

THE CEREMONIAL LIFE OF THE JAPANESE IN CALIFORNIA
AS COMPARED WITH THAT OF JAPAN.

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(Notes taken from an unpublished manuscript
in possession of Dr. Paul Radin)

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- Nori Ikeda (Unpublished manuscript)
(Through the Courtesy of Dr. Paul Radin)

PART I. CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS.

1. Birth Ceremonies in Japan.

The position of boys in Japanese society is more important and as such more honor is accorded to boys. However all births are met with rejoicing and relatives and friends come with gifts to a naming ceremony in honor of the birth. These gifts are always tied in red and white paper strings. Gifts of eggs and fish for good luck usually accompany the gift offering.

The name is given before the 7th day of life. A name of a living person is rarely given. Girls receive names like "Snow", "Flower", etc. or other names representing the beauties of nature. A manly name like "Tiger" may be given a boy. Often mere position in the family is denoted: "First One", "Tiger Second One", etc. are common. There is a name giving feast in which the father chooses the name but there is no special ceremony with the name giving. Relatives and close friends are invited to the naming ceremony.

Like the western christening is the Miya-Mairi. This is a ceremony which occurs on the 31st day of life for boys, the 33rd day for girls. It is believed that a girl requires more time to be prepared for this rite. This entails a visit of the child to the Shinto shrine. He is carried thither and is placed under the protection of the Shinto deity there. After this rite, the parents are obliged to entertain their friends and relatives at home. At this time too the presents given to the child at birth must be acknowledged. Everyone who has given anything to the child must receive a return gift. This may take the form of mochi, ground rice cakes. The gifts of as many as 100 people may have to be remembered. This entails a financial as well as a social burden.

Formerly November 15 marked the return of the children to these shrines. In former times the boy at the age of seven was relieved from the burden of having to have his head shaved while the girl could adopt the kimono and leave off the narrow child's sash. These ceremonies took place at the patrons' shrines. In Japan of today the ritual meanings of these acts has been lost with the result that the day alone is observed.

There is no celebration of birthdays in Japan. Some people remember birthdays by eating red bean rice (red beans cooked in rice). January 1 is the national birthday with the result that everyone adds a year to his age at this time.

2. Birth Ceremonies among the Japanese of California.

The elaborateness of custom in Japan is lost here. Japanese names with the same meanings as in Japan are given but the custom of giving an American name in addition is being adopted. Miya-Mairi cannot per se exist because of the scarcity of Shinto shrines. The Buddhist child in the United States thus has no ceremonies surrounding its advent into the world while the Christian child goes through the regular rites of baptism, etc. Some people have the custom of sending red bean rice to friends to announce births in the family. Some also eat this at birthdays. The concept of the New Year as being the birthday of all is not celebrated here. Age is computed in two ways: According to the American way where the actual

age is listed and according to the Japanese way where a year is added at birth.

3. Marriage Ceremonies in Japan.

A striking difference between the Japanese and American type of marriage is the fact that former is less personalized and more of a family affair. The Japanese customarily enlist the services of a friend as a go-between or middle-man. When a person in the family is of marriageable age a go-between's services are enlisted. Often several go-betweens are requested to perform the necessary services. The office of go-between in Japan is necessary and functional because of the lack of opportunity for young people of opposite sex to meet and mingle. The go-betweens search for and decide on a suitable mate. The young people then are introduced. This is called Mi-ai (mutual seeing). If either party objects the matter is considered closed although the parents may exercise their authority in any such matter. If both agree, an exchange of gifts (Yuino) takes place. This is the formal betrothal and is binding by custom if not by law. Most Japanese today give a ring for betrothal apparently in the urban centers. Westernized Japanese hold to the ring only and do not make any other exchanges. The bride is dressed in a white gown. This is a sign of mourning to show that she is dead to her family. The ceremony occurs at the groom's family's house to which the bride is carried together with her trousseau and her gifts. She is brought by the middle-men and their wives. The trousseau and gifts precede her. This latter is really a dowry. In case of separation or divorce a bride may take all she has brought to her husband with her. At the groom's house the bride changes her costume and wears a kimono with the groom's family crest on it. The groom wears the traditional Japanese wedding costume for men. Often today men may wear the cutaway or evening clothes of the west. Japanese ceremonial in wedding is lacking except for the San-San-Ku-Do which is distinguishing. This is the "Three three nine times". Both parties raise three wine cups of different sizes to their lips three times. This is symbolic of sharing. A dinner for the guests takes place after this at the groom's house and there is much merrymaking as compared to the stiff formality of the time preceding the San-San-Ku-Do.

