

Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu

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Shichigosan 七五三



From October to November, Japanese parents take their children to shrines as part of the traditional "shichigosan" (7-5-3) ceremony of presenting the children to Shinto guardian gods to report their healthy development and to ask for the continued health of the child.

The following are questions asked by parents during our 2008 Shichigosan.



How is Shichigosan celebrated?

Parents usually ask a Shinto shrine to perform an *oharai* purification rite and recite a *norito* prayer for their children's health.

Why the ages of 3, 5, and 7?

In ancient times, these were milestones when rites of passage were performed.

Parents started to let their children's hair grow out when they turned 3, according to the book *Nenju Gyoji Girei Jiten* (Annual Events Ceremony Dictionary). This event is known as "kamioki" (leaving hair).

At age 5, boys wore their first *hakama* pleated traditional trousers, in the "hakamagi" donning celebration.

When girls turned 7, parents celebrated the "obitoki" rite, in which their daughters went from using straps to secure their kimono to wearing *obi*.

Shichigosan is thus usually celebrated by 3-year-old and 7-year-old girls and 3-year-old and 5-year-old boys.

It is also believed that the odd numbers bring good luck based on the Taoist Chinese philosophy of feminine and masculine force.

Parents used to celebrate Shichigosan based on the ancient Japanese counting method of "kazoedoshi," in which a baby is automatically 1 year old at birth and becomes a year older every New Year's Day. Nowadays, most parents mark Shichigosan based on the Western way of counting age.

When is shichigosan celebrated?

The official day is Nov. 15. Shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, who reigned from 1680 to 1709, celebrated the health of his 3-year-old son, Tokumatsu, on that date. Some books say Shichigosan is celebrated on November 15 because this is the festival day for celebrating the autumn harvest under the lunar calendar.

It is also the luckiest day according to the ancient Chinese calendar. However, Shichigosan is currently celebrated on weekends throughout October and November.

When did Shichigosan originate?

Shichigosan was originally a ceremony for aristocratic children

in the Heian Period (794-1185).

It spread to ordinary citizens in the Edo Period (1603-1867) according to the book *Nihon Matsuri to Nenju Gyoji Jiten* (Dictionary of Japanese Festivals and Annual Events).

How much does a shichigosan kimono cost?

The price varies widely depending on quality. An average Shichigosan kimono set ranges from ¥19,800 (\$198) to ¥98,000 (\$980) for 3-year-old girls, ¥39,800 (\$398) to ¥200,000 (\$200) for 5-year-old boys, and ¥78,000 (\$780) to ¥198,000 (\$198) for 7-year-old girls.

Renting kimono, including a fee for styling hair and applying makeup, is more reasonable, but still costs from ¥35,000 (\$350) to ¥65,000 (\$650).



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Tohji - The Winter Solstice

冬至(今年は12月22日)とは北半球において太陽の位置が1年で最も低くなる日で、日照時間が最も短くなります。1年で最も日が短いということは、翌日から日が長くなっていくということで、冬至を太陽が生まれ変わる日ととらえ、古くから世界各地で冬至の祝祭が盛大に行われていました。

中国や日本では、冬至は太陽の力が一番弱まった日であり、この日を境に再び力が甦ってくることから、陰が極まり再び陽にかえる日という意の一陽来復(いちようらいふく)といって、冬至を境に運が向いてくるとしています。

冬至はクリスマスのルーツでもあります。クリスマスは、太陽の復活を祝う古代ヨーロッパの祝祭とキリストの生誕が結びついたものでその年の冬至が12月25日だったため、キリストの降臨日が12月25日になったといわれています。

冬至には「ん」のつくものを食べると「運」が呼びこめるといわれています。にんじん、だいこん、れんこん、うどん、なんきん……など「ん」のつくものを運盛りといって縁起をかついでいたのです。

冬至の行事食にはかぼちゃと小豆を使った冬至粥もあります。冬至南瓜や、冬至粥は春を呼び戻す神を祀って、この神に供えた食べ物を一緒に食べるという祭事がその元にあると考えられます。

柚子湯は一年の終わりに体を清めるために行われていた禊ぎ(みそぎ)の風習からきている厄払いをするためのみそぎです。

昔は毎日入浴しませんから一陽来復のために身を清めるのも

道理ですし、現代でも新年や大切な儀式に際して入浴する風習があります。冬が旬の柚子は香りも強く、強い香りのもとには邪気がおこらないという考えもありました。

In astronomy, the winter solstice is the moment when the earth is in a point of its orbit at which the northern or southern hemisphere is most inclined away from the sun. This causes the sun to appear at its farthest below the celestial equator when viewed from earth. The date of the winter solstice is the date with the shortest day and The longest night of the year.

