



JAPAN FOUNDATION

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**AUDIO/VISUAL
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DVDs

The Gift from Beate

English narration & subtitles

2004/92 minutes

Nippon Eiga Shinsha, Ltd.

Beate Shirota Gordon took part in the drafting of a new Japanese constitution following the end of World War II. Daughter of the internationally renowned pianist Leo Shirota, she had spent many years in Japan with her parents. Knowing the low position women occupied in pre-war Japanese society, she wrote an “equality of gender” clause for the document. This film is a work of women’s history, beginning with “Beate’s gift” to the women of Japan, Articles 14 and 24 of the Japanese constitution, and following the paths women have walked and the activities they have undertaken in facing the reality of Japan between the war’s end and the present day.

Nitaboh: The Founder of Tsugaru Shamisen

Japanese with English subtitles

2006/100 minutes

Wao! Education & Entertainment

Nitaro (Nitaboh) was born to a poor family of a waterman (a man who lets people on his boat and helps them to cross the river) living in Kanbara, in rural Aomori prefecture, at the very northern tip of Japan’s main island. Nitaro has an extremely humble background which was out of “Shinokosho” (a class distinction in the Edo Period. *Shi*, *no*, *ko* and *sho* each means “samurai,” “peasant,” “craftspeople” and “merchant.”) Nitaro’s mother died just after his birth. In spite of being in such a sorry plight, he was a healthy child. One spring, he met a *goze* (Tamana) and her little daughter in the precincts of a shrine. A *goze* is a blind woman who plays the *shamisen* and sings for a living. Tamana later became Nitaro’s master of the *shamisen*. When he was 8 years old, he caught smallpox which was an epidemic at the time. He barely escaped death. He lost his eyesight, but Nitaro never lost his heart. Nitaro groped his way through life. He was lucky to have his father Santaroh, Tomekichi who was like a brother to him, and Matsu, who ran a doss house called “Matsuya” near the ferry in the village. They always helped him. Later, Nitaro was fascinated by a *goze*’s *shamisen* performance. He wanted to learn to play the instrument, and desperately appealed to the *goze* (Tamana) and his father. Nitaro had an innate talent for music. Day by day, he began to master Tamana’s *shamisen*. He always told his disciples, “Don’t imitate anyone. Establish your own way to perform!”

The Lovers’ Exile: The Bunraku Puppet Theatre of Japan

Japanese with English subtitles

2006/90 minutes

Marty Gross Film Productions Inc.

The Lovers' Exile features the incomparable Bunraku Theatre of Japan: the world's most sophisticated puppet theatre. For those unfamiliar with Bunraku, the spectacular staging and emotive power of the puppet handling, music and narrative will be a revelation. This is an adaptation of "Meido no Hikyaku" (The Courises for Hell) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon.

1. Awajimachi

Chubei of the Kameya Courier shop has been embezzling his clients' money to pay for nightly visits to his lover Umegawa, a prostitute at a local Tea House. His friend, Hachiemon arrives demanding that money owed to him be paid back, Chubei tries to persuade Hachiemon to be patient. A courier arrives with a packet of money from Edo, Chubei leaves immediately with the intention of delivering it.

<Haori Otoshi>

On the way to make his delivery, Chubei is overwhelmed with indecision. He should deliver the money, but what harm can it do if he dropped by the Tea House? He becomes so distracted running back and forth that he does not notice when his *haori* jacket falls off.

2. Fuingiri

Chubei arrives at the Echigoya Tea House. As he approaches, he overhears Hachiemon betraying him. Hachiemon is telling everyone that Chubei has been stealing money to pay for his visits to Umegawa. Chubei, enraged, runs into the room and drops all the money he has been carrying on the table. He quickly pays off Umegawa's contract and they rush out, knowing that the police cannot be far behind.

3. Ninokuchimura

The desolate lovers arrive in the village Ninokuchimura to pay a farewell visit to Chubei's father Magoemon. At first, Magoemon refuses to see Chubei, now a criminal and fugitive. Umegawa persuades him to see his son one last time before they continue their flight from justice.

The Miracle at Tsubosaka Temple

English narration

1974/28 minutes

Asahi Video Projects Ltd.

This one act play written by Danpei Toyosawa and Chikajo in 1877, which depicts the love between a blind music teacher and his wife, is still one of the most popular plays performed by Kabuki, Bunraku and other traditional theatrical groups. In this film, the play is presented by the Yuki puppet troupe, which has a 350-year tradition in string manipulated puppets. The handling of the strings by the experienced puppet masters is quite remarkable.

