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Japan Video Topics 2009/2010 No.5 October '09 English Summary

***Funadansu* Sea Chests**

3'40"

Being an island nation where it was always easier to transport goods by water, Japan has a long and proud seafaring tradition. Back in the days of sail, no other country developed such sophisticated techniques for making beautiful, sturdy sea chests to protect valuables and documents. With secret compartments and cunning locks, precisely designed to be watertight and floatable, beautifully decorated old *funadansu* are sought-after collectors items and there is still a demand for new chests, hand-made using traditional techniques.

Sweet Accessories

3'24"

Right at this moment, there's a new trend sweeping the streets of Japan. Like women everywhere, Japanese women delight in sweet desserts and in fashion accessories, and now they've found a way to combine these two passions. On rings, pendants, cell phone straps, bracelets – the trend today is to wear tiny accessories that are perfect replicas of your favorite sweets. Top brands are even sold in stores resembling upscale confectionary boutiques.

Yamaga Lantern Festival

3'52"

In one of Japan's oldest and best-known fire festivals, a parade of blazing pine torches commemorates a legendary imperial visit to Yamaga. This venerable Kyushu merchant town has a unique 500-year old tradition of making lanterns out of *washi* craft paper, and the highlight of the festival is the sight of 1,000 dancers circling in the slow Sen-nin Toro Odori, illuminated by the gentle flickering glow of the paper lanterns they wear on their heads. The procession ends with the offering of the lanterns at ancient Omiya Shrine.

Wagakki – Ancient Japanese Musical Instruments

4'18"

When the Japanese adopted the ancient Chinese court music tradition called *gagaku*, they also imported a complete orchestra of musical instruments. These were the ancestors of instruments still played today, such as the 13-stringed *koto* harp, the *shakuhachi* bamboo flute and the three-stringed *shamisen* lute. Over many centuries, Japanese musicians not only modified the instruments, they also evolved a unique variation on the pentatonic scale used everywhere else, giving this music a sound only heard in Japan.

01 (Sea)

Japan is an island nation, and in the age before rail and highways most goods were transported by sea.

02 (Pan R – sea chests)

On the old ships, currency, documents and other valuables were carried for safety in sea chests known as *funadansu*.

03 (Town & map)

Mikuni, a major port in Fukui, was also a famous center of *funadansu* production.

04 (Building exterior)

Even today, there are still workshops in Mikuni making these unique old-style sea chests.

05 (Men at workbench)

Funadansu artisans continue to use the traditional painstaking manual techniques.

06 (Hitting nail)

It takes four to five months to complete each chest.

07 (Tilt up - chest)

Funadansu were mainly used as safes, so they incorporated many elaborate mechanisms to ensure that only the owner could open them.

08 (Interview - M)

"This *funadansu* has six keys. Each one is different.

Turning the key isn't enough. You have to pull out the central bolt before it will open.

This cover only comes off if you slide it to exactly the right position.

In the center here there is a secret compartment. You can't pull the cover off, you have to lift it and slide it out.

Now we can pull out the hidden drawer."

09 (Pulling out large lower drawer)

This section is made completely airtight to prevent any water getting in. It looks like a drawer, but you can't pull it straight out - you must first slide the top to one side to access the box inside.

10 (Hands holding box)

Boxes like this were used to safeguard important documents.

11 (Pan R - chests)

Such secret compartments aren't the only unique feature of *funadansu*.

12 (Zoom in on chest)

The elaborate external metal decoration gives them a special, dignified beauty. And their airtight construction means they would float in the case of a shipwreck.

A lovingly-used antique *funadansu* speaks to us of the pride and wealth of the old Japanese seafarers.

13 (Interview - M)

"The interesting thing about the construction and design of *funadansu* is that you will never find two chests that are identical. Each one was designed and crafted specially to meet the individual requirements of its buyer."

14 (Man with metal piece)

With a history going back 500 years, these beautiful yet highly functional sea chests remind us not only of the skill of the old artisans, but also of their ingenuity and playful imaginations.

Sweet Accessories

3'24"

01 (Sweets)

Delicious-looking sweets, just asking to be tasted.

02 (Hand picks up sweet)

Actually, no. These are rings and other wearable accessories, all designed with a sweet motif.

03 (Street scene)

Checking people on the street quickly shows the popularity of this new trend.

This necklace imitates a chocolate topped with a strawberry.

04 (Ring)

On rings, cellphone straps, bags – the sweets-theme can be seen everywhere today.

05 (Pan down to shop)

We visited a store specializing in these accessories.

06 (Interior)

They use a sweets motif even in their interior design.

