

# The record of Women's great treasures

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# The Record of Women's Great Treasures

Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Edo Period: A Translation  
of Volume Three of *Onna chōhōki*

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**Abstract:** *Onna chōhōki* was a bestselling practical guide for women published in Japan in the late seventeenth century. This article translates volume three, concerning pregnancy and childbirth. It covers the whole period from first suspicion of childbirth to early childcare, and briefly describes childhood rituals. The advice can be divided into two broad categories: practical advice on diet, behaviour, and medications, and descriptions of customary rituals that should be performed on certain occasions. It also includes a significant amount of information on fortune telling for a child's future, and a number of charms for such things as increasing the flow of milk. While it does include a list of the Buddhas who watch over the foetus, the contents are overwhelmingly practical and secular in character, with very little discussion of moral issues.

**Keywords:** *Onna chōhōki*, Guides for women, Edo Period Japan, Pregnancy, Childbirth

## 1 Introduction

*Onna chōhōki* 女重宝記, *The Record of Women's Great Treasures*, provides an unparalleled insight into the daily life of women in Edo-period Japan. It was written by Namura Jōhaku 苗村丈伯 and published in the fifth year of the Genroku era (1692). It was reprinted several times in the Edo period, but the contents were substantially unchanged until the last version, published in 1847. As Edo-period publishing set great store by “newly revised and expanded”

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**Original Title:** *Onna chōhōki* 女重宝記, by Namura Jōhaku 苗村丈伯

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editions, this fact suggests that the original version of this text was found valuable for a long time.<sup>1</sup> This translation is based on the Genroku version.<sup>2</sup>

*Onna chōhōki* provided the practical information that women needed for daily life, and covered all the rites of passage for women: preparations for marriage, the wedding itself, pregnancy, delivery, and supervising a daughter's wedding ceremony. This paper contains our translation of volume 3, on pregnancy and childbirth. This volume is almost entirely devoted to practical advice, and even sections that might strike a contemporary reader as superstitious appear to have been included in the belief that they would be helpful. The volume starts by discussing the need for women to marry and at least try to bear children, then moves on to pregnancy testing and antenatal care, and to care around the birth itself, finishing with postnatal care. It covers medical issues, but also ways to tell the baby's fortune, and descriptions of important rituals.

## 1.1 Author and background

Little is known about Namura Jōhaku's life, but it is thought that his family had been doctors in Ōmi, near Kyoto, for generations, and that Namura himself was a doctor and belonged to the Confucian school of Itō Jinsai. Namura published 21 books, of which the *Onna chōhōki* was the most influential.

In the seventeenth century, the level of literacy among women improved sharply, and they became an important market for books; by 1670 a general catalogue of books available for sale had a separate category for “women's books”,<sup>3</sup> which includes five volumes classified by Kornicki into the same genre as the *Onna chōhōki*.<sup>4</sup> The book market as whole grew rapidly over the century, and it is estimated that there were over 7,000 titles in print by 1692.<sup>5</sup> As a result, Namura was writing within a well-established genre, even in the Genroku period,<sup>6</sup> and in this volume he appears to have relied particularly on *Onna kagami hide-nsho*<sup>7</sup> (1650), *Fujin yashinai kusa*<sup>8</sup> (1686), and *Fujin kotobuki kusa*<sup>9</sup> (1692) (available

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1 Berry 2006: 19.

2 Namura 1692.

3 Kornicki 1998: 431.

4 Kornicki 2010: 26.

5 Berry 2006: 31.

6 Berry 2006: 196.

7 Unknown 1650.

8 Baiu 1689.

9 Masuda 1895.

online at [http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/ya09/ya09\\_00386/index.html](http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/ya09/ya09_00386/index.html)), even reusing some illustrations.

While Namura does appear to have aimed his book at urban women, it is not clear which rank he primarily targeted, and he does not seem to be writing to reinforce rank distinctions. This is a feature also found in other informational books of the period,<sup>10</sup> and Lindsey argues that books like this were published to enable people of the commoner class to appropriate samurai culture for their own purposes.<sup>11</sup> He states that the primary readership of this genre were “[w]ealthy farmers, village headman families, and middle- and upper-class urbanites and those living in proximity to large and provincial cities”.<sup>12</sup> There is evidence that girls in such families were normally being taught to read in the seventeenth century,<sup>13</sup> and Kornicki notes<sup>14</sup> that books were available to all levels of society. A catalogue from 1709 gives the price of *Onna chōhōki* as two *monme*, which was the cost of 10 days’ rice for one person.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, we know that the publishing industry was aiming at least some of its products at townsmen,<sup>16</sup> and the *Onna chōhōki* seems to have been among them.

While Namura can in no way be described as a feminist *avant la lettre*, he does appear to be genuinely concerned for women, and that they live life as best they can within their society. *Onna chōhōki* encourages women to study subjects and participate in activities that go beyond caring for children or their husbands. We can say that *Onna chōhōki* encouraged women to realize the value of their lives in everyday practice, and it seems reasonable to speculate that this attitude is part of the reason for the long popularity of *Onna chōhōki*. Women may well have agreed that it contained great treasures.

## 1.2 Publication history

While the publication history of the text is not completely clear, it was republished and reprinted several times during the Edo period. Some of these versions made minor revisions, while the last version, published in 1847, was partly rewritten by Takai Ranzan (1762–1838) and its illustrations were completely redone by Katsushika Ōi, who was a daughter of Katsushika Hokusai.

