

A Historical Walk Around Kyoto



Okayu-san

Since “*Wasyoku*” was added to Intangible Cultural heritage in 2013, Japanese food culture has attracted more and more attention. One of the historical foods is “*Okayu*”.

“*Okayu*” is like a Japanese porridge, made by simmering rice until it becomes soft in much water. Japanese people often eat it when we catch a cold. Because it is very easy of digestion. There are many ritual services surrounding “*Okayu*” in Kyoto in January.

Various Shinto rituals related to “*Okayu*”

January 7 of the New Year, Shinto priests offer the 7 kinds of herbs to the god and treat people with the “*Nanakusagayu*” using those 7 herbs and its spring water “*Gokosui*” in Gokounomiya Shrine in Fushimi-ku in Kyoto (a photo attached). “*Nanakusagayu*” is the *Okayu* with 7 herbs (*Seri*, *Nazuna*, *Gogyo*, *Hakobera*, *Hotokenoza*, *Suzuna*, *Suzushiro*; different herbs used depending on areas) which sprout around New Year’s Day ahead of the other plants. Taking new vital energy in New Year and making a wish for perfect health during the year. And *Okayu* festival is held and *Azukigayu* is served for people in Shimogamo Shrine in Sakyo-ku on January 15 (little New Year; *Kosyougatsu*). This is offering “*Azuki-gayu* (*Okayu* with red beans)” and “*Daizu-gayu* (*Okayu* with soy beans)” to the god and praying for huge harvest and the peace of the nation in this festival. There are some other ritual servings of *Okayu* related to *Nanakusa* (7 herbs) in Jonangu Shrine and Kasuga Shrine and those concerning *Azuki-gayu* in Myoshinji Temple and Torinin Temple.

“-san” is often used with affection

By the way, Japanese people often express their affections with “San” followed after names. Some time we do so to the food and nature as well. For example, the *Okayu* and the Moon (*Tsuki*) is affectionately called *Okayu-san*, *Otsuki-san*, respectively.

How about to eat “*Okayu-san*” and feel the Japanese New Year culture with a pray for the health of the year ?