

34. Annual events

34.1 Bon and Kure ceremonies

Various seasonal and annual regional events survive from old times. The shogatsu and the Bon events are the most important of these. The shogatsu event is dividable into o-shogatsu and ko-shogatsu. *O-shogatsu* is performed through New Year's day to the following several days to welcome *Toshigami-sama* (New Year's visiting God). *Ko-shogatsu* centers on full moon day of the *Kyureki* (old lunar calendar) in prayer for rich harvests. The Bon is the one day of the year when the family's ancestral spirits return to the home.

34.2 The O-shogatsu event

Preparation for O-shogatsu starts with *susutori* (year end house cleaning). The head family and branch families used to gather to make mochi cake (*mochitsuki*) on December 28. Rice being a precious food, *awa* (foxtail millet), *kibi* (millet) and *hie* (Japanese millet) were mixed. The pounded volume could reach 1 *ppyō* (4 *to*), about 60 kg, for a large or wealthy family. The Mochi supplied inedible offerings to the gods and *noshimochi* (edible flat rice cakes). *Shogatsukazari* (New Year's decoration) served as decoration up to December 30. Religious observance discouraged their being displayed on the 31st. *Shogatsukazari* included *shimekazari*, straw bound into a sheaf. Some families also prepared their *toshigami* God shelf, for the coming year's god to visit, a counterpart of the *kamidana* (household Shinto altar). Believing that sleeping early on New Year's Eve would prematurely gray the hair, many families stayed up late. On hearing the *joya-no-kane* (watch-night bell), the family would proceed to their shrine.

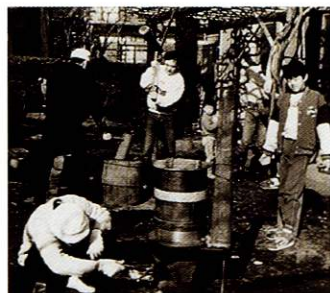


Fig.216 Mochitsuki (rice-cake making). Family members gather, boil water on a stove, steam glutinous rice in a maruseiro (round basket steamer), then pound the steamed rice into a mochi paste.

The *toshiotoko* (family head or first-born son) would rise early to draw *wakamizu* (New Year's well water), light the stove and cook *zoni* (soup with rice cakes) to offer Buddha and other deities. Women enjoyed three days' rest. In the *utaizome* event of Kumagawa Village, running through to the Showa 30s (1955-65), local family heads gathered on the seventh to decide *nenban* and *niwaba* events. On the eleventh, the *kuwaire* (noire, or *unaihajime*) event brought prayer for productive farming and for the new season's farm work. At the same day the family prayed ritual storehouse opening (*kurabiraki*) and offerings of *zoni* to the storehouse. The mochi of *zoni* was used for the day, put in the house as the seven day offering of the New Year.

34.3 The Ko-shogatsu event

On January 11, *abo* and *hebo* would be created as ko-shogatsu ornamentation (known as *monotsukuri*). A 15 cm length of *niwatoko*, *nurude*, *nemu* or other branch was cut. Its bark stripped halfway, it was inserted into the partially split end of a thin bamboo stalk. About ten such ornaments were bundled and mounted on a compost heap as a charm for a rich harvest and a talisman to guard against evil spirits. In the days of sericulture, *mayudamakazari* events in prayer of productive cocoons were common. On January 13, various sized cocoon-form *dango* (dumplings) were made to adorn *tuge*, *ume*, *kashi*, *yanagi* and other species' branches supported by a stone mortar to ornament the reception room. Sake and candlelight offerings were placed before a *kakejiku* (hanging picture) or equivalent silkworm spirit display device. Hatchet-armed children would lightly tap the trunks of an *ume*, *kaki*, *kuri*, or other fruit-bearing trees while reciting a charm for rich harvest "*Miga-naruka-naraneeka-naraneeto-buttagiruzo*" (If the fruits be not grown, the trees were cut off.), "*Naruto-yukara-yoseyo*." (Say grown, so stop the cut.) (called to *narikizeme* that means grow –fruitfully blaming).



Fig.217 Abohebo event (Ushihama, 1970s (Showa 50s)). Abohebo were mounted on backyard compost heaps. Some families decorated their reception rooms with miniature *abo* and *hebo*.



Fig.218 Meedama-kazari (Nakabusa, 1985 (Showa 60)). January 13 was Mayudama (cocoon-like dumpling) decoration day, the 16th removal (from branch) day. This removal event was called *mayukaki* or *mayumogi*.

Prior to the Pacific War, Kumagawa's Minami and Uchide district residents would post the prayer *See-no-kami* God on a column each January 7. Children would collect used shogatsu ornaments and *daruma* (Dharma doll) to fix to a small shelter at the foot of the column. On January 13 the column would be pushed down and the small shed burnt early the next morning. It was believed that cooking *mayudama-dango* (cocoon-formed dumplings) on this flame and eating it, would prevent colds. January 15 was The day of *Satogaeri* (bridal returning day). January 16 was *Jigoku-no-kama-no-futa-ga-aku* (opening the pot of Hell) day, also known as *Enma* (King of Hell) holiday, when all workers took leave to cook *azuki-meshi* rice. January 17 was *Yama-no-kami* (mountain God) day when entry to the mountains was prohibited. January 20 and October 20 were days of *Ebisu-ko* when dishes such as whole fish with head and tail were presented to the gods *Ebisu* and *Daikoku*, prayers for prosperity were made and 1 *sho-masu* (0.9 liter) offerings were put in all family members' wallets or purses.

34.4 Obon-sama

In the Nishitama region, through the Taisho Period, the Bon festival was sometimes politely called *obon-sama*. In Fussa the Bon festival fell through August 2 to 4, almost overlapping the August 1 Yagumojinja Shrine festival and also clashing with busy silkworm breeding work, until district people negotiated the Bon festival period change to the present term, July 13 to 16.

The Bon Shelf was erected on the morning of 13th to bid the Bon spirit. The shelf displayed an image of Buddha and an ancestral funerary tablet. A horse effigy of eggplant served as the spirit's vehicle, and offerings of water, new wheat *somen* (fine noodles) and *fukashi-manju* (steamed buns), first season's vegetables, *misohagi*



Fig.219 Offering the Ebisu-ko (Kami, 1985 (Showa 60)).

(loosestrife) flowers, etc. were made. In the evening wheat straw was burnt at the residence gate while adults and children together recited "*Bonsama, Bonsama, omukaemosu*" to welcome ancestral spirits. *Segaki-kuyo* ceremony was performed at the temple on the 15th or 16th. August 16 was known as *Jigoku-no-kama-no-futa-ga-aku* day of absence. Workers took leave to visit ancestral graves. Servants and brides also returned to their parental homes. A farewell fire saw off the Bon-sama to the recitation of "*Bonsama, Bonsama, ookurimosu*". An *azuki* bean and rice dish known as *enma-no-akameshi* adorned a Buddhist effigy for the seeing off.



1. Weaving a rope using chigaya (cogon) to decorate the Bon Shelf top.



2. Preparing newly-grown bamboo (niiko).



3. Decorative the niiko at Bon Shelf ends. Formerly it had decorated the four corners.



4. Horse effigy of eggplant to carry the spirit and a bundle of misohagi that was used to splash water on the offerings.



5. A Buddhist image and an ancestral tablet (brought from a Buddhist altar) adorn the Bon Shelf.



6. A welcoming fire beckons the Obon-sama.