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<sup>10</sup> Berry 2006: 207.

<sup>11</sup> Lindsey 2007: 11.

<sup>12</sup> Lindsey 2007: 14.

<sup>13</sup> Kornicki 2010: 9–12.

<sup>14</sup> Kornicki 1998: 55.

<sup>15</sup> Saitō 1985: 220. See also Kornicki 1998: 186.

<sup>16</sup> Berry 2006: 32.



Nagatomo Chiyoji's analysis is recognized as the most current bibliographical study of *Onna chōhōki*.<sup>17</sup> He categorizes the versions by size, *hanshi* and *ō-ban*, and by the relationship of each printing to earlier printings. Nagatomo reported his versions on the basis of a thorough analysis of the surviving texts, and he records ten different *hanshi* versions, and nine *ō-ban* versions.

The information given by Kornicki<sup>18</sup> about publication practices allows us to draw some conclusions from Nagatomo's data. Kornicki endorses an estimate of about 8,000 copies from one set of blocks,<sup>19</sup> while Nagatomo reports eight *hanshi* editions printed from new blocks, and three such *ō-ban* editions. This allows a rough estimate of around 80,000 copies of the Genroku edition in circulation during the Edo period. What is more, four of these sets of blocks were carved in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, suggesting sales of over 24,000 copies in that period. Kornicki reports<sup>20</sup> that best-selling works of fiction sold under 3,000 copies in the seventeenth century, and around 10,000 in the nineteenth. By these standards, the *Onna chōhōki* seems to have been a runaway bestseller.

Another source of information on the market for the book is booksellers' catalogues. Saitō Junkichi analysed nine catalogues, and *Onna chōhōki* is found in all the catalogues up to and including 1729, absent in both 1754 and 1772, but present again in the catalogue of 1801.<sup>21</sup>

Turning to the Kōka version, there are copies with small differences including size, title, and the names of publishers and bookshops. As some give the place of publication as "Tokyo" (not "Edo"), it seems that the Kōka version was reprinted into the early Meiji period.

This evidence supports the following sketch of the history of *Onna chōhōki*. It was very successful when first published in the late seventeenth century, and remained popular in the early eighteenth century, before falling out of favour in the middle of the century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, it became popular again. After forty years it was significantly revised, and this version retained its popularity for at least twenty five years, into the early years of the Meiji period.

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<sup>17</sup> Nagatomo 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Kornicki 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Kornicki 1998: 137.

<sup>20</sup> Kornicki 1998: 137–138.

<sup>21</sup> Saitō 1985.

### 1.3 The translation

*Onna chōhōki* is split into five volumes, and this article presents our translation of volume 3, concerning pregnancy and childbirth. We have completed the remainder of the translation, but it is too large for this venue.

In our translation we have aimed to be clear and faithful to the original text, which is not at all literary, and sometimes changes subjects very abruptly; we have provided notes to help the reader when Namura is particularly confusing.

### 1.4 Japanese transcriptions and characters

We have avoided using Japanese as far as possible, but when necessary we have followed the modified Hepburn convention, with macrons indicating long vowels. In addition, we have modernised the transcriptions of most words, following the pronunciation in modern Japanese. Japanese characters have only been provided when the text talks about the structure of characters, and thus the text makes no sense without the characters.

### 1.5 Source texts

The translation is of the edition published in 1692 (Genroku 5), referring to the copy in the National Diet Library, Tokyo (microfilm YD-古-3319) and the modern editions published by Tōyoko Gakuen and Nihon Shigaku Kyōiku Kenkyūjo. We also referred to the texts available online from Tokyo Gakugeidaigaku, which have the Genroku edition illustrations, but lack information on date and place of publication. One includes corrections of xylographical errors, and so is clearly a later printing. Finally, we referred to the edition published in 1847 (Kōka 4) from the copy in the National Diet Library, Tokyo わ-159-124 (microfilm YD-古-3872).

Space constraints make it impossible to provide specific references to sources at all points in the translation. The texts given in the selected bibliography at the end were consulted for the translation of this volume.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.6 The rest of the book

There is only space to publish our translation of one of the five volumes of the *Onna chōhōki*. The following section gives the tables of contents of the remaining volumes.

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<sup>22</sup> Fukuda 1990, Okamoto 1702, Yoshida 2004.

*Volume One: Miscellaneous things that women should learn*

- I The origin of humanity was female
- II On the maintenance of life and moxibustion
- III Ranks of women and the assessment of fashions
- IV Unsuitable behaviour, and learning for women
- V Suitable expressions for ladies and traditional expressions of the court,  
and words to be avoided at weddings
- VI Section on women's make-up
  - Oil for the hair
  - How to improve rust-coloured hair
  - Treatment to remove scurf from the hair
  - Medicine to restore hair
  - Hairstyles
  - Presentation of the forehead
  - Presentation of the eyebrows
  - The use of powder and rouge
- VII Varieties of clothes, and currently popular styles of sash dyeing

