

shosha

MARUBENI

Q U A R T E R L Y • A P R I L 2 0 0 2 • V O L . 7 1



The Feature Story:

Have you been watching TV lately?

- A look at the past, present and future of TV in Japan -

In Japan today, the average household has over two TVs and in many homes the TV is always on. Although Japanese are able to receive terrestrial, BS/CS and cable broadcasts, it is not uncommon for TVs to be used as clocks, alarm clocks, or a source of weather information. In addition, the TV is also used as a monitor for watching videotapes and DVDs, viewing digital photos and playing TV games.



– A look at the past, present and future of TV in Japan –

According to a study in 1999, each Japanese household owns an average of 2.3 TV sets and the TV penetration level is 99.3% (National Consumption Fact-finding Study/Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications). The year 2003 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the start of TV broadcasting in Japan. Following various technological developments; receivers have transformed from black and white to color, screens have enlarged, quality has improved, the actual size of TV sets has become more compact and various other changes have occurred. In addition to these, the Japanese are now presented with a wealth of different forms of TV including BS, CS, CATV, and digital high-definition television (HDTV). With all these developments to TVs, in what ways have Japanese come to enjoy TV?

Do Japanese like TV?

Japanese are said to be “TV lovers,” and particularly Japanese women are said to watch twice as much TV as women in other countries. In 2000, the average daily TV viewing time of Japanese (weekly average divided by days) was 3 hours and 45 minutes. In 1990, the daily viewing in Japan was 3 hours and 16 minutes and further back in 1985, the first year of the study, it was 3 hours (NHK opinion poll). Thus there is a clear indication that the viewing of TV by Japanese is increas-

ing annually. This leads to the question of why TV viewing is growing in Japan despite the increase in alternative entertainment.

One characteristic of Japanese TV viewing is that watching TV during meals has become a common part of daily life for many. This is in part due to the living conditions (small kitchens, combined dining and living rooms) and family situations (increase in nuclear families living independently); however, it also demonstrates that TVs are entrenched as part of the normal everyday life of today’s adults who grew up watching TV. Increased TV viewing time is also a result of societal factors such as an aging society, increased time spent at home due to the spread of the 5-day work and school weeks, and the decrease in children playing outdoors. Moreover, in the recession following the collapse of the bubble economy, the fact that TV is a free form of entertainment has also had somewhat of an influence.

History of TV Penetration in Japan

The full-fledged era of TV broadcasting in Japan came with the opening of the NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) Tokyo TV Station in February 1953 and the establishment of the Nippon Television Network in August of the same year. When NHK began operations, there were 866 TVs nationwide. At that time, TVs themselves were luxury items costing 230,000~290,000 yen (average

salaries of college graduates at the time being about 10,000 yen). As of November 2001, the number of households contracted with

Mini History of TV in Japan

- 1953** NHK TV broadcasting station opens
- Private TV stations open
- 1959** NHK Tokyo Educational TV station opens
- Crown prince’s wedding (NHK reception contracts approximately 3.46 million households)
- 1962** TVs sold surpasses 10 million units (penetration 48.5%)
- 1964** Transmit images of the Tokyo Olympics to the West via satellite
- 1971** NHK general broadcasting becomes entirely color
- 1975** NHK becomes first TV station to broadcast live from Antarctica Color TVs sold surpasses 20 million units
- 1982** Multiplex TV broadcasting starts
- 1983** Captioned broadcasting for the hearing impaired starts (Tokyo, Osaka)
- 1987** 24-hour broadcast satellite service starts
- 1989** Satellite broadcasting starts Launch of first private Japanese communication satellite (JCSAT-1)
- 1994** Practical HDTV broadcasting starts
- 1995** NHK international broadcasting starts
- 2000** BS digital high-vision broadcasting starts
- 2001** NHK reception contracts total about 37.6 million households (penetration 99.9%)

the quasi-governmental corporation NHK, which operates by reception charges paid by viewers, was 37,601,280 households. This represents a penetration level of more than 99.9%.

