

# CHILDREN'S DAYS IN JAPAN

BY  
TAMOTSU IWADŌ, M. A.

*Illustrated by*  
*Takewo Takei*



BOARD OF TOURIST INDUSTRY  
JAPANESE GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS

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# CHILDREN'S DAYS IN JAPAN

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

It is a common desire among tourists to learn something of the culture of the countries they visit as well as to see their beautiful scenery. To see is naturally easier than to learn, but flying visits merely for sightseeing hardly furnish the time or opportunity for more than a casual glimpse of the culture of any foreign people. This is specially true of Japan.

The Board of Tourist Industry recognizes the difficulty of attaining this high purpose, viz., to provide foreign tourists with accurate information regarding the various phases of Japan's characteristic culture. It is endeavouring therefore to meet this obligation, as far as possible, by publishing this series of brochures.

The present series will, when completed, consist of more than a hundred volumes, each dealing with a different subject, but all co-ordinated. By reading therefore the entire series the foreign student of Japan may gain an adequate knowledge of the unique culture that has developed in this country through the ages.

For those who wish to follow up these studies with a closer investigation, bibliographies are appended, which we trust may be found reliable and authoritative guides in their study.

Board of Tourist Industry,  
Japanese Government Railways

Explanation of Cover Design : The cover design shows the carp streamers flown on the Boys' Festival, May 5. See p. 44.

At the head of each chapter there is a picture of one of the twelve cards which represent in Japan the months of the year. The Japanese children play with these cards at New Year. They are called *Hana Karuta* or "flower-cards." The botanical specimen shown on each card is the symbol of its respective month. The following is the complete list of the months and their botanical symbols.

Months	Botanical Symbols
January	Pine tree
February	Plum blossoms
March	Cherry blossoms
April	Wisteria
May	Iris
June	Peony
July	Bush clover
August	Pampas grass
September	Chrysanthemum
October	Maple leaves
November	Willow tree
December	Paulownia



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THIS BROCHURE,  
though conceived and written to give information to  
people who are strangers to our ways and thoughts,  
is dedicated  
to  
the Mothers of Japan,  
who, through their self-sacrificing love, and  
by their thoughtful but never obtrusive ways,  
constitute the heart and soul of  
Japanese Childhood.

## INTRODUCTION

"The children sing in far Japan."

—*R. L. Stevenson*



In an old lullaby still often sung in Japan, Lady Moon is asked to bring back from her meditated journey a number of presents consisting, among other things, of a little drum, a gong and a bamboo flute. These instruments have always furnished music on festive occasions, and as such must once have figured prominently in the nursery. But though they are still to be seen wherever a festival is held, they are nowadays seldom to be met with in a nursery or a toyshop.

It is within living memory, too, that any nursery or toy-box was considered incomplete without such things as a piece of bamboo shaped like a samurai's sword and covered with silver-paper, a cardboard wig decorated with a topknot true to the classic style of the samurai, a paper helmet like those seen on warriors in old colour prints, and a suit of armour made of cardboard or other material with realistic trimmings. The



nurseries of the country in those days bristled, indeed, with deadly arms.

Such toys were first supplanted by articles of modern military gear; next by steam trains, which had become a novelty known as "land steamers." Baldwin locomotives then became all the rage. Today, however, no toy-box or shop is thinkable without aeroplanes or streamlined motor-cars. When a little military figure emerges from the nursery today, he is more often than not dressed like a tin-hatted Tommy on the Somme, or his goose-stepping khaki-clad brother out in Manchoukuo.

The children themselves have been subject to no less change. It was not many years ago that children, except where European influence had early begun to be felt, used to go to school clothed in a fashion which was, to say the least, a strange combination of foreign and native ideas. They wore peak caps that any ship's skipper might be proud of, and *hakama*, or the long pleated skirts, indispensable at all Japanese ceremonies. These children waddled along on high wooden clogs or trudged by with flat straw sandals known as *sōri*. But today all school children, boys and girls alike, wear uniforms of European style. Moreover, the European influence is felt not only at school but in the home as well.

