

T Interview with Film Director, Hirotugu Yamazaki

The Production of *Food Culture in Europe*

The Final Installment: Professor Shosaburo Kimura's Sicilian Food Travelogue



Hirotugu Yamazaki
Film Director

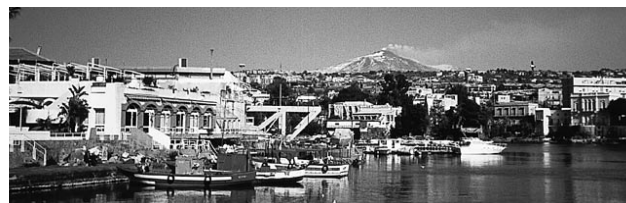
Hirotugu Yamazaki was born in Fukuoka in 1939. After graduating from the Faculty of Education at Waseda University, he worked at Tokyo Cinema, a company producing scientific films. He later became a freelance film director and writer. His many works include; *The Owara Bon Festival for Appeasing the Spirits of the Wind*, *The Story of Famous Western Confectioneries*, and *Wheat and the Japanese*. A recent work is his five-part documentary film *Food Culture in Japan*, which considers Japanese food culture ranging from *kaiseki* (tea ceremony cuisine) to the ordinary food of the common people. Yamazaki is the recipient of various awards, including the Grand Prize at the International Industrial Cinema Contest and the Gold Award in the Movies Introducing Japan Contest.

FOOD CULTURE:

Filming of the *Food Culture in Europe* series is entering its final stage. The theme of the final installment is southern Italian food—currently the focus of considerable attention as a healthy and delicious cuisine—and, in particular, Sicilian cuisine. We hear that the subject was considered so important that the editorial supervisor himself, Professor Shosaburo Kimura, volunteered to appear in the film as the reporter. It was Goethe who spoke of the irresistible attraction of the countries to the south, a longing that is clearly shared by Professor Kimura. We look forward to hearing what he has to say about the Sicilian secrets of healthy living.

Yamazaki:

Yes, in the film, Professor Kimura follows in the footsteps of Goethe by one day deciding to set out on a journey across the Alps toward the sunny skies of Italy. His enthusiasm carries him all the way to the island of Sicily. We were working on the film's scenario in a *ristorante* in Catania, and the first thing the chef asked us was, "Why come all the way to Sicily?" The simple reply was that we were looking for the birthplace of the renowned Mediterranean diet—and also that the scenery was so spectacular! The chef had an interesting comment regarding the



A fishing harbor in Catania

Mediterranean diet: "During the days of the Roman Empire, the well-off devoted themselves to Epicurean pleasures. However, the Italians later settled on an extremely healthy diet—one reason for this was probably poverty." This exchange appears in the movie's prologue, introduced by the professor.

FOOD CULTURE:

What we call a Mediterranean diet is based on ingredients such as fresh seafood, vegetables and pasta, isn't it?—essentially the same ingredients that are found in Japanese cuisine.

Yamazaki:

The best way to achieve an understanding of the modern Sicilian kitchen is to take a look at any local *mercato* (market). The rich produce of the sea and the land that we found in Sicily certainly did resemble ingredients used in Japanese cooking. In the end, the difference comes down to the way these ingredients are prepared, and the professor took us to a village at the foot of Mount Etna where he tried his hand at Sicilian home cooking. There he just threw himself into the work of cooking *ragu* (tomato-based meat sauce), boiling pasta and sautéing vegetables. While this was going on, the item that appeared in front of the camera more than any other was olive oil, which is used extremely liberally in the Sicilian kitchen. There has been much talk about the high oleic acid and vitamin E content of olive oil. And then there is the pasta. This is a natural product made from wheat flour and water, with no salt added. Added to this, is an assortment of green and yellow vegetables, a little low-fat natural cheese and some wine to go with the meal. But the most important thing is the way of



Mercato in Catania

cooking things, which brings out the best in the raw ingredients without destroying their natural flavors. This is the essence of Sicily's unique cooking style, now currently in the spotlight thanks to its health benefits. This was the starting point of the Mediterranean diet.

FOOD CULTURE:

If you look at a map you'll see that Sicily is within easy reach of Europe, Africa and Asia; because of its geographical location, Sicily has been governed by a variety of rulers, starting with the Carthaginians, then the ancient Greeks and then the Romans. No doubt this coming and going of different civilizations over the centuries is reflected in Sicilian food culture.

Yamazaki:

Definitely. One striking example of this is the dolce (sweets and pastries). These include the honey-filled nougat *cubbaita* and *cassata*, cheesecake baked with dried fruits, as well as apricots, sesame and cinnamon, all of which were brought to Sicily by the Arabs between the 9th and 11th centuries. People seeing this film will probably get a good sense of how the roots of European cooking can be traced back to the Mediterranean of a thousand years ago.

FOOD CULTURE:

In a sense we are seeing an ancient food culture on the dining tables of the 21st century, then, aren't we?

Yamazaki:

In the film, Professor Kimura offers the following comments on the joys of eating: he says the most important aspect of dining in the 21st century is

sharing a meal—getting together with others to enjoy good food. In the cities of the 19th century there was a liberal approach to dining that allowed individuals to eat when and where they pleased. The dining table became the domain of the individual, and it is from this time that the modernization of eating habits began. In the 21st century, however, the trend is to regard the dining table as a place where we can gather together to enjoy delicious, healthy food.

FOOD CULTURE:

One scenario involves Professor Kimura being wined and dined by those one-eyed giants, the Cyclops, doesn't it?

Yamazaki:

That's right. In myth, the Cyclops lived beneath the Mount Etna volcano. Ancient Sicilian cities were completely destroyed by volcanic eruptions and huge earthquakes. But the rivers that flow from Mount Etna nourish the produce that abounds in the region. And in any case, the "Cyclops" who appear in the movie are actually a group of local scuba divers who organized a get-together. Everyone was having such a good time that before we knew it the get-together had turned into a huge party. Everything from the food to the set was made from scratch by the scuba divers. Professor Kimura was invited along and encountered "good people, good food and good conversation," satisfying all the requirements of the 21st century dining table! The professor concludes by suggesting that this Latin approach to life will become increasingly important in this century.

(The film has been completed early August.)



A variety of pickled olives



Salted and fermented sardines



Making ricotta cheese