Enjoyment as a TV

In Japan, nationwide terrestrial wave broadcasting is conducted by NHK (two stations: general and educational) and five private broadcasting networks headquartered in Tokyo. In addition, there are also 129 TV stations including UHF stations. Private stations operate on program sponsorship and spot advertisements, allowing for free viewing. On the other hand, NHK, a quasi-governmental corporation, employs a system in which each household pays a monthly reception fee. According to a survey of TV viewers, 82% of respondents said they liked TV (like very much and like) and 75% responded they had TV programs they always watched. Basically, Japanese like TV and almost everyone has a favorite program.

Within the past ten years, satellite broadcasting, a competitor of terrestrial broadcasting, has increased its penetration. Presently, Sky PerfecTV enjoys 2,889,088 contracts, NHK's BS broadcasting stations (Nos. 1 and 2) have 10,948,816 contracts and the analog BS broadcasting station WOWOW has 2,544,081 contracts while its digital counterpart has 141,912. Although these stations broadcast for a fee, the content is being enhanced and contracts are increasing annually. The spread of CS broadcasting, which provides a great amount of channels, has also been remarkable in the past few years. Add to these developments the starting of CS110 degree broadcasting, including the just started BS digital broadcasting, and further penetration of satellite broadcasting is foreseen.

One other form of TV broadcasting is cable broadcasts. In Japan, it is also possible to view satellite broadcasting via CATV and each CATV channel broadcasts its own unique content. In addition, internet services provided by CATV companies and telephone services that utilize the internet lines have attracted people's attention. However, CATV has not spread as it has in the U.S. due to



Expanding channels of CATV will attract more attention in the age of digital broadcasting

various problems including infrastructure.

Marubeni has been developing the CATV business in the Kanto and Kansai regions in the following two ways. One is, through direct investment in local CATV companies, to provide multiple channel broadcasting and internet services to residents. The other is, through cooperation with prominent partners as a Multiple Systems Operator, to provide various kinds of broadcasting and communicating services to many CATV companies. In the coming age of digital broadcasting and broadband communications, the company is convinced that CATV will attract more attention as a leading tool and is ready to reinforce the business.

Presently, the phenomenon of having many channels available has not yet spread in Japan like it has in the U.S. (average of 62 channels according to 1999 study). However, the current trend is to further diversify one's TV life by adding new forms of broadcasting, such as satellite and cable, to terrestrial broadcasting.

Use as a Monitor

TVs are being used as a monitor for reproducing images in addition to serving as a receiver. A representative example of this is videos, which have been a central presence of the secondary use market. However, this market is in the midst of a shift to DVDs with movie software producers switching from video to DVD production. The total video-related consumption in fiscal 2000 was 275,702 million yen, a year-on-year figure of 109.9%. The growth in DVDs has been particularly remarkable with figures reaching 346.3% compared to the previous year, at 104,713 million yen. Thus sales are rapidly approaching those of videos, which have a 45.7% share.

Video cameras and digital cameras have also become common and many people view the images they have recorded on a TV monitor (playing them on PCs is also increasing).

In addition, there is also the well-known Japanese product, TV games. These new games, beginning with "Famicon (Nintendo)," have not only transformed the lives of children but created massive hits that have enthralled adults. Today, new software is being continually developed and with the release of high performance game machines Japanese continue to enjoy TV games.

TV in the Future

The Digital Era

Presently, the TV industry is focusing its efforts on and has bright expectations for digital TV. Digital broadcasting of satellite



NEXION Corporation, delivering video transmission and hi-definition relay broadcast services

broadcasts is already underway and will be initiated for terrestrial broadcasting and CATV in 2006. Full digitalization of terrestrial broadcasting is scheduled for 2010.

