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Japan Video Topics 2009/2010 No.3 August '09 English Summary

***Ajisai* – Hydrangeas in Hakone**

3'41"

The hydrangea is a flower native to Japan, where it is called *ajisai*. This delicately colored flower blooms everywhere during the rainy season, but one of the finest places to see it in all its many varieties is the beautiful mountain and hot spring resort of Hakone, one hour from Tokyo by train. The tracks of Hakone's nine-kilometer long switchback railway are lined with over 10,000 blossoms, the varieties changing as the train climbs higher up the mountain, and special sections are even illuminated at night.

Lettuce From a Factory

3'24"

Agriculture today faces problems from abnormal weather to chemical overuse that cause concern about the safety and reliable supply of our daily vegetables. One promising solution is the "plant factory," where food is grown indoors in a computer-controlled environment. Vertical stacked growing beds produce far greater amounts of crops than regular farms of the same area, while pest-free sealed environments simplify organic cultivation. New technologies are making factory-grown cultivation safer, more nutritious and more efficient than conventional farming.

***Mizuhiki* - The Art of Tying Paper Cords**

3'18"

A custom that's long been part of daily life in Japan is to present gifts or offerings in an envelope decorated with a complex knot of colored cords. The 1,000-year old custom of *mizuhiki* symbolizes the wish that the ties binding giver to receiver will never break. Today, in addition to the traditional use, people also use *mizuhiki* to tie many other things, such as birthday cards, companies are developing new products using *mizuhiki* cords and artists are adapting the old materials and techniques to create art objects.

New Life for Old Facilities

3'36"

In recent years, local communities all over Japan have been discovering the cultural and social benefits to be obtained by converting old facilities, buildings and infrastructure to serve new purposes rather than simply demolishing them after their service life is over. We see an old power station that has been converted to a flourishing art museum, a discontinued railway that is now a popular cycle trail, and a primary school reborn as a toy museum.

***Ajisai* – Hydrangeas in Hakone**

3'41"

01 (Rain)

June marks the start of *tsuyu*, the Japanese rainy season.

02 (Street with 2 women approaching)

In this season, one flower can be seen blooming in almost every street and garden – *ajisai*, the Japanese hydrangea.

03 (Pink and white petals)

The Japanese have a deep affection for *ajisai*, with its delicate colors that enliven the overcast rainy days.

04 (Mt Fuji)

Hakone, in the southwest of Kanagawa.

05 (Ship)

Just one hour by train from Tokyo, this old resort is set among beautiful mountain scenery.

06 (Street)

One of Japan's most famous hot springs, Hakone is a popular tourist spot all year round.

07 (Child with flowers)

But in the rainy season, many people come just to see the *ajisai* that flower everywhere here.

08 (Interview - F)

"They're far more beautiful when you see them with your own eyes."

09 (Interview - F)

"I think the best way to see the flowers is from the mountain railway."

10 (Train)

The finest views of Hakone's *ajisai* are from the windows of the little train that winds up through these mountains.

11 (Ajisai from train window)

During the hydrangea season, it's known as the *Ajisai Railway* on account of the almost 10,000 plants that bloom alongside the tracks.

12 (Train front appears)

The train takes a leisurely 40 minutes to climb the 445 meters between the lower and upper stations, a switchback route of nine kilometers.

13 (Station)

The *ajisai* are most abundant around Miyanoshita Station, the mid point of the railway.

14 (Telop – *seiyo ajisai*)

Many of the flowers here are mophead hydrangea, a variety developed in 18th century England from native Japanese *ajisai*.

15 (Station)

Kowakidani Station is the place to see the most beautiful of all hydrangea varieties, the Japanese cultivated *gakuajisai*.

16 (Train)

This is a great attraction of the Ajisai Train – as it slowly climbs the mountain, new varieties of flowers come into view.

17 (Night)

Another attraction is the railway's night illuminations.

18 (Close up of flowers)

Starting from six thirty each evening, the flowers at seven major spots are lit up to create a fantastically colored spectacle.

19 (Interview - F)

"I love this place. I've come here so many times."

20 (Train)

Brightening the rainy season and heralding the coming of summer - the *ajisai* is a flower with a special place in the hearts of the Japanese.

Lettuce From a Factory

3'24"

01 (Vegetables)

Agriculture today faces problems, from abnormal weather to chemical overuse, that cause concern about the safety and reliable supply of our daily vegetables.

02 (Car park)

Inside this building is a system that may solve such problems.

03 (Man opening door - telops)

This is a "plant factory" - where vegetables are cultivated completely indoors.

04 (Three meters)

Every part of the environment is automatically controlled - from the lighting and temperature to the humidity and water supply.

05 (Green leaves)

The great advantage of factory cultivation is that it's fully protected from weather and climate variations. The required nutrients and light needed for photosynthesis are computer controlled, allowing times and size of harvests to be systematically planned.

Lettuce, for example, can be harvested over 20 times a year.

06 (Tomato)

The sealed environment keeps out insect pests, so pesticides are unnecessary. This means that vegetables can be completely organically produced.

07 (Tilt up over vegetable racks)

Cultivation on conventional farms is limited by land area. In a plant factory, growing beds can be stacked one above the other, allowing a far greater volume and variety of vegetables to be grown in limited space.