*Volume Two: The Wedding*

- I Wedding Procedures
- II Betrothal and the Date of the Wedding
- III The Trousseau
- IV Seating Arrangements and the Ceremonial Toast
- V The Traditional Dishes and Ceremonies for the Wedding Feast
- VI How to Decorate the *Mizushi* and *Kuro-tana* Shelf Stands
- VII How to Display Household Goods at the Wedding
- VIII The Procedures for Serving Sake at the Wedding Toast
- IX Manners for Ordinary Drinking
- X Miscellaneous Eating Manners for Women

*Volume Four: Accomplishments*

- I Literacy and calligraphy
- II Learning to compose poems and learning about poets
- III Playing the koto and the names of the parts
- IV Shell-matching and poem cards
- V Listening to incense and the game of ten incenses
- VI Good compounds for wearing incense
- VII The names of *kyara* incense and ways of compounding *kyara*
- VIII Women's illnesses and secret sovereign remedies
- IX Ways of removing any stain

*Volume Five: Suitable Usages for Women*

(This volume is mostly word lists)

- I Words for women — utensils
- II — clothes
- III— cloths
- IV — names of colours of dyes
- V— women's language and phonetic letters
- VI Table of contents of the *Tale of Genji*
- VII The use of kana
- VIII Five seasonal festivals and *inoko*
- IX Japanese poetic vocabulary and Chinese-style names
- X Illustrations of Ogasawara style wrapping methods and foldings

## 2 Translation

### Onna chōhōki

#### Volume 3 – Translation

##### I Pregnancy and ante-natal care

Some medical texts say that women ordinarily start menstruating when they become fourteen years old and men first ejaculate at the age of sixteen. Bearing this in mind, in China people say that until these characteristics are firmly established you cannot safely have sexual relations, so that men do not get married before thirty years old and women do not do so before twenty. This is because people are afraid that they would not be able to produce an heir. In our country, we do not have such a tradition, and men tend to get married when they reach the age of sixteen or seventeen, while women do so at the age of thirteen or fourteen. The higher the class people belong to, the younger they are accustomed to get married. Since parents worry that their children might form unacceptable attachments, or that they might become depressed or suffer from tuberculosis, they hurry their weddings. As a result, men sire children while they are still young, and do not know how to teach them, while women become mothers while they are immature, and do not have the capacity to bring up children. If the parents are not mature enough, their child will be sickly from birth and not live long. If the child dies very young, the family will become extinct for want of an heir. This is the greatest impiety. A wise man called Mencius declared, “Having no descendants is clear impiety”. A man gets married in order to continue the line of his ancestors, and have someone to manage the household. If a man, blinded by lust and overwhelmed by love, marries his lover without considering his wider responsibilities, he

has left the correct path. Therefore there are seven faults<sup>23</sup> which can exile women from their husbands' family. Not giving birth is one of them. However, whether a woman gives birth or not depends on her physical condition and she cannot do anything about it. If a woman is sickly from birth, she will not become pregnant. Even though she seems fine, if she has trouble with blood circulation, lumps, or her genitals, she might not be able to bear a child.

However, if you are born as a woman, you should not remain single for life. Whether when you are young or when you get old, you will have an opportunity to get married. Therefore you should always take care of your health in order to get pregnant without any physical problems. When you conceive a child, you must be more careful morning and night about your health, food, and so on. Particular advice for the period of pregnancy is discussed later. If you take care of yourself following this advice, you will not become ill. Moreover, women who are already ill will completely recover, other women who are sickly from birth will become strong enough, and all kinds of women will be able to get pregnant.

When you look around the world, you will see that the vulgar get many children but nobles like the shogun and domain lords cannot sire any children, despite their wishes. They carefully choose as concubines women who are expected to conceive children. Even though they take great pains to sire a child, they sometimes fail. This must be their fate in this incarnation. The shogun and domain lords are in this world's paradise, but on the other hand the vulgar are like the hungry ghosts in hell. It is reasonable that very few seeds of the Buddha should be born into paradise in the chaos of these last times, but on the other hand the seeds of the hungry ghosts born into hell are as many as the clouds in the sky. You should realise that, because it is difficult to become a Buddha, the upper classes are unlikely to have children. Although I say nothing of ordinary life, women should be particularly fervent in their devotions to the kami and Buddhas during pregnancy. If you do so, your child will be wise and talented, and your delivery will be easy.

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<sup>23</sup> These faults, which were originally from Chinese Confucianism (the *Dàdài Lǐjì* 大戴禮記 of *Dài Dé* 戴德), were as follows. A woman could be made to divorce if she (1) did not obey her parents-in-law (2) did not bear a child (3) was lecherous (4) had a disease (5) talked too much (6) was thievish, or (7) was jealous. They were popularised in Japan with the publication of the *Onna daigaku* in 1716.

**II How to ascertain whether or not you are pregnant**

Take 3.75 g of ground Szechuan lovage in a liquid of decocted mugwort when you feel hungry. If you notice some slight movement in your abdomen on the same day, you are pregnant. If there is no movement, you are not pregnant. You are ill.

Another test: decoct mugwort with good quality vinegar and take half a sake cup of it. If you feel constant pains in your abdomen, this is a clear symptom of pregnancy. If there is no pain, you are not pregnant. You are ill.

