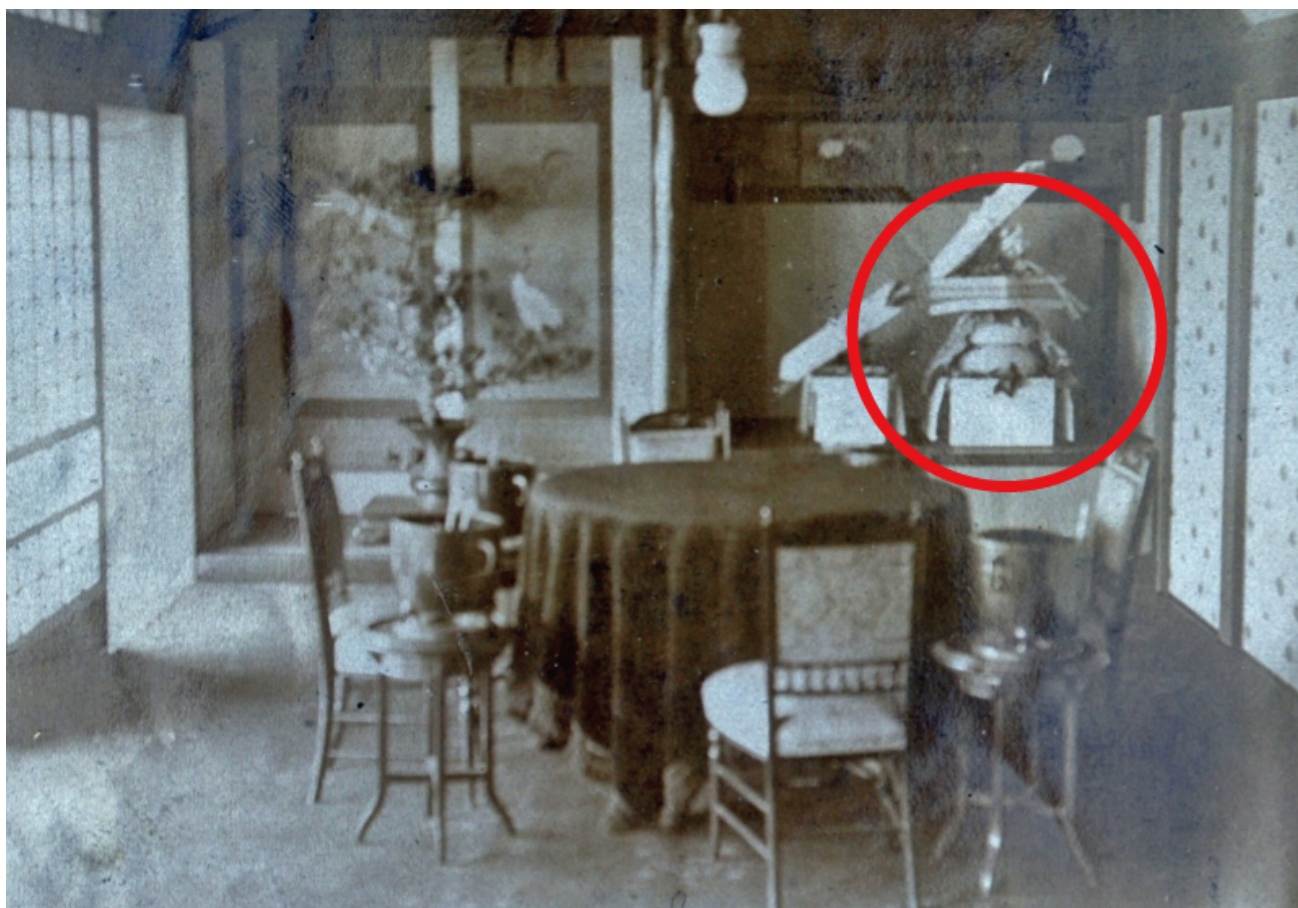


Kagami-mochi tells — From the records of a count's family

Fumi Ashina
Modern Japanese Political Documents Division
Reader Services and Collections Department