On the third day after marriage the couple visit the bride's parents where another party is held. These dinners and parties are for the family and close friends. In two to three months the couple is expected to have a party or series of parties for their friends and acquaintances thus making a public announcement of their marriage. The only legal step involved is the announcement to the government agencies where the name of the bride is deleted from the ranks of her own family and included in that of her husband.

A man may marry into the family of his wife as an adopted son. This may occur when the family has only girls or otherwise no sons. The man must adopt the family name of the bride and honor her ancestral tablets. Usually the bride is wealthy and the man poor. A man loses his name and a certain amount of prestige by this. (?)

4. Marriage Ceremonies in California.

In this respect again the customs have changed. Before 1910 there were few women and virtually no marriages. Between 1908 and

1914 there were arrangements made to procure picture brides. After an exchange of pictures the women were sent to California. Many such women were disappointed and separated from their new husbands to return to Japan. The majority remained however. Wholesale ceremonies took place at Angel Island with the license, ring, etc. supplied by a Japanese minister. The girls, coming as they did, wore only the kimono. The men wore evening dress or simply western clothes. The license and the church wedding in the Christian manner were entirely new to the Japanese precept.

Today marriages occur nearly only among the Nisei. There are four types of weddings notable. The really only common feature of these is the license and the declaration of intent demanded by California and American law.

These types of weddings are:

1. The Christian wedding: This follows the established pattern of weddings in America. It entails the use of the license, the wedding ring, bridesmaids and groomsmen and usually a kiss. The kiss is considered most immoral in Japan and often shocks the Issei who see it. Such weddings usually take place in church with a minister in attendance.
2. The Buddhist ceremony differs somewhat. There is not, properly speaking, a Buddhist wedding ritual. Inasmuch as the signature of the officiating minister is required by law the Buddhists have adopted a ceremony vaguely reminiscent of the Christian. The priest gives each party a Buddhist rosary. There is no kiss. The go-between functions before and at the ceremony.
3. Issei, most Kibei, and some Nisei adhere to the Japanese style of wedding. The girl wears the white dress of mourning and the man western dress of some formal kind. San-San-Ku-Do is observed as in Japan. A license is used and of course a western ring is given. Usually a Buddhist or Shinto priest will sign the license. Some people marry in church in the western style and then to placate their elders go home for a feast and the San-San-Ku-Do wearing Japanese dress. The duplication of the rite is considered more binding.
4. Tenrikyo wedding: Tenrikyo is a Shinto cult. In this wedding a contract is made before the Shinto gods and is a sacred rite. No divorce is permissible after such a holy covenant is made. Four priests are in attendance. The bridal party wears Shinto costumes and sits on the floor of the temple and three rows, each behind the other. The head priest waves a stick to which are attached paper of a sacred nature (ofuta ?) over the heads of the crowd. The priest stands. This act is of a purifactory nature. A second priest prays before the shrine while another engages in reading a sermon or text which is especially prepared for the parties concerned. Two priests lead the couple to the altar where they make their vows. Then they are led back to their places and go through the San-San-Ku-Do ritual. Tenrikyo ceremonies are rare in American Japanese life because the cult is not very well represented in the United States.

The Japanese features remain in good part it is seen. The influences of the west come in in the ring, the license and the Christian church.