There are many special features to digital TV such as multi-channels, HDTV, digital stereo sound, interactivity, T-commerce, data enhanced casting, data storage and searching, digital compression, quality sustainability and electric program services. It is truly a new TV system full of enormous potential. In particular, interaction, commerce and shopping are possible with the T-commerce function, which is drawing attention in many industries with which tie-ups are needed. Since the sending of information from viewers is indispensable to this system, CATV and other communications businesses are also showing great interest.

Digital TV has the optimal functions for the future broadband era and along with the Internet and mobile communications is sure to become a big part of our daily lives.

NEXION Corporation, a member of the Marubeni Group, successfully provided video transmission services for NHK's digital hi-definition relay broadcasts of the Salt Lake Winter Olympics, held in February 2002.

NEXION was established as a 100% subsidiary of Marubeni in November 2000 with the expected phenomenal growth in the delivery of dynamic video contents that would accompany the digitalization of recording and delivery in the broadcasting field and the introduction of broadband access lines in the communications area. NEXION provides new broadband services that utilize the international submarine optical fiber cable, backhaul and backbone lines in Japan, regional optical networks and such communication infrastructure owned by the Marubeni Group.

Future Types of TV in the Digital Era

NHK is pursuing development of Integrated Service Digital Broadcasting (ISDB) as the broadcasting system for the 21st century. ISDB TVs are future type TVs for the multimedia era, which enable the use of various services on a single TV set. The receiver of this digital age will be an Integrated Service Television (ISTV) that contains a home server

and provides various services. The NHK Science & Technical Research Laboratories announced a prototype TV containing a server for the first time in the world in 1996. Plans are to release an even more advanced model to the public, where, for example, information will be sent to the home server while you are asleep and the home server will automatically record the program. It will then be possible to watch the program whenever you want to, a form of "home interactive TV."

Next Generation TV Monitor

The traditional Braun tube screen is insufficient to view and use the diverse functions of digital TV. Therefore, expectations are great for plasma TVs, liquid crystal display (LCD) TVs and projection TVs to serve as receivers for digital TV.

Plasma TV

Similar to the theory of fluorescent lights, large screens are possible due to the simple structure in which glass is laid together. It is thin and light, has a greater viewing angle than LCDs and no color misalignment or distortion.

LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) TV

Images are displayed using the principle that path of light can be altered by changing the alignment of molecules through applying voltage to substances with properties between that of liquids and solids. The depth of these TVs is 1/10 that of Braun tube TVs and their weight is half. In addition, 1/5 the power is consumed and the TVs can be hung on walls. There is little flickering of the screen.

Projection TV

There are two types of projection TV systems: the front projection system in which electronic material is projected to the screen from the front like with a movie and the rear projection system in which the TV is projected from the back of the screen.

The above represent a glimpse of TV in the future. Marubeni is involved in the expanding LCD market which now includes PC monitors, as well as television sets, mobile phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs). In June 2000, Marubeni jointly established Glory Optics Technologies, Ltd. in Taiwan for the manufacturing of backlights, a crucial component for LCDs, to be sold to Taiwanese display manufacturers. In addition, Marubeni supplies Jilin Caijing Digital

High-tech Panels Ltd., China's first thin-film transistor LCD producer, with such parts as glass substrates, color filters and driver integrated circuits to strengthen its presence in the fast growing LCD industry.

Marubeni has been further involved in new technologies for the diversifying flat-panel display business and has already started handling OEL(organic electroluminescence) and PDP(plasma displays). Marubeni has invested in Shanghai Asahi Electronic Glass

Co., Ltd. that produces television glass bulbs and Beijing Asahi Glass Electronics Co., Ltd. that produces and sells adhesion bond for glass bulbs in China, where the demand for TV sets has been increasing.

As TVs continue to evolve and change, we can be sure that the impact, the use and the ways to enjoy TV will also continue to evolve in Japan and throughout the world. It is definitely something worthwhile to watch.