**III How to take care of yourself when you are pregnant and food for expectant mothers.**

When you do not menstruate for two or three months and you finally know you are pregnant, you feel sick, throwing up and coughing up phlegm, you have food cravings, and you feel dizzy, chilled and feverish both. These symptoms are called morning sickness. Even without taking medicine, you will recover as your pregnancy progresses. When you are finally sure that you are pregnant, you should be most careful of your mind and body for ten months. Keeping evil things from your ears and evil scenes from your eyes, you should listen to the precepts of the saints and sages and read texts, even if you do not fully understand. Keeping evil odours from your nose and evil tastes from your mouth, you should sleep and work on a regular schedule and neither get angry nor bear a grudge. You should keep your heart honest and your compassion deep. You should be calm and not get agitated. If you are careful like this, you will bear a child who is creative and talented. He will be an ideal man and good to his parents.

While you are pregnant, you should do your household tasks positively, and you should sleep with your legs bent. If you take it easy and lie with your legs stretched out, the baby will become fat, and you will have trouble giving birth. You should walk around the room.

While you are pregnant, you must not stretch to get something from high up, you must not carry anything heavy, and you must not stumble. If you do these, you will miscarry and your baby will die.

During pregnancy, you should not eat anything too sweet, too spicy or too hot. If you eat such food, the baby will have skin trouble on the head.

If you often make love after the fifth month, your baby will suffer serious smallpox. You should be careful.

If you are surprised and frightened many times during pregnancy, your baby will inevitably have convulsions after birth.

Do not have moxibustion in the last month. If you do, you will give birth in a few days. It does not benefit you to deliver earlier. You must wait patiently for the proper day. You may have moxibustion in the previous month.



Even when pregnant, some women menstruate every month as before and then give birth. This is called *kutai*. Some women bleed a great deal some months after becoming pregnant, but still give birth normally. This is called *rōtai*. You will find these in medical texts.

Harmful food combinations for expectant mothers

If you eat eggs and either carp or sweet fish together, your child will have seasonal eczema at birth.

If you eat chicken and sticky rice together, your child will have roundworm at birth.

If you eat sea gull eggs and mulberry, you will have a breech birth.

If you eat sparrow with sake, your child will be born lecherous and shameless.

If you eat crab, your baby will present sideways at birth.

If you eat water chestnuts, you will have a miscarriage.

If you eat ginger, you will have a child who has more than ten fingers.

If you eat mushrooms, your child will have convulsions from birth.

If you eat eggs and dried salted salmon, your child will have boils from birth.

If you eat freshwater snails, you will have a difficult birth.

If you eat soft-shelled turtle, your child will be born with a short neck.

If you eat soy bean sauce and young leaves of beans, you will have a miscarriage.

If you eat sparrow and flavoured soy bean paste, your child will have a birthmark.

If you eat fish without scales, for instance loach or eel, you will have a difficult birth.

If you get pregnant in a strong wind, in heavy rain, during thunder, during an earthquake, or in front of either a statue of Buddha or a holy image, you will have a difficult birth and your baby will die young.

Good food for pregnancy

Barley, foxtail millet, millet, black soy bean, daikon radish, edible burdock, fiveleaf aralia berries, strawberries, Chinese wolfberry, thistle, sweet cicely, spikenard stems, Japanese yam, carp, oysters, cuttlefish, wild goose, jellyfish, gluten, carrots.

Bad food for pregnancy

*Nashi* pear, Japanese plum, peach, plum, apricot, water chestnut, powdered starch, Japanese leek, noodles, beans, Japanese rice cake, mushrooms, lotus root, Japanese knotweed, soya bean seasoning, konjac, crab, freshwater clams, almond, sweet fish, marinated fresh fish and shell fish, prawn, duck, pigeon, sparrow, flatfish, kelp, octopus, loach, meat, fish without scales, smelly food,

spicy food, salty food, oily food, hot food, fresh water fish, common purslain, crucian carp.

#### IV About the sash during pregnancy and the daily development of the foetus<sup>24</sup>

Speaking about pregnancy in general terms, you will give birth in the tenth month after your last menstruation.

A one month foetus is said by medical texts to be like “white dew”. Buddhist texts say that it has a figure like a pilgrim’s staff, and Fudō watches over it.

A two month foetus is said by medical texts to be like a “flower of a peach tree”. Buddhist texts say that it has a figure like a single-tined ritual rod, and Shaka-nyorai watches over it.

A three month foetus is said to be like a triple-tined ritual rod, and Monju watches over it.

A four month foetus is said to be like a five-tined ritual rod, and Fugen watches over it.

From the fifth month, a foetus has the figure of a human being, and in this month Jizō Bosatsu watches over it.

A six month foetus is watched over by Miroku.

A seven month foetus is watched over by Yakushi.

An eight month foetus is watched over by Kannon.

A nine month foetus is watched over by Seishi.

A ten month baby is watched over by Amida-nyorai, and its human figure is completed.

If a pregnant woman has faith in the Buddha of each month, the child will not be handicapped and will be wise. From the fifth month, the foetus is taking on its shape, and you should tie the sash-belt before then.<sup>25</sup> If you tie the sash, you will not have a difficult birth because the sash will stop the foetus moving up. Concerning the sash, you should fold 240 cm of unrefined silk into four. The man should hand the folded sash over from his left sleeve to the woman’s right hand. This is a celebratory ritual. After the birth, you should dye this cloth pale yellow with auspicious patterns and make baby clothes.

There is another celebratory ritual in which you ask a woman who has borne many children to give the sash to you.

<sup>24</sup> This section is partly quoted from Masuda 1895: 89, but Namura added pictures of the foetus and was more influenced by Buddhism.

