

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR  
WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY  
Tule Lake Center  
Newell, California

April 26  
1944

Community Analysis Section

Japanese Folklore About Birth  
(Staff Report)

All peoples and cultures have folklore concerning birth. Japanese culture is no exception. It is also universal that the new-born child is thought to be the most beautiful thing on earth to its' parents, and the birth of the child is the proudest moment of parenthood. It is an everyday occurrence and yet an instant of mingled joy and profound amazement.

In the different countries in the world there is an bewildering number of customs and superstitions regarding child-birth. For instance, in the United States, cigars are passed around by the father at the birth of a boy.

The following are some of the superstitions and sayings in Japan relating to child-birth which were collected from various sources.

- 1) A Japanese woman should not cry out at child-birth, for the moment is one of great pride and to do so is very shameful.
- 2) An expectant mother should not eat sour foods or the child's bones will be too soft.
- 3) The pregnant woman should not eat highly seasoned foods or the child's brain will be affected.
- 4) A pregnant woman should try not to be frightened by fire for if she should exclaim and place her hand on any part of her body, the child will be born with a marking on the spot on which the mother's hand had been placed. If, for instance, the hand had been placed on the face; it is supposed that there will be a marking on the face, and that part of the body is the most unfortunate place to have a spot.
- 5) If a mother should think of beautiful things before a child is born, the child will have a beautiful soul. The woman should not quarrel or become too nervous, otherwise



the child will be an extremely high-strung person.

- 6) If an expectant mother works hard her labor pains will not be too severe. In the rich families of Japan where there are many servants to do household duties, beans are thrown around a room and the pregnant woman is made to pick them up one by one and thus get her exercise.
- 7) It is believed that if the expectant mother should do any work involving a circular movement with her arms, that the umbilical cord will wind around the baby and choke it.

In Japan, customs and superstitions relating to child-birth differ in many "kens" and "muras." From southern Japan come the following customs:

- 1) The new-born baby is made to drink a bitter liquid (go-ko) which is suppose to kill all poisons which may be in the child's system.
- 2) After birth the baby's hair is all shaved off in order that it will have very black hair.
- 3) The mother should not eat red-fleshed fish for it's supposed to be too strong for the system.
- 4) A baby is dressed in a red kimono.
- 5) As soon as a child is born he is given the "mogusa" (burning on the back of the neck and other parts of the body) treatment in order that he will not get frightened or get dizzy in later life.
- 6) After the 5th month of pregnancy, the woman's abdomen is bound with a cloth.
- 7) One week after a child is born, the parents go to the "miya" (shrine or temple) and register the child's name.
- 8) After birth a girl is made to drink "miso-shiru" (soy-bean soup) in order that her blood will circulate well.

Just how many of these superstitions are adhered to by the mothers in Tule Lake is not certain. Of course, women who would adhere to old customs would do some of the above. However, there is not too much adherence to the given superstitions.



In this camp, I heard that when more girls are born during wartime (as is recently the case here in Tule) that peace will be coming soon.

Many women in the Colony Hospital will not drink tea or coffee because they believe that it will affect their milk in some way. They will not read anything for fear that it will lower their resistance, and many will not eat spices for they believe that it will affect the new-born in some manner.

If a gift is presented for a new-born child, it is a Japanese custom that the parents give some gift in return. This custom is practiced in this camp.