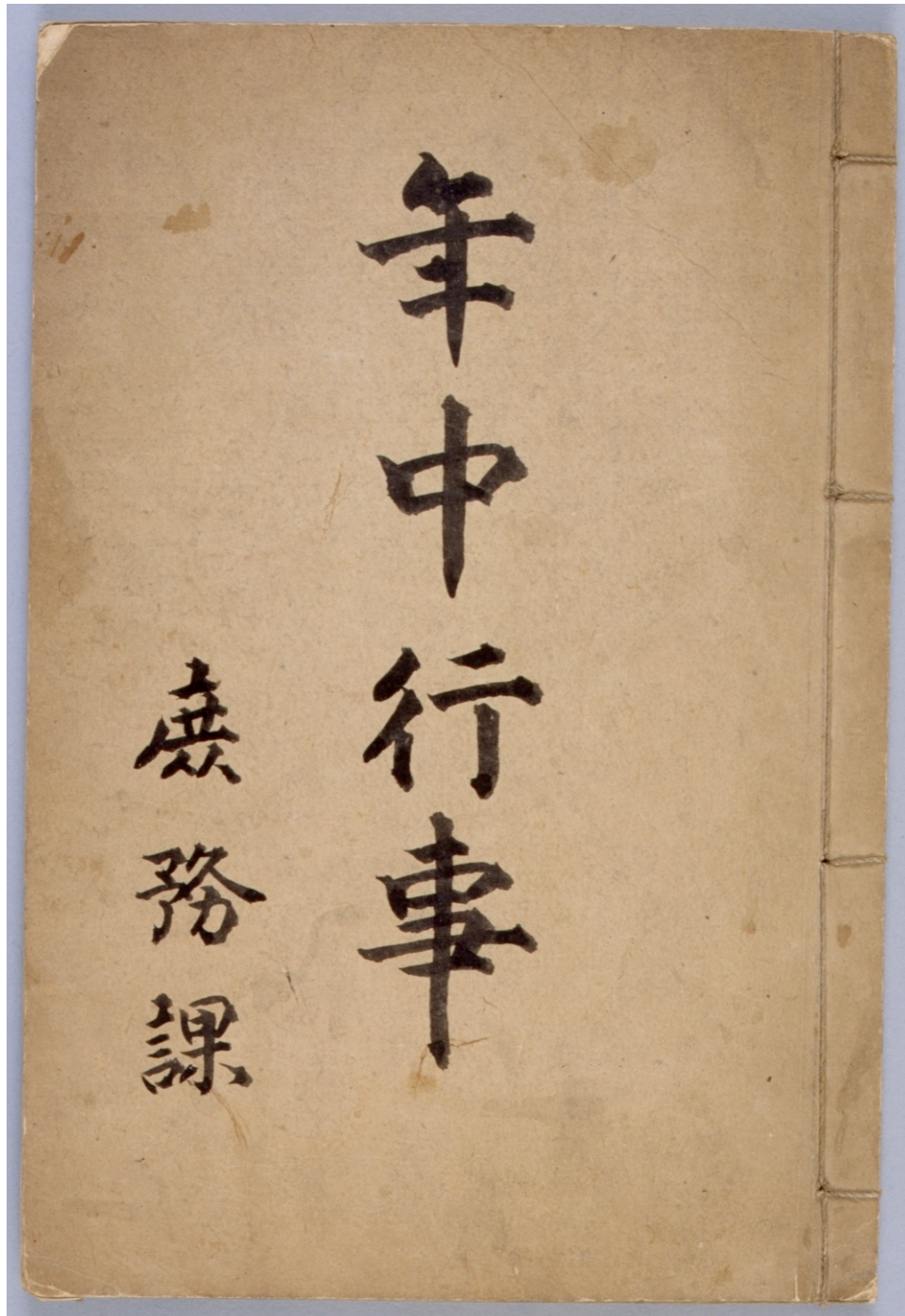
*This article is based on the article in Japanese
in NDL Monthly Bulletin No. 634 (January 2014).*

In Japan, people have long believed that a god called *Toshi-gami* brings good luck in the New Year. *Kagami-mochi* (stacks of two or three rice cakes shaped like flat round mirrors) are used as offerings for *Toshi-gami*, then cut and eaten on January 11, *Kagami-biraki* day (lit. Mirror opening day).