Picturecard Storytelling: An original form of programs liked by children



Kami-shibai (picturecard storytelling) is still being performed today at a number of historical halls (Photo courtesy of Shitamachi Museum)

Kami-shibai, or picturecard storytelling, is the telling of stories in a sequential format using pictures and a narrative, and is the origin of the "to be continued" stories seen in popular children's programs, cartoons, original puppet theater and such on TV today.

In the "Tale of Genji" (the first novel ever written in Japan) scroll, pictures portrayed little girls on the palace grounds looking at picture scrolls while a lady maid narrated the stories. Thus, a popular thesis on the origin of *kami-shibai* is "picture scrolls." Later on, the method of presentation known as *etoki* (explanation of illustrations) appeared in which difficult teachings of Buddhism were taught while listeners looked at pictures of Buddha's life, Buddha and such.

Around 1730 in the middle of the Edo Period, *nozoki-karakuri* appeared as shows during festivals and proved popular among children. *Nozoki-karakuri* involved individuals inserting puppets inside a wooden box and having people look through tiny holes in the box to watch these mechanical puppets move humorously to the songs and narration.

Around 1860 in the latter part of the Edo Period, stereopticon projectors arrived from Holland and *utsushie* (shadowgraphs) became popular. *Utsushie* used a projector and slides to show images that appeared to be moving, similar to today's animation. Several needle hole stereopticon projectors were used and the pictures were projected onto sliding paper doors using candlelight. The

images were enjoyed by stacking them on top of each other, but the emergence of movies led to their disappearance around 1890 during the middle of the Meiji Period.

Tachie was born during the Meiji Period (1869~1914). *Tachie* is similar to paper puppet theater but unlike *utsushie* doesn't need stereopticon projectors. Since a single person under normal lighting conditions could perform this, it proved popular until around 1930 in the early Showa Period. Although *tachie* was an improvement on *utsushie*, it eventually transformed into *kami-shibai*.

In the early Showa Period, *kami-shibai* replaced *tachie* in popularity. In this form of storytelling, the stories were told in sequential form with story-based pictures and soon this was seen in parks and on street corners around Japan. Children would buy *mizuame* (starch syrup candy) and other candies from adults telling the picturecard stories and this served as the "viewing" charge. The relationship between picturecard storytelling and candy is old and drops were being sold in place of viewing fees from the time of *tachie*.

The golden age of picturecard storytelling was between 1945~1965 and the many heroes that appeared on the cards nurtured the dreams of children. However, with viewing contracts for NHK topping 1 million and TV spreading nationally, picturecard storytelling soon disappeared from the street corners of Japan.

Note: The photo of "Beauty in Kotatsu" by Utagawa Toyokuni, which appeared on page 4 of the previous issue (Vol. 70, published in January, 2002), was provided courtesy of Tokyo National Museum.



Shanghai Asahi Electronic Glass Co., Ltd., producing glass bulbs for TV sets

Television around the world: What I watch on TV.

We received the following comments from Marubeni's employees around the world in response to some questions regarding TV in their lives, home and country.

The Euro was introduced this year and although the business advantages may be numerous, the Euro also made one particular TV show more appealing. The show is a very popular knowledge quiz show called "Who is to be the millionaire?" where the top prize used to be one million German marks. Many people enjoy trying to answer the questions while watching the TV program. After all, who does not dream of becoming a millionaire?

However, with the arrival of the Euro, suddenly the luster of the show was lost. Fortunately, the producers of the program agreed and the program is still called "Who is to be the millionaire?" But now it is Euro-millionaire, which is much more than the former prize value.

In Germany almost everybody has satellite and/or cable TV. When satellite TV first began, you could tell where the foreigners lived. Since four million foreigners wanting to watch TV programs from their home country, makes for a lot of satellite dishes. Pay TV has yet to become popular in Germany, probably due to our being spoiled by the around 20 private and state run channels.