Usually the groom's family will give a dinner party after the wedding. This too is a Japanese survival. Love mating, showers, announcements, honeymoons, etc. are hardly known in Japan and show adjustment by the Nisei here.

5. Funeral Ceremonies in Japan.

In Japan the family and friends act as undertakers. (Note: no mention is made in this account of the buraku help at funerals, of kumi cooperation, or of the tendency to give gifts of money at time of death to the bereaved family.) Body is wrapped in a quilt and is placed with the head to the north. Some visitors come with gifts for the spirit of the deceased. On the day after death all the relatives below the rank of the deceased must come and help to wash the body. (No mention made of purificatory washing in salt water) New utensils must be used for this. The body is dressed in white and the dress is folded wrong: right to left instead of left to right. (Note: This is the only mention of the Japanese custom of doing things by opposites at time of death.) The body is put in a white bier with the chin resting on the knees. This is because the traditional Japanese coffin is round or square or generally keg shaped. This type of coffin is dying out in Japan. Some personal objects are put in while it is believed that the dead will have need of them. The coffin is nailed up, wrapped in white, and tied with a white cord. It is placed on a white stand quite high above the floor. Food and incense are given to it. In the urban areas of Japan today coffins are oblong in the western style and funeral parlors are coming into vogue. The sitting position for the dead is passing out. The priest comes to the house for prayers (Buddhist); friends and relatives wait around.

On funeral days the priest comes and prays ceremonially dressed in his robes of office. A procession to the graveyard takes place on foot. Men are hired to carry flowers and to engage in mourning. Priests and mourners, both sincere and hired, march to the grave carrying flowers and flags. At the grave each relative and friend burns incense, one at a time.

The bereaved family remains in seclusion for 49 days and may not appear in public until the 49 days have passed. On the 49th day the period of uncleanness is passed and those friends who gave gifts at the funeral must be remembered by other gifts. The dead are remembered and commemorated for certain days thereafter and every year for time. The memorial tablet is kept in the house and incense is burned at it.

6. Funeral Ceremonies among the Japanese in California.

Funeral parlors, Church services, cremation, etc. are observed in the western manner. The Christian service entails prayers, hymns, etc. in a true Christian church service.

The Buddhist concepts are more ritualized. Two priests read sutras in the temple. A little bell is struck during the intonation of the sutras. Incense is burned. The mourners, men first, according to family rank, come forward one by one and burn incense sticks. This is done at the coffin and the corpse is the recipient of bows. The priest gives a eulogy for the dead while at the end of the funeral a feast is held, this being the last time the people present will feast with the one who has died. Before the funeral the Buddhists keep a vigil over the dead in the Japanese manner. Autos are used to carry the mourners to the cemetery while no mourners are hired. Western black has taken the place of the Japanese white as a mourning color. After the funeral an incense urn is put in the family shrine near a picture of the deceased. One stick of incense is burned at a time to guide the dead person. It is believed that the incense forms a road for the departed spirit.

If more than one stick of incense is burned at one time the spirit will become confused and not know which road to take. Thus only one may be burned at a time. Water and rice are offered daily to the tablet and picture for the 49 day period. The Water and rice are offered for many years at special occasions. Sc. O-bon-dori. Flowers are placed at the home shrine as long as the family feels it necessary to do. Every good thing enjoyed by the family in way of material gain is shown or given in part to the tablet. This is a symbolic sharing with the dead.

As in Japan the Buddhists observe days after the death. The 7th, 49th, and 100th days after death are observed. A ceremony is held on the 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th years after death. After this all years ending in the number 3 or 7 are observed as commemorative feasts. Thus the 13th, 17th, 23rd etc. years are observed in commemorative feasts. The 49 day period is likewise observed and the Buddhists in America refrain from social activities at this time.

The members of the Tenrikyo cult have six priests at funerals who officiate at the temple where the funeral is held before the Shinto gods.

HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS CELEBRATED IN JAPAN AND CALIFORNIA

Certain holidays are celebrated in both countries, certain Japanese festivals being transplanted bodily. Some Japanese festivals have been deleted from the social pattern while others of a western nature have been added.

Those which are celebrated in both countries are:

1. New Years' Festival.

There is much preparation for this feast in Japan. Mochi (rice cakes and dumplings are made) is always present at this feast in Japan. Every person who has been of service to the given family in the past year is given a gift (O-sei-bo). All the merchants with whom the family deals are given gifts. All servants of the family are given some small present. It is a very costly holiday for a family and is usually saved for. All debts are paid at the end of the year so that the New Year may be begun with a clean slate. Certain seasonal foods are eaten (Like turkey at Thanksgiving) and special dishes are prepared. Outside of the house branches, ofuta, and paper symbols of good luck, flags, etc. are put so as to ward off ill-luck. All these are symbolic of good luck. At midnight of the last day the family remains together and eats noodles which signify the passing of one year into another without interruption. The family always remains together at the time of the New Year. New Years' means leisure and a general time of merrymaking. Gifts are exchanged. Three days of leisure follow. No one works. The holiday season lasts until January 15. The 7th and 15th of January are festal days. Other days during the season are for rest although some work is done, none is taken seriously.

In America few celebrated holidays at first because of the small Japanese population. As more people came in interest in the holiday was very prevalent until the 1920's. At this time the merchants would decorate their shops in the Japanese manner with ofuta, etc. The features preserved in California today are those of family dinners and family gift exchange. Japanese newspapers usually cease publication during the three day period. Special foods, mochi, are brought out and served at this time in the family dinners even today. The three day idle period could not be observed in California even though the Japanese would have done so. Today there is a conflict between the Nisei and the Issei in the matter of New Year celebration. The latter would have the whole family together on this day while the former would celebrate in the American manner with dances, etc. In America the celebration of New Years' Day in the American way is gaining hold of the Nisei and they tend to follow it than the Japanese way.

2. Empire Day.

This is the national flag day in Japan. It occurs on February 21. Since 1915, however, it has vanished from the American-Japanese folkway.

3. Doll Day (Girls' Day) and the Flag Festival (Boys' Day)

Doll or Girls' Day takes place on March 3. Girls in each family display their dolls. This is done on tables or boxes in the family home. Little girls dress up in kimono and obi and visit one another with the intent of seeing each others' dolls which are on display. There are Japanese sweetmeats, and sweet liquors for the girls. First these must be given to the dolls. Dolls are dressed in the traditional Japanese costumes.

May 5 is the Boys' Day (Flag Festival) On this day paper carp are hung on poles outside the houses in Japan. This is especially to announce the birth of a son, during the past year. Dolls are also exhibited at this festival but they are soldierly images, representations of the feudal samurai, etc. The boys engage in games of war on this day. There is some interest in both of these festivals in America. This is based on the sentimental feeling of the older Japanese for these festivals as a link with the homeland. A general consensus of the Issei is that these holidays instill in their children an appreciation of Japanese culture from the traditional and artistic point of view. The purpose of the observation of these holidays in America is that the children will note the Japanese traditions and history and profit thereby. The calm mien and composure of the dolls is supposed to be a precept for the children. Dolls of this kind are often valued heirlooms and are connected in the minds of the Japanese with ancient feudal history and the glories of Japan.

4. Festival of the Dead (Bon-Ōdori)

This occurs in July from the 12th to the 16th. It is believed that the dead return to their families once a year. Foods are placed at the home shrines and flowers at the tablets of the ancestors. At the end of this festival lighted candles on lotus leaves are sailed into bodies of water. This when it dies out marks the return of the spirit of the dead to the spirit world. It is called the O-Bon. (Bon O-Dori) In Japan this period is a national holiday. Originally religious, this festival is now both religious and social. In America it is observed chiefly by the Buddhists. Graves are cleaned and decorated and it acts as a kind of Memorial Day. Church services are held by both Buddhists and Christians. The Buddhists preserve still the food offerings to the dead. Bon dances are held in most Japanese communities. As social functions these are increasing in popularity. Such dances are held in the streets in Japanese quarters. Such streets are roped off and most of the people engage in the traditional Bon dance.

