



Hyotan

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Setsubun Japanese Traditional Event in Coming Spring

Every year *Setsubun* is celebrated all over Japan on February 3rd. Have you heard the expression "Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!" (Out with the devil! In with good luck!) emanating from the windows of your neighbors' houses or have you seen celebrities like Sumo wrestling champions or movie stars throwing beans to those visiting shrines or temples? But, how did this all start?



Setsubun literally means the division of the seasons and used to take place between each of the four seasons. However, the spring one, which heralded the beginning of new life, was considered to be the start of the new year. *Setsubun*, which was the day before *Risshun* (the first day of spring) took on the role of commemorating the passing of the old year and the seeing of the new year (*Toshi Koshi*).

In the old days, people believed that evil or disaster might sneak into the house at such a turn of the seasons. Some people stayed inside quietly waiting for the evil to pass, while others decorated their houses with sardine heads and holly leaves as a charm to ward off evil. When there was a plague raging around the country in 706, an event took place in the Imperial Palace in which people dressed up as devils and were chased out of the four gates of the palace. This is believed to have been the beginning of the event known as "Mamemaki" (bean throwing). Later, around the 12th and 13th centuries, this became established as a traditional ritual in shrines and temples, and by the 17th century, it was being carried out by

ordinary people in their homes. However, the method of celebration changes according to the household or the region. As some shrines had "Devils" as guardians, the words of the "mamemaki" had to change to "Fuku wa uchi! Kami wa uchi!" (In with good luck, in with God!).

After throwing the beans, family members would then pick them up. Even now, it is believed that eating the same number of beans as your age brings good fortune for the coming year. In Kansai (Western Japan), there is the custom of eating "Ehomaki" (Rolled sushi), whilst facing the gate through which the god of the New Year is felt to enter, and praying for one's dreams to come true.

Recently, it is not so common for ordinary homes to celebrate *Setsubun*, especially in built up city areas. However, *Setsubun* has become a popular event at shrines and temples.

We, Hyotan editors, visited Suwa Shrine built 750 years ago. There were quite a number of local community small children with their mothers and grandparents keeping warm around a bonfire of big logs, while waiting for the Mamemaki to start. Around 3pm, 12 men clad in the "Kamishimo" (warrior's ceremonial dress) appeared on the platform, shouted "Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!", and threw beans, snacks and rice crackers in small bags at the crowd assembled there. There was a second bean throwing at 6pm so that more people could take part in the event.



Activities of Japan-China Friendship Association Hitachi

The Japan-China Friendship Association is an organization in which local friendship associations are joined. The chairperson of this organization is Dr. Ikuo Hirayama, former president of Tokyo National University of Fine Arts & Music. The Japan-China Friendship Association Hitachi, one of the branches in Ibaraki, is chaired by Mr. Hideo Mori.

The Japan-China Friendship Association was founded in 1950. In Ibaraki (including Hitachi), three existing groups were unified and they started the association about 10 years ago. Hitachi branch is the most active in Ibaraki Prefecture.

The aims of the group are to boost mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and China in addition to contributing to the peace and development of Japan, Asia and the world. This is achieved by the exchanges between nations in the field of culture, art, education, technology and sports.

There are about 150 fee paying members in the Hitachi branch who give active support to the association. The most important activity is supporting students from China. Many of them attend education institutions such as the Faculty of Engineering in Ibaraki University, Ibaraki Christian University and language schools such as the Ibaraki International Language Institute. There are almost 100 students from China at these schools. In addition to students, there are also 'on-the-job trainees' from China living in Hitachi. Several types of support are offered including financial support, invitations to meet with Japanese, and opportunities to tour Japan etc.

