

The Historical Evolution of the Tōka-Ebisu “Opening of the Gate” Ceremony at Nishinomiya Shrine

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1. Introduction

Every year on January 10., the main gate (known as the “red gate”) at Nishinomiya Shrine in Nishinomiya City, Hyogo Prefecture, is opened at 6 a.m for visitors to proceed to the main shrine. The event is known as the Tōka-Ebisu “Opening of the Gate” Ceremony. The first three people to arrive at the main shrine are designated *fuku-otoko* (lit. “men of fortune”). The news is announced to the *kami* and then a special rite is performed. More than 6,000 people participated in this ceremony in 2009.¹ Media coverage of the event has increased from year to year, with not just local Kansai-area media but also the national television networks and, in 2008, even the international news organization Reuters filing reports.

How did this ceremony originate? How has it changed over the years and due to what factors? The present article seeks to answer these questions through an examination of the historical record. Using such contemporary sources as newspapers and the shrine’s daily logs I will focus in particular on developments in the modern period from later years of the Meiji period (1868–1912) to 1940 [Shōwa 15],. My goals are to show how this ceremony changed in parallel with the transformation of modern society and to conduct an inquiry regarding the meaning that this transformed ceremony came to have in the society of the time.

2. Previous Research and Methodology

Previous research relevant to the goals of the current study includes the work of Yoshii Yoshitaka (the former head priest of Nishinomiya Shrine) on the Ebisu cult and the Tōka-Ebisu ceremony,² and research by Tanaka Sen’ichi on the nationwide cult of Ebisu.³ Research limited to the Tōka-Ebisu ceremony at Nishinomiya has been conducted using an exclusively anthropological approach, primarily participant observation, interviews, and distributing questionnaires to participants. I employed the current methodology of using newspaper sources to trace historical transitions to a limited extent in a previous article, “Tōka-Ebisu kaimon shinji kō.”⁴ In the present article, I also use documents from the shrine itself—*Nishinomiya jinja shamu nikki*; Nishinomiya shrine’s daily logs (hereafter *Nishinomiya nikki*)—in hopes of arriving at a more precise depiction of the transformation the ceremony went through in the modern period.

I have used Yoshii’s work and shrine records to reconstruct the evolution of the Tōka-Ebisu ceremony, from which it is believed the “Opening of the Gate” ceremony originated. To trace the changes in the ceremony that unfolded in the modern period, I used newspapers and *Nishinomiya nikki*. The newspaper sources include primarily microfilm copies of the *Osaka Asahi shinbun* (hereafter *Osaka Asahi*) and the Hanshin and Kobe editions of the *Kobe shinbun*. Entries from the *Nishinomiya nikki* were reviewed from the Meiji through Shōwa periods. Unfortunately, the shrine’s daily logs from 1941 to 1945 were lost to fire due to the Nishinomiya air raid of June 1945; consequently, any future inquiries into that period of important historical changes will have to rely solely on newspaper sources. I also used the interview I conducted with the surviving family members of the prewar *Ichiban-fuku* (“first among the fortunate”) that is used in my previous article noted above.

3. The Origins of the Tōka-Ebisu

In his study, Yoshii notes that the Tōka-Ebisu

is performed mainly at Ebisu shrines in and west of the Kansai region just after the New Year’s season, for three days from January 9-11. The hustle and bustle in the area before the shrine in particular is said to outdo that of the Tokyo Otorisan [*tori no ichi*] festivals. The festival follows a pattern that has long been deeply connected to older folk beliefs in a way that is different from the [ancient] state-sponsored festivals (*kansai*). Here, the *kami* is aroused and a world in which the *kami* and humans are united is created in the ritual area (*yuniwa*).⁵

Yanagita Kunio has observed that in terms of time of year harvest season (the 10th month in the lunar calendar) sees the most festivals in Japan, followed by the period of late spring and early summer (the 4th month in the lunar calendar).⁶ The January 9-11 timing of the Tōka-Ebisu just after the major festivities of the New Year thus makes it rather unusual, even if we acknowledge that the official *kinensai* is also an exception to the rule (that event takes place at the start of the 2nd lunar month).

An examination of the historical record will help us to understand why the Tōka-Ebisu took place on these dates. First, we see that the monk Gen’ei from Awataguchi in Kyoto recorded in his *sūtra* notes (*Kyōmon okugaki*, 1194, Kenkyū 5) that the 9th through the 11th of the fifth lunar month were “Nishinomiya shrine visitation days” (*Nishinomiya sankeibi*).⁷ Turning next to the Kamakura period-work *Sumiyoshi daijingū shoshinji shidai* (A description of the rites performed at Sumiyoshi Grand Shrine) of Sumiyoshi Grand Shrine in Settsu Province, we find the following excerpt dated the 10th day of the first month :

Hirota hunting rite (*mikari*) held the evening of the 9th. *Sake* and food offerings are presented and a *miko* dance is performed before Ebisu Shrine. . . . The hunting rite itself is held on the 10th at the hour of the cock [approximately 6 p.m.]. . . . Offerings are then presented again to Ebisu [Shrine]. . . . The Kitayama hunting rite held at Hama-minami [shrine] follows. . . . The event ends at Hama[-minami shrine].⁸

The hunting rites originally performed at Nishinomiya’s subsidiary shrine Nangūsha and at Hirota Shrine to Nishinomiya’s north are believed to survive at the Sumiyoshi Grand Shrine.⁹ Details on the rite itself can be found in the commentary to “Sumiyoshi shatō nenjū sairei shinji no shidai” (A description of the annual festival and rites performed before Sumiyoshi Shrine), a work from around the 14th century that appears in the *Sumiyoshi matsuba taiki*.¹⁰ Citing the interpretation of 17th-century physician-scholar Matsushita Nishimine (Matsushita Kenrin),¹¹ the commentary notes that the Hirota hunting rite was performed on the 10th day of the first lunar month. *Miko* would dress as men and carry bows and arrows, giving them the appearance of someone setting out for the hunting grounds. This symbolized that the deity had appeared and had gone out to hunt and thus suggests that the rite was at least in part a hunting ritual. Returning to the passage, it then explains that the rite involves wearing the garb of hunters because Suwa Myōjin [a *kami* associated with battle-trans.] was one of the deities venerated at

Hama-minami Shrine. That said, it is difficult to imagine that hunts frequently took place around Nishinomiya, which is located on a plain. Moreover, the time of year is not the appropriate season for a hunt.

Based on this, Yoshii believes that the rite was not a “hunt” but perhaps rather what Yanagita Kunio describes as *mikawari*.^{1 2} In his 1942 article “Nihon no Matsuri,”^{1 3} Yanagita wrote:

Mikari and *mikawari* were performed in a region stretching from the two Jōsō districts to the Bōshū region in southern Chiba Prefecture for seven to ten days in the latter part of the 11th lunar month. People would sit in silence. There was no laughter or spirited talk, they did not tie up their hair, nor did they weave at the loom or sew. They would not go out to work or let anyone inside. Prior to the event, they would particularly not like to be visited by a warrior.^{1 4}

In other regions, this rite is called *igomori*—purificatory abstinence rites that entail going into seclusion—but here it was known as *mikari* or *mikawari*. Some have argued that the people here believed the *kami* were hunting in the mountains during this period, and thus they hoped to avoid disturbing them. However, Yanagita argues that the rite originally was called *mikawari* (“changing of the body”) and that it provided a preparatory period during which persons would renew their everyday, mundane flesh so they could become participants in a purification festival.