5. Moon Gazing; (15th of August and 15th of September)

There are full moons at this time in Japan. These are the largest moons of the year. The Japanese in Japan customarily take walks in the moonlight and compose songs and poems about the moon. After 1910 this was pretty well abandoned in America. Some people still observe it however, and take walks in the full moonlight and compose tankas and haikus. Miss Ikeda estimates that about one tenth of the Japanese in California do this now.

6. Chrysanthemum Festival (September in Japan)

This in Japan is a day of arranging and exhibiting the chrysanthemum blossoms. These flowers are said to confer longevity. In Japan much ado is made about this and the emperor's gardens are notable.

7. Tencho-setsu (Emperor's Birthday)

At present this is May 30 for the Showa regime. In Japan it is a national patriotic holiday with accompanying patriotic demonstrations. It is a time for rejoicing and general festivities including picnics and outings of all sorts. In the Japanese communities in America it was a great solidifying factor. There were formerly large celebrations in Japanese communities on this occasion. A hall was hired and meetings held before the pictures of the imperial family. American and Japanese flags were displayed.

At this time all the Japanese of the community gathered together irregardless of community differences in ken, religion, or the like to observe the Tencho-setsu. This was continually observed until 1920. However, since then, although the ceremonial obeisance to the emperor has been retained to this day, not every member of the community engages in this festival. The attendance has fallen off and smaller halls have been used for this celebration. More frequently, this festival is observed in private. One reason for this breakdown is that since the death of the Meiji the close bond has been broken. Most of the immigrants to America came at the time of the Meiji rule with the result that they feel a close bond with that administration. With the death of Meiji the feeling of a close bond has been somewhat lost. Thus the new emperors are strangers to most of the people from Japan. A common celebration of the Emperor's birthday today is a visit to the consulate and a moment of silent prayer with bowed head before the portraits of the emperor and empress.

SPECIFIC RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS: (Which sometimes take place in
Buddhist: America.)

1. December 8. Day of Shaka's enlightenment.

(Shaka may be said to correspond to Christ in Christianity.)

2. February 15. Shaka's Death

Oddly enough, the above two festivals may be said to be celebrated more among the Buddhists of America than those of Japan. No reason for this is disclosed.

3. January 9 to 16. Memorial services for Shinran, founder of the Buddhist sect of that name.

4. Spring and Autumnal equinoxes. At this time a seven day festival is held for the specific purpose of worshipping Buddha.

5. April 8. This is a most important Buddhist festival. It is Shaka's birthdate. The latter festival is marked by services in the temple. The Buddhists in America convene at the shrine in their neighborhood and anoint the Buddha with licorice wine and water. It is conceived that they thus purify themselves and do a service to the Buddha image. In this way they too, become Buddha-like.

Tenrikyo:

1. January 26. This is the celebration at the death-day of the foundress of the sect.

2. October 26. Celebration of the founding of the sect.

The members of the Tenrikyo sect are most strict. They are ardent pacifists but are most loyal to the emperor of Japan. For the sake of peace and agreement however, the members of the Tenrikyo sect attempt to adopt the ways and customs of the countries in which they live. They tend to leave out most of the normal Japanese festivals and do observe all the American holidays. The sect is not well represented in northern California. At the time of this writing (c. 1936) there were 50-60 in San Francisco, 15-20 in the East Bay, although there were several hundred in Los Angeles. Christmas is an important festival for them in this country and they follow the American way of exchanging gifts. On one of two points they are most tenacious. In the matter of attendance to the Tenrikyo shrines, of making covenants with the Shinto deities, and in the matter of weddings, they are purely Japanese and follow the patterns of the sect in Japan.

