SUMMARY

The Scenario of Wakinotan
(documentary film, color, 123 mins, 2013):
A Record of Life in Harihata, Kutsuki Village, Part 8-1

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Mt. Mikuni lies at the border of the three former provinces of Ōmi, Wakasa, and Tamba. Ōmi (now Shiga Prefecture) is drained by the tributaries of the Harihata and Ado Rivers, which flow into Lake Biwa. Harihata, part of the former administrative unit of Kutsuki Village, is a quiet mountain hamlet in the north of Shiga Prefecture.

"This is a place where people can live," say the village elders, describing a way of life that draws on the bounty of woods and valleys, using tools they make from readily available materials to meet their households' needs, in a community whose members help one another. "The forest animals and plants let us live with them." We see how time passes in nature, a time which postwar Japan has forgotten as, in return for material affluence and comfort, it has above all valued speed, amid convenience and efficiency.

Harihata is no exception to philosopher Uchiyama Takashi’s observation "Stories of people being tricked by foxes were last heard around 1965." In Harihata, however, people say they hear the voices of the mountain kamis spirits and the jinō guardian statues at the crossroads, and, amid the life energy of the woodland, the horse chestnut trees saying "The old men and women, their children and grandchildren all come rejoicing to pick up our fallen fruit. We’ll be sure to bear plenty again next year."

We have now been visiting Kutsuki for four decades, since 1974. Listening to the stories that each of the village’s inhabitants has to tell, one senses the community’s warm bonds. These are also conveyed by the finely honed implements, stored in the barns, which support farming, work in the mountains, and domestic life. These numerous handsome tools make deft use of the materials of the local deep culture supporting the village, such as rice straw, jute, bebe oil, and many kinds of plants.

Wakinotan is a four-part omnibus, a record of memories reflecting the filmmakers’ fascination with Harihata, which, while receiving the bounty of the tan (valley), treasures the ki (spirit), tai (body), and chi (knowledge) that it hands on as memory in its folk wisdom and skills.

In this issue, we present the scenarios of Part 1 (Forest and Water) and Part 2 (Bounty of the Valley), Part 3 (Granny Toma and the Hemp Bag) and Part 4 (Beads) will appear in the next issue.