<sup>25</sup> This information about the sash is also found in *Fujin kotobuki kusa*. Masuda 1895: 83–84.



When you tie the sash, you should do it facing the fortunate direction after a formal three cup toast.<sup>26</sup> Afterwards, you should remove this sash and replace it with another.<sup>27</sup> Auspicious days for tying the sash are as follows<sup>28</sup>: in the upper wood, the rat or dog; in the lower wood, the ox, sheep, or dragon; in the upper earth, the horse, rat, or dog; in the lower earth, the ox; in the upper metal, the monkey or dog; in the lower metal, the rabbit or rooster; in the upper fire, the horse or dog.<sup>29</sup>

If you perform the sash-ritual on these days, you will not have a difficult birth.

### V Auspicious directions to face when giving birth

On the day of the rat, horse, rabbit, or rooster, you should face south.

On the day of the tiger, monkey, snake, or boar, you should face northwest.

On the day of the dragon, dog, ox, or sheep, you should face southeast.

In the first month of the year, the direction of the sheep (30° west of due south).

In the second month, the direction of the dog (30° north of due west).

In the third month, the direction of the ox (30° east of due north).

In the fourth month, the direction of the sheep.

In the fifth month, the direction of the dragon (30° south of due east).

In the sixth month, the direction of the horse (due south).

In the seventh month, the direction of the tiger (30° north of due east).

In the eighth month, the direction of the sheep.

In the ninth month, the direction of the monkey (30° south of due west).

In the tenth month, the direction of the dog.

In the eleventh month, the direction of the dog.

In the twelfth month, the direction of the ox.

If you give birth facing the direction given above, neither you nor your baby will have any problems.

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<sup>26</sup> This is described in volume 2, on the wedding ceremony.

<sup>27</sup> This sash is purely ceremonial. However, pregnant Japanese women traditionally wore a special sash-belt throughout the pregnancy, so this instruction means that the woman should remove the ceremonial sash and replace it with the practical one.

<sup>28</sup> These instructions refer to the calendar's *jikkan jūnishi*, literally “10 stems and 12 branches”. The system consists of two ordered sets of Chinese characters, one of 10 units called the 10 stems or trunks, and the other of 12 units called the 12 branches. The two sets were used together in two-symbol combinations to create a cycle of 60, which was used to count years and mark time in other ways. The ten trunks are the five Chinese elements, upper and lower, while the twelve branches are the animals of the Chinese zodiac.

<sup>29</sup> There appear to be no auspicious days in the lower fire, or in water.

## VI Clothes and items to be avoided at the delivery

The clothes that you should avoid in the delivery room are cloth with raised thread patterns, clothes without any pattern, purple ones, striped ones, bright red coloured tie-dye, blanched white, and cloth with a fine crepe. You must not enter the delivery room in these clothes. It is essential for women giving birth to avoid the clothes listed above. They will have a bad influence.

Particular people whom you should exclude from the delivery room are people with strong body odour, menstruating women, people undergoing purification, and people who ate something with a strong smell. You should exclude anyone and anything impure from the delivery room.

## VII The times of Death's Known Time (*Chishigo*)

On the first, second, ninth, and tenth days, Death's Known Times are the hours of the rat (23:00–01:00), the horse (11:00–13:00), the rabbit (05:00–07:00), and the rooster (17:00–19:00).

On the third, fourth and fifth days, Death's Known Times are the hours of the ox (01:00–03:00), the sheep (13:00–15:00), the dragon (07:00–09:00), and the dog (19:00–21:00). On the sixth, seventh and eighth days, Death's Known Times are the hours of the tiger (03:00–05:00), the monkey (15:00–17:00), the snake (09:00–11:00), and the boar (21:00–23:00).

These days repeat differently in the upper, middle, and lower periods of the month. A baby who is not born at Death's Known Times will have a short life. For instance if a baby is not born in the hour of the rat, you should take care that it is born in the hour of the horse on the next day.

## VIII Items that you should prepare before the delivery

Placenta Pail. Normally called *ena oke*, formally called *oshi oke*. The formal custom requires twelve, but you can get by with one. These are pails in different sizes, 21 cm, 27 cm, and 18 cm in diameter, and 18 cm, 21 cm, and 26 cm high. Each pail has a lid. Patterns of cranes, turtles, pine trees and bamboo trees are painted on the surface. If you prepare twelve pails, you should prepare twelve small knives; if you only have one pail, you should have one knife. You should prepare the knives, string made of nettle fibre, and three unglazed plates in advance.

You press the umbilical cord against the unglazed plate when cutting it with the knife. Then you wrap the baby's cord in paper and tie it with the string.

Twelve small coins and a small amount of rice are often put in the pail. Sometimes people also put more of the string, five pieces of rice straw, or dried

abalone in the pail. Determine the auspicious direction and then, facing it, dig a hole about 30 cm deep in the ground, and bury the pail in it while sprinkling salt water a little at a time. It is said that sprinkling salt water venerates the deity of the soil. It is commonly said that the placenta pail should be buried under the border between rooms or another place that people step over,<sup>30</sup> or under the delivery room. Lower class people wrap the afterbirth in a straw mat and throw out it on the street. Kites and crows come down and take it. They leave it on shrines, sacred trees, and shrine gates. This is sacrilegious. The placenta covers the foetus' head in the womb and prevents the foetus from being harmed by poisons in the mother's food, and its base extends from the navel and transfers vitality. Therefore the placenta feeds the foetus for ten months in the womb and then it becomes unnecessary after cutting the umbilical cord at birth. This is because a baby is nourished by milk.