Yet, in spite of all these changes, Japanese children live in their homes today under conditions little different in their essentials from those which prevailed, say three or four generations ago. To be sure, houses

are now lighted with electricity. Children therefore have no longer to sit in the uncertain light cast by a few rush wicks burning in oil, as their ancestors did in the days when men regaled themselves on the wisdom of ancient Chinese philosophers. Today there is instead the radio to give cheer to all family hearths.



Nevertheless, the spirit of conservatism is manifestly evident. Children, like their seniors, sleep in beds spread on the floor. Crying babes are lulled to sleep on the backs of their mothers or older sisters, just as they have been for ages untold. Children sit at table and eat meals of which boiled rice is the *pièce de résistance*. Then, there are few families without a sacred shelf before which fathers and mothers bow their heads each morning and offer prayer, and tell their children to do the same. The majority of Japanese homes treasure a family shrine in which the spirit of each ancestor is worshipped, and before which the children are taught to venerate the departed souls.

It is before these symbols of their ancestors that children are formally named on the seventh day after birth. And they are firmly linked to the shrine of the local deity, *Ujigami*, the guardian and protector of the people of the district. Therefore, *Miyamairi* (shrine visit), the first real festival in a baby's life, has a deep religious significance. Babies are carried in fine clothes to the tutelary shrine to receive the blessing of the family's God. But the day for this fête differs according to the sex of the baby. For a boy it is usually



held on his thirty-second day ; for a girl, on her thirty-third day.

Concerning the attitude of Japanese parents toward their children, it may not be out of place to quote here a passage from the account of Japanese life given by Laurence Oliphant, who accompanied Lord Elgin's Mission to Japan in 1858 :—

“ Upon no occasion, though children were numerous, did I ever see a child struck or otherwise maltreated. Thunberg, who passed many years in Japan, mentions the same fact—Kaempfer, Charlevoix, and Titsingh agree in saying that the love, obedience, and reverence manifested by children towards their parents is unbounded ; while the confidence placed by parents in their children is represented to be without limit. Parents select their children to be arbitrators in their disputes with others, and submit implicitly to their decisions ; it is also a constant practice for parents to resign their state and property to a son when he shall have attained a suitable age, remaining for the rest of life dependent on him for support ; and abuse of this trust is said to be unknown.”

At the Restoration of 1868, a strong government assumed office, and a new order of things came with it. In 1872 a unified educational policy was launched and efforts were continued until it was fully organized on a national basis. This was in 1880, when education became compulsory throughout the Empire. The welfare of children, as might be expected, became the subject of expert study in early days. The growing

printing presses of the country began to turn out what had in the past been preserved by word of mouth. A host of men and women began to think it worth while to write for little children. Where there had been no music but that which might be coaxed out of a kettle-drum, a bronze gong and a bamboo flute, children



were soon introduced to musical instruments of novel sorts. Organs first, then pianos, began to furnish melodies at all state schools. Then there came the cinema, followed by the radio and talkies. Special programmes consisting of news, plays, stories, lectures and music are now being regularly offered for the benefit of little people. Children are daily taught, in ways that the children of olden times could never have imagined, that

“The world is so full of a number of things,  
I’m sure we should all be as happy as kings.”

Some years ago, following the example of Europe and America, Japan began to set aside days and weeks for public and social purposes of one sort or another. Motor drivers began to be told not to smash up their cars during a certain week and tipplers to keep dry on certain days of the year. Similarly, some days have been set aside for the benefit of children, and it may be apropos here to take brief notice of these special occasions.

**Children’s Protection Day.** The first day to be dedicated to children was “Children’s Protection Day,” which falls on 17th April. The slogans played up on this day are: “Good children grow up in sunny



homes," and "Guard well the little lives budding in your families !"

In 1922 the Government enacted a law by which justice was tempered for youthful delinquents. They were no longer to be sent from court to prison or to houses of correction ; they were to be placed in the care of schoolmasters and mistresses to be carefully guided back to the right path.