<<Image 1: *Kiku-no-ma* (Chrysanthemum Room) in the house of the Arima family>>

The picture above (Photo 1) is a room in the family house of Count Arima, former lord of the Kurume clan (present Kurume city in Fukuoka prefecture in the Kyushu region), during the New Year's holiday: a set of decorated *kagami-mochi* was placed in the alcove behind the table set. It is hard to date the photo but it is estimated to be in the middle of the 1920's. It is included in the manual called "*Nenju gyoji*" (Photo 2) handed down among servants working for the Arima family, and it describes how to prepare for important annual events like New Year.



<<Image 2: The cover of "Nenju gyoji" (lit. Annual events)

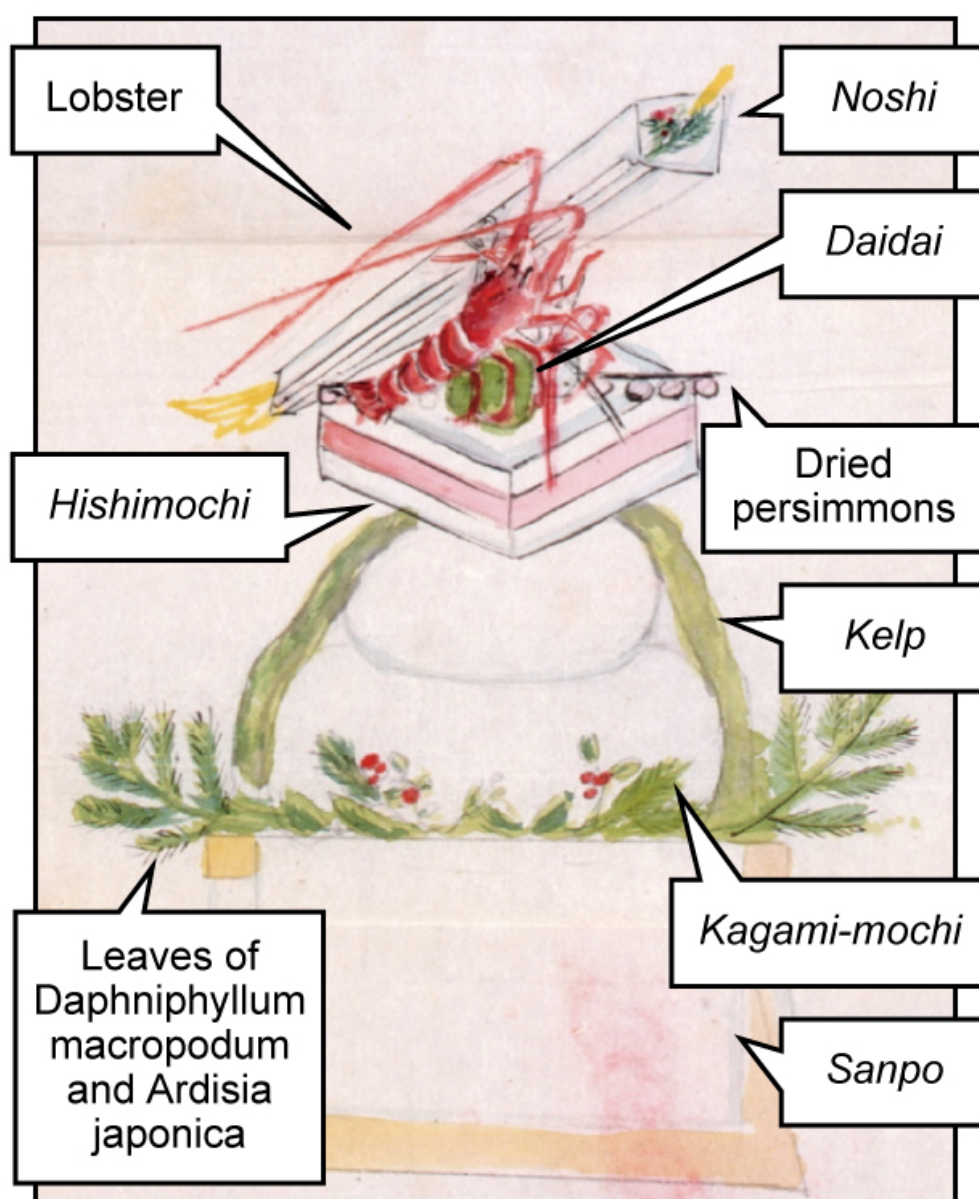
NDL Call No. Arima Yoriyasu Papers 113-12

It is available in microfilm format at the Modern Japanese Political
History Materials Room of the Tokyo Main Library, NDL>>

The general affairs office of the Arima family of the day compiled the manual. Indeed the "general office" of a house sounds a bit strange, like a bureaucratic organization, a famous family like that of the lord of a clan such as Arima had no choice but to set up a general affairs and accounts office to manage his large-scale budget and domain properly. The household also had many servants in a clear hierarchy including Karei (in charge of general office and accounting), Kafu (supporting Karei) and Kaju (ranked under Kafu).

