Techniques of Magemono

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Magemono (round vessels shaped by bending and securing a thin sheet of wood) have been used in daily life for larger than any other wooden vessel, apart from kurimono (wooden vessels made by carving). They have been used in a very extensive range of applications in every aspect of life, e.g., for food, clothing, shelter, business, and transport, as well as matters of rite of passage and religious life. Hooped oke (tubs), made by arranging splints in cylindrical form and securing them with a hoop, appeared from the later Kamakura period to the early Muromachi period, but before that, oke had meant exclusively a magemono. The word oke derives from the word for a tub for ramie, which was also a magemono. The popularity of magemono came from the fact that magemono can be made of large capacity more easily than kurimono.

The method of making magemono seems complicated at first glance. However, if the wood grain is well used, it can be made basically with only three tools; a hatchet, a chisel, and an eye-leteer. Of course, excellent skill, intuition, and hard work are also required. Today, magemono are manufactured in many places. Once the craft went into decline, driven out by plastic vessels; however, in some areas, it has been revived. In most places, modern instruments, such as lathing machines, are used: however, there are several places where magemono are still made with traditional tools.

This paper describes the cardinal points of the craft and the usage of tools in magemono production, omitting details of the manufacturing process. Examples are taken from Narai, Narakawa Village, Kiso County, Nagano Prefecture; Kanagi Town, Kita Tsugaru County, Aomori Prefecture; and Kawauchi Town, Shimokita County, Aomori Prefecture. The author attempts to review traditional techniques in the manufacture of magemono, and to examine how technological progress has caused skills to decline and made the products crude.