Zoom in on pile of soil)

It has been helped by the development of a new type of extremely light soil that retains 10 times more water than normal soil.

12 (Zoom in on garden)

Because this soil is very rich in organic nutrients, a depth of just 10 centimeters allows you to grow vegetables and even rice.

13 (Aerial view of rooftop)

Technological innovations are now making it possible to plant greenery on rooftops and walls in many new and attractive ways.

Rooftop gardens not only help to cool our overheated cities, they provide pleasant spaces for people to relax.

New ideas continue to change and enliven our urban landscapes.

Once it becomes normal to grow vegetables on the roof, what will they think of next?

Japan Video Topics 2008/2009 No.9 March, Contact List

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