

# ANNUAL CUSTOMS AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN YOSHIO VILLAGE

(Awa District, Chiba Prefecture)

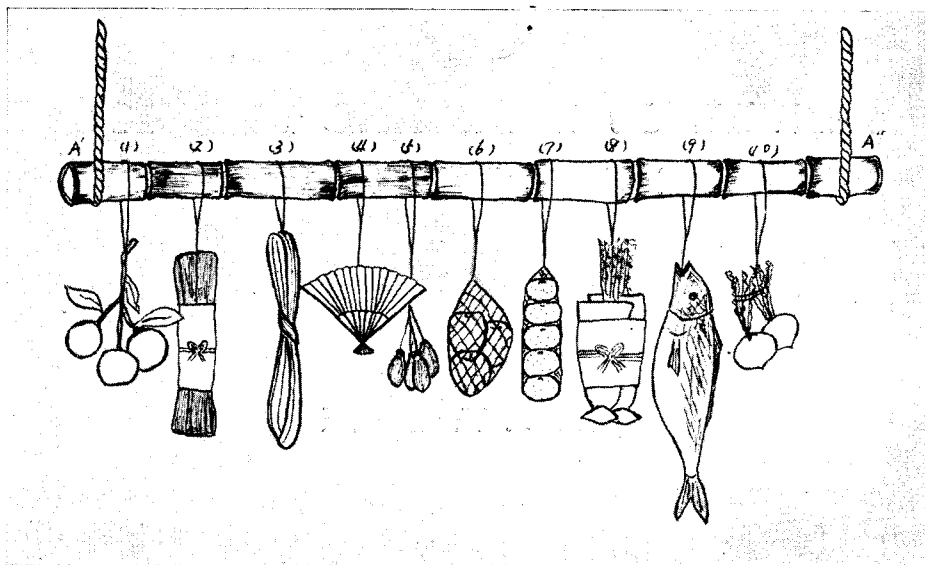
By

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Yoshio Village is situated about 6 km. west of Kamogawa Town in Soto-Bôshû and has a population of 3528. The present report is based on informations received there from Mr. Sunada Heiji, an old farmer, during summer 1952 and January and March 1953, and deals with annual customs and avoidances observed there by the farmers.

## I. Annual Customs

1) "The young New Year" (*waka-shôgatsu*). This is the name of the period between the first day of New Year and the day which is called *nanakusa* ("seven herbs"), that is the seventh day of the first month. The New Year decorations are left on their places throughout the whole first month. Together with sacred ropes (*shimenawa*), vegetables, fruits, a salmon, a fan, hemp, tangle (*Laminaria*, a sea-grass) and bigarades (*daidai* 橙, the bitter orange) are hung before the house-altar. By a play upon words the Japanese words for these objects of offering result in the following auspicious verse: "*Sue nagaku, hiraite daidai yorokobu*", that is: "May the lineage be long, the generations extend and be happy!" The hemp stands for *sue nagaku* ("the ends are long"), since hemp has long fibres; *hiraite* ("open") is expressed by the fan. A folding fan is called *suehiro*. The fan symbolizes in the text of this verse the many generations which may branch off from one source throughout many ages. The word *daidai*, bigarades, is a homonym for *daidai* (代々) generations. The word *yorokobu* is symbolized by *kobu* tangle. The element *yoro* has no symbol, *kobu* (tangle) stands for *yorokobu* also in wedding ceremonies. Other fruits offered, without contributing to the sound symbolism, are mandarin-oranges, apples and dried persimmons.



Auspicious decorations of the New Year's altar.

- |                                       |                     |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1) bitter oranges                     | 10) vegetables      |
| 2) tangle                             | A', A'' bamboo pole |
| 3) hemp                               |                     |
| 4) folding fan                        |                     |
| 5) dried persimmons                   |                     |
| 6) apples                             |                     |
| 7) mandarin oranges                   |                     |
| 7) dried cuttlefish ( <i>surume</i> ) |                     |
| 9) salmon ( <i>sake</i> )             |                     |

The decorations are hung on the altar on the 28th of the 12th month and taken away on the first day of the 2nd month. Then they are used as fuel for the cooking of rice to be offered on the house altar.

2) Customs practiced and offerings made during the first three days of the New Year.

Persons whose "year of birth" (*umaredoshi*) (the Japanese apply the name of one of the twelve zodiacal animals to their year of birth) falls in this year get up before all others in the morning of New Year and draw the so-called "young water" (*wakamizu*). Before they do so they offer *arare* (lit. hail-stones), that is rice-cakes cut into small pieces and dried, and rice to the Kojinsama (hearth-god), to the Jigamisama (mansion-god) and to the Idokamisama (well-god), while they recite three times: "Draw coins, draw gold, draw treasures, draw young water with a golden pole." With the drawn water tea is made and offered to each god. Besides, a clear soup, called *okan*, is offered. To the souls of the dead no broth with dried fish is offered. Instead of it they offer a clear soup containing two slices of big raddish (*daikon*) and sweet potato. To the goddess Amaterasu these offerings are given in a *shô* measure (1 *shô*=1,588 quart). The family members celeb-

rate New Year by eating soup in which rice-cakes have been cooked.