08 (Plant with small purple flowers)

Whether it is special soils with higher nutrient content, or hydroponics systems that require no soil at all, plant factory technology continues to evolve and advance.

09 (Plants with machinery behind)

One such technology is LED lamps, now widely used for plant factory lighting.

This has greatly increased the life of the lamps and reduced power consumption.

And by changing the color and wavelength of the LED lamps, growing conditions can be controlled.

10 (Tomatoes & red light)

Using red light speeds the rate of growth, since it increases photosynthetic activity.

11 (Blue lighting)

Blue light, on the other hand, results in perfectly formed leaves and strong roots. Developments in lighting technology also promise improvements in nutritional value.

12 (Interview - M)

"Japan has extremely advanced industrial capabilities. We use a wide range of technologies here, from computer control to air conditioning. We can produce grain crops such as rice, barley and corn, and soybeans too."

13 (Workers in white)

Plant factories produce more and more of our daily food, reliably supplying vegetables that taste exactly like those from regular farms. They also offer greater safety, higher nutritional value and larger harvests.

01 (Zoom in on envelope)

A custom that's part of daily life in Japan is to decorate gifts or offerings by tying the envelope with a complex knot of colored cords.

02 (*Mizuhiki*)

These paper cords are called *mizuhiki*.

03 (Envelope)

The roots of this custom go back over 1,000 years. The solid knot expresses the wish that the links joining giver and recipient will never come untied.

04 (Crane and turtle)

Extra meaning can be added to these good wishes by including traditional symbols such as cranes or turtles, signifying long life.

05 (Illustr. of samurai)

Today's *mizuhiki* are tied in a style that originated from the cords known as *motoyui*, used to tie up the hair in the days when Japanese men wore topknots. The tough paper designed to hold hair firmly is easily twisted into decorative shapes.

06 (Rolls of brown tape)

Production of *mizuhiki* begins with cutting rolls of Japanese *washi* craft paper into thin strips.

07 (Woman operating spinning machine)

These strips are spun into long paper strings.

08 (Pulling starch-covered rod through strings)

Nori starch is then forcefully applied several times to the stretched strings, adding the stiffness needed for *mizuhiki*.

09 (Spinning machines)

Gold, silver and other metallic foils, as well as vividly colored dyes, are used to express different wishes and messages.

10 (Hands working cords)

The *mizuhiki* cords are ironed to soften them so they can be shaped into graceful curves.

11 (Twisting the *mizuhiki*)

It was the strength and pliability of the *mizuhiki* cords that allowed artisans to create complex shapes like this crane.

12 (Interview)

"When we thought about the traditional process, we realized that our unique techniques for tying paper cords could be adapted to make a range of attractive new products."

13 (Women with boxes)

Starting from the basic traditional technique, they developed special tools and new tying methods to allow more complex, three-dimensional designs.

14 (Birthday cards)

Today, *mizuhiki* are used in many new and non-traditional ways, such as for decorating birthday cards and gift-wrapping presents.

15 (Helmet)

Transcending its origins as ornamentation for gifts, *mizuhiki* is now also used for creating works of art. This traditional custom can still be seen everywhere in Japan, but the applications for *mizuhiki* continue to expand.

New Life for Old Facilities

3'16"

01 (Photo)

In 1995, after a lifetime of service, this old hydroelectric power station in Toyama was reborn as an art museum. The power company had planned to demolish the building, but the local people didn't want to lose their much loved landmark and so the town decided to take it over and convert it to a new use.

02 (Installation)

Artists seized the opportunity given by the 10-meter high interior space to present installations like this one, in which a mountain of stacked iron beds from an old hospital is bathed in running water.

03 (Pan R at floor level)

The main turbine was removed, but many other machines and facilities remain in the large hall and are often incorporated by artists into installations designed specially for this space. This museum is just one example of the growing awareness in Japan that fine old structures can be converted and reused after reaching the end of their original functions.

04 (Train photo)

The Tsukuba Railway in Ibaraki ended operations in 1987. In 1994, its old railway tracks that run through the plains around Mount Tsukuba were reopened as a cycle trail.

05 (Cyclist from behind)

The 40-kilometer cycling course with its many long, straight stretches offers a perfect way to enjoy the scenery, free from cars and busy traffic.

06 (Station)

The course is suitable even for beginner cyclists, with rest stops at converted old stations.

07 (Cyclist from front)

Local residents quickly made the cycle trail part of their daily lives, and beautified it with flowers and greenery.

08 (School entrance)

Erected in 1935, this old primary school building was reborn in 2008 as a toy museum.

09 (Red display shelves)

The collection on display includes not only traditional Japanese toys and games but also children's playthings from around the world.

Exhibits are arranged by theme in the refurbished classrooms.

10 (Interview - M)

"Tokyo Toy Museum is a place for parents and children to experience toys from history and all over the world. The museum has given new life to this lovely old school building, and our toy displays continue its work of educating young minds."

11 (Corridor)

The museum retains much of the atmosphere of its days as a primary school, although the focus now is as much on fun as on learning.

12 (Iron bed exhibit)

Throughout Japan, expired structures and facilities like these are being reborn, converted in ingenious ways to bring new value to their communities.

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New Life for Old Facilities

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