Kites of Japan

English narration

1976/28 minutes

Toho Ad Center

The heart of the traditional Japanese kite is the kite picture which is based on the *ukiyo*e print style. The use of bamboo and hand-made Japanese paper gives a special quality to Japanese kites, which are not simply a form of sport, but are associated with popular faiths. This association has continued to present times. This film introduces and classifies over 200 kites from various regions of Japan, considers their history, and shows the expressions of enthusiasts who gather at kite flying festivals.

Mind and Body – Judo Worldwide

English narration

1977/20 minutes

International Motion Picture Co., Inc.

Judo was refined from the bare-handed fighting art of the mighty samurai by Jigoro Kano in 1882. It is a form of self-defense in which the attacker's own strength and momentum are used against him. In practice, Judo is more than a martial art. Kano taught it as a way of life, where manners, discipline and respect for one's opponent are as important as strength and skill. In Japanese society, all age and social levels are involved in Judo, with its emphasis on character building. Around the world, Judo now claims eight million followers in 100 countries. This film traces the development of Judo from its samurai origins to its worldwide popularity today.

Prayers in Clay: Traditional Japanese Figurines

English narration

1977/29 minutes

Shibata Film Promotion

Regarded by many as toys and objects of folk-art, clay figurines still retain their associations with customs deeply ingrained in the traditional Japanese religious sensibility. The film treats both the historical origins and the folk-customs attached to the most significant of these figurines.

Zen Culture, Zen Spirit

English narration

1978/29 minutes

Dentsu Films

Zen Buddhism, introduced into Japan from China in the latter part of the twelfth century, has been and continues to be a central creative force in Japanese culture since the fourteenth century. “Zen Culture, Zen Spirit” presents the living reality of Zen today, first through the strict daily routine in the training hall of a large Zen monastery. Focus is then shifted to a variety of traditional arts inspired by Zen – calligraphy, ink painting, dry landscape gardens, noh, and the tea ceremony – revealing the austerity and incisive simplicity that are their distinctive characteristics. Underlying both Zen practice and the culture it gave rise to in Japan is the attempt to penetrate all that is inessential and awaken to the true reality. It is this attempt that forms the central theme of “Zen Culture, Zen Spirit.”

Voices of Young Japan

English narration

1978/29 minutes

Gunya Film Productions

The Japanese younger generation have grown up during a period of peace and prosperity, and their lifestyle seems very Western. Yet there are deep undercurrents in their lives that make them different in some ways from Western young people. The starting point for an understanding of Japanese youth – and the starting point of this film – is the Japanese education system, which features unusually intense academic competition. In Japan, the most prestigious and secure jobs are almost exclusively reserved for the graduates of a handful of top universities; thus, during the school years, only the best is good enough and failure can lead to severe depression, or even suicide.

Having gone through this traumatic period, most young Japanese settle down to a rather conventional lifestyle. In a traditional Japanese way, they accept their lot with patience and resignation. However, there are a growing number, who, for various reasons, take a more challenging attitude towards the future. Some high school graduates in a depressed agricultural area have started their own cultured mushroom plant as an alternative to living and working in a big city. A small commune of former student activists is making salt from sea water on a remote island. In the Philippines, a team of volunteers is helping local farmers to improve rice and vegetable crops. Other young Japanese featured in this film – two young men working at a steel plant – give a moving personal account of their dreams for the future.

The English narration of this film is supplemented by extensive interviews (with English subtitles) which gives provocative and sometimes humorous insights into the thinking of the young Japanese. What they say gives an important clue to the way Japan, as a nation, may change in the next few decades.

Crafts of Edo

English narration

1979/29 minutes

Mainichi Film Productions

During the Edo Period (1603-1867), a great range of craftsmanship came to full flower in Japan. As the world of craftwork began to interpenetrate with the fine arts, the achievements of master artists like Korin, Koetsu, Ninsei and Kenzan came to enrich the life of the common people – particularly those of the merchant class, who were fast becoming economically influential in Japanese life. The pride and dedication and technical skills of the Edo craftsman are still alive today; this film is an introduction to the masterworks of the period, to the distinctive designs and forms they inspired, and to the craftsman of the present age.

The Hanawa Family

English narration

1980/29 minutes

NHK Promotion Service

The postwar Constitution of Japan made sweeping changes in a social system that had traditionally been rooted in the hierarchical family structure. The extended family is still an element in Japanese life, but Japan's enormous growth and urbanization of the past 20 years has generated still other forces of change. How have the Japanese responded to these forces? What role does the family itself play in the life of the individual in present-day Japan? This film explores these questions as it focuses on four generations of the Hanawa family, in the suburbs of Tokyo: their beliefs, their ways of working and living with each other, their hopes for the future.