The *igomori* festival discussed by Yanagita does closely resemble the Nishinomiya Tōka-Ebisu festival. This resemblance was discussed in a *Mainichi shinbun* article dated February 19, 1899 (Meiji 32); the lengthy excerpt below originally appeared in a 1998 paper titled “Ebisu shinbun” [Ebisu newspapers] by Ōe Tokio, who has conducted research on deities of fortune:

The *kami* celebrated at Nishinomiya Shrine, in Nishinomiya City, Muko District, Settsu Province, is known to the world as Ebisu Ōkami. From ancient times he has been deeply respected in folk belief as a deity who provides happiness and fortune. There is not a region throughout Japan where he is not celebrated and prayed to. Today I beg the readers’ patience as I inquire into the reasons why he is worthy of a great festival. There are those who have said that the Tōka-Ebisu festival has long been an *igomori* festival. This is because every year on the eve of the grand festival on January 10, all of the parishioners [*ujiko*] of the shrine take the pine decoration that had been used to celebrate the New Year hung at the entrance of their homes and turn it upside down. They close the gate, lay down a straw mat, and stay inside their home from sundown to sunrise, refraining from making any sounds or echoes in their quiet seclusion. The next day at daybreak, they open their doors is opened and race to the shrine. This is commonly known as “Tōka-Ebisu.”

The *Hongi* of Nishinomiya Shrine records: “So it has been said. In this harbor an evil deity dwells, and on the 9th day of the first month he takes a living person as his human sacrifice. The sadness and tears of the people are limitless on this day. The deity Ebisu (*Hiruko*) stopped at this harbor and told us the following: ‘You should avoid this awful deity. Everyone should stop their coming and going, shut their gates, close their doors, and go into hiding. Also, if you fell a pine tree and hang it upside down above the gate of every home, the evil deity

will certainly not come.’ The people did as he instructed, thereby escaping disaster. They have continued the practice without fail to this day. It is called the *Nishinomiya igomori matsuri* [Nishinomiya seclusion festival].”

Thus, even now on the 9th day [of the first month], there are houses that turn their New Year’s pine decorations upside down. This practice has been seen in ancient times based on such records as the [Muromachi-period work] *Jūhen ōninki*.

The article does specifically use the word *igomori*. Certain elements such as the upside-down pine decorations do appear unique to Nishinomiya, but we can deduce from the general form of the rituals that this indeed is a variety of the *monoimi* (rites of austerities and purification, a category that includes *igomori*) that are performed in many regions in Japan.

Understanding this to be an *igomori* rather than *mikari* rite also makes sense in light of the time of year when purificatory seclusion rituals are carried out. Such rites, Yanagita has found, are mostly performed in June in western Japan and at the transition between winter and spring around Kyoto area and in eastern Japan.

Yanagita writes that the ritual lasted around seven days in ancient times, but was shortened in some areas to only two or three days the closer we get to modern times due to work-related demands.^{1 5}

Yoshii reached the following conclusion based on Yanagita’s *mikawari* thesis:

The strict seclusion rite would change the body (*mikawari*) into a purified form closer to that of a deity, whose state was different from that of an ordinary human. This was a Shinto rite for making the spiritual preparations to begin creating a space where deities and humans could commune that would be appropriate for visiting the next day for the Tōka-Ebisu ceremony. I believe this is the fundamental significance of the *mikawari*—that is to say, the *mikari*—rite.^{1 6}

I find Yoshii’s explanation fairly compelling. The only point that concerns me is that the Kantō region around Tokyo is the only place where we find similar rites called *mikari*.

I will take a moment here to explain my own thinking concerning the evolution of the Tōka-Ebisu. In ancient times, there was a rite called *imi* or *imoi* [the word is related to *monoimi*-trans.] that was a local custom in the Nishinomiya area. It was performed in the first month of the lunar calendar—that is to say, during the interim between the winter and spring in the agricultural calendar. The intermingling of this rite with belief in the deity Hiruko that had begun along the coast south of Nishinomiya marked the starting point for the *igomori* rite unique to Nishinomiya. These elements in turn were combined with the cult associated with Hirota Shrine in northern Nishinomiya and the word *mikari*—associated with Suwa Myōjin, who is also enshrined there—to result in an event that centered around a procession that was performed in the manner of a hunt. Subsequently, thanks in part to tales spread by puppeteers (*kugutsushi*) from the 13th to 15th centuries, the deity Hiruko, who had possessed strong connotations of being a deity of fishing, took on the characteristics of the deity of fortune Ebisu, who was also associated with such concerns as business and agriculture. As this transition unfolded, the rite attracted the belief of commoners in increasing numbers and it became established as one of the most important in the Kansai region. Yoshii writes, “It was during the Edo Period that the deity of luck attracted the belief of many as a deity of commerce and became integrated into the lives

of the common folk. . . . The appointed day, coming as it did immediately after the annual New Years rites, was best suited for praying anew for good fortune in the year to come.”¹⁷ One can imagine how people came to take advantage of this rite as a special event at a time when the region was becoming the most commercialized one in Japan.

The activity was particularly conspicuous at Imamiya Shrine in Osaka’s southern outskirts, which was established by transferring the divided spirit (*kanjō*) of Ebisu from Nishinomiya Shrine. Thanks to its geographic proximity to the commercial capital of Osaka, the lively atmosphere at this shrine surpassed even that around its parent in Nishinomiya. A passage from the *Setsuyō gundan* about the Ebisu Shrine in Imamiya suggests the liveliness: “Every year on the 10th day of the New Year, everyone from the richest to the poorest gathers to pray for the good fortune of the merchants; this is commonly called the Tōka-Ebisu.”¹⁸

The meaning of the rite qualitatively changed from its original one at Nishinomiya. This evolution can be seen if we first examine the following entry from Nishinomiya shrine’s daily log dated to 1817 (Bunka 14):

The rite of seclusion (*igomori*) on the 9th day of the first month: the parishioners (*ubuko*) lay out straw mats at their front and rear gates and hang the pine sprigs upside down. As has been done since antiquity, they refrain from coming and going. Following the old customs, no lanterns are lit on this night inside the shrine. The visits of pilgrims cease in the evening and the front and back gates are closed, and they strictly refrain from the ringing of bells and pounding of drums to indicate the time from [six in the evening until six in the morning].”

The parishioners thus appear to have been conducting an *igomori* rite of sorts. However, the following passage from the *Settsu meisho zue* regarding the Tōka-Ebisu gives evidence of change:

Every year on the 10th day of the New Year, there is an *igomori* festival. On the evening of the 9th the *kami* pays a visit to Hirota Shrine. It is said that he is ashamed to be seen by people because of his dreadful appearance, so the front gates at all the homes in the city are shut tightly, they spread out straw mats, and turn their pine hangings upside down. Large numbers of people ranging from close friends to mere acquaintances come to the gates and drink *sake*. . . . They confine themselves for one night and worship the deity in silence. People from the neighborhood visit the shrine starting at the first crow of the rooster [on the 10th], and the area before the shrine livens up. Doors and gates open throughout the city as well, and everyone heads to the main shrine. Various vendors set up shop in the area around the shrine, and there is a stage where performances are given. People are bunched together like rice stalks and hemp. This is called the Tōka-Ebisu.¹⁹

The reason why people shut their doors the night before the festival and purify (*shōjin*) themselves has become the unsightly appearance of Ebisu. Accordingly, we see here that the meaning behind practicing seclusion has started to change. The overall pattern of preparing for a grand festival over the course of three days remains, if barely, but the fundamental point that such preparations are being made so that humans may enter a state of communion with the

deities no longer seems to apply. In sum, the form of the Tōka-Ebisu cult and the nature of what people expected from Ebisu both evolved during the Edo Period.

4. Modern Transformations

The Meiji Restoration brought with it great changes for Nishinomiya. The establishment of State Shintō saw nearby Hirota Shrine designated one of the 22 Major Shrines (*kanpei taisha*) due to its association with the Empress Jingū; Nishinomiya Shrine, for its part, received the rank of prefectural shrine. Of greater significance to the discussion here was the adoption of the solar calendar in 1873 (Meiji 6), which had a major impact on the scheduling of annual festivals and ceremonies throughout Japan. All public and many private institutions switched to the new calendar at the same time. While many rites and festivals in the countryside continued to be held based on the old lunar calendar (*kyūreki*), the rhythm of the lives of city dwellers had changed to match the new Western (Gregorian) calendar (*shinreki*) and as a consequence the scheduling of local festivals changed to accommodate.

