

## *Jinjitsu no Sekku (Festival of the Seven Herbs)*

In an ancient Chinese custom, the first six days of the New Year were assigned to chicken, dog, boar, sheep, cow, and horse, and it was forbidden to kill the animal on each of these days. The seventh day was designated as human's day (Jinjitsu: jin means "human" and jitsu means "day"), and special clemency was granted to criminals. During these seven days, people collected seven different kinds of young herbs without eating any living creatures, and ate hot soup made of these herbs on the seventh day to pray for good health for the year and to ward off evil spirits.

Japan also had an ancient custom of picking young shoots at the beginning of the year. This custom was called "young herb collecting". People collected the seven different kinds of herbs in the fields and mountains while praying that no epidemic or disaster would occur. It is considered that during the Heian period (794-1185), "young herb collecting" was combined with "rice porridge with seven different kinds of cereal grains" due to the influence of the Chinese Jinjitsu and became "rice porridge with the seven herbs", continuing to exist until today.