You should ask a doctor to give you *anshinsan*<sup>31</sup> powder before the delivery and take it with hot water if you feel dizzy after giving birth. If you take it with cold water, you are likely to feel pain from the contraction of the womb. It is better to take this medicine even if you do not feel dizzy.

In addition, you should prepare carrots. As soon as the mother starts labour, you should put 3.75 g of chopped carrot and 0.5 g of ginger in one tea bowl of water and boil it down to six or seven tenths of the original volume. If the mother loses consciousness after giving birth, have her drink a little of this liquid straight, and she will come round. Since there is no time to make it when you need it, you should boil it in advance. This liquid is called *dokujintō*.

We say the waters break when amniotic fluid comes out of the womb before you start labour. The common people call it “door opening water”. If you have “door opening water”, you should take medicine to speed up labour. You should not take this medicine before the waters break.

You should prepare high-quality vinegar and a broken piece of high-quality lacquered ware. If the mother is faint and dizzy after delivery due to lack of blood to the head, you should put a burning coal in a tea bowl with the vinegar and have her smell this smoke. Alternatively, you can put the piece of lacquered ware into a fire and have her smell the smoke. She will revive and come round.

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**30** People avoided stepping on the wooden strip that marked the border between rooms in a house. Note that the text implies that you take up the floor of the house to bury the *oshi oke*.

**31** It is unclear now what this medicine was, but it is also mentioned in *Fujin kotobuki kusa*, so it seems to have been well known at the time.

### IX At the delivery<sup>32</sup>

Just before giving birth you always have labour pains, when the baby turns over. If you do not have pains in your back, but just labour pains, you must not try to give birth. You should walk gently around the room leaning against something or being supported by someone. If you do this, your womb will relax so that the baby can easily turn. When the baby has already turned and the midwife can touch its hair in the birth canal, she should lift you up and have you push in a burst.<sup>33</sup> If you push before the baby turns, the baby will be born with its arm first, sideways birth, or feet first, breech birth. In either case the delivery is difficult.

Further, if you exert yourself before the appropriate time, you will become tired and it will be difficult for you to give birth. You should push when the midwife says. A woman who ought to have babies should habitually listen carefully and learn about the delivery. If you are remiss, you will have a difficult birth.

After you have given birth, you should take the *anshinsan* mentioned above and smell the vinegar. Close your eyes and lean against something high, drawing up your knees instead of stretching out your legs, and not standing on tip toe, or leaning on something while standing. You should occasionally stroke yourself from the breast down to the groin. You should not take a long sleep. If a new mother does sleep for a long time, someone should wake her gently. She should not be woken suddenly. You should eat plain rice porridge.

### X Good food and care after the delivery

In the seven days after the delivery, you should refrain from eating raw fish.

You should avoid draughts.

You should not cry or be sad.

You should be neither surprised nor scared.

You should not leave bed for twice seven days.

If you have a fever, you should not take a hipbath.<sup>34</sup>

You should not put your full energy into anything.

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<sup>32</sup> As is normal in Japanese, almost none of the sentences in this section have explicit subjects. Some of the advice is clearly aimed at the mother, while other advice is clearly aimed at people attending the birth (what to do if the mother falls asleep, for example). The author makes no distinction. Since most of the advice is directed at the expectant mother, we have referred to her as “you” in the translation.

<sup>33</sup> In the Edo period, Japanese women gave birth while squatting, supported either by attendants or by holding onto ropes fixed to the ceiling.

<sup>34</sup> Where you immerse yourself in water up to the hips.

You should not eat until you cannot eat more, nor stop while still hungry.

You should not wash your hair early.

You should not comb your hair early.

You should not wash yourself in a tub early.<sup>35</sup>

You should not make your hands and feet cold with water.

You should not cut your nails early.

You should not approach a man early.

You should not perspire.

You should not walk long distances or do physical labour.

You should not stay in the toilet a long time so that your vulva gets cold and you catch cold.

You should not irritate your gums with a toothpick in the seven days after the delivery.

Unsuitable food after delivery

Aubergine, squash, bracken, water pepper, potato, buckwheat, konjac, Japanese pear, garlic, pepper, pricklyash, azuki bean, lettuce, vinegar, sake, kelp, mushrooms, fruits, cold food including uncooked fish and vegetables, noodles, people with strong body odour.<sup>36</sup>

Suitable food after delivery

Porridge, urine of a newborn baby,<sup>37</sup> the white part of Japanese leek from seven days after birth, pike eel, carp, oyster, eel, jellyfish, flying fish, the shoots from old potatoes.

### **XI Good or bad seasons for delivery depending on the year when a mother was born**

For a woman who was born in the year of the rat, summer and winter are good, but spring and autumn are bad for the delivery.

For a woman who was born in either the year of the ox or the year of the tiger, summer and winter are good, but autumn is bad for the delivery.

For a woman who was born in either the year of the dragon or the year of the monkey, spring and autumn are good, but summer and winter are bad for the delivery.

For a woman who was born in the year of the sheep, spring and autumn are good, but summer and winter are bad for the delivery.