Some evidence of this is provided by the following passage from an article in the *Osaka Asahi* of January 10, 1883 (Meiji 16):

Police from Nanba Police Station were kept busy yesterday and today as always by the Tōka-Ebisu festival. Patrolmen blocked rickshaw traffic from the south side of Ebisu Bridge and stood along both return roads from Imamiya one by one at intervals of five or six to watch over the returning participants.

Thus, we see that the festival had taken root in the new calendar in Osaka within a decade of its adoption. The *Osaka Asahi* of January 10, 1891 (Meiji 24), noted police planned to construct temporary substations at the performance stage in Minami Shinchi and near the Hankai train station given “the prospect of people thronging the area for this annual event should the weather be fine,” suggesting an extremely large turnout was expected.

The paper ran a similar article on January 11, 1893 (Meiji 26). This piece noted that officers and special deputies were to be mobilized to protect against pick pocketing, and also mentioned that the Ebisu Shrine in Kyoto celebrated Ebisu in a similar fashion:

The Ebisu Shrine in Kyoto Kenninji-chō is not as lively as Imamiya Shrine here [in Osaka], nor does it have [the procession of] palanquins (*kago*) and the like. Nonetheless, pilgrims have gathered over the past two days in throngs befitting the event, and as a result the backstreets of the shrine in Miyakawa-chō bustled with activity.

The appearance of these articles on those dates demonstrates that the Tōka-Ebisu was being held in accordance with the new calendar in Osaka and Kyoto. The question then arises as to what the situation was at the main shrine in Nishinomiya. Unfortunately, I could not find any mention of the event in either the *Osaka Asahi* or its Kobe supplement for the 1880s. For the next mention we must turn to the February 26, 1893 (Meiji 26) *Osaka Asahi*:

Today will be the 10th day of the first month under the old calendar; accordingly, special trains will be dispatched today between Umeda and Kobe for the large number of people expected to visit Ebisu Shrine in Nishinomiya. Sellers of good

luck charms (*hōe-tate shōnin*), peep box theater showmen (*nozoki karakuri*), and other side show operators have been setting up shop since yesterday, along with the vendors of used items. The result is quite the bustling scene.

The foregoing articles suggest that a split had emerged regarding the scheduling of the Tōka-Ebisu, with the shrines in Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe (Yanagihara) going by the new calendar and Nishinomiya Shrine using the old lunar one.

However, the opening of the Hanshin Railway in 1905 (Meiji 38) changed this general rule. The plan for the railway called for laying tracks through every town that had traditionally existed between Osaka and Kobe. Nishinomiya had been one of the most prominent shrine towns between Osaka and Kobe since medieval times and thus was graced with Ebisu station (currently the site of Nishinomiya Station on the Hanshin Main Line). This made it easier for people from Osaka and Kobe to visit the shrine, a development noted in the *Osaka Asahi*'s Kobe supplement for January 11, 1908:

The Tōka-Ebisu at Nishinomiya has been held every year since the opening of the Hanshin Railway in accordance with both the old and new calendars. Though there were not as many revelers as at the old calendar Tōka-Ebisu, many people from Hanshin [i.e., Osaka and Kobe] and surrounding areas came to the shrine thanks to the lovely weather and still winds yesterday. Two to three times as many people came the day before the festival, and the trains were full of passengers all day long. All of the patrolmen from Nishinomiya police station were dispatched to manage the crowds. Patrolmen were also dispatched from police stations along the route to every area train station to control the traffic. No accidents of note had occurred by 3 p.m., and accordingly the roads around the shrine grounds and naturally those around the city were lively in general.

It can be surmised from the foregoing that the new calendar Ebisu had become a vibrant affair. Still, the old calendar Ebisu also remained a lively occasion, based an article from the paper's Kobe supplement for February 12, 1908:

Regardless of whether or not the National Railway's new Ebisu station loses in the popularity contest with [that of] the Hanshin Railway, the fact remains it became easier this year to get to the Ebisu festival. The number of visitors has grown, with people coming not only from Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe, but also from Shiga, Gifu, and Aichi to the east, and the various locations around Bantan [the ancient Harima and Tajima provinces; present-day western Hyōgo Prefecture] and Okayama to the west. More than a few visitors also came from Awa (Tokushima) and Awaji via special services operated by the [now-defunct merchant-ship operator] Osaka Shōsen. Some visitors stayed all night on the 9th and pushed their way through when the gates opened at 1 a.m. in an effort to be *dai-ichi no fuku* [“the first of the fortunate”]. The Ebisu Eve on the 10th (perhaps a mistake for the 9th–A.H.) attracted a crowd rarely seen these days. A dreadful scene ensued when the crowd pushed inside the gates, creating a human avalanche. . . . The ceremony ended just past 4 a.m. When the gate was opened, the area before

the shrine—lit gorgeously with beacon fires—filled with people in an instant and for a moment no one could move at all.

The article tells us there was competition for passengers on Osaka-Kobe routes, mentioning as it does the National Railway (*Kantetsu*, the present-day JR) building new stations to attract passengers in order to compete with Hanshin Railway. The competition would subsequently expanded to include Hankyū Railway, which began service on its Kobe line in 1920 (Taishō 10).

Also of particular note for our discussion here is the line that describes the rush to be first in the shrine to obtain fortune (*fuku*), which since the Muromachi period has been at the center of the Ebisu cult. We get the sense that the writer thought it exceptional for people to have lined up at the gate since the night before in such numbers that by early in the morning they had spilled over onto the grounds of the shrine. Furthermore, we see that the gate had taken on another role. The main gate (referred to as Akamon, or “red gate”) is closely associated with the “Opening of the Gate” ceremony. Shrine lore from the Azuchi Momoyama period to the early Edo period had held that the gate was donated by Hideyori Toyotomi. Naturally, the gate was opened and closed for the Tōka-Ebisu during the Edo period, but the shrine’s daily log attaches no special significance to that beyond it being opened and closed for business purposes. The shrine gate is hardly brought up in the newspapers prior to the article quoted above, though there are numerous instances that mention how people around town opened the gates to their homes after the period of seclusion. Accordingly, we should note well that this is the first instance in which the shrine gate itself was the object of special attention in any newspaper. I will discuss the ceremonial role the shrine gate played in the sections that follow.

5. The Tōka-Ebisu in the Hanshin Area

The January 1908 article from the *Osaka Asahi*’s Kobe supplement excerpted above noted: “The Tōka-Ebisu at Nishinomiya has been held every year since the opening of the Hanshin Railway in accordance with both the old and new calendars. Though there were not as many revelers as at the old calendar Tōka-Ebisu, many people from Hanshin [i.e., Osaka and Kobe] and surrounding areas came to the shrine thanks to the lovely weather and still winds yesterday.” The January 11, 1909 (Meiji 42), edition of the *Osaka Asahi*’s Kobe supplement remarks that “Nishinomiya’s Tōka-Ebisu [festival] is celebrated according to the lunar calendar.” According to Nishinomiya’s supplicant priest (*negi*) Yoshii Yoshihide, although the rite at present takes place in keeping with both the new and old calendars, the Tōka-Ebisu was held as an event open to the general public under both calendars only until 1945 (Shōwa 20).

Based on this, I hypothesize that (1) the numbers of people who became attuned to the rite being held in accordance with the new calendar rose as Osaka and Kobe suburbanized, and (2) the “main” and “secondary” festivals became reversed in a substantial terms, based on the numbers of pilgrims and officiants.” I shall now examine our source materials to explore the two hypotheses.

I begin by crosschecking newspaper sources with shrine documents to determine when the change in stature of the festivals under the old and new calendars occurred. First, the January 9, 1911 (Meiji 45) *Osaka Asahi*’s Kobe supplement contains the following:

The Nishinomiya Tōka-Ebisu slated for the 9th, 10th, and 11th has been held every year based on both the old and the new calendars. Since the old calendar

was eliminated, the same festival has been repeated three times—the first time on January 10, the “Main Ebisu” on February 10, and the “Hatsuka [20th] Ebisu” on February 20. Festival participants apparently can receive good fortune during any of these events.