The Graying of Japan – Rural and Urban

English narration

1980/29 minutes

TV Man Union

The Japanese people now enjoy among the highest longevities in the world: lifespans of about 73.5 for men and 79 for women. By the year 2000, 14.2 of every 100 Japanese will be over 65 – a “graying” phenomenon that has already begun to affect the fabric of Japanese society. This film explores some of the ways in which Japan's older citizens find useful and productive roles in that society, focusing on two very different settings. One is the village of a 73 year-old retired farmer in Nagano Prefecture, still active in preserving a traditional festival that dates back some 500 years; the other is a recycling facility in Tokyo, where retired workers have started second careers, restoring discarded appliances and other household goods for resale.

The Edo Stage – Kabuki and Bunraku

English narration

1980/29 minutes

Iwanami Productions Inc.

During the Edo Period (1603-1867), Japan was almost totally isolated from the outside world. The rich flow of cultural influences from Asia and even Europe that had characterized former ages came to a halt. But despite this, or perhaps because of it, the Edo Period was a time of intense creativity, resulting in art forms that we view today as distinctively Japanese. Among these are the theatrical arts of kabuki and bunraku.

Like the theatres of other cultures, kabuki and bunraku reflect the society in which they were born; its morality, its dreams and its changes. In the case of Japan, the mid-to-late Edo Period was a time of deep-seated dissatisfaction with feudal morality and kabuki and bunraku plays echo the growing power and consciousness of the common people.

This film features extracts from two plays: “Sukeroku-yukari-no-Edozakura,” a kabuki comedy, and “Sonezaki Shinju,” a tragedy written for bunraku by the great playwright Monzaemon Chikamatsu. In these plays are mirrored both the laughter and tears of Edo-period Japan.

Manga: The Cartoon in Contemporary Japanese Life

English narration

1981/29 minutes

Nihon Cinesel Japan, Inc.

One of the most popular forms of entertainment in contemporary Japan is the “manga.” The work is usually translated as “comics” in English, but “manga” are not limited to the publishing industry alone. In fact, this art form has extended its popularity into almost every communication media: movies, records, television, etc. There are both children’s and adult “manga,” playing a definite role in shaping cultural norms with their realistic, often dramatic narratives. This film uses the “manga,” its devoted readers and their circumstances in general to introduce on eside of the Japanese personality, a facet of Japanese culture as a whole.

On a Wind from the South: The First European Impact on Japanese Culture

English narration

1981/29 minutes

Sakura Motion Picture Co., Ltd.

In the summer of 1543, a ship with three Portugueses aboard drifted ashore on the island of Tanagashima: this was the first recorded Japanese encounter with the West. The Japanese called these people “Namban-jin,” or foreigners from the south; one of the new artifacts they brought with them, which greatly influenced the course of Japanese hisoty, was the matchlock musket. Six years later, the Jesuit Francis Xavier arrived in Japan to preach, and Christianity was

first introduced. In the ensuing period, a number of Europeans – particular Portuguese, Spaniards and Italians – came to Japan for trade or missionary work.

From around 1570, a Portuguese trading ship began to call at Nagasaki every summer, bringing silk from China to trade for Japanese silver. The various goods also brought from Europe and Asia gave rise to a Japanese fascination with “Namban” culture: this film explores, mainly through the “Namban” folding screens and other works of art and artifacts that have survived from this period, the ways in which the Japanese responded to foreign cultures, and the influence they had on Japan as the country emerged from an era of civil war into one of peace and stability.

From the Asian Continent: Chinese Characters and Buddhism in Japan

English narration

1982/29 minutes

International Motion Picture Co., Inc.

This film introduces the characteristics of Japanese culture through the ways in which the Japanese people adopted and absorbed elements of culture from the Asian continent as they were introduced via the Korean Peninsula from the 4th to the 6th Century. The film focuses especially on the introduction of Chinese characters (*Kanji*) and Buddhism. The Japanese simplified the Chinese system of writing and created their own syllabaries called *Hiragana* and *Katakana* that contributed to the development of Japan’s unique literature, education, culture and society, and in turn its politics and economy. Buddhism also went through various changes and deeply influenced Japanese thought, painting, sculpture and architecture.

Bunraku: Sonezaki Shinju “Journey to the Tenjin Woods”

English narration

1982/29 minutes

Iwanami Productions, Inc.

The film introduces “Suicide Journey to the Tenjin Woods,” the final part of the play “Sonezaki Shinju,” one of the most famous plays ever written for the Bunraku puppet theater. Sonezaki Shinju was written by Japan’s greatest dramatic poet, Monzaemon Chikamatsu, and it was first performed in May 1703. The story is based on an actual suicide that took place only one month before the play’s first performance. In a sense, it is a kind of documentary, as we might see on TV today following some major news event. The actual course of events and the characters involved were followed very closely in the play.