In view of the spirit of this legal enactment, which was promulgated on 17th April, 1922, the same day of the following year was observed as a "Children's Protection Day" under the auspices of an organization called "Hoseikai," and it has ever since been observed annually so that it is now a national institution. The purpose is to diffuse and emphasize the thought of extending kind, friendly considerations to youthful delinquents who would otherwise be denied a chance in life.

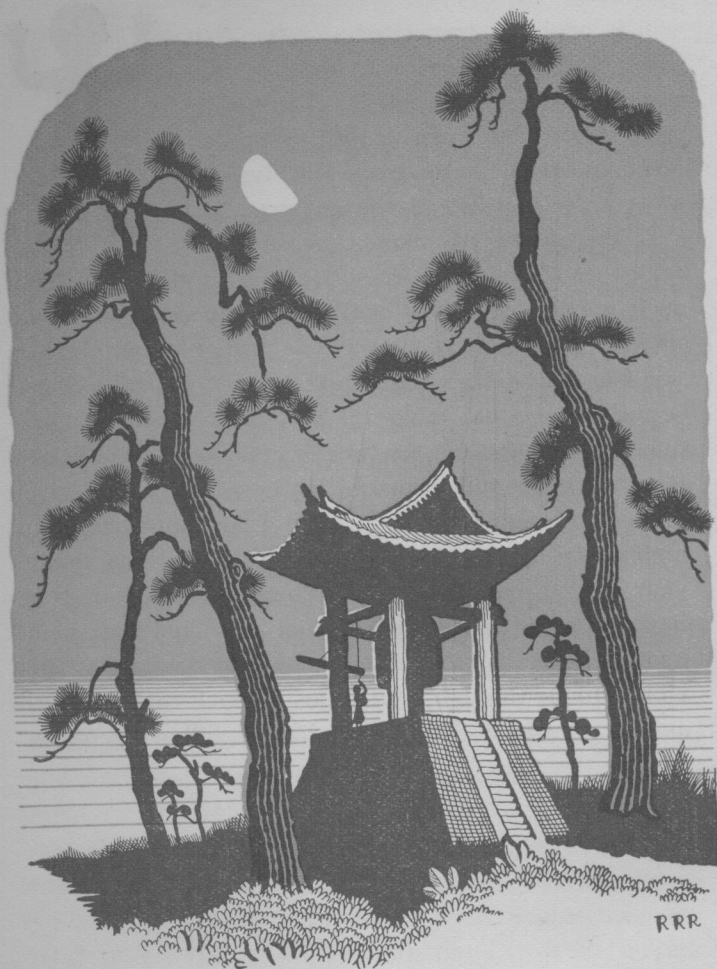
**Infants' Welfare Week.** This is a week devoted annually to the care of children of all ages. Stimulated, no doubt, by a similar movement started in the United States five years before, the Japan Kindergarten Association inaugurated in 1921 "The Infants' Welfare Day" in Tokyo, and the city of Osaka followed suit. This movement was co-ordinated on a national basis in May, 1927, under the auspices of the Central Social Welfare Association, with the support of the Departments of Education and Home Affairs. At the second convention held in Tokyo for two days in November, 1930, it was decided to extend "The Infants' Welfare Day," setting aside for the purpose one whole week from



5th May each year, with the slogan which may be translated: "See that your children are strong in body, wholesome in mind and lovable!" During the week endeavours are made to spread some knowledge of medicine and hygiene among the mothers of the country.



The Japanese calendar is thus already well burdened with special days and weeks. That such special occasions will further increase it is not difficult to imagine. It is no less probable that children will have more days marked off for their benefit. But it seems certain that whatever sort of day may be introduced or thought out for their benefit, there will be few ideas so sweet and beautiful as those which have given birth to the time-old festivals and other happy days and nights that continue to bring joy to all children as each year goes through its cycle. These customs and events have been put to the test of time, and have been found good. There can be little doubt, therefore, that they will continue through future ages in much the same form as that in which they appear in the following pages.



“Let the Old Year out, and the New Year in”——  
boom the 108 strokes of the temple bell