In China, people still celebrate the Lunar New Year (Chinese New Year or *Chunjie*) which follows the Chinese lunar calendar. It fell on January 29th this year. They say the celebration is greater than the Japanese one. Even in Japan, the media



covers *Chunjie* celebration from Yokohama's and Kobe's Chinatown. The Hitachi branch of the Japan-China Friendship Association also held a Chinese Lunar New Year Party on the 29th at the Hitachi citizens' hall (*Hitachi Shimin Kaikan*). About 150 Japanese people including the associate members and over 50 Chinese people, mostly students, participated in this event. The conference room was decorated with Chinese embroidered tapestries, auspicious Chinese character ornaments and beautiful Chinese lanterns. Food imported from China was served in buffet style. The guests enjoyed it very much. The *Jiaozi* (boiled dumplings) and buns were especially popular. The party was exciting. Chinese conjuring tricks and *Enka* (Japanese ballads) sung in Chinese were performed by way of entertainment. Bingo game was also played and the winners got various souvenirs. During the party, young foreign students took on the role of masters of ceremony (MC) and created a pleasant atmosphere.



Ajisai Volleyball Club

Sports activities as well as cultural ones are flourishing in Hitachi. Volleyball is one of the most popular sports and there are 16 volleyball clubs in Hitachi.

The "Ajisai Volleyball Club" is based on the Hidaka area in Northern Hitachi. It is one of

so-called "Mama-san" volleyball clubs which are mainly played by housewives.

The Ajisai Club was started in June 1979 by the original members of Ajisai's predecessor, "Hidaka YMV" (which had dissolved several years before) and by some new members. It consists of 17



members and is run through its membership fees. The Ajisai Club meets every Friday from 6.30 ~ 8.45

pm. The two other volleyball clubs in the Hidaka area practice at night and in the day.

A part of their activities includes staging a tournament called the "Ajisai Club Night Game Cup", in which four teams, one from Hidaka, one from Tajiri, one from Miyata, and one from Toyoura, compete for a cup. They also take part in games hosted by the Hitachi Athletic Association and the Ibaraki Women's Association. Their goal for both these competitions is to advance to the second round.

The members that we spoke to said that the

good thing about playing volleyball is stress release and mutual cooperation. The club members hope that the numbers of those wanting to play volleyball will increase. They would also welcome new members from foreign countries with open arms. The captain, Mrs. Ushioda, commented warmly "I'm always happy to hear of ex-members doing well in other fields, even if it is not volleyball".

We hope that "Mama-san" volleyball teams will increase in number and that volleyball will become more popular.



Japanese Culture and Social Customs Part 12

Good Luck Symbols The Gourd (Hyotan)

We would like to introduce you to the "Hyotan" (which is also the title of this bulletin) as a symbol of good luck. The Hyotan is a plant of the gourd



family and bears fruit. Its fruit has a very hard shell and usually narrow in the middle. There is a Japanese saying "Hyotan kara koma ga deru". "Koma" means a horse, but of course a horse can't spring out of a gourd. The

meaning is that things can happen in unexpected places. The "Hyotan" bulletin which started 17 years ago took its name from this saying, because it was hoped that our readers would get useful information from it.

The "Hyotan" or gourd is one of the most ancient garden plants and originates from Africa. Its fruit was used as a food and for tools and drinking receptacles. Part of the summer scenery in

Japan was the making of shelves for the growing of gourds, the leaves of which give much welcome refreshing shade. After removing the seeds and drying them, gourds were used as flasks or containers for water, alcohol, medicine and seeds. They were especially used as seed containers over the years, and it was often said that seeds kept in such containers always bloomed successfully. They thus signified happiness or success to people. Their humorous shapes have also always been thought of with affection. There are thus several sayings featuring the word "hyotan". A set of three gourds are a good luck symbol as the sound "san-byoshi sorou" in Japanese. It means a great person all-round. Also a set of six gourds is even luckier, because "mu-byou" means no sickness! Gourds also remind us of Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1537-1598), one of the most well-known historical samurai heroes. Hideoshi's battle ensign was a gourd motif. He would add further gourd motifs to his ensign every time he won a battle. After that, this ensign became a famous symbol of victory, the "Sennarihyoutan" which means one thousand gourds growing on a tree.