In 2001, Germans watched an average of 3 hours of TV per day. In our household my husband only watches the evening news and for me the TV is merely the backdrop while ironing, which means that some people must be watching a lot to keep up the average. However, Sunday evenings are different. Both of us get nice and comfortable on the sofa in front of the TV to watch our favorite detective series, "Tatort." The program has been on the air for as long as I can remember, as a child, just hearing the theme music would give me the creeps. Every week the show is produced by a different German federal state TV station and there is a lot of local color in each show. Identifying the location of every show is part of our weekend ritual. Once this show ends on Sunday evening, it signifies to us the end of the weekend.

Anne Koenen *Dusseldorf, Germany*

I enjoy watching TV everyday, which takes up most of my leisure time, since it is a source of up to date news, fashion information and personal relaxation. The TV is always on from the moment I return home until bedtime.

I am fond of serial drama programs, entertainment programs, news and the daily weather forecasts. The serial dramas that are broadcast at 9:30pm are my favorite, which I never miss. The program lasts about one hour and varies from romantic love stories, humorous stories, etc.

Normally, our entire family watches TV together in the dining room. However, sometimes we will watch programs individually. If there is a special program such as a football (soccer) match, my husband's favorite, he will go to watch it in our bedroom.

I enjoy watching Hong Kong TV channels such as TVB, ATV and Pearl. It is a pity that I seldom watch local TV channels. In China, we pay a monthly CATV fee and there are about 40 basic channels that we can receive. If we would like to watch more TV channels then we can get another 40 channels by ordering digital TV, but we would have to pay more for this.

Huang Jian-Wen *Guangzhou, China*

TV is truly the biggest pastime of modern day society. With both partners in many households working till late in the evening and returning home exhausted with many chores to attend to does not leave much time for socializing, especially on weekdays. Thus, the most relaxing and easily accessible source of entertainment is the TV, which a majority of the Indian middle class population can boast to possess.

My family is no different from the norm. Being a working woman and mother of two young boys, the only available source of weekday entertainment is the TV. In fact, when I return home, the TV, which is conveniently located in our bedroom, is already on with my sons watching the Cartoon Network, the Discovery Channel or some music channel. Though I am not an avid TV watcher, I do end up in tussles with my children and husband since we all have different interests when it comes to the TV.

While my husband likes watching daily news programs (particularly CNN, Star News, ZEE News and *Aaj Tak*, the latter two being local news channels) and sports programs, the children enjoy educational channels (such as National Geographic and the Discovery Channel), cartoons and music programs. I enjoy watching Indian soap operas such as *Kahin Kisi Roz* (a suspense serial), *Kasauti Zindagi Ki* (a Bengali family drama), *Sanjivni* (a program about the life of young doctors and interns, politics and practices in a high profile hospital) and *Kyonki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (a family drama centering on a typical upper class Gujarati business family).

However, I rarely get to watch most of these since my husband usually wins the 'tug-of-war' over the TV in our family. He often watches cricket matches, which very much dominate the Indian TV screens during the winter. If there is a cricket match on during the weekend, you can be sure of negligible traffic on the roads and nearly empty shopping plazas and other facilities.

Only a few years ago, there were no cable networks in India and only news and a few entertainment programs were telecast for a couple of hours every evening. As a child, I remember that I used to really enjoy watching horror programs and a musical program that was aired once a week for 30 minutes. The entire family used to patiently await its broadcast every week.

Recently in India, we have a lot of family dramas and Indian historical and mythological serials being aired around the clock with stiff competition among the channels over who can come out with the most interesting serials. My mother, who is in her seventies, is a walking encyclopedia on these serials. Given time, no work outside of the home and of course the drive to fight off my children and husband, I am sure that I too would soon become a TV addict.