However, this is almost certainly a mistaken interpretation. I say that based on the following item from the February 3, 1924 (Taishō 14) *Osaka Asahi* Kobe supplement:

(February 1924) The 2nd of this month is the date for the old calendar Tōka-Ebisu. Those who could not attend the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu as well as pilgrims from the countryside accordingly helped make “Ebisu Eve” events on the 1st quite the lively affair. Given that *setsubun* [the last day of winter under the old calendar] also falls on the 3rd, the date for *nokorifuku* (the last day of a three-day festival, lit. “leftover fortune”), so there should be even more people on hand.

Based on the shortness of the treatment and a comparison of the composition and size of this and other articles regarding the new calendar Ebisu with those from other years, one can surmise that the statures of the old and new calendar events changed places for pilgrims during the Taishō period. Since the newspapers do not note how many people participated in the old calendar Ebisu, we cannot make a numerical comparison. However, even though turnout for the 1924 new calendar Ebisu was low “due to a little rain,” local police data shows that the festival still had 190,000 participants over the three days. The Hanshin Railway “was expected to cancel express service on all their lines for the Main Ebisu event on the 10th and run local trains stopping at every station to connect with [other trains],” which for the time constituted a landmark response. That the size of the turnout depended on the weather, the nature of the deity being celebrated, and economic conditions remains true for the Tōka-Ebisu of today. Some articles as late as the early Shōwa Period mention that certain years saw more visitors come from the direction of Osaka and other years favored the Kobe direction due to concerns related to *ehō* (the most auspicious geomantic direction for a given year).

The newspapers show that the means of transit between Osaka and Kobe—the Hanshin, Hankyū, and national railways—fell into place between the first and third decades of the 20th century (from late Meiji through the Taishō period). It is conceivable that this is why a festivity that had once been primarily for Nishinomiya became an event for the entire Hanshin area.

Turning to the shrine’s daily log for corroboration of these various developments, we find first a 1907 (Meiji 40) entry noting that Hanshin Railway (referred to as “rail company” in the log) held a special event on the day of the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu. The log further notes that the railway constructed two new waiting rooms at the Ebisu stop in connection with Osaka laying in an auspicious direction in 1907. The company also erected dozens of streetlights along the approach road to the shrine, along with six gas lanterns erected for aesthetic purposes.

I compared the old and new calendar Ebisu events using the shrine’s daily log entries during in 1927 (Shōwa 2). The shrine did not count the actual number of people who participated in the old calendar event, but the log reports that for the new calendar event 95,435 people disembarked from Hanshin Railway’s Nishinomiya and Nishinomiya Higashi-guchi stations (82,787 at the former and 12,668 at the latter) over three days. The entry also notes how many images of Ebisu (*mie*) the shrine handed out. The data from the two events is shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 New Calendar Tōka-Ebisu, 1927 (Shōwa 2)

<i>Type of Item</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Remaining</i>	<i>Balance</i>
Ebisu and Daikoku images (<i>ryōgamigake</i>)	20	15	5
One deity (<i>hitokamigake</i>)	30	29	1
Small amount (<i>kogane</i>)	1,000	419	538
Large amount (<i>ōgane</i>)	500	195	305
Good luck charms (<i>kai'un</i>)	11,000	1,250	9,750
Wooden amulet (<i>kifuda</i>)	1,000	105	895
Protection at sea (<i>funadama</i>)	500	450	50
Amulet coffer (<i>hakofuda</i>)	6,000	919	5,080
Daikoku image (<i>daikoku</i> [one of the seven deities of fortune, a group that includes Ebisu])	10,000	6,100	3,900
Ebisu image (<i>mie</i>)	40,000	11,740	28,260

Figure 2 Old Calendar Tōka-Ebisu, 1927 (Shōwa 2)

<i>Type of Item</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Remaining</i>	<i>Balance</i>
Ebisu and Daikoku images (<i>ryōgamigake</i>)	20	16	4
One deity (<i>hitokamigake</i>)	20	14	6
Small amount (<i>kogane</i>)	100	24	76
Large amount (<i>ōgane</i>)	45	24	21
Good luck charms (<i>kai'un</i>)	1,000	66	934
Wooden amulet (<i>kifuda</i>)	90	20	70
Protection at sea (<i>funadama</i>)	500	321	179
Amulet coffer (<i>hakofuda</i>)	1,000	69	931
Daikoku image (<i>daikoku</i>)	3,500	2,192	3,852
Ebisu image (<i>mie</i>)	10,000	3,852	8,148

“Total” is the number of items the shrine office prepared and had on hand; “Remaining” is the number of those that went undistributed; and “Balance” is the number of items that the shrine actually bestowed. For example, let us attend to the number of images (*mie*, a painted image of the deity Ebisu), which was at both festivals the highest volume item. While it is difficult to make generalizations due to such variables as economic conditions, *ehō*, public holidays (the old calendar Tōka-Ebisu that year fell on February 11, which was *kigensetsu* and is now National Foundation Day), and the weather, we can nonetheless deduce from this statistic that the scale of the new calendar event was roughly four times that of the old calendar one.

Next, the shrine’s log records in detail the annual passenger volume data for the 10-year period beginning in 1935 (the second decade of the Shōwa period) for Hanshin Railway’s Main Line, Hanshin Railway’s Kokudō line, and the Hankyū Railway (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Number of Rail Passengers around the New Calendar Ebisu

	1936	1937	1938	1939
Hanshin	159,600	225,600	232,000	289,400
Han-Koku	50,400	53,700	52,800	60,300
Hankyū	17,156	12,955	not surveyed	not recorded

Each figure represents the total number of passengers over the three-day festival period. The Hanshin Railway Main Line data is the total for Ebisu (Nishinomiya) and Nishinomiya Higashi-guchi stations. The Hanshin Railway Kokudō Line data covers passengers disembarking at its Ebisu and Fudabasuji stations. The Hankyū Railway data is for Nishinomiya Ebisu Rinji (“temporary”) Station, which the company erected between its Kita-guchi and Shukugawa station for the duration of the festival. Unfortunately, no data is available either for the National Railway or for 1938 and 1939 for Hankyū Railway; however, it is evident that Hanshin Railway (its Kokudō Line was a streetcar that ran along the present-day National Route 2) was the primary source of transportation for this event by an overwhelming margin.

I would next like to present in chronological form some of the major developments for the area between Osaka and Kobe, with a primary focus on Nishinomiya, beginning from the Meiji Period.

- 1874 The national railroad begins service on its Tōkaidō Line. Nishinomiya Station constructed.
- 1895 Arthur H. Groom, an Englishman, opens the Rokkōsan resort.
- 1900 Murakami Ryūhei acquires land in Mikage-chō. Business figures begin to migrate to areas between Osaka and Kobe.
- 1905 Hanshin Railway begins operations. Abe Gentarō develops residences in Sumiyoshi. Business figures begin constructing residences in areas between Osaka and Kobe, centered around Hanshin Ashiya Station.
- 1907 Kōno Kuraji and Hashiyama Keijirō open their Kōroen development. Kansai Horse Race Club established in Naruo Village. Hanshin Railways founds Kōroen Swimming Beach and Ashiya Amusement Park.
- 1908 Hanshin Railways publishes *Shigai kyojū no susume* [“Recommended in-town residences”].
- 1909 Hanshin Railways constructs 30 rental houses near Nishinomiya Station; Minoo-Arima Electric Railroad publishes *Ikanaru tochi o erabubeki ka, Ikanaru kaoku o erabubeki ka* [“How to choose land? How to choose a house?”].
- 1910 Minoo-Arima Electric Railroad begins sales of homes in Ikeda Muromachi on monthly installment plan. Hanshin Railways constructs mixed, Western/Japanese-style housing (*bunka jūtaku*) in Naruo Village.
- 1911 Nakamura Isaburō constructs a hot springs resort in Kurakuen. Hanshin Railways develops houses on single-lot parcels in Mikage. Hankyū Railways opens its Takarazuka New Hot Springs Paradise resort. Private educational facilities geared toward the children of business executives begin to be established.
- 1914 A telephone exchange station is opened at Ashiya Post Office. Hanshin Railways publishes *Kōgai seikatsu* (“Suburban Living”). Naruo Golf Club opens.
- 1917 Daishin Central Land Corporation (*Daishin chūō tochi kabushiki gaisha*) buys up land in Kōroen and turns it into luxury housing.

