

Japanese culture festival blooms

Crowds sample art, music, food at annual event

By Annik Stahl
Special to The Denver Post

On a straw mat in front of a bamboo and rice paper screen, four Japanese-American women performed the elaborate rituals of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony Saturday at Denver's 25th annual Cherry Blossom Festival.

As part of the cultural festival in Sakura Square, the women, dressed in colorful kimonos, demonstrated the ancient rite in front of two dozen quiet onlookers who were all but transported to Japan within the confines of the Denver Buddhist Temple's cool basement.

In celebration of Japanese culture, 35,000 people are expected to attend the festival and partake in sampling and viewing traditional Japanese food, art, clothing, music and martial arts demonstrations. The festival, on Lawrence Street between 19th and 20th streets, continues today from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission to all events is free.

Everett Watada, a member of the festival planning committee, said: "This is the only way to educate them as well as the rest of the community about the Japanese culture."

Hundreds of people sitting at community tables in the temple's gymnasium chatted amiably with strangers and lunched on chicken and beef teriyaki, sushi, egg rolls, curry dishes and a host of desserts, all prepared by volunteers.

"We come every year and really enjoy the food, the culture and the people," said Michael Gorin, who was sampling the fare with his two daughters. "I think it's particularly important for my children to be exposed to Japanese culture since they are part Japanese."

Elaine Tsumura, one of the ladies of the temple, makes manju, a steamed or baked pastry made of cake dough and filled with sweetened azuki beans.

"It's a good seller," she said, standing behind her table and eyeing the crowd. "It takes so long to make them that people rarely do



Miyako Tanaka Price checks traditional Japanese furniture at the Cherry Blossom Festival on Satur-

day. About 35,000 people are expected to attend the festival, which continues today.

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Mako Aizawa of Boulder, right, explains the meaning of the Japanese characters on a T-shirt worn by Matt Daley, 13, at the Cherry Blossom Festival on Saturday.

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anymore, and this time of year everybody likes to buy them."

Inside the temple, in addition to the large food court, a bonsai tree display, a lecture on Buddhism and the chanoyu, the tea ceremony, are presented. Outside, a fashion show, dance troupe, karate and kendo demonstrations and music performances took place on the main stage. Entranced by the young men

performing karate Saturday, 3-year-old Chai Cherchom sat on the street, barely able to take his eyes off them, standing up every so often to throw a kick himself.

Sayuri Murrain and her mother, Ayumi Shiuchi, performed with the Rocky Mountain Sankyoku, a music group whose members play traditional Japanese instruments such as the shamisen, a lute; the koto, a

harp; and the shakuhachi, a bamboo flute. Shiuchi has been with the group for four years.

"My mother used to have a koto, and one day I just picked it up to see what happened," said Shiuchi, dressed in a colorful kimono and enjoying her plate of food.

At the tea ceremony, the qualities of harmony, respect, purity and tranquility were impressed upon the observers, and the man who explained the ritual also defined how the Japanese culture tries to offer "the best of hospitality, the best of generosity."

Watada wants to make sure the traditions of this culture don't die with the older generation.

"As we all get older, our kids begin to forget about their culture," he said. "We can't lose the Japanese culture."

One feature today will be a performance by the Colorado Symphony Orchestra and Colorado Children's Chorale at 11 a.m.