>>>> INFORMATION March 2006 >>>>

EVENTS in HITACHI

Date	Event & Main Attractions	Place	Admission	Inquiry
1 st (Wed)~5 th (Sun) 9:30~18:00	Photo Exhibition Hobu Group	Juo Library	Free	Juo Library Tel 20-2345
11 th (Sat) 14:00~15:45	Special Show of Well-known Films: "Misuzu" (Poet)	Shichokaku Center	Free	Shichokaku Center Tel 35-1215
11 th (Sat) 13:00~15:00	Equals Seminar with Mini Concert	Josei Center	Free	"Equals" office Tel 21-8927
12 th (Sun) 9:00~14:00	Wanpaku-Otenba Fureai Festival "Jump out to the Universe"	Shimin Undo Koen (Ikenokawa)	¥300	Mr. Wada Tel 24-3652
12 th (Sun) 13:00~	Enjoy Dance Meeting (Rumba, Waltz, Tango, etc.)	Namekawa Gym.	¥500	Mr. Sato Tel 39-3430
18 th (Sat) 9:00~12:00	Planting Acorn trees Festival	Sukegawa Shiminnno Mori	Free	Sukegawayama Hozen Club Tel 37-1884
24 th (Fri) 16:30~20:00	Recital of Noh Songs with Tea and Snack	Kyodo Hakubutsukan	¥1000*1 ¥1500*2	Kyodo Hakubutsukan Tel 23-3231
25 th (Sat)~26 th (Sun) 9:00~	Eastern Japan Table Tennis Tournament	Chuo Taiikukan	*3	Hitachi Takkyu Kyokai Tel 23-2212
26 th (Sun) 13:30~	Aiai Concert by Hitachi Boys & Girls chorus	Hitachi Shimin Kaikan	Free	Chorus office Tel 22-6481
26 th (Sun) 17:30~	Beatles Sound, The Parrots Concert	Yuyu Juo J Hall	¥3000	Yuyu Juo J Hall Tel 39-7111

*1 adults *2 adult and one child *3 ¥1000 singles ¥1500 doubles ¥500 high school student and younger

Japanese Language Classes

NAME	LOCATION	DATE & TIME	Fee	Contact
Sakura	Shichokaku Center etc.	Saturday 10:00-11:30	¥1,800/semester	Ms. Yukiko Katsuki Tel (0294) 35-3475
	Kyoiku Plaza	Thursday 10:00-11:30	¥1,800/semester	
Sakura (Kanji)		Friday 10:00-11:30	¥1,800/semester	
Anzu	Shichokaku Center	Tuesday 19:00-20:45	¥300/month	Mr. Shichizoh Kohsaka Tel/Fax (0294) 35-3989 Kohsaka73@ybb.ne.jp Ms. Keiko Kanaoka Tel/Fax (0294)42-8176
	Kyoiku Plaza	Friday 14:00-16:00		

Movies in March

Theater	Day	Titles (Original Titles)
Aigakan 1&2 Tel:23-2323	-4	Otokotachi no Yamato[J]
	-	Night of the Sky [E]
	4-	Doraemon[J]
	4-	One Piece[J]

J: Japanese E: English

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<http://www.city.hitachi.ibaraki.jp/upload/english/index.htm>

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Thank you for reading the Hyotan. Inquiries and comments can be sent either by letter, fax or E-mail. We look forward to hearing from you.

Emergency Doctors on Duty

Hitachi uses a system called "TOBAN-I". The doctors in the city take turns standing by for emergency patients from 9:00 to 16:00 on Sundays and national holidays...

Surgeons

Feb.	Hospital Name	Address	Tel
5	Imura Geka	Omika-cho	52-2191
12	Owada Geka	Okubo-cho	33-2367
19	Ootashiro Clinic	Heiwa-cho	22-8800
21	Kawasaki Ichou Koumon HP.	Sakuragawa-cho	36-1800
26	Koizumi Ichou, Geka	Wakaba-cho	22-5960

Physicians, Pediatricians and Dentists seven days a week: Hitachi Medical Center (5-1-1 Higashitaga-cho)