- 1918 Kōyō Land Company opens Kōyōden luxury housing development.
- 1919 City Planning Law and Downtown Building Law promulgated.
Takarazuka Music School founded.
- 1920 Hankyū Kobe Line opens.
- 1921 Hankyū Railways develops housing in Okamoto. Hankyū Seihou Line opens. Nada-Kobe Cooperative established.
- 1922 Hanshin Railways opens Kōshien development.
- 1923 Hankyū Railways begins building residences at Kōtōden development.
- 1924 Hankyū Railways develops residential land in Nikawa. Hankyū Kōyōden Line opens. Ashiya Bunkamura constructed on the north side of the national rail Ashiya Station.
- 1925 Kōshien Swimming Beach is opened.
- 1926 Takarazuka Hotel opens for business. Hankyū Imazu Minami Line opens.
- 1927 Hanshin Kokudō Line opens and service begins.
- 1928 Hanshin Railways develops residences in Kōshien.
- 1929 Rokurokusō Corporation established, Kwansei Gakuin University moves to Kōtōden.
- 1930 Hankyū Railways develops residential area at Nishinomiya Kitaguchi and opens Hankyū Department Store at Umeda in Osaka. Kōshien Hotel begins operations.
- 1934 Nishinomiya Imazu Kenko residential area is developed, Kobe Women’s College moves to Okadayama, Kōnan Hospital opens.
- 1937 Hankyū Railways opens Mukonosō Station. Nishinomiya Stadium opens.

Prior to the Meiji Restoration, one would have been justified in thinking of Nishinomiya as a single farm village and its immediate vicinity, albeit one with a thriving *sake* brewing business. However, as the foregoing shows, the growth of the transportation infrastructure turned it into a residential community for Osaka and Kobe and a site of cultural production. At the same time, the Osaka-Kobe industrial belt that was to be the trigger for Japan’s second industrial revolution developed in the early years of the Shōwa period; the town of Nishinomiya became a city in the process and the population influx intensified. The jumble of train lines made the area more accessible, bringing together large numbers of migrants from outside the area. These people now living in a city perhaps found it easy to adopt the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu as a festival that suited their urban lifestyle.

The foregoing documents and chronology allow us to infer that the development of the transportation infrastructure (the Hanshin Railway in particular) led to the urbanization and suburbanization of Nishinomiya. This produced large numbers of pilgrims who lived their lives based on the new calendar. That development in turn verifies the hypothesis that the new calendar festival supplanted the old calendar event, leading to a reversal in the relative statures of the two events. One can also conclude that the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu festival was a by-product of the construction of the inter-Osaka-Kobe area, a process that unfolded hand-in-hand with the urbanization of Nishinomiya.

Thus, the growth of the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu festival and its transformation for all intents and purposes into the main festival can be attributed in part to the business efforts of the railway companies. But why were so many people gathering for this festival? I would like to explore this point in detail. In the next section, I review newspapers from 1937 (Shōwa 12) onward to investigate the development at the new calendar festival of the “Opening of the Gate” ceremony, an event that continues to attract much attention at Nishinomiya Shrine even today.

6. The Evolution of the New Calendar Tōka-Ebisu Festival

The earliest newspaper article I have seen that refers to people rushing to get to the main shrine after the gate has been opened during the new calendar festival comes from the January 10, 1913 (Taishō 2) *Osaka Asahi* Kobe supplement:

As is the case every year, everyone—including not just pilgrims but also even the street vendors—who had been on the grounds of the shrine was driven out between 8 and 9 p.m. This was done to hold the late night ritual and perform the usual “opening of the gate” ceremony at 5 a.m. They say that the first person to pass through the gate and get to the sanctuary (*shinden*) to pull the cord of the bell will receive great good fortune, and so many people will brave the morning cold and push toward the gate, but what if it rains?

The word “usual” here suggests that the practice had become a routine state of affairs for some time. However, the task of gathering documents that demonstrate this remains ahead of us; currently this is the oldest record we have.

While the foregoing passage does not tell us when the practice began, we do know that opening the gate had become an established Tōka-Ebisu ritual even under the new calendar and that it was believed that the first person to reach the bell’s rope would receive “great fortune.” The February 12, 1908 (Meiji 41), *Osaka Asahi* Kobe supplement reported: “Some people who had arrived on the 9th to stay overnight at the shrine pushed in when the gate opened at 1 a.m. to try to be the first to receive fortune,” thus indicating the practice had completely become a part of the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu. The newspaper also tells us that the *igomori* festival the shrine held on January 10 followed the same pattern as the one held under the old calendar, and that during these rites pilgrims and street vendors left the grounds of the shrine to places outside the gate.

However, this is not to say that all of the parishioners of Nishinomiya Shrine went into seclusion as had been the case with the *igomori* festival during the Edo Period. The rite had changed. Now, the only site for *igomori* was the grounds of the shrine—the area “within the gate” (*mon no naka*). Opening the gate at 5 a.m. released the shrine grounds released from their state of seclusion, at which point the pilgrims made their dash “in pursuit of fortune.”

An article dated January 11 describes the scene from the previous day at 5 a.m.:

The dawn “opening of the gate” took place as usual at 5 a.m. When the gate was opened, the mass of faithful that had clustered together shoved their way in all at once. It made one think of a race among the frontline elements of an army from the days of the Genpei War. The first person to arrive at the sanctuary (*shinden*) received a hearty welcome and was given a paper amulet (*shinpu*), after which he would depart with great happiness. This was quite a wonderful sight. People

continued to come without let up by train from both Kobe and Osaka, including the nearby areas and outskirts. The Hanshin Railway company had erected electric streetlights the previous evening at Ebisu, Kōroen, and Higashi-guchi stations, so those who arrived in the evening would not have to worry about their footing. At 9 a.m. those merchants who had claimed spaces the night before along the roadside were earnestly calling out to the visitors.

Likening the scene to a battle from the 12th century Genpei War is perhaps an overstatement, but it does convey the feverish atmosphere. Note also from this article that the shrine gave the person who was first to arrive at the sanctuary a special amulet. On the whole, the article demonstrates that by around start of the Taishō Period (1912) everyone from the pilgrims to the priests shared in the understanding that the first person to reach the sanctuary had a special place in the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu.

The February 6 *Osaka Asahi* describes the old calendar Tōka-Ebisu as follows:

The shrine’s venerable sanctuary was decorated and the grounds cleaned in preparation for the arrival of pilgrims for the Lunar Calendar Tōka-Ebisu on the 15th at Nishinomiya Ebisu Shrine, just as had been done for the Tōka-Ebisu festival in January. Pilgrims from country villages that still adhere to the lunar calendar set out from the early morning. Hanshin Railway trains from both directions were filled to capacity by after 10 a.m. The travelers coming from afar by train laden with their shoes and *furoshiki*-wrapped bundles all tied up in red blankets would cram the roads with every arrival. As a result, the street stalls and vendors did excellent business.

At 10 lines in the original Japanese, the coverage for this event was relatively small compared to that for the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu. Also of interest is the fact that no mention is made of people rushing forward at the opening of the gate as had been the case in articles about the old calendar Tōka-Ebisu from as recently as five years before.

