

日本の魚釣知恵紹介

Learning Japanese

By JAMES HALL
Editor

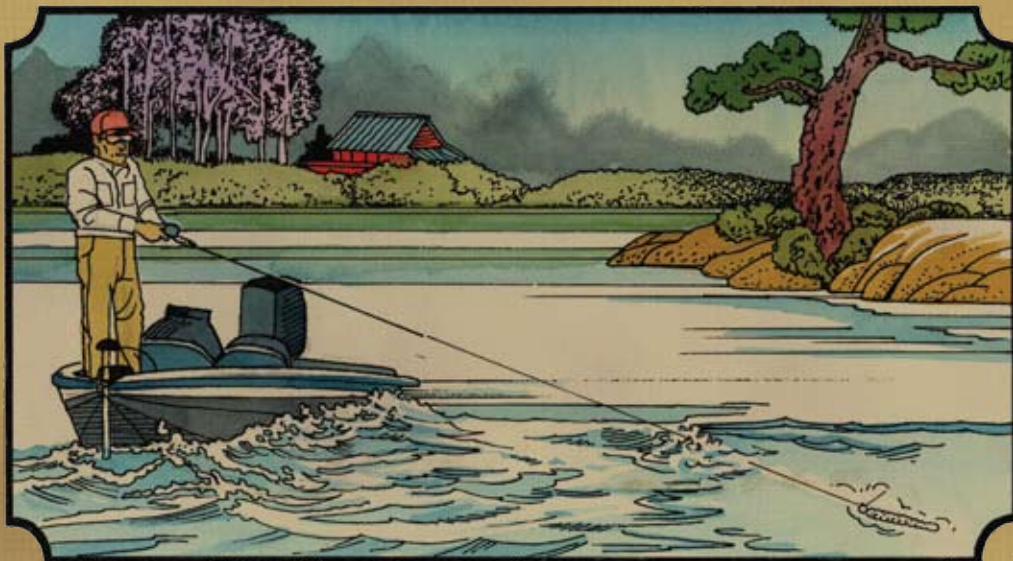


Here are some bass fishing lessons uncovered in the land of Hinode (rising sun)

“ARIGATO” MEANS “THANK you” in Japanese. This is the first thing I learned when getting off the plane from Florida to Tokyo ... and just about the only Japanese word I could remember during my 10-day stint in the country. The lessons I did absorb, however, were much more useful to me upon my return to the States. These lessons included tactics and techniques for catching bass — concepts completely foreign to U.S. anglers.

While walking the aisles of Popeye, a popular chain of tackle stores in Japan, I was dumbfounded by the number of unfamiliar lure manufacturers represented on the pegs. The quality of this tackle, at least to the naked eye, was very impressive. Once I spent a little time on the water with some of Lake Biwa’s local pros, I realized there were just as many unfamiliar techniques being utilized by savvy Japanese anglers. Following are lesson plans to the best baits and techniques I ran across. *(Continued)*

Photo: Yasutaka Ogasawara



Jackall I Shad

“I” MOTION

The newest finesse technique in Japan may be the simplest to come out of the country. Jackall Bros. lure company is calling it “I” motion. You simply cast a bait, point your rod at the lure, and slowly wind it back. Here’s the surprising part: the lure you cast has no action whatsoever. Having last year released the I Shad, a slim, short, soft plastic minnow lure designed for the technique, Jackall this year introduced the Sierra Minnow, a small hard bait outfitted with trebles.

“The idea is to make bass believe the baitfish is completely comfortable and not at all nervous. When you watch a minnow in the water when it is not worried about getting eaten, it swims perfectly straight with almost no visible movement,” explained Ty Ono, owner of Jackall.

Finding the concept a little too easy, I joined Ono on Japan’s Lake Biwa for a demonstration. Fishing a grass flat, I was instructed to cast toward the grass edges and

reel very slowly. The rod was medium action, and the line was 4-pound-test fluorocarbon.