Winter Solstice has been celebrated in cultures around the world for thousands of years. This start of the solar year is a celebration of Light and the rebirth of the Sun. In old Europe, it was known as Yule, or Jul, meaning wheel.

Today, many people in Western-based cultures refer to this holiday as "Christmas." Yet a look into its origins of Christmas reveals its Pagan roots.

Emperor Aurelian established December 25 as the birthday of the "Invincible Sun" in the third century as part of the Roman Winter Solstice celebrations.

Shortly thereafter, in 273, the Christian church selected this day to represent the birthday of Jesus, and by 336, this Roman solar feast day was Christianized.

By 1100 Christmas was the peak celebration of the year for all of Europe. During the 16th century, under the influence of the Reformation, many of the old customs were suppressed and the Church forbade processions, colorful ceremonies, and plays.

In 1647 in England, Parliament passed a law abolishing Christmas altogether. When Charles II came to the throne, many of the customs were revived, but the feast-

ing and merrymaking were now more worldly than religious.

Most of the customs, symbols, and rituals associated with "Christmas" actually are linked to Winter Solstice celebrations of ancient Pagan cultures.

The ancient Europeans decorated their homes in Druidic holiday colors red, green, and white. Holly, ivy, evergreen boughs, and pine cones, a sprig of mistletoe was hung above a major threshold as a charm for good luck throughout the year.

At the heart of Saturnalia was the custom of family and friends feasting together and exchanging presents.

Today's Santa is a folk figure with multicultural roots. He embodies characteristics of Saturn (Roman agricultural god), Cronos (Greek god, also known as Father Time), the Holly King (Celtic god of the dying year), Grandfather Frost (Russian winter god), Thor (Norse sky god who rides the sky in a chariot drawn by goats), Odin/Wotan (Scandinavian/Teutonic All-Father who rides the sky on an eight-legged horse), Frey (Norse fertility god), and the Tomte (Norse Land Spirit known for giving gifts to children in Winter).

The new solar year was celebrated with light, especially, the five pointed star or pentagram.

In Japan, the winter solstice or *toji* is celebrated by eating certain foods that end in "n" - nankin (pumpkin), ninjin (carrot), daikon, udon, etc to strengthen the immune system and for good luck in the coming year.

Azuki beans were also added to the dishes as the color red was thought to have special vibrations to ward off evil. A popular dish is a rice porridge with pumpkin and azuki beans.

Everyone took *yuzu* baths, meant to purify and warm the body. *Yuzu* is a citrus fruit that looks a bit like a small grapefruit with bumpy, yellow skin. The fruit originated in China, and was introduced to Japan and Korea during the Tang Dynasty.



Japanese Year-end Customs

"Shiwasu" is another term for December in Japan. Literally, 師走 (shiwasu) means "priests or teachers running around in a frenzy."

During this time of *shiwasu*, various customs and practices exist in Japan to bring closure to the old year and to prepare for a new year. Here are some of the typical events during *shiwasu*:



Oseibo Year-end gift

In Japan, it's customary to give gifts periodically to people such as co-workers, bosses, relatives, teachers, friends, and so on.

The giving of end of year gifts is called *oseibo*. Department stores display many types and sets of *oseibo* gifts from November to December.

Most people have the store deliver the gifts. You can also order oseibo gifts at post offices or convenience stores. Some still follow traditional ways and deliver gifts in person.

Oseibo are specifically given to repay favors received during the year and is usually sent by the 20th of December. Despite its timing, oseibo gifts are different from Christmas gifts.

The cost of a gift ranges from 3,000 yen to about 20,000 yen, and the average is about 5,000 yen.

Popular items for oseibo are ham, cooking oil, gift certificates, beer, coffee, seafood, fruits,

etc. The type and cost of gifts depends on your relationship with the recipient. People usually give the most expensive gifts to their bosses at work.