Ohatsu is a courtesan of the lower class who is trapped in her position by many debts. Tokubei is a shop assistant. They fall deeply in love, but it becomes clear that they can never marry. To repay her debts, Ohatsu must become the mistress of a rich samurai. Tokubei is forced to marry the niece of the owner of the shop where he works. They realize

that the only escape is suicide. In this way, they will at least be together in the next world.

Their dilemma is expressed in Japanese by the words “giri” (“obligation”) and “ninjo” (“human feelings”). Because they cannot bring themselves to choose one or the other, their situation is hopeless. In exquisite poetry, Chikamatsu portrayed their agony and the power of the love they felt for each other. He wrote a real human drama which was quite different to the traditional drama of that time, featuring heroes, battles and super-human power. Chikamatsu was a truly great dramatist – the Shakespeare, one might say, of the Japanese theater.

Bunraku plays are performed to the accompaniment of shamisen and a sung narrative. Each puppet requires three people to manipulate it, a unique feature of the Japanese puppet theater. As the drama proceeds, one will begin to perceive the puppets as real and will also perceive that the play is not about events, but about feelings. What we are seeing is the spiritual transition of this young couple from life to death as they pass along the road to suicide.

From Karakuri to Modern Technology: A Crucial Transition in 19th-Century Japan

English narration

1983/29 minutes

Sakura Motion Picture Co., Ltd.

A marionette show has traditionally been presented yearly at a festival in Yame City, Kyushu. The “Karakuri,” or mechanical devices that control these marionettes, were contrived by a man named Tanaka Giemon. Through Giemon’s inventive life, this film will show how Japan received and digested the modern technologies of the West during the 19th Century toward the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the early Meiji Period.

Japan, at the time Giemon was born, was ruled by the samurai class which controlled nearly 300 clan domains. Japan had closed her doors to the world except for limited contact with China and Holland, and in the ensuing almost 300 years of peace, wealth was accumulated, education was popularized and manual industry developed – all laying the foundation for the coming industrialization of society.

Born in Kurume, Kyushu in 1799 as the son of a tortoise-shell craftsman, Giemon demonstrated a talent for inventing “Karakuri,” or mechanical devices, from an early age. Later, he moved to Kyoto, the official capital of Japan, and opened a shop to sell the products he invented. Through an artisan, Giemon studied up-to-date Western sciences through “Dutch Learning.” One of the results was his Myriad-Year Clock, a combination of traditional handicraft beauty and the absolute accuracy of science.

Around the mid-19th century, Asia was exposed to the crisis of colonization by Western powers, and the shogunate and feudal clans of Japan made desperate efforts to cope with the pressing needs for national defense. The Saga Clan, ahead of the others, succeeded in casting iron cannon, with Giemon participating.

Bowing to the pressure of Commodore Perry's black ships, the shogunate decided to open up Japan in 1854. Among the gifts Perry presented were a model steam locomotive and a telegraph set, both of which had a strong cultural impact on the Japanese. Giemon immediately collected all the information available and made working models of them. However, the manufacture of real steam engines was more difficult; yet Japan's first steamship was completed after 10 years of trial and error.

After the opening up of Japan, the shogunate and various clans sent study missions to the advanced countries of the West and clearly recognized a gap of a century between the technological level of Japan and the West. They concluded that their only way to fill this gap would be to import industrial plants.

The new Meiji government which replaced the shogunate in 1868 felt the same need for industrialization in order to prevent the colonization of Japan. To attain rapid industrialization of the country, the government endeavored to invite foreign engineers and scholars in every field of industry and promoted the import of machinery and equipment.

The surge toward modernization even influenced customs, fashion and lifestyles. Steamships and steam locomotives proliferated. Giemon, now in Tokyo, manufactured various types of telegraphs at the request of the Ministry of Technology. This factory later grew into Japan's first privately-owned heavy electric equipment maker.

In promoting the modernization of technologies, the Meiji government instituted compulsory elementary education nationwide, and also invited foreign instructors to train promising Japanese engineers. One outcome of such efforts was the Biwa Lake Canal Construction Project, designed and directed by Tanabe Sakuro.

The project was designed to create a water traffic-way and a power source for water mills for Kyoto by digging a canal, including a 2,400 meter long tunnel, from Lake Biwa to Kyoto. In those days, it was normal for any big construction work to be designed and directed by foreign engineers. But this project, led by Tanabe, was completed exclusively by the Japanese, combining traditional Japanese technologies with those of the West.

In 1891, a hydroelectric power plant was built utilizing the canal water, and the electricity generated enabled Kyoto to install street cars. At this power plant were power generators made by Giemon's company, proudly at work alongside those from Europe and America.

In this manner in the 19th century, Japan was launched towards industrialization, successfully combining both Western and traditional Japanese technologies.