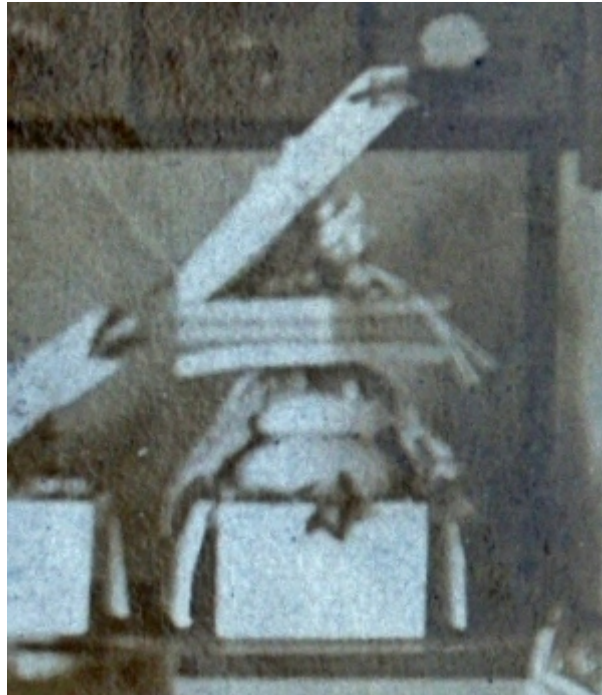
Compared to the simple description for such things as for Yorishige's religious rites and other family heads' birthdays, annual events for the New Year are recorded in detail, and especially *kagami-mochi* seems to be stressed in both photo and illustrations. It seems to have been quite hard work to set up *kagami-mochi* according to the family tradition.

These are instructions in the manual on how to arrange the *kagami-mochi* (Image 3). The caption says: Lay down *hosho-shi* (traditional white, uncreased Japanese paper, made from high-quality paper mulberry fiber) on a small stand called *sanpo*. Then, set two rounded rice cakes, *kagami-mochi*, on leaves of plants including *daphniphyllum macropodum* and *ardisia japonica* on the stand. Finally, decorate the *kagami-mochi* with kelp, *hishi-mochi* (lit. diamond-shaped rice cake), *daidai* (bitter orange), dried persimmons on a spit, lobster, *noshi* (traditional Japanese gift wrapping paper), etc.



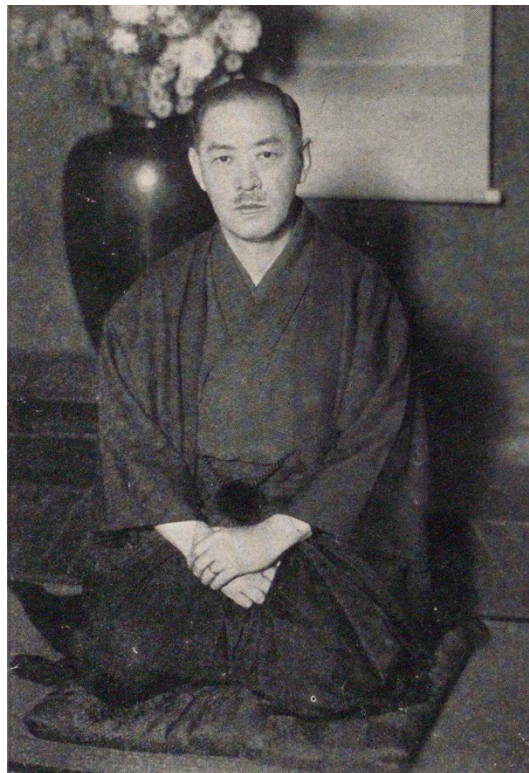
<<Image 3: Illustrated example of decoration of *kagami-mochi* from "Nenju gyoji."