The following is a list of those festivals which are confined solely to Japan or to the Japanese in California:

Japan only:

1. February 4 - Certain ceremonies for well-being and luck.
2. March 6 - Empress' (Showa) birthday.
3. March 21 - Spring Equinox
4. April 3 - Death of Jimmu Tenno, legendary emperor of Japan and supposed founder of the Japanese imperial line.
(c. 7th cent. B.C.)
5. May 27 - Japanese Navy Day
6. July 7 - Festival of the Weavers.
7. August 1 - Horse festival for the good luck of boys.
8. August or September (Dates vary) Religious festivals for the rulers of Japan, also for certain national groups.
9. September 24 - Day for the worship of the Imperial ancestors.
10. October 17 - Offering of the first fruits to the Shinto deities.
11. November 23 - Offering by the Emperor of the first fruits to his ancestral tablets.
12. Numerous minor festivals.

California only:

The following holidays, taken over from American culture, are observed by the Japanese here:

The Christian festivals of Easter and Christmas.

(Nearly all the Japanese here observe the Christmas spirit and many exchange gifts, Xmas cards, etc.)

Also:

Mother's Day

Father's Day

Thanksgiving

The children observe: Hallowe'en, April Fools' Day, Valentines' Day July 4.

A general tendency seems to be that the Japanese holidays and festivals are dying out and are being superseded by those of America. This is in accord with the tendencies of the Nisei generation.

PART II - FOLK-TALES

There are five principal folk-tales which are familiar to the Japanese whether they reside here or in Japan. These are:

1. Urashima Taro (The Japanese Rip Van Winkle)
2. Momotaro (The Little Peach Boy)
3. Saru-to Kani (The Battle of the Ape and the Crab)
4. Hana-saka Jijii (The Old Man who made the Flowers Bloom)
5. Shita-kiri Suzume (The Tongue-Cut Sparrow)

See A. B. Mitford (Tales of Old Japan)

These are known by nearly every child and are taught in the Japanese Language Schools here. The details of the tales seem to vary with province and prefecture but the essence remains the same innearly every case. There are a number of less well known tales which are known here and have been brought from Japan. These, however, are known practically only to the Issei. A new folk-lore is growing up in this country because of the contacts by the Nisei with the folk-lore of other countries as taught in the elementary schools, the Sunday-Schools, etc.

PART III - Life in Japan as remembered in California (Case Histories)

In the course of her study Miss Ikeda contacted many Japanese of her acquaintance and questioned them as to their memories of their lives in Japan before their emigration to America. A definite attempt was made to obtain a cross-section of Japanese society, as well as attempts to delimit various representative cases from the ken of Japan. The informants were questioned as to their earlier memories of Japanese life, their education, marriage, and their emigration to America. In themselves, the cases are extremely interesting but they unfortunately do not reflect the ensuing acculturation of the individual after his arrival in America. A number of customs were drawn from these case histories, the questioned survival of which in America may well bear some investigation. These include:

A taboo on the eating of all meat except fish and fowl.

Bathing habits: Most people own a family tub which is round and wooden. These are mounted on stilts and have a metal bottom so that a fire may be built under neath. Steps lead up to the tub, the sides of which reach shoulder height. (Of the average Japanese) A bench goes around the tub on the inside and a platform is placed above the metal bottom so that the feet may not be scorched. In bathing, a person enters the tub, the water in which has been heated to almost a boiling point, and soaks a moment. He then steps out and ~~XXXX~~ lathers himself with soap or ashes, and rinsing the soap off he steps back into the tub to soak. Men precede the women in bathing. Statements as to education may be found in any one of the publication relative to Japanese education issued by the Japanese Bureau of Education in the early 1900's.

Clothing, art, family and home life, religious observances are well described for the various classes of people in Japan.

Marriage ceremonies are described. Much attention has been called to the matter of "picture brides" which affected so many of the immigrants to America. A more interesting aspect to be introduced here would be the matter of acculturation of these Issei in America.