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<sup>35</sup> Standing in a small tub and pouring water over your body; similar to a shower.

<sup>36</sup> This is just added to the list in the Japanese as well. Edo period Japanese did not eat people, however, even if they had no body odour.

<sup>37</sup> It appears that this really was drunk in the period.

For a woman who was born in either the year of the rabbit or the year of the rooster, summer and winter are good, but spring and autumn are bad for the delivery.

For a woman who was born in either the year of the dog or the year of the boar, summer and winter are good, but spring and autumn are bad.<sup>38</sup>

## **XII Predicting good or bad fortune for a baby depending on the birth month**

In the first month: good for a baby boy, but bad for a baby girl.

In the second month: good for a baby boy, but bad for a baby girl.

In the third month: good for a baby boy, but bad for a baby girl. She will become poor.

In the fourth month: good for both baby boys and girls.

In the fifth month: a boy will have a long life and a girl will become poor.

In the sixth month: good for a baby boy, but bad for a baby girl.

In the seventh month: a baby boy will be poor but good for a baby girl.

In the eighth month: good for a boy, but bad for a girl.

In the ninth month: good for a boy, but bad for a girl.

In the tenth month: good for a boy, but bad for a girl.

In the eleventh month: good for a boy, but bad for a girl.

In the twelfth month: a boy will be given a court rank and good for girl.

## **XIII Powerful treatments and moxibustion for difficult deliveries<sup>39</sup>**

There is fish called a seahorse which lives in the sea. It is said that a woman will not have a difficult birth if she is made to hold this fish in her hand. A seahorse is similar to the shrimp called *shakunagi*. Alternatively, there is a shellfish called *koyasukai*.<sup>40</sup> If you put medicine to speed up delivery in this shell and the mother drinks it, she will give birth safely. I will include pictures and you should look at and remember them.

The mother will have a difficult delivery if she has an unsuitable lifestyle during pregnancy. If she strains herself before the right time during labour, her baby might come out feet-first, called breech birth, or come out hands-first,

<sup>38</sup> The text gives no indications for women born in the years of the horse or snake.

<sup>39</sup> Once again, the author does not clearly distinguish the target of the advice. Verb forms and context indicate that most of the advice is aimed at someone other than the pregnant woman, so for this section “you” is someone attending the birth.

<sup>40</sup> Two different species are called this in modern Japanese, but the illustration in the text looks nothing like either of them.



called sideways birth. Even if it seems a very difficult delivery, you should not panic in order not to alarm the pregnant woman. As avoiding a difficult delivery depends on the skill of the midwife and the doctor's medicine, I will not describe it in detail here. I will describe some good treatments here, and you should use them in emergencies.

A charm against difficulty giving birth; you should write *ise* 伊勢 on paper and venerate it. You should have the mother drink it with water and then she will give birth smoothly. If you break up the Chinese letters for *ise* you can read them as “this is perfect power to give birth for human beings”.<sup>41</sup> Therefore it is rational to think that it has a divine power over birth.

Stroking down the groin with a bear's paw helps the mother give birth.

Burning mugwort three times at the top of the mother's little toe on the right foot changes a very difficult delivery into a safe one. Alternatively, it is good to burn mugwort three times along the 16<sup>th</sup> vertebra.

When the baby's hands or feet come out first at the birth, stick a thin needle 0.5 cm into the hands or back of the feet of the baby. If you spread salt on this wound, the baby will withdraw his hands or feet. As such a treatment makes the baby turn in the birth canal, the mother should then push.

If the baby died inside the mother before birth and the mother cannot deliver it, you should have her take steamed deer horn with sake. The baby will come out without further treatment. Alternatively, it is also good for the mother to take a 1.25 cm length of musk and 11.25 g of cinnamon powdered with sake. The evidence that the baby has died in the womb is that the mother's tongue has turned black.

If a mother cannot expel the afterbirth, you should shell castor-oil grains and knead and mix them with ground steamed rice. Spread this paste on the back of the mother's feet, and she will soon expel the afterbirth.

If the mother feels cramps after the delivery, you should grind the poppy-based medicine called *engosaku* and she should take this powder with sake. It is rather old-fashioned, but it is good for her to take the stalk of *matsutake* mushroom or potato stalk in miso soup. If she wears a hemp cord at the groin she will, marvellously, feel no pain after the birth.

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<sup>41</sup> The leftmost element of 伊 is a form of 人, meaning human being, and 尹 originally means reign. 勢 is being divided into 生 (live or give birth), 力 (power), and 丸 (round, complete, perfect). *Ise* is also the site of the main shrine to Amaterasu, which was a centre of popular devotion in the Edo period.

**XIV Swelling and pain in the breasts after birth<sup>42</sup>**

If your breasts become inflamed, and you have pain and shivering, you cannot nurse. In this case you should grind the white part of Japanese leek and its roots and spread this paste thickly on the swollen parts of your breasts, covering it with paper. If you put a warmed stone wrapped in cloth on this paper on the breasts, you will start perspiring and get better. If you have just a slight swelling, you should warm the juice of ginger and put it on your breasts several times with a bird's feather.

It is also good for you to grind pure male sparrow droppings and take the powder with sake 7.5 g at a time.

Medicine to make enough milk. If you take the liquid from azuki beans in small amounts, your milk will become sufficient. Alternatively you can take equal amounts of licorice and lotus leaves boiled together. It is also good for you to take steamed honeycomb with sake.