To the gods rice-cakes, called *o-kazari-mochi* ("decoration rice-cakes"), are offered, but to the goddess Amaterasu, however, three layers of such cakes are offered. These are called *sangai no kagami-mochi* ("three storied mirror-cakes," "mirror-cakes" because of their polished and shining surface). The other gods get only two layers of cakes.

3) The seventh day of New Year (*nakakusa*, the "seven herbs").

On the morning of this day people cook rice with vegetables, others make a rice-gruel that contains herbs.

4) The fifteenth day of New Year (*ko-shôgatsu*, "Small New Year").

A tree is made to look as if covered with blossoms by hanging ordinary rice-cakes or spiced ones on its twigs. The tree used for it is a very small kind called *ebota*. On the house-altar are placed imitations of straw rice-bags (*tawara*) in such a small size that one hand can grasp them; besides them, hoes and skythes of the size of a match-box are put there as offerings. Together with them are offered imitations of millet-ears (*awa no ho*), made of wood by splitting a stalk of the *kusaji* tree up into thin pieces 10 cm. long.

The rice-cakes with which the tree is decorated are called *ki-mochi* ("tree rice-cakes"). When New Year is over, the cakes are cut into small pieces and dried, then called *arare* ("hail-stones"). Later, during the first ten days of June, when cotton is sown, they are offered in the middle of the field.

On the morning of the 16th day of the first month the "millet-ears" are taken down from the house-altar, and the bases of persimmon-trees, pear-trees, chestnut-trees, peach-trees and other fruit-trees are struck with them while singing: "Bear fruits, bear fruits, bear fruits from your front to your back" (*narimôse, marimôse, moto kara ura made narimôse*). The customs of this time show that the farmers pray in their way for a good crop throughout the year.

5) The religious gathering at New Year (*nen-tô-kô* 年頭講).

Relatives and intimate friends gather and enjoy a banquet. The gathering may take place at any time of the New Year's month, the most favored time being that before the tenth.

6) The first day of the second month (*osame no ichinichi*, that is: the first day of the end, namely of the New Year's period).

On this day the New Year decorations are burnt, rice is cooked, rice-cake is made and offered before the house-altar.

7) The "first day of the horse" in the second month (*batsu-uma* 初午).

It is believed that on this day the danger of fire is especially great and people are on guard against it. They pray to the god Inari for protection against fire calamities and offer red rice-cakes to him. On this day the festival of Inari fell originally.

8) *Setsubun* (the day before the commencement of the spring season, also called *mame-maki*, that is an exorcism of scattering parched beans. Another name of the festival is *toshikoshi*, lit. "bidding the old year out", in this connection: the night before the beginning of the official spring season).

The festival falls on the fourth day of the second month. Twigs of the holly-tree are cut and stuck on the pillars of the entrance-door together with the head of a sardine. The sardine head is used as an amulet to keep the devils away who fear the shining eyes of the fish and dare not enter the house. At the same time a basket with big meshes hung on the roof of the house also prevents devils, who fear the big meshes (in Japanese *me* "eyes"), from entering the house. In every house people can be heard shouting, while scattering around the beans, : "*Fuku wa uchi, oni wa soto* (may luck enter, may devils leave)!" For this rite soy-beans are used.

9) The seventh day of the second month.

This day is dedicated to the mountain-god. On it tree cutting is tabooed and nobody dares enter the forest so that no work is done there on this day. The mountain-god receives red rice as offering.

10) The festival of the clan-god (*ujigami*) on the 28th day of the ninth month.

All persons connected with the festival eat only a vegetarian diet for a whole week, eat and sleep in the village shrine, and clean their bodies. On the festival day the shrine minister (*negi*) mounts a horse and shoots at a target with bow and arrows. Three hits are called *wase* ("early rice-crop"), two hits *nakate* ("mid-season rice-crop"), one hit is called *okute* ("late rice-crop"). In this way a good or a bad harvest is foretold. The villagers call this divination *Hachimansama no oshie* ("the teaching of the god Hachiman").

11) Religious gathering in honour of the god Ebisu (*Ebisu-kô*) on the 20th day of the tenth month.

It is said that the god of luck enters the house on this day and fish is offered to him. If no fish is available, one block of bean-curd (*itôhō tōfu* 丁豆腐) takes its place.

## II. Taboos and Avoidances

### 1) Unlucky days (*fujônichi* 不淨日 “unclean days”).

The belief in unlucky days is far-spread, from Tôhoku to Kantô and Shikoku, the counting of such days being the same everywhere. No work must be started on them. The belief in them has no connection with the “twelve stems” (*ju-ni shi* 十二支). A year is divided into two parts. From the first to the sixth month the unlucky days follow in this order: the third, the second, the first, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth day; besides them, every following ninth day is unlucky. For example: in the first month the third day is unlucky, the next unlucky day comes nine days later, that is the twelfth day of the same month. There are regions where on such days even taking counsel is avoided. No charcoal furnace is built on unlucky days and no charcoal is burnt, no bathing water is boiled. Instead of *fujônichi* some say *fujôjû* (不成就), that means “unsuccessful”.