Ashima Sharma *New Dehli, India*

Overseas

The Seoul Office

Seoul is the capital of South Korea and the fourth largest city in the world, with a population of 11 million people. Although South Korea has been known as "a country of morning calm," it has become a country bustling with activity in preparation for hosting of the FIFA World Cup, 14th Asian Games Busan 2002 and the 8th Busan FESPIC Games. Advanced and first-rate infrastructures such as airports, harbors, railways and optical communications are being implemented to support these events.

The Seoul Office is located on the twentieth floor of the Lotte Building, which is the tallest building in Jung-Ku, the old and long central part of Seoul. Jung-Ku encompasses palaces of the Lee-Dynasty, Seoul City Hall, luxurious hotels and various business centers. The Seoul Office boasts around 70 employees, including 12 Japanese staff.

President Yoshio Ohtsu took up his current post in January 1999, one year after the establishment of Marubeni Korea Corp. from a branch office. Upon his inauguration, he placed primary emphasis on the core businesses of promising sectors and direct transactions (*shikiri-shoubai*), which originated locally. In line with this, he proceeded to make strategic alliances with blue-chip corporations and investments in venture companies. Consequently, in just three years the company has constructed a solid foundation as a local overseas entity that can generate substantial profits. President Ohtsu maintains a directive for all employees to develop a mental attitude of self-innovation and value creation so that new objectives can continue to be established and achieved.

Within this new wave of events, C. W. Kim, the Assistant to the General Manager of the Chemical Products Department, has distinguished himself as a frontline soldier who creates high values. Kim currently works three days a week at WIN-TECH, a three-company joint venture established two years ago by the Seoul Office, together with both Japanese and South Korean LPG container makers. Kim is responsible for the exporting activities of gas cylinders to Japan and coordinating the interests of the three partners so that business matters proceed according to plans.

Despite significant differences in business practices and satisfactory quality



The Marubeni Seoul Office is located in the tallest building of Central Seoul



Seoul World Cup Stadium

standards, as a joint venture between foreign companies everything has been going well. However, at the end of last year the situation became critical when all of the products from a shipment sent to Japan were returned. Up until that time, there had been several claims against the company that were resolved by the president of the joint venture, who endeavored to understand it as a necessary hurdle to overcome in the development of the firm's technology. However, this return of all products made him burn with vehemence and ultimately declare the "complete cut-off of exports to Japan and ending of the joint venture relationship." Naive Kim, who voiced words in defence of the Japanese partners, was immediately kicked out of the factory.

Nevertheless, Kim never gave up and stayed up all night strongly emphasizing that "the stabilization of quality is the only way all the companies related to the joint venture would be able to survive." At the same time, he received promises from the Japanese partner that they would relax their claims to a certain extent and raise the export prices from the New Year. As a result of these efforts, Kim was able to return to his former post from the next day.

As Kim rides the bus to Win-Tech every morning, he swells with pride at the bright future of WIN-TECH while planning the company's domestic sales strategy for this year.

Established:
1967

Main Business and Products:

- **Textiles:** Cotton yarn, staple fiber, filament, yarn, knit-fabric, t-shirts and apparel
- **Machinery:** Medical instruments and textile machinery
- **Metal resources:** Copper cathodes and ferro chrome
- **Energy-chemical products:** Crude oil, naphtha, ethylene, propylene, caprolactam and agrochemicals
- **Materials:** Pulp and chips, tires, paper and film
- **Food products:** Corn, soybean, wheat, palm oil, tuna, raw sugar, etc.

Employees:
70 (as of January 2002)

Business Areas:

Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Germany and the U.S.A.

Voices from the World

Weaving a Foundation in China

Marubeni Textile Asia Ltd.

Address:
20th Fl. Tower-1, Admiralty
Centre, 18 Harcourt Road, Hong Kong

Tel:
852-2375-2747

Fax:
852-2375-8061

Established:
1994

Ownership:
Marubeni: 80%
Marubeni Hong Kong & South China Ltd.: 20%

Main Business:
fabric, fibers and yarn

Employees:
72 (as of February 2002)

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China is the official name of Hong Kong since it was handed over to China in 1997. About 7 million people from various countries live in Hong Kong, which continues to be a center of finance and trade in Asia and now acts as a gateway to China.

