

## *Tango no Sekku (Iris Festival)*

Tango refers to the first day of the horse in the month (tan means “first” and go means “horse”). However, since go also means “five”, tango has been misunderstood as the fifth day of the fifth month, and this misunderstanding has been accepted.

In ancient China, the fifth month was considered a bad month, and many events were held in this month to ward off evil spirits. In Japan, the fifth month of the lunisolar calendar is the rainy season, and people had to pray for the success of rice planting and protection from plagues in this month. The event for warding off evil spirits, which was introduced from China, was changed in the Japanese way. Aristocrats built sacred palanquins using iris stems, put iris leaves under pillows, hung medicine balls using iris leaves on the wall, and visited Kamigamo Shrine and other shrines to participate in horse-racing rituals. In addition, the practices of putting the stems of iris and artemisia in the eaves of houses, putting the leaves of iris in the bathtub and bathing in it, drinking iris sake, and eating sticky rice dumplings have gradually spread throughout the country as the conventions of this seasonal event.

It was not until the Edo period (1603-1867) that carp-shaped streamers were erected and samurai dolls were displayed to wish for the healthy growth of boys on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunisolar calendar. It is considered that these displays were due to the influence of the Tokugawa shogunate, which valued the connection with the way of the samurai. These displays became popular as seasonal displays among samurai families throughout Japan.

In present-day Japan, 5 May is Children’s Day and a public holiday. However, many Japanese people regard Tango no Sekku as Boys’ Festival.