Our informant said *fujônichi*, but the *Vocabulary of Popular Terms for Taboos and Avoidances — Kinki shûzoku goi* 禁忌習俗語彙 by Yanagita Kunio has *fujukunichi* (不熟日), that is “unripe days”, days on which nothing ripens or succeeds. No seeds planted on such days will grow and ripen. The term *fujukunichi* is possibly a regional variation of *fujônichi*. No seeds planted on an “unsuccessful day” will ripen, people here in Awa District and in Nasu believe.

To find out which days are unlucky, the year is divided into four quarters, namely 1) January-March, 2) April-June, 3) July-September, 4) October-December. In the first of these four periods bad days are that of the rat (*ne* 子) in the first month, that of the horse (*uma* 午) in the second, and that of the cock (*tori* 酉) in the third. The same sequence is observed in the following quarters. This avoidance rule refers particularly to field planting: if such is done on an unlucky day, the rice will either not ripen or not be good for food. In Tôhoku districts (Sendai, Fukushima) rice sown or planted on such days is considered to become food for days of distress or food for sick family members. To avoid this misfortune, nobody sows or plants rice on unlucky days.

### 2) *Sanrinbô*

There is still another set of unlucky days. To determine which days are unlucky, the year is again divided into four quarters as above. In the first month the day of the boar (*i* 亥) is unlucky, in the second that of the tiger (*tora* 寅), in the third that of the horse (*uma* 午). The same rule of sequence is valid for the months of the following periods. On these days

construction of the main house of the mansion, the renovation of thatched roofs, and other work in connection with house building has to be avoided.

3) *Kezô*

Another set of days called *kezô*, must be avoided for building stables for horses and cows, this time the days are marked by the zodiacal signs and memorized by the farmers with the help of the following verse (the numerals indicate the months in which the respective zodiacal sign marks a bad day):

申 (1)	酉 (2)	に	又	酉 (3)	過ぎて	亥 (4)	と	子 (5)
<i>saru</i>	<i>tori</i>		<i>ni mata</i>	<i>tori</i>	<i>sugite</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>ne</i>
(ape)	(cock)			(cock)		(boar)		(rat)
丑 (6)	寅 (7)	申 (8)	卯 (9)	辰 (10)	午 (11)	未 (12)		
<i>usbi</i>	<i>tora</i>	<i>saru</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>tatsu</i>	<i>uma</i>	<i>bitsuji</i>		
(ox)	(tiger)	(ape)	(hare)	(dragon)	(horse)	(ram)		

4) *Horobunichi* (*horobonichi* 亡日)

The word means "days of destruction" and refers to days which are not good for field planting. They are also determined, as those referring to animal husbandry, by means of the twelve zodiacal signs and memorized with the help of the following verse:

辰 (1)	と	亥 (2)	と	羊 (3)	羊 (4)	戌 (5)	に	四	匹
<i>tatsu</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>yô</i>	<i>yô</i>	<i>inu</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>shi-</i>	<i>biki</i>
(dragon)		(boar)		(ram)	(ram)	(dog)		(four)	
寅 (6, 7, 8, 9)	丑 (10)	己 (11)	に	丑 (12)	は	亡ぶ	なり		
<i>tora</i>	<i>usbi</i>	<i>hebi</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>usbi</i>	<i>wa</i>	<i>horobu</i>	<i>nari</i>		
(tiger)	(ox)	(snake)		(ox)					

For example, in the third and in the fourth month the day of the ram and from the sixth to the ninth month, the day of the tiger are unlucky.

### III. Rain Prayer

If a drought continues for a long time, all inhabitants of the village go in a body to the shrine of the village god three times on one day. When they gather in the morning, they fill water into buckets and barrels, soak bamboo grass and branches of trees in the water, take one leaf from them and offer it to the god. This is also repeated three times, that is, once on each visit to the shrine. Before the shrine god they beat a drum and pray for rain by reciting the following text: "Dragon palace of the sea, water god of the river, bestow a heavy rain upon us (*umi no ryûgû, kawa no suijin, ô-ame furashite tamaware yo* 海の龍宮, 川の水神, 大雨降らして賜れよ)."

When the farmers have continued their rain prayers for three consecutive days, they make an offering, called *gokannô* (probably to be written *go-kannô* 御感應 efficacy), consisting of rice-wine and fish, for thanksgiving. But if the rain prayers are not answered by the gods, people try once more, this time at the Takakura Shrine in Ôyama Village (Awa District), but only two or three persons make the pilgrimage there as representatives of their village community. If there is still no rain, they go to Takago in Kimitsu District, where they receive water from the well of the goddess Kannon. If rain is again denied, they go to receive water from Haruna-san, a sacred mountain in Gumma Prefecture. If all these pilgrimages do not result in rain-fall, the sacred palanquin of the clan-god is carried into the sea and the *shiogoi* (潮乞 ちゝ), that is "praying for tides," is practiced.