It is also good to burn an old winnowing fan and warm your breasts. Writing the character for carp (鯉) on your breasts is also a charm against lack of milk.

Suitable food for a mother whose milk is insufficient.

Carp, grains of wheat, dried squid, paulownia leaves, Japanese yam, lettuce, dandelion, flying fish, unflavoured rice porridge, porridge with azuki, weak sweet sake.

**XV Things to be performed after the birth<sup>43</sup>**

When the baby is born, the midwife should wrap her finger with cotton and wipe away the old blood inside the baby's mouth before the first cry. If the baby swallows the old blood, he will suffer serious smallpox. Therefore you should arrange to have two midwives at the delivery. One is for the baby and the other for the baby's mother. You should not make a single midwife take care of both the mother and baby. If one midwife takes care of both, she spends time looking after the mother, leaving the baby on a straw mat. Thus, the baby swallows this poisonous blood when he first cries. This causes him to suffer smallpox and eczema.

The first bath. You should wrap a small amount of salt and put it in water which was used to wash rice.

When you give the baby his first bath, you should hold him in a piece of cloth. You should dry the baby with cotton.

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<sup>42</sup> The target of the advice seems to revert to the mother in this section, and so the mother is now indicated by "you".

<sup>43</sup> This section covers the first five years of life; the target of the advice is broad. "You" is taken to be the mother.



The first clothes for a baby. You should put a baby boy's left arm in first and a baby girl's right arm into the sleeve first. Do not tie the belt over the top, just wrap the clothes over.

Naming a baby. You should name the baby within the first seven nights. If you cannot make a final decision in the first seven days, you should give the baby a temporary name for the celebration.

Presentation at the shrine. A baby boy should be presented at the shrine on the thirty-second day after the birth, a baby girl should be presented on the thirty third day.

Ritual first meal. This ritual should take place on the one hundred and twentieth day after the birth. A man should pretend to feed a baby boy and a woman a baby girl. A man should hold the baby on his left knee, a woman should hold the baby on her right knee. Either should take a small offering of rice from rice made into a globe shape and place it at the far right corner of the tray.<sup>44</sup> Each person just pretends to feed the baby. The roast dish on the tray is gurnard. You should put two stones on the rice.<sup>45</sup>

The ritual of *kamioki*.<sup>46</sup> Both boys and girls perform this ritual on the fifteenth day of *Shimotsuki*<sup>47</sup> at the age of three.<sup>48</sup> They should be dressed up with wigs of white cotton decorated with pine, carrying a decorative fan and hair band, and then go to their patron shrine.

The ritual of first wearing trouser skirts and veils. This ritual should take place on the first day of the year when children become five years old.

### XVI Treatment for a newborn baby

As soon as a baby is born, you should grind 3.75 g of liquorice and 0.75 g of goldthread root together and wrap this powder with cloth and drop it in hot water. You should dip cotton in this liquid and have the baby drink it from the cotton.

The mix of five spices called *gokōtō* is also good. Alternatively it is also good to boil red seaweed, liquorice and a tuber of butterbur together and add safflower prepared in the coldest days of winter. These medicines help a

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<sup>44</sup> The author uses the Buddhist term for an offering to spirits, *saba*, to describe the rice set to one side, and the word used for the decoration on top of a Buddhist pagoda, *hōju*, to describe the shape of the rice.

<sup>45</sup> This was supposed to help the baby to have strong teeth.

<sup>46</sup> "Putting hair". Babies' heads were shaved for the first few years of life.

<sup>47</sup> The name for the eleventh month of the old lunar calendar. This happened roughly around December.

<sup>48</sup> This is "counted age", which counts the number of years in which the baby has been alive. It is one or two years ahead of the age in full years.

baby discharge poisons from the womb and the baby will only have mild smallpox.

You should not bathe the baby often before the umbilical cord drops off. This is because water will get in through the baby's navel and the baby will get the illness called *saifū zakkō*. If a baby's navel festers after the cord drops off, you should grind musk, tooth-blackening, and mercury chloride together and put this powder on the navel.

Nappies and clothes for a baby should not be left drying outside until nightfall. If you dry these clothes in the heat of a fire, the baby will suffer burning skin sores.

When a baby is sleeping deeply, you should put the light some distance from the baby. The wet nurse should not breathe on the soft head of the baby in her sleep. The baby will become ill.

You should make a pillow with millet and put it over the baby's abdomen when he sleeps.

The various diseases of childhood other than those described above are things that doctors should know, and they are not described here.

### **XVII The laws for taboos that women should follow**

Menstrual impurity. You should stay isolated for seven days. You may go to a shrine from the tenth day after menstruation starts. Fathers are impure for seven days after a birth, mothers for thirty five.<sup>49</sup> From the eighth day you may go out and visit other people's homes. People who attended the delivery or who live in the same house may go to a shrine after two nights and three days.

Miscarriages and impurity. If you miscarry in the first three months, you should follow the rules for normal menstruation. If you miscarry in the fourth or fifth month, the father should not attend rituals for five days and the mother should not do so for ten.

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<sup>49</sup> Note that this means that the mother cannot attend the presentation of the child at the shrine, which happens 32 or 33 days after birth. Traditionally, the father's mother carried the child.

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