Marubeni Textile Asia Ltd. (MTA) was established in November 1999 as Marubeni's headquarters for its Asian textile raw materials and fabrics trade in response to increasing demand for textile trade among developing countries. The former company known as Marubeni Textile Development Ltd. (established in 1994) was combined with the textile department of Marubeni Hong Kong Ltd. to form MTA, which now handles the functions of both former companies.

MTA's head office is located in

Hong Kong and it has branch offices in Shanghai and Shenzhen, China and in Singapore. MTA handles textile raw materials from different kinds of natural and synthetic fibers and yarn as well as various types of fabrics.

MTA collaborates with raw material suppliers and end-users under the concept of "Materials to Final Products" to not only trade such products but also develop new products in accordance with emerging market needs. All company staff work under the concept of "Providing whatever our customers need" and strive to discover new ideas by taking a consumer oriented viewpoint and always thinking of the final products and the end-user.

At the end of 2001, China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the U.S. and EU trade quota restrictions will be abolished by 2005. These are the biggest recent issues in the textile world. China not only has the largest population base but also the largest capacity for supplying textile products to the world. The second target of MTA is to strengthen its workforce in Shanghai and other textile centers in China, attempt to import high-technology textile materials from abroad and export fabrics and garments. In conjunction with this, MTA is working to develop materials in China and convert them into fabrics and garments for both domestic and overseas markets.

Through achievement of the above objectives, MTA will also obtain vital information concerning the textile field and fulfill the vital role of providing this information to all offices and departments handling textile products throughout the world.

Hong Kong still offers the million dollar skyline and delicious Chinese cuisine. Come and enjoy these in garments and fabrics made by MTA.



Marubeni Textile Asia Ltd. located in the Admiralty Centre Building (with Toshiba's signboard on top)



Gateway to China; the world's largest container terminal in Hong Kong



Night scenery in Hong Kong



Hong Kong Rugby Seven's (well known annual sports event held at the end of March)

Want Something Very Japanese?

Part IX: Gift from the Forest—The Culture Nurtured by Trees

During a bold and grand three-day ceremony known as “Yama-dashi” (out of the mountains), large fir trees with a diameter of about one meter, height of over twenty meters and weight of over ten tons are cut down. The trees are located on a mountain owned by the Suwa Shrine from where it will take three days to transport the trees to the shrine, which is actually located twenty kilometers away. The trees will be used as “onbashira” (holy pillars) in the four corners of the shrine.

This process is part of the “Onbashira Festival” that takes place at Suwa Shrine in Nagano once every six years in the year of the tiger and monkey (in the Chinese Lunar Calendar).

Place where god resides

Japan has 25 million hectares of forests including natural and man-made groves, meaning that forests cover approximately seventy percent of the country. The abundant rainfall and range of divergent geographical features from the north to south have given birth to many types of forests. There are ancient forests like the Yaku Cedar Forest on Yakushima Island in Kyushu and the Japanese beech tree forest of the Shirakami Mountains in the Tohoku Region, which are both designated as World Heritage sites.

Forests themselves are revered as places where gods reside. Most shrines have their own forests, which are regarded as sacred.

The fir trees cut down during the Suwa Shrine festival are from a forest the shrine owns. In addition, from ancient times not only the forest but each tree is regarded as being a dwelling place of a god as phrases from the song sung when felling trees reveals: “The big tree from the heart of the mountain came down to our village and became a god.”

Even today, you can observe people placing their hands together in prayer towards old or gigantic trees encircled by a straw rope, whether the tree is inside or outside of a shrine’s property.

Japanese rebuild shrines using these sacred trees, the most famous rebuilding activity is that of the Ise Shrine which takes place on a grand scale once every twenty years. Japanese cypress is used to completely rebuild the shrine over a ten year span.