Given that the *Osaka Asahi* was a newspaper whose readers presumably lived in Osaka and the content of the Kobe supplement was directed toward readers in Kobe, we can presume that most pages of the paper dealt with matters connected with living in those respective cities. Thus, the *Osaka Asahi* focused its coverage on the new calendar Ebisu first at Imamiya Shrine and later at Horikawa Shrine (both located in the city of Osaka), while the Kobe supplement prioritized the event at Yanagihara Ebisu Shrine. This changed little in the 1910s. However, we see a dramatic increase during this decade—which marked the end of the Meiji Period and start of the Taishō—in the number of articles concerning the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu at Nishinomiya. This increase began in 1913 (Taishō 2) , and by the Shōwa Period for the most part only the new calendar Ebisu is mentioned in the news.

I spoke of this change in the previous section. The creation of the Hanshin intercity area (*Hanshinkan*) turned Nishinomiya into an urban area, and visits by area residents now living their lives according to the new calendar increased. The newspaper coverage attests to the fact that the new rite had surpassed the original old-calendar one in scale and become the main festival.

Finally, while the idea that the first person through the gate to ring the sanctuary bell would be blessed with fortune was not the only reason for holding the old-calendar Tōka-Ebisu,

the notion nonetheless was adopted in its entirety under the new-calendar rite and became a customary practice. The newspapers show that this development occurred during the Meiji-Taishō transition, though more materials will be needed from those years if we are to understand the specific process involved. Be that as it may, we are now faced with the question of why the “opening the gate” ceremony and the notion of receiving fortune became customary features of the new calendar event. In the next section, I will take up these questions along with those raised in the previous section.

7. The Birth of “*Ichiban-fuku*” (first among the fortunate)

The first time we see the phrase *Ichiban-fuku*, which remains in use today, is in the following excerpt from the *Osaka Asahi*'s Kobe supplement from 1914 (Taishō 3).

On the 10th of the month, in Nishinomiya, at the main Ebisu [festival], the pilgrims waited for the gates to open at 5 a.m. to try to obtain the *Ichiban-fuku*. As they kept pushing forward,, by around 8 or 9 a.m., the shrine grounds were entirely filled with people.

The time of the gate opening, 5 a.m., was the same as in 1913 (Taishō 2), one hour earlier than it is today. A 1917 (Taishō 6) article from the same newspaper reports:

The rite was performed at 4 a.m. while the sky was still dark, under the light of the blaze of a bonfire. After it finished, at around 6 a.m., the East and West gates were opened.

The time for opening the gates had become exactly 6 a.m. by 1920. In 1918, the newspapers were full of stories about the war's *nouveaux-riches*; nothing was written that touched on the topic of when the gates were opened. I could not find any data on this in articles from 1919, either. The following was written on January 11, 1920:

Today, the *igomori* ritual was held in the early hours of the morning at the so-called main Ebisu festival. Pilgrims formed a single line when the gates were opened at 6 a.m. and surged forward, racing like in a marathon to the front of the shrine to claim the prize of being the *ichiban-fuku*. Fortunately, as always there were no injuries—a miracle indeed.

The above passage and the use of the word “marathon” in particular make it clear that the site was crowded with people in a state of excitement.

The gate-opening ceremony does not come up again in the newspapers I have collected until the following mention in the *Osaka Asahi*'s Hanshin edition for January 11, 1935 (Shōwa 10):

The people who were vying to be the first to reach the bell crowded in tightly at 6 a.m., and as the gates opened the race to the hall of worship to claim good fortune ensued.

The name of the person who became *ichiban-fuku* appeared for the first time in the *Osaka Asahi*'s Hanshin edition for January 1, 1937 (Shōwa 12). The article, accompanied by a photograph, is titled “A storm of people aiming for good fortune.”

Some 3,000 people—young and old, men and women—had descended on the great gate in the hopes that they would be the first in fortune, chanting *wassho*, *wassho!* (“heave-ho, heave-ho!”) as they waited impatiently for the gate to open. At the signal of the drum, they surged forward in a great burst, rushing straight for the bell of the main shrine building in the freshly cleansed ritual area (*yuniwa*). The grounds were already buried under a crowd of pilgrims the instant after Tanaka Taichi of the Senzoku Lumber Store in Kubo Town leapt forward. . . . The townspeople's interest had been absorbed for the past few days by the question of who would arrive first at this year's Ebisu festival, and as expected it was Taichi Tanaka . . . “I won! I'm number one! I'm number one!” the winner shouted loudly. Tanaka, now 37, has won the race at Nishinomiya a record 16 times since he first participated at the age of 21, having lost only in last year's festival. His philosophy about coming in first consists solely of doing his thing in a solemn manner: “It was not out of desire. I am happy just to be healthy and able to make the visit. I'm going to take the good fortune back to my boss. I would have felt bad somehow if I did not come in first.”

The *Osaka Asahi*'s Hanshin evening edition for January 10, 1938 (Shōwa 13), also contains an article about Tanaka, although the number of years he is reported to have been the *ichiban-fuku* differs:

As usual, several hundreds pilgrims vied to be the first to reach the altar when the gate opened at 6 a.m. But, for the second, third, even fourth year in a row, Tanaka Taichi of Senzoku Lumber Store in Kubo Town, Nishinomiya City, and Omatsu Shinnosuke from Kasugaroku Village, Hikami District, grabbed the bell's rope just at the same time, and in the end both became the number-one pilgrim.

However, in the morning edition from January 11 we see:

The 3,000 virtuous men and women who had been waiting for the chance to become the *ichiban-fuku* surged forward when the gate was opened at the drum's signal at 6 a.m.. Illuminated by bonfires burning at several places on the grounds, they stampeded forward in their quest to reach the bell in the sanctuary. The *karamon* [the Chinese-style gate], which is usually closed, was thrown wide open to welcome in the first to arrive. Tanaka Taichi, the *ichiban-fuku* for 16 years, from Senzoku Lumber Store in Kubo Town, Nishinomiya [City], and Omatsu Shinnosuke from Kasukabe Village, Tanba Hikami District, leapt into the purified ritual area at the same time, raising a joyous celebratory song.

From this we can assume 17 is the correct figure for the number of consecutive years that Tanaka became *ichiban-fuku*. The shrine's daily log for 1938 for the first time also records the name of the person who came in first: “The first arrival was as usual Tanaka Taichi from

Senzoku Lumber Store.” An article from *Osaka Asahi*’s Hanshin edition from 1939 (Shōwa 14), reports that Tanaka was an eighteen-year record holder. However, taking into account the 1937 (Shōwa 12) article, it is possible that this means it was the 18th time for Tanaka to have run the race (including 17 times in which he was the *ichiban-fuku*). The “Opening of the Gate” ceremony of that time cannot be easily compared with today’s event, but regardless this is an incredible record considering the difficulty of becoming the *ichiban-fuku*. In that light, in the next section I would like to explore why Tanaka was so persistent in wanting to be first.

8. Seventeen-Time *Ichiban-fuku* Tanaka Taichi

I became deeply interested in this man who became the *ichiban-fuku* seventeen times. Unfortunately, I was never able to meet Tanaka in person, but I was able to meet his surviving family members through the introduction of Yoshii Yoshihide and had the opportunity to gather very valuable information from them. In this section, I would like to describe his background, his motivations for participating in the *ichiban-fuku* competition, and his later life.

The photograph shows Tanaka standing in front of the gate at Nishinomiya Shrine in 1935 (from Nishinomiya Shrine publicity materials). He was born in 1900 (Meiji 33) in what is now Tannan Town, Taki District, Hyōgo Prefecture. We can surmise from the newspaper articles that he came to Nishinomiya in 1921 (Taishō 10), and that he had already been living in the Hanshin area by then. According to his family:

He was a very devout man. He would go to Fushimi Inari at the beginning of every month , and he would go to Kabutoyama Daishi in Nishinomiya on the 21st. He was a fervent believer in both Shinto and Buddhist deities.. When he opened his own lumber store he would repeat to his employees, “You have to treasure the *kami* and buddhas.” He would even visit the graves of other people’s families.

Nishinomiya Shrine brought out the depths of his devotion to their greatest extent. He visited the shrine every day of the year without fail. He even cleaned the streets around the shrine every morning, and as a consequence received a commendation after the war from the Kinki office of the Ministry of Construction.