On each oseibo gift, the sender places a piece of paper called *noshi*, on which the word "oseibo" and the sender's name is written.

Bonen-kai - Year-end party

Bonenkai literally means "Forget the troubles of the year" party and is a time to reflect on the past year's events and to anticipate with hope the opportunities of the new year.

Many times, work places will throw one to celebrate the year end and to look back at a year with a measure of pride in what was accomplished.

Susubarai (cleaning)

What in America is referred to as "spring" cleaning, takes place at the end of the calendar year in Japan.

Called *susuharai* or *susubarai*, these cleaning rituals begin early in December with diligent dusting in homes, offices, and neighborhood temples and shrines.

This is the time of year when new cleaning products and gadgets



are introduced on the market.

It is also a time to buy new dishtowels, underwear, etc in anticipation of the year to come.

Susubarai cleaning is also the time to wipe the slate clean for debts.



Nenga-jo (New Year's greeting cards)

The Japanese, like many Asian cultures, use a 12-year rotation of animal signs to designate each year. 2008 is the Year of Rat and 2009 will be the Year of the Ox.

Accordingly, various images of cows and oxen will appear on 2009 greeting cards -- some cute others more subdued and traditional. Even with the advent of e-mail, the custom of mailing New Year greeting cards persists in Japan.

Originally greetings were delivered in person in conjunction with *oseibo* year-end gifts. Then, in 1873 the post office issued its first *nenga-jo* cards.

By the end of the 19th century, the postal service guaranteed delivery on January 1st to all those who posted their cards by the third week in December -- a promise they still keep. (Truly impressive when you consider that nearly 4.5 billion cards were processed last year and all delivered on January 1, 2008.)

Since 1949, the Japanese post office has been managing a

New Year lottery -- numbers are printed on each of the cards the post office sells and the winning numbers are announced early in January. Prizes vary from regional food delicacies to special edition stamps.

O-misoka (New Year's eve)

The final day of the year, December 31, is called O-misoka in Japan.

In order to usher in the new year feeling reinvigorated and fresh, families make preparations for the new year by omisoka.

Many college students and working people who moved to big cities to attend school or take on a job return to their hometowns to spend New Year's with their families, friends, and relatives.

On New Year's Eve, many families gather around the TV set to watch special o-misoka programs and eat toshi-koshi soba noodles in the hope that one's life will be stretched out as long as these noodles.

As midnight approaches, Buddhist temples around the country begin ringing out the old year (literally!), sounding the temple bell 108 times. This practice is based on a belief that humans have 108 earthly passions they have to overcome in order to attain enlightenment, and each ring is thought to drive away one such passion.

People wait until the reverberations have completely died down from each bell toll before making the next strike, and so it takes about an hour to complete the 108 strokes.

The tolling of the bell at some of the country's most famous temples are broadcast live on television and radio. Many people welcome the new year by listening to the calming sounds of these bells.

As the clock strikes midnight, the breaking of a new year is much more than just the beginning of a new day.

Oshogatsu (the first three days of the year) is Japan's biggest holiday, and people flock to shrines and temples to pray for a healthy and

prosperous year regardless of their religious affiliation.

This visit is called *hatsu-mode*, which used to mean going to a Shinto shrine before dawn and paying respects to one's guardian deities. Now, the term is also used when visiting a Buddhist temple at new years.

Trains and buses that normally stop running late at night operate on a 24-hour basis on New Year's eve and New Year's Day.

Another regular feature of O-misoka starts at 7:30 pm when public broadcaster NHK airs *Kohaku Uta Gassen* (Red vs White singing contest), one of the country's most-watched television programs. Popular singers and singing groups split into two teams, women in the red team and men in the white, which then alternate while competing for the audience's heart throughout the evening.

At around 11:30 pm, the final singer (or group) sings, and the audience and a panel of judges are asked to cast their votes to decide which team sang better. The winning team gets a trophy and "the winners' flag", and the program ends at about 11:45 pm. Programming then switches to coverage of midnight celebrations around the country.

Osechi Ryori

Japanese New Year's food is



called *osechi-ryori*, and colorful osechi-ryori dishes are packed in layers of lacquer boxes, called jubako. Each dish and ingredient in osechi has meaning, such as good health, fertility, good harvest, happiness, long life,

and so on.