07 (Showcase)

Products are displayed in showcases resembling those in a real confectionary store.

08 (Gold spoon with banana slice)

Silver and gold dessert trays and spoons complete the illusion.

09 (Interview - M)

"When I'm designing these accessories, I try to imagine how each one would taste and feel if it really were a sweet that you could actually eat. We all have a lot of fun designing and making these

objects."

10 (Man from behind at desk)

When making molds for these pieces, the goal is to create textures that look realistically edible. This is achieved by using a combination of tools to shape and roughen the surfaces.

11 (Heart shaped chocolate)

The result – delightful objects that make you want to pick them up and take a bite.

12 (Showcases)

The design and modeling of these products are so good that they have been selected for display in museum galleries.

13 (Interview - F)

"It's great fun choosing sweet accessories. They feel natural and cheerful, and I'm always being stopped in the street by people who ask 'what's that you're wearing?'"

14 (Interview - F)

"They're cute, they look tasty enough to eat, and they make a unique fashion point."

15 (Street)

Women in every country are famous for their love of sweets and desserts. So it seems only natural that they should take delight in wearing them too.

Yamaga Lantern Festival

3'52"

01 (City & map)

Yamaga City in central Kyushu has a long history as a commercial center, thanks to its location on the Kikuchigawa River...

02 (Old houses)

...and you can still see many fine old merchant houses.

03 (Store with red lanterns)

In August each year, over 300,000 visitors fill these streets for the Yamaga Lantern Festival.

04 (Shop interior)

In this very old festival, paper lanterns are carried by a parade of dancers to the city's main shrine. Yamaga lanterns have been made like this for over 500 years, with only *washi* paper and glue. No metal or wood are used at all.

05 (Crowd and red shrine model)

Believe it or not, this is also a lantern. Yamaga merchants have always competed to sponsor the most gorgeous design, and lanterns can resemble anything from shrines to castles.

The festival ends with the dedication of these lanterns at the Omiya Shrine.

06 (Pan down from tree to old gate)

The highlight of the festival is the Toro Odori, a dance performed by women wearing paper lanterns on their heads.

07 (Continue)

This slow, graceful dance is accompanied by a traditional local melody.

08 (Crowds in street)

The center of town slowly fills with crowds, here to enjoy the dancing.

09 (Lit lanterns at night)

After darkness falls, it's time for the main event of the festival.

10 (Crowd with torches)

There is a very ancient legend that the town once illuminated the path for a visiting emperor with pine torches. The legend lived on in a festival where blazing torches were carried in procession to Omiya Shrine.

Today, paper lanterns are offered instead of torches.

11 (Zoom back from dancers)

In the final Sen-nin Toro Odori, 1,000 dancers wearing paper lanterns move slowly in a vast ring of circles.

12 (Panning R over dancers)

Bathed in the gentle lantern light, they dance to honor their ancestors, offer thanks for the blessings of nature, and pray for the future.

Wagakki – Ancient Japanese Musical Instruments

4'18"

01 (Concert)

The term *wagakki* describes the oldest traditional Japanese musical instruments.

02 (2 *koto* & *shamisen*)

Wagakki include a rich variety of instruments, from wind and stringed to percussion.

03 (*Koto* player)

The *koto* has 13 strings that are played using finger picks.

04 (*Shakuhachi*)

The *shakuhachi* is a bamboo flute.

Its sounds are created by blowing across the top opening.

05 (*Shakuhachi* player)

Slight variations in blowing or fingering technique produce large and expressive differences in tone.

06 (*Shamisen*)

The three-stringed *shamisen* is played with a large plectrum called a *bachi*.

07 (Midway through shot of hand playing)

Shamisen rhythms are traditionally memorized by chanting the sounds.

08 (Interview -F)

"Ten-tsuru, ten-tsuru' – that's one of the major *shamisen* rhythms. If I play it, it sounds like this."

09 (Woman playing)

This verbal method is used to remember how to press with the left hand as well as how to pluck with the right.

10 (Piano keys)

Japan also developed its own unique pentatonic scale.

11 (Hand)

This is the classic pentatonic scale used all over the world.

12 (Interview - M)

"This scale came to Japan from China, with the court music called *gagaku*. However, in the 17th century, *koto* musicians started playing mi and rah flat, like this."

13 (Interview - M)

This developed into the Japanese version of the pentatonic scale.

14 (Prints of musicians)

Japanese traditional music is alive and well today, with a fresh generation of players making beautiful music using the ancient *wagakki* instruments and uniquely Japanese rhythms and scales.

Japan Video Topics 2009/2010 No.5 October, Contact List

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