One senses that his single-minded devotion to the deity Ebisu was the primary reason why he repeatedly came in first at the Tōka-Ebisu event. He may have been *ichiban-fuku* precisely because the other parishioners and pilgrims recognized his devoutness. Of course, it also seems his physique was such that he was skillful at maneuvering sharp turns and he was also quite swift.

The first *ichiban-fuku* to have his name mentioned in the papers, Tanaka remained a devout Ebisu worshipper both during the war and after it, though he retired from participating in the opening of the gate

run. He continued to visit Nishinomiya Shrine every morning even after he moved outside Nishinomiya City and always participated in the early morning pilgrimage on January 10. He also found the chance to create the Nishinomiya Chrysanthemum Society (Nishinomiya kikuka kyōkai); was involved in launching among other groups the Waka Ebisu-kai, an organization for young parishioners of the shrine; and rendered many years of service to Nishinomiya Shrine and the parishioner community. He also planted a



TANAKA Taichi

(provided by the author)

double-flowered cherry tree (*Prunus lannesiana*) near the southern gate of the shrine with his own hands; several offshoots have since taken root and every April they yield beautiful flowers. Tanaka died in 1991 (Heisei 2). In his later years, he would say that, “This long life [is] a benefit (*goriyaku*) from Ebisu.”

One can imagine from Tanaka’s story just how remarkable the changes were in Nishinomiya society since he first began to participate in worship at the shrine. The scale of the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu had totally supplanted that of the old calendar event, and the very fact that it was a new festival may have presented the possibility for Tanaka, who in a strict sense was not a parishioner (*ujiko*) of the shrine, to become the *ichiban-fuku*. I will now explore this point further in conjunction with my previous hypotheses.

9. Tōka-Ebisu during the Sino-Japanese War

Once it was determined that seventeen-time winner Tanaka had shared first place with Omatsu from Tanba in 1938, it would seem that speed—an element that has nothing to do with faith—was regarded with greater importance when it came to the dash to be first among the fortunate. Articles about the speed of the participants became more prevalent thereafter. At the same time, the shadow of war dogged those reports. The following excerpts from newspapers and the shrine’s daily logs for 1939-1940 (Shōwa 14-15) confirm these developments. First, an article from the *Osaka Asahi*’s Hanshin edition for January 11, 1939:

Tanaka Taichi, the manager of the Senzoku Lumber Store in Kubo Town, Nishinomiya City, has finally relinquished his throne after a record 18 wins in the Ebisu race that has everyone in town absorbed with the question of “who will be first?”

A victory song was raised instead to Tashiba Kyūichi, 25, an employee of Taguchi Store in Ishizai Town, Nishinomiya City. Kyūichi’s older brother, Ennosuke, 29, an employee of Senzoku Lumber Store, took second place. Tanaka came in third.

Tanaka had not been feeling well in recent days and was apprehensive about taking part, but he showed up garbed in the dashing costume of the young men’s group and accompanied by the aforementioned Tashiba brothers as his seconds. They began their wait around 1 a.m., joined by a crowd of people jostling one another in front of the main gate.

At a signal from the drum at 6 a.m., 20 or 30 men from the fire brigade opened the heavy doors from the inside. The crowd raised a cheer and in a twinkling surged forward like a flood.

Tanaka as expected was among the dozen or so front runners. He broke through to the front, but became labored as he ran across the two-block-length of the shrine grounds.

Seeing this, the Tashiba brothers—perhaps thinking that the time had come for someone else to reign supreme—gave it one last spurt. Kyūichi was the first to reach the bell and sing out in victory, claiming the prize of *kagamimochi* [mirror-shaped rice cakes, usually presented as an offering to the *kami*].

“Tanaka was physically ill, so I went so far as to take part to help him out. When he ran into trouble, though, I just had to push everyone else aside. I have no intention of breaking Tanaka’s record,” said Kyūichi.

Both Tashiba brothers are hardy types who ran track as athletes when they were at Yōgai Elementary School. First-place finisher Kyūichi works at Taguchi *Sake* Barrel Maker in Ishizai Town, Nishinomiya City. His older brother, second-place finisher Ennosuke, is a serious young man who works with Tanaka at the Senzoku Lumber store. Ennosuke is a private first class in the engineers. He served at the Battle of Shanghai and currently serves on the board of the central branch of the reservists’ association in Nishinomiya.

Tanaka expressed his satisfaction despite having surrendered his reign in his 19th race due to being fatigued from illness.

“I thought it would be difficult to come in first with my body weak from having been sick. At the very least, since I held that status for so long I wanted to bestow the position of first among the fortunate to someone among my friends. For the Tashiba brothers, with whom I am generally well-acquainted, to have stepped up to claim that status is no small thing.”

Next is an article dated January 11, 1940 (Shōwa 15), from the same newspaper:

Tashiba Kyūichi of Taguchi *Sake* Tarumaru store in Ishizai Town for a second year in a row has established his supremacy in the race to be number one at the Tōka-Ebisu in Nishinomiya, where the question of “who will be first among the fortunate this year” has been the talk of the town.

Concealed behind Kyūichi’s outstanding performance were the passionate emotions of his brave older brother [Ennosuke] and the deep friendship of his [school] seniors, all encouraging him from the frontlines. . . .

Ennosuke received his glorious call-up notice last August and shipped out to the front in China. He is active as a private first class, but even at the frontlines he is always thinking about the Tōka-Ebisu race. He sent by air mail a photograph taken on the 10th of last month of himself with his comrades before enemy-occupied territory along with a letter saying, “Do your best when it comes to being the first to the bell in the New Year of a radiant Greater East Asia.”

Kyūichi received this encouraging correspondence from the front on the 9th, the eve of the festival, and decided that he would “go at it with the spirit my brother had when capturing enemy territory.”

Tanaka Taichi (40), manager of Senzoku Lumber Store in Kubo Town, Nishinomiya, and a close friend of Pvt. Ennosuke, was deeply moved by these brothers of a nation at war [*gunkoku kyōdai*]. The winner of the race a record-setting 18 times, Tanaka decided to enter this year’s event as Kyūichi’s second.

This morning at 4 a.m., Kyūichi put on his running shirt and a headband emblazoned with the *hinomaru* flag of Japan, and tucked his brave brother’s photograph and letter into his pocket. When the gate opened at 6 a.m., he threw himself forward filled with a fierce determination to win.

Several people formed into a pack in the opening stretch and ran together through the darkness. As they closed in on Nangū Shrine, Kyūichi shot out in front with Tanaka continuing to urge him on, shouting, “Tashiba, do it!”

Finally Tashiba shouted out his triumph. Grabbing the bell’s string, he exclaimed emotionally and without conscious thought, “My brother, I did it!” He

received from the shrine’s chief priest Yoshii a rice offering, chopsticks, and a protective amulet for his brave older brother as a prize for coming in first.

“It was extremely cold this year, but the cold is nothing when I think of my brother on the frontlines so I did my very best. I want to send the amulet and the news on to my brother right away to put his mind to rest.”

Articles on the opening of the gate ceremony generally continued to appear until 1945, even though the volume of newspapers shrank as wartime conditions worsened. The years that received the most prominent coverage in the *Osaka Asahi* were 1939 and 1940. Those years corresponded with the development of the Hanshin industrial zone, with Nishinomiya at its heart thanks to the presence of factories like the Kawanishi aircraft plant. This was also a period when Japan had greater economic surpluses than ever before. Most of all, the Sino-Japanese War that had been going full tilt since July 1937 held great meaning.

The longest articles yet on the Tōka-Ebisu event were to be found on the pages of the newspaper during these years. The speed of the participants received emphasis alongside the aspect of “gaining personal fortune” that had been central to the event previously. Most noticeable of all are the added connotations of the race as an event to lift wartime morale. These are modalities that differ from those of “first among the fortunate” that came before. In the final section, I would like to consider the particular features of the Tōka-Ebisu rite that caused these changes to occur, or made it possible for them to take place.

