

Thunder Catcher

Sugaru is famous as the young woman who caught thunder bare-handed. Her exploit is mentioned in the Nihon Shoki (Ancient Records) and also in Nihon Ryōki (collection of strange tales).

Once as she approached the palace of Emperor Yuraku (5th century), suddenly there was loud thunder and lightning flashed. The emperor and empress were terrified in their room. Seeing Sugaru, the emperor asked her if she could go and catch the thunder. She replied she would.



Instantly she left on a horse. Racing from Kaguyama to Unebiyama, she kept on loudly shouting "Come down. It is the emperor's order." Then she returned knowing that even the thunder had to obey the imperial command.

The thunder fell to the earth. A priest went to place it in a palanquin and brought it to the palace. As the emperor looked at it, the thunder glared with its big eyes. Frightened at its fierce look, the emperor ordered it to be taken to the spot where it fell. The place came to be called Ikazuchi-no-oka (thunder's height) after that.

Soon Sugaru died. Appreciating her faithful service, the emperor closed all offices for seven days in mourning for her. He buried her at the spot where the thunder fell, erecting a tablet with the inscription "Tomb of Sugaru who caught the thunder."

The thunder seeing the tablet became extremely angry. Thundering loudly he came down to the place again and smashed the tablet. But in doing so one leg was caught in a slit made in the pillar supporting the tablet. However, the emperor had pity upon it and ordered its release.

Then the emperor put up a new tablet which said "Tomb of Sugaru who alive and dead caught the thunder."

Even before her thunder-catching exploit Sugaru was famous as the person who opened the first children's nursery in the country. As silk worm raising became popular Emperor Yuraku wanted to acquaint the empress with the art of silk worm raising and asked Sugaru to gather silk worms.

But instead of silk worms she collected many young children. The emperor had a merry laugh. At that time, silk worms were called "ko," also a homonym for children, powder, baskets and silk worms. The emperor told her to take care of the children as she had gathered them. Thus, the nursery she opened was called Chisai-tobe (little children's house).