“Make sure you point your rod tip at the bait. If you don’t, you will accidentally impart too much action,” instructed Ono, former Japan Bass Angler of the Year.

A couple of casts later, I had a bass hooked up. A couple of casts after that, I had another. A couple of casts after that one, we doubled up.

Amazed by the effectiveness and simplicity of this technique, I asked how well “I” motion was catching on in Japan.

“When we introduced the I Shad, nobody really believed it would work — not even our own pro staff!” explained Ono. “But now, you can’t find a Sierra Minnow on the shelves of tackle stores. Everyone is sold out.”

By the end of our day on Lake Biwa, one of the most highly pressured lakes in the world, we had landed 14 bass using the “I” motion technique. I am a believer. *(Continued)*

GOVERNMENT OPINION

About 10 years ago, bass fishermen were cast as comic book heroes in Japan. These comic books were not niche publications but consumed by the general public. Schoolchildren would read about these bigger-than-life anglers, and want to grow up to be professional bass fishermen. Then, about six years ago, the Japanese government decided that bass were a nuisance

species, a non-native threat to traditional Japanese fish. A law was then put in place demanding that every bass caught had to be killed.

Not only did the comic book heroes go away, but schoolchildren were taught that bass were bad and, by extension, so were the fishermen who targeted the species. Not surprisingly, it hurt the Japanese bass fishing market.

Interestingly enough, though, it seems like the negativity toward bass is beginning to dull. The local governments around Lake Biwa and other mountain lakes in Japan are extremely hospitable to bass anglers, understanding the economic impact of tournaments and recreational fishing. Although national law still demands anglers must kill bass, local agencies are refus-

ing to enforce the law.

Technically, a fisherman could be fined up to \$5,000 for releasing a bass into Lake Biwa. I talked to more than a dozen bass anglers on the lake, and none of them had ever seen enforcement officers write a ticket for the release of a bass ... and there have been live-release tournaments on the lake with enforcement officers in attendance.

THE OCTOPUS RIG

Wacky jighead fishing, made popular with the Jackall Flick Shake, has become more popular in Japan than drop shotting. So, it comes as no surprise that Japanese anglers are developing modifications for this rig.

One such modification was shown to me by Tak Hata, a popular Lake Biwa guide and professional Japanese angler. Using a standard Flick Shake head (many manufacturers make similar jigheads now), thread two worms on the hook. Once the second worm has been added, spin the first worm 90 degrees and impale it back on the hook, making an "X."

"This adds bulk and displaces more water. It is good for big fish and when the water is a little murky," Hata explained.

To fish it, simply twitch the slack in your line after the cast.

"You don't want the bait moving too much. You want the jighead to simply roll over in place, making the tips of the worms wiggle," explained Hata.

Hata's favorite locations to fish the octopus rig are along grass edges and adjacent to hard cover such as laydowns and bridge pilings.

REAL FINESSE FISHING

When U.S. anglers think of finesse fishing, images of 8-pound test and 4-inch worms come to mind. In Japan, similar tackle choices would be considered for heavy lifting. There, finesse means 2-pound test and sometimes micro-baits, in the 2-inch range.

"We use a lot of 2- and 3-pound test when the fishing gets really tough," explained Ono. "And when you are using such thin line, you have to carefully match your rod and reel to the task," he explained.

Ono likes to use a medium action rod that has a light tip but plenty of backbone. The soft tip allows you to cast tiny baits and set the hook without



snapping the light line. The backbone is necessary once you hook a fish, ensuring you have the power to land a bass in short order. And to keep from breaking off, you need a reel with a very smooth drag.

Although most of the tiny lines being used are fluorocarbon and quite a bit stronger than you would think, anglers not used to fishing with such tackle do need to modify their technique. The most obvious modification is the hook set. Once you get a bite, simply sweep the rod across your shoulders. Because the hook you are using is made of extremely light wire, it doesn't take a lot of force to embed the hook in a bass' jaw.