*Annotation added during this translation>>



<<Image 4: Enlarged kagami-mochi from Photo 1>>

Proud of displaying such a beautiful kagami-mochi, the Arima family had a crowded schedule during the New Year. The Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room of the National Diet Library (NDL) has the diaries from 1913 to 1957 of ARIMA Yoriyasu (Photo 5) who became the 15th Arima family head in 1927.



<<Image 5: Photo of Arima Yoriyasu (1884-1957) available in the digital exhibition "Portraits of Modern Japanese Historical Figures" at <http://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/datas/540.html?cat=156>>>



<<Image 6: Arima Yoriyasu's diaries>>

Arima Yoriyasu was the eldest son of Count Arima Yoritsumu, former lord of the Kurume clan. After graduating from the Agricultural College of the Imperial University of Tokyo in 1910, he joined the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce and got involved in agricultural policy. Later, as a member of the House of Peers, he served in many important posts including the Minister of Agriculture in the first Konoe Cabinet. He attracted attention as one of the "innovative" nobilities, interested in Peasants Union activities and assuming the position of the first secretary general of the Taisei Yokusankai (Imperial Rule Assistance Association). After World War II, he became the president of the Japan Racing Association.¹ The famous horse race "Arima Kinen" (lit. Arima Memorial) was set up in his memory.

His diaries vividly tell us how the old feudal lord's family spent New Year's days, for example it says that they set a table for former retainers from the Kurume clan who visited

to exchange greetings for the New Year.

Contrary to the conservative view in the "Nenju gyoji" respecting traditional customs, it is very interesting that Yoriyasu had a cynical attitude toward common practices and ceremonies. For example, at the beginning of 1920, he attempted to make small moves against the traditional customs for welcoming the New Year, saying "I neither made courtesy visits nor sent New Year's greeting cards this year, because I felt very uncomfortable to obey customs I do not feel necessary" in the entry for January 1, 1920 of his diary. What he wrote in his diary is very clear, but in light of his future as the next head of the noble family, his behavior would have embarrassed the people around him. In the following year, he resumed courtesy visits and New Year's greeting cards, giving himself the lame excuse that "it is vain but not harmful," although he experienced inner conflict. In the entry for January 2, 1921 of his diary, he said "When I was seated in a car going from house to house for courtesy visits, wearing an official court dress of the Empire of Japan, even a wide road felt narrow. I could not feel as comfortable as I am when I hold on to a strap in a train in casual dress."

Yoriyasu intermittently wrote in his diary up to 1957, and the notes around the beginning of the years show how the New Year customs had been changed. As a long time had elapsed since the Meiji Restoration, the number of former retainers from the Kurume clan who visited the family for New Year's greetings gradually decreased; in wartime when people said "luxury is enemy," description of *zouni*, rice cakes boiled in soup, was recorded as a modest embellishment of the New Year.

Certainly the line between traditional practices and empty formalities might be extremely thin as Yoriyasu complained at one time, but the New Year provides a good opportunity to contemplate what customs and traditions are, all the more for people in a court family like Arima in the old days, in which New Year's customs went far beyond private family matters. The manual "Nenju gyoji" is surely a valuable record to pass on to the future one family's dignity and their enormous efforts to keep it.

Reference (in Japanese)

- *Arima Yoriyasu Nikki* (lit. Arima Yoriyasu's Diary) edited by Shoyu Club and Takashi ITO published by Yamakawa Shuppansha from 1997 to 2003, five volumes in total; NDL Call No. GK37-G6
- *Kazoku reijotachi no taisho showa* (lit. Taisho and Showa era for young ladies in noble families) edited by Kazoku Shiryo Kenkyukai published by Yoshikawakobunkan in 2011; NDL Call No. EC168-J6
- *Kuratomi yuzaburo nikki* (lit. Kuratomi Yuzaburo's Diary), vol.2, edited by Kuratomi yuzaburo nikki kenkyukai published by Kokushokankokai in 2012; NDL Call No. GB411-J173

¹ The Japan Racing Association (<http://japanracing.jp/en/index.html>) is a public company established to operate Chuo Keiba (lit. Central horse racing) and to manage racecourses, betting facilities, and horse-training facilities. It was founded in 1954, according to the Horse Racing Law and the Japan Racing Association Law, and is operated under the strict oversight of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Japan).