These ceremonies are recognized to be an expression of rebirth.



Kawagoe

At the “Onbashira Festival” held at the Suwa Shrine, the ceremony for transporting logs across the river (*kawagoe*) is held at the upper shrine as a part of the 3-day *Yama-dashi* Festival early in April.

Within daily life

Trees are sacred but at the same time their variety and richness have been widely used in daily life, including the artistic depictions of the trees.

As Japan was previously known as a “country of houses made of trees and paper,” trees were used to construct houses, buildings, furniture, interiors, combs and other accessories, lunch boxes, bowls and even fine craftwork such as wooden mosaics.

In addition, there are diverse aspects to the use of single trees.

Japanese cypress trees as used in the Ise Shrine are still often used as housing material. The tree’s fragrance is well known and it is used in a variety of ways throughout the house as building material. Japanese-style hotels feature bathtubs made from Japanese cypress as a key attraction for attaining customers. In addition to the trunk, the bark is used for shingles when roofing a shrine.

Japanese cedar is another tree often used in building and there was a time when it, along with Japanese cypress, was used as a form of tax.

Trees not only maintain a life force for a long time, but can also be used as ingredients for dyeing and as charcoal. Japan has a long cultural history of using wood charcoal for fuel; however, charcoal has recently also become known for its use as part of interiors and as a purifying material. Trees add joy to our lives in the various forms that they are adapted.



Raising the onbashira, the highlight of Satobiki

After the *onbashira* (holy pillars) have been purified by clear mountain water placed in the *onbashira-yashiki* (onbashira mansion) for one month and are pulled to the main Suwa Shrine to be used as its pillars, as part of the 3-day *Satobiki* Festival in early May.

Tree Gallery

Trees and Forests of Life

Cherry blossoms are eagerly awaited with great anticipation each spring in Japan. What is the allure that Japanese people find in the short-lived lives of blossoms on these ancient trees? Could it be the vibrant power for life of the trees that also sustains the life of moss for many years and has the power to regulate the moisture in homes when the wood is transformed into another form? Life, in the Japanese mind, is crystallized into short moments, symbolized by the blooming of the cherry blossoms.

Kigen Cedar on Yaku Island

Yaku Island, registered as a World Heritage site in 1993, has a circumference of over 100 kilometers and is located about 135 kilometers to the south of Kagoshima Prefecture, southern Kyushu. About 16,000 trees over 1,000 years old can be found in the Yaku cedar virgin forest due in part to the abundant rainfall of the region.

During the Edo Period, many trees were cut down for tribute to local lords and were also used as boards to cover roofs of houses. Some trees survived due to their location or shape, such as the *Kigen** Cedar in the photograph, which is said to be 3,500 years old.

**The trees are named Kigen meaning A.D. due to their ancient age.*



Kama no koshi zakura / Yamagata Prefecture (Tohoku district)

Of all the old trees in various regions that Japanese value, a single cherry tree exhibits the greatest power to attract and make us yearn for its cherry blossoms. There is no end to the efforts devoted to maintaining and resurrecting old cherry trees.

Kama no koshi zakura, 800 years in age and one of the most famous trees in Japan, has a height of 20 meters and circumference of 6 meters.



Miniature Nikko Tea Set

The abundant wood resources in Japan have generated unique woodcrafts throughout the country and many of these crafts are still treasured as souvenirs.

Ieyasu Tokugawa, founder of the Edo Period (1603-1868), is enshrined in Nikko Toshogu (shrine), a World Heritage site. Craftsmen assembled in Nikko when Nikko Toshogu was rebuilt by the third shogun. These craftsmen are said to be the founders of the unique woodcarving and woodcraft of Nikko.

This miniature tea set was created for visual enjoyment and a wood craftsman used various pieces of scrap wood that match the features of each tool. This type of tea set was first made in the Meiji Era and has since become an established souvenir of Nikko.



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