

Reading and Talking

“Akabeko” lucky red cows

In the Chinese zodiac, 2021 is the year of the ox. It is also the second year of Covid-19. For both these reasons, “akabeko” red cow toys from Fukushima Prefecture are now popular. “Aka” is red in English, and “beko” is a word for a cow or bull in Tohoku. People believe that red keeps away sickness and bad luck. In the Edo period, children were given akabeko to keep them safe from “tennentou” smallpox. We can hope that akabeko also keeps away Covid-19. At a store that sells Fukushima products in Tokyo, akabeko toys are now sold out.

(106 words)

Have you ever bought an “akabeko” traditional red cow toy?

↳ Yes, I have. (--Where did you buy it? / Do you still have it? / Have you seen a wooden carved bear with a salmon in its mouth?)

↳ No, I haven't. (--Have you ever seen an akabeko? / Do you have a “kokeshi” wooden doll? / Have you ever bought a “maneki neko” lucky cat doll?)

Do you have an object or picture of a cow or ox to celebrate this year?

↳ Yes, I do. (--Is it an object or a picture? / Where is it? / Did you visit a shrine or temple at New Year?)

↳ No, I don't. (--Did you write New Year cards? / Do you know someone who was born in the year of ox?)

Do you think that the Covid-19 pandemic is going to end this year?

↳ Yes, I do. / Kind of. (--Why do you think so? / Have you gotten a flu shot this winter?)

↳ No, I don't. (--Why don't you think so? / Do you want to get a vaccine for Covid-19?)

(15 January, 2021)

More Information

“Akabeko” lucky red cows

In the Chinese zodiac, 2021 is the year of the ox. It is also the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the year is beginning with a third wave of infections. All these facts have led to the current popularity of a papier-mâché bobblehead toy from the Aizu region of Fukushima Prefecture.

The toy is called “akabeko,” “aka” meaning red and “beko” being a word for a cow or bull in a Tohoku regional dialect. As for its color, traditionally people believe that red fends off disease and bad luck. Akabeko has a long history as a good-luck charm. The black markings on its side are said to represent “tennentou” smallpox spots. In the Edo period, smallpox was an infectious and sometimes fatal disease, and children were given akabeko in hopes that it would keep them safe.

Fukushimakan Midette is a store in Nihonbashi, Tokyo, that sells food and other products from Fukushima Prefecture. The akabeko there sold out last December, and the store expects that they are going to be in short supply for a while.

(184 words)

(15 January, 2021)

Reading and Talking

New “nabe” hotpot pots

“Nabe” hotpot is a popular winter meal. Here are two new products. Marumo Takagi Jiki makes a clever clay nabe pot. If the design on the lid is orange, the lid is cool enough to pick up with your hand. If the orange design changes to yellow, it is hot and you need to use an oven mitt. A one-person pot is 5,500 yen from <<https://marumotakagi.buyshop.jp/>>. The Thanko electric nabe cooker has a metal basket inside. Press a button and the basket lifts the food above the soup. Also, if you put the kombu under the basket, it can't be picked up by mistake. It is 7,980 yen at <<https://www.thanko.jp/>>.

(117 words)

Do you want to buy these new “nabe” hotpot pots?

↳Yes, I do. (--Which one do you want to buy? / Do you think they're going to be popular?)

↳No, I don't. (--What do you think about these new products? / Have you bought cooking equipment recently?)

Do you like “nabe” hotpot meals?

↳Yes, I do. / Kind of. (--When did you last have a nabe hotpot? / Do you have a nabe hotpot meal alone? / What's your favorite nabe hotpot meal? / Do you use instant soup for nabe?)

↳No, I don't. (--How come you don't like them? / Do you like sukiyaki? / Do you like creamy stew?)

When you have a “nabe” hotpot at home, what food do you add to finish with?

↳I/We add [rice / udon noodles / XXX] to finish with. (--Have you ever added mochi rice cakes? / Do you know any unusual food to add? / Have you ever used cheese and pasta to finish your nabe hotpot? / Do you control everything when you cook nabe hotpot with your family?)

(15 January, 2021)

More Information

New “nabe” hotpot pots

What better way to warm yourself in winter than a bubbling “nabe” hotpot meal. Here are two new products that promise to improve your nabe experience by solving common problems.

Have you ever burned your hand on the hot lid of a clay nabe pot? Marumo Takagi Jiki, a pottery company in Tajimi, Gifu Prefecture, has come up with a pot whose lid changes color as it gets hotter. If the design on the lid is orange, the lid is cool enough to pick up with your bare hand. As the lid heats, the orange design changes to yellow, which tells you that you should use an oven mitt or similar. A one-person pot is ¥5,500 from <https://marumotakagi.buyshop.jp/>.

Do you fish around in murky nabe soup, trying to find food, only to end up with a piece of inedible kombu kelp? Thanko, a company that markets gadgets, has you covered. Its electric nabe cooker comes with a metal basket inside. Press a button and the basket lifts the food above the soup for easy access. In addition, if you place the kombu under the basket, it can't be picked up by mistake. This nifty pot is ¥7,980 at <https://www.thanko.jp/>.

(205 words)

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