

An Essay on Japanese Seasonal Events with Haiku January: Welcoming the New Year and enduring the coldest weeks

日本の季節行事と俳句

一月—新年と寒

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要旨: 日本人は、新年を特別な料理（お節と雑煮）で祝う。お節には、長寿を象徴する海老、先を見通すように穴が開いている蓮根、喜びに通じる昆布、まめ（健康）であることを願う黒豆など、特別な意味を込めた食物がある。雑煮は地方色が強い。典型的な違いは、関東では各餅に醤油味、関西では丸餅に味噌味で作られることである。子供たちは、正月に両親や親戚、年始回りの客から、お年玉をもらうのを楽しみにしている。お年玉の玉には、魂の意味があり、魂を象徴するものとして、もともとは餅が使われていたが、昭和の頃に餅から現金に変わった。新年を迎えてすぐに、あるいは、年賀状を読んでから、人々は神社や寺へ初詣に出かける。かつては、正月には、晴れ着（フォーマルな着物）を着て出かけていたが、近年は、ほとんど見られない。新年の最初の七日間は松の内と呼ばれる期間である。その後、一年の中で最も寒さの厳しい寒に入り、その期間は、二月初めまで続く。雪や凍結によって交通機関が乱れることが多いこの時期に、大学入試が行われる。同じころに、二十歳を祝う成人式も行われる。成人式は、一生に一度であるため、正月とは異なり、寒くても、天気が悪くても、多くの新成人が振袖を着る。

一月は、祝月であり、寒中に起こる様々な生活上の不便さに耐えなければいけない月であるが、日本の暦の上では、冬の終わりが近づいてくる月でもある。人々は、冬の中に春が兆すのを、楽しみに待っている。

Key words: new year, osechi, prawn, lotus root, kelp, black soy bean, zōni, square or triangular rice cake, miso, soy source, otoshidama, New Year's greeting cards, New Year celebration, long-sleeved kimono, matsu-no-uchi, the coldest season, examination, the coming-of-age ceremony

新年、お節 海老 蓮根 昆布 黒豆 雑煮 丸餅 角餅 味噌 醤油 お年玉 年賀状
初詣 晴着 松の内 寒 センター試験 成人式

Japanese people celebrate the New Year by eating special dishes, 'osechi' and 'zōni'. Osechi is festive and zōni is full of local flavor. Osechi contains some foods which are thought to be connected to our desires in daily life, for example, 'ebi' a prawn symbolizes long life because it has a bent back like an old person, 'renkon' a lotus root for foresight because it has tubular openings, 'kombu' tangle or kelp for joy because 'kombu' sounds like 'yorokobu' which means being glad and 'kuromame' a black soy bean for health because both beans and health are 'mame' in Japanese. Zōni is soup with 'mochi' rice cakes, vegetables and other ingredients. The shape of mochi and the seasoning of soup vary by region. The shape is a square and the soup is soy-based in the eastern region of Japan and triangular and light miso-flavored in the western region of Japan.

One of the great pleasure for children is 'otoshidama' a New Year's gift which is usually money from parents, relatives and visitors. Originally, they gave mochi which was a symbol of the soul as otoshidama. During the Showa era otoshidama changed from mochi to money. Almost all Japanese people receive New Year's greeting cards, some of them get dozens of the cards. After reading them, some people go out for New Year celebrations at a shrine or a temple. Other people have already finished the celebration at midnight, right after the beginning of the New Year. In the past young girls wore long-sleeved kimono, formal dress for unmarried women, however, in recent years nobody wears kimono for the celebration. The reason seems to be it is extremely cold for wearing formal kimono outside.

The first seven days of the New Year are called 'matsu-no-uchi', the week when gates are decorated with pine branches for the New Year. After the decoration is taken down, 'kan' the coldest season begins and continues until early in February. It snows hard not only in the northern areas and districts along the Sea of Japan but also sometimes in the southern areas and district along the Pacific side. Unfortunately, during this time of hard weather, the national center examination for university applicants is held all over Japan. Commuting to the tests may be difficult and some applicants are late in many places every year. The time of the examination is changed for such applicants, if possible. Another important event is the coming-of-age ceremony on the second Monday of this month. Twenty-year-olds are celebrated. On this day, the twenty-year-old women wear long-sleeved kimono no matter what. Even though it may be the most bitterly cold or raining heavily or snowing or if a strong wind blowing, they wear kimono without any hesitation because the celebration is a once in a lifetime experience.

January is a month of celebrations. In the past, the New Year was called 'the first spring'. However, it is the coldest season of the year. People must endure the inconveniences during midwinter on several occasions. Even so, January is the last month of winter according to the current Japanese calendar, therefore, people are looking forward to the signs of spring.

Haiku

A departing ceremony for postal delivery
was modestly held
early morning on New Year's Day

ひっそりと郵便局の出初式
Hissori to yūbinkyoku no dezomeshiki

My first dream of the year
yawning
a pink fur cat was

初夢はピンクの猫のひと欠伸
Hatsu'yume wa pinku no neko no hito'akubi

A liquor store
next to a women's college
dry and dusty in midwinter

女子大に隣る酒屋の寒埃
Joshidai ni tonaru sakaya no kanbokori

New year followed old year
and passed through
my drinking straw too

ストローを通り抜けたる去年今年
Sutorō wo tōri-nuketaru kozokotoshi

New year and last year
on board
greeting the new century

去年今年機上に在りて新世紀
Kozokotoshi kijō ni arite shinseiki

My flight home to Japan
three times welcoming
of the new year

三回の新年迎ふ帰国便
Sankai no shin'nen iwau kikokubin

During the first meeting of the year
a professor read an e-mail
on her mobile phone

初会議携帯メール読む教授
hatsukaigi keitaimēru yomu kyōju

To open one moving box after another
that was
my preparation for the new year

引越しの箱を開けみる年用意
Hikkoshi no hako wo akeiru toshi-yōi

An ambulance
without any decoration
for the new year

正月の飾りはつけぬ救急車
Shōgatsui no kazaro wa tsukenu kyūkyūsha

Last year and the new year
briskly
I prepare our usual meals

さくさくといつものごはん去年今年
Sakusaku to itsumo no gohan kozokotoshi