

Japanese traditional drink for the new year: Otoso

お屠蘇

Otoso, the traditional Japanese drink during new year celebration.

Every year for three days from January 1st, the Japanese drink [Otoso](#) as part of their celebration of the new year. It is made of spiced Japanese rice wine.

Most Japanese don't know the root of the meaning of the word Otoso which literally means, "something that was slaughtered and resurrected." Yes! This name literally has Christian roots! It has to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Reading from left to right as in English, the first character for O makes a word honorific, the same meaning as the o in *Ocha*, Japanese green tea.

The second character with the sound of to means a person who was slaughtered or killed.

The third character, so, has the meaning of resurrection, coming back to life. Interestingly part of this character is the character for fish. A fish symbol was used among early Christians as a secret sign to know one other. The top part of the character is used in all characters that are plants. Some people say it represents a crown of thorns. The right part of the character has the meaning of tree with a cross.

There is not a single educated Japanese person who will argue the meaning of those Chinese characters! I repeat, not a single person. It is as clear as the difference between black and white to them. Some doubters may argue the Christian roots of that word, but they will not deny those characters mean something killed / resurrected.

There are **many** things in Japanese language and culture that indicate Christianity came to Japan far earlier than most Japanese believe. They were taught in school that Christianity first came to Japan with a Jesuit priest, Francis Xavier, who came to Japan in 1549. But evidence abounds that Christian missionaries came to Japan much earlier, from the 2nd century. This knowledge has been covered.

I hope to add to this blog from time to time more information about Christian influence in Japan that have become central to Japan culture.