10. Conclusion

In this report I have traced the history of this rite from the late Meiji until 1940 (Shōwa 15), based primarily using the shrine’s daily logs, newspaper materials, and interviews. I have verified that Nishinomiya was suburbanized and urbanized through the development of transportation infrastructure (the Hanshin Railway in particular). This brought together a large population of shrine visitors who lived according to the new calendar; this in turn led the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu to become the main event even at Nishinomiya Shrine. Thus, the Tōka-Ebisu that is currently performed is not the ancient festival, but rather a new event that is a product of the new calendar. In this final section, I would like to consider several questions, Why did worshippers gather in large numbers for the new event performed under the new calendar? Has the level of attention focused on the gate increased under the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu? And why is so much meaning assigned to the first people to arrive at the shrine? That is perhaps to say, how has it been possible to assign such meaning to it?

One of the features of this festival, also apparent in the old calendar Tōka-Ebisu, is that it was not closely bound to the shrine parishioner system (*ujiko soshiki*) amid the changes that occurred after the Edo Period. The concept of *fuku* was one that came to be associated specifically with individual this-worldly benefits (*genze riyaku*), and both festivals were such that they allowed for new events to be introduced. For those reasons, it was even possible for the ideas that worshippers had under the old calendar festival regarding being the first person to get in to come into play under the new calendar festival as well.

In the Meiji Period, large numbers of people moved to Nishinomiya from various places and the district urbanized. These developments made it impossible to continue holding the *igomori* rite throughout the entire parishioner district. Simultaneously, I believe, a new role for the gate became firmly established; it now began to function as an apparatus that separated the sacred from the profane to create an extraordinary space, thus replacing the *mikari* rite that the

entire neighborhood had once performed. Recall the 1908 article that mentions how people “pushed their way through when the gates opened at 1 a.m. in an effort to be *dai-ichi no fuku*.” The very extraordinariness of these people converging in the middle of the night or early in the morning itself represents the mental state of “a union between deity and man” (*shinjin wagō*) described by Yanagita.

The Tōka-Ebisu was able to grow while still retaining its meaning as a festival precisely because it was able to preserve elements of the original old calendar event despite social changes and the festival’s evolution into a different sort of event under the new calendar. The unique “Opening of the Gate” ceremony took on a life of its own as these changes unfolded.

The deeply devout Tanaka made his appearance as “first among the fortunate” as the focus shifted to the “Opening of the Gate” ceremony. This may have been linked to an increase in shrine visitors who participated in the race to be first because the practice was so simple. Originally, the *igomori* (*mikari*) was something that only parishioners performed; it was a festival that did not allow for the prying of outsiders. The increasing freedom to participate in the festival that came about as it evolved over the course of the Edo and Meiji periods is what caused the scale of the festival itself to expand. The original subtext of the festival was preserved by the existence of the gate.

I really wanted to ask Tanaka for his impression of the race in his heyday and what it was like to take part, but that did not come to pass. However, he said it all in a newspaper interview: “It was not out of desire. I am happy just to be healthy and able to make the visit. I’m going to take the good fortune back to my boss. I would have felt bad somehow if I did not come in first” (January 11, 1937). He appears to have been stirred to run in the race to be *ichiban-fuku* by something other than something that would benefit himself, an impression that becomes even stronger if we think about how he lived the rest of his life.

The nature of the new calendar Tōka-Ebisu festival permits us to imagine how susceptible it was to being influenced by the trends of the times. The intensification of the Sino-Japanese War led the newspapers that covered the festival to take on an increasingly wartime feel, and that in turn bled into how they reported on the *ichiban-fuku* race. An article in the *Osaka Asahi* Hanshin edition for January 11, 1940, observed that the people waiting for the gate to open included “many people of serious appearance, including in particular those young women who had sent their husbands or fathers off to the frontlines and were petitioning the *kami* for continued fortune at war. In this, too, the great strength of the East Asian Empire is inscribed.” The very fact that this concept of *fuku* was involved is what made such a scene possible. The Tōka-Ebisu contained such elements, yet also functioned to provide this-worldly benefits for people while still retaining its original ritual elements as an abstinence (*monoimi*) rite.

The Tōka-Ebisu began as a hunting rite (*mikari shinji*) that had been performed since ancient times. It experienced changes to the patterns of Ebisu belief during the Muromachi Period. Further shifts occurred during the Meiji Period, including the time of year during which it was held as well as further changes in the form of the rite itself. I assert that nonetheless the functions of the original festival remain in the race to be first at the opening of the gate.

I reach two conclusions based on the foregoing regarding the significance that this festival—a product of many changes that took place before modern times—has for society. First, it provides a venue for obtaining the this-worldly benefit of *fuku*, and second, it provides an opportunity to arrive at that mental state of “a union between deity and man” that the festival originally had.

Japan plunged into the Pacific War after the period under study. Going forward, I would like to gather more materials from the Meiji and Taishō periods, and study the historical records from the Pacific War period through the present day, tracing in greater detail the changes the event has undergone subsequent to the present report. In particular, I would like to conduct a document-based inquiry once again with regards to such questions as when the terms used today such as *fuku-otoko* and *kaimon shinji* first appeared as well as the reason why so many articles came to focus on the speed of the front-runner. I would also like to research the changes the rite underwent during wartime and thereafter.

My goal is provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Tōka-Ebisu “Opening of the Gate” Ceremony by continuing my research through participant observation, interviews and surveys to find out whether today’s participants in the rite sense the role for the shrine gate I suggested above, and whether the functions of the festival continue even today.

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¹ *Asahi shinbun*, evening Hanshin edition, January 10, 2009

² Yoshii Yoshitaka, *Jinjashi ronkō* [A study on the history of the shrine]. Nishinomiya Jinja, 1990

³ Seijō University Graduate School of Literature Nihon Jōmin Bunka Senkō Tanaka Sen’ichi’s Kenkyūshitsu, *Ebisu no Sekai: Zenkoku Ebisu shinkō chōsa hōkokusho*. Seijō University, 2003.

⁴ “Tōka-Ebisu kaimon shinji kō” [A consideration of the Tōka-Ebisu “Opening of the Gate” ceremony], in Yoneyama Toshinao, ed., *Ebisu shinkō kenkyūkai hokoku: Ebisu shinkō no nazo o megutte* (Ōtemae University, 2001: 35-70). See also, “Tōka-Ebisu kaimon shinji saikō” in Yoneyama Toshinao, ed., *Bunmei, shūkyō, minkan shinkō: Minkan shinkō kyōdō kenkyūkai hōkoku* [Civilization, religion, popular beliefs: A report from the joint study group on popular beliefs] (Minkan Shinkō Kyōdō Kenkyūkai, 2004: 101-122)

⁵ Yoshii, p. 40. Translator’s note: *tori-no-ichi* festivals are events that take place at *otori* (rooster or cock) shrines held on the day of the cock

⁶ Yanagita Kunio, *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shū 10* [The collected original texts of Yanagita Kunio, vol. 10], Chikuma shobō, 1989:168

⁷ Nishinomiya Jinja ed., *Nishinomiya Jinja* [Nishinomiya shrine], Gakuseisha, 2003:106

⁸ Yoshii, p. 52

⁹ Yoshii, p. 53. All three shrines were deeply connected to Empress Jingū

¹⁰ Yoshii, p. 58

¹¹ Yoshii, p. 60

¹² Yoshii, p. 61

¹³ Yanagita, pp. 153-314

¹⁴ Yanagita, p. 222

¹⁵ Yanagita, p. 220

¹⁶ Yoshii, p. 61

¹⁷ Yoshii, p. 67

¹⁸ Yoshii, p. 64

¹⁹ Yoshii, p. 67

²⁰ *Osaka Asahi shinbun* morning Kobe supplement, February 7, 1903

²¹ I referred to “Hanshinkan samitto,” Jikkō iinkai, ed., *Hanshinkan modanizumu*, Kawade Shuppansha, 1993