The kinds of osechi dishes eaten at Japanese homes vary from region to region and is usually eaten from the 1st to the 3rd of January.

Traditionally, people completed cooking osechi dishes by New Year's Eve so that they have food for a couple days without cooking.

Most of the dishes can last a couple days in the refrigerator or at cool room temperature.

Nowadays, people buy ready-made osechi dishes at stores instead of cooking them at home. It can be time-consuming to cook so many kinds of dishes. In Japan, you can order a set of osechi-ryori at department stores, grocery stores, convenience stores or restaurants..

Toshi koshi soba (year end noodles)

Some households serve *soba* (buckwheat) noodles for dinner on the night of December 31, but most slurp their noodles near midnight as Buddhist temple bells begin to toll 108 times.

Although *soba* is specified, other kinds of noodles are also eaten, especially *udon* in the Sanuki region of Shikoku.

The longer the noodle, the better - don't cut noodles shorter than they already are, since you would be cutting short the happiness you seek.



Shrine Calendar

December

- 6 Mochi Pounding 餅つき
- 7 Tsukinamisai Monthly Service 月次祭
- TBA Clean-up Susubarai 煤払い

January

- 1 Hatsumode 初詣
- 18 Sagicho - Burning of the old Omamori 左儀長



Samurai Food Culture

fish from the back originated at the Nihonbashi fish market during the Edo period.

Preparation begins by positioning the fish with its head on the right. The first cut is made along the back, beginning at the base of the head. Many believe this was to prevent any association with *hara-kiri* in the samurai society.

On the other hand, in Kyoto, or the Kansai region, fish were split by cutting along the belly. Since Kyoto is an inland city that required the transport of fish from the coast, fish were cleaned and salted before they ever left.

Eel is also cut open from the back in the Kanto region and from the belly in Kansai.

There were many *yatai* or food stalls scattered around the city which was frequented by all classes.

Edo was full of unmarried single men on *sankin kotai* (a system that required daimyos or feudal lords to go to Edo every other year to report to the shogun) and artisans working away from home.

This meant more opportunities to dine out as stall food was economical and satisfying.

Including restaurants and *yatai* stalls, Edo probably had the most restaurants and eateries in the world during the early 19th century.

The samurai class was especially sensitive to the concept of *ko-todama* resulting in many taboos surrounding meals for the samurai class.

The samurai class stayed away from fish like *konoshiro* (gizzard shad), *fugu* (blow fish) or *maguro* (tuna).

To eat *konoshiro* in casual Japanese is “*konoshiro wo kuu*” which has the same sound as “the demise of the castle”.

However, *konoshiro* was a delicious fish, especially marinated in vinegar and eaten as sushi. Since *konoshiro* was taboo, the samurai class began calling it by another name - *kohada*. To date, *kohada* is one of the most popular fish at sushi restaurants in Tokyo.

Fugu or blowfish was toxic if not prepared properly. It was meritorious for a samurai to die on the battlefield but an embarrassment to die from the toxic poisons of a *fugu*.

Another name for *maguro* (*ahi*) was *shibi*, which sounds like the “day of death” in Japanese.

The procedure used to clean and fillet fish varied between the two regions of Japan - Kanto (Tokyo area) and Kansai (Osaka area).

The Kanto method of splitting



The height of Edo culture is said to be the Bunka and Bunsei eras (1806 – 1829) when the gourmet boom began in the streets of Edo.

Yaozen, a legendary restaurant in Asakusa and other posh establishments were patronized by the upper samurai and merchant class.

Upper class samurais patronized *ryotei* for meetings - the start of “*ryotei-politics*” in Japan.

The lower class samurai usually had simple meals consisting of rice, miso soup, *tsukemono* pickles for breakfast with the addition of another dish at dinner.

Although Edo (present day Tokyo) was blessed with a bay full of fresh fish and shellfish, additional dishes of fish, simmered vegetables, tofu or eggs would don the dinner tray only on special occasions.

In Japan, it is believed that there is a spirit in the words and sounds that we use in communications, a concept called *ko-todama*.

As such, positive words were thought to bring positive energies and negative words surrounded the user with negative energies.