One of the most curious problems I stumbled upon while fishing with 2-pound line was actually

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THE Y100,000 REEL

One of the most impressive pieces of equipment I stumbled across while touring different tackle manufacturers in Japan was the Monoblock Bespoke Limited, a reel produced by Megabass Inc. This small, round baitcaster is machined from a solid block of aircraft grade aluminum (hence the name), making it incredibly strong. The action is smooth and the reel is featherweight. What really stands out, though, is the cosmetics. Leather insets on the drag plate, checkered thumb bar and antique styling set this baitcaster apart from the crowd. Oh, so does the price tag. The Monoblock retails for \$1,000. Available in three colors (black, brown and silver/gold) and both left- and right-handed versions, only 600 of each model were produced. No need to break out your credit card, though — they are already sold out!





keeping the line on my finger during the cast (using spinning gear). I simply was not able to feel the line, and therefore sent several casts sailing behind me as I lost grip of the line during the backcast.

“Make your backcast faster,” Ono instructed. “This will put tension on the line that your finger can feel, and you’ll be able to maintain contact with the bait throughout the cast.”

Perhaps what impressed me the most about using such thin-diameter line was what it allowed baits to do in the water. It’s like the difference between water skiing and snow skiing. When a lure doesn’t have a rope connected to it, steering it in a certain direction, it has incredible freedom of movement. With 2-pound test, the lure steers the line instead of vice versa, creating action you simply do not get with thicker line tests.

THE AFTERMARKET MARKET

While admiring some of the tackle used by Ono on our day on Lake Biwa, I was drawn to an Abu Garcia Revo. This was no ordinary Revo, though. Its spool, brake knob and levelwind screw were metallic purple. “So, what gives with the Revo makeover?” I asked Ono.

Come to find out, there is a sizable aftermarket industry in Japan for bass fishing equipment. His Revo was just one example. A company called K.T.F. modifies a Revo to make it a baitcaster that will perfectly handle 2- to 4-pound-test lines. The idea is to combine the benefits of fishing a baitcaster with the benefits of using very thin-diameter lines.

K.T.F. first replaces the standard Revo spool with one made of aircraft aluminum. This spool not only is lighter than the original but also is much shallower to better accommodate light line. The sealed steel bearings are replaced with open ceramic ones, improving line feed and retrieval. The gears are also replaced to better suit finesse fishing.

I tested this reel, sporting 2-pound test and a weightless 3-inch worm, in the parking lot of a tackle shop. I was able to pitch the bait effortlessly 20 yards. I cast the bait twice as far without issue — in the wind. I wouldn’t be surprised to see U.S. manufacturers take notice of this particular aftermarket upgrade and develop a similar reel in the near future.

After 10 days of being immersed in the Japanese bass fishing culture, I was truly impressed. The anglers in that country are not only extremely committed to the sport, but also are constantly tinkering with ways to improve the enjoyment of fishing and the success of anglers. So, to those bass fishermen and tackle manufacturers 7,000 miles away from my home in Florida developing new ways and means for the world to catch bass, I say thank you. Ah, make that “arigato.”



Log on to Bassmaster.com/japantackle to see *Bassmaster* Editor James Hall walk the aisles of a Japanese tackle store and detail the coolest tackle Japan has to offer.

LURES FROM ABROAD

Walking through tackle shops in Japan is exciting for an American angler. The design and craftsmanship of local baits are impressive. Here are just a few that turned my head.



Megabass XPod – This topwater walking bait has an adjustable lip and holes through its gills. You can click the lip downward to create a totally different action.



Jackall Mikey Slim – This jointed swimbait looks killer in the water. Featuring a narrow profile, this bait is meant for finesse swimbait fishing.



Nekorig Master – These tiny screw-in rubber stops are created for what Japan anglers call an “undershot rig.” Screw this into a soft plastic bait and push your hook through the yellow rubber stop. It saves lures and allows for added action.



Garagecraft Java Stick – This is a 5-inch jointed, soft plastic swimming stickbait. The swimming action in the water is hyper-realistic.