



Center for Asian
Health Equity

Asian Health Coalition
University of Chicago Medicine

Asian Profile Series:

Japanese Community Culture



Obon (お盆) is an annual Buddhist event for commemorating one's ancestors. It is believed that each year during obon, the ancestors' spirits return to this world in order to visit their relatives. Traditionally, lanterns are hung in front of houses to guide the ancestors' spirits, obon dances (bon odori) are performed, graves are visited and food offerings are made at house altars and temples. At the end of Obon, floating lanterns are put into rivers, lakes and seas in order to guide the spirits back into their world. Obon is mainly observed from August 13 to 16, and the Obon week in mid August is one of Japan's three major holiday seasons (alongside New Year and Golden Week).

Health

According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), from 2005 to 2015, the top diseases in Japan were cerebrovascular disease, Ischemic heart disease, and Alzheimer's disease. High blood pressure contributes to many of these top diseases in Japan. Additionally, a 2015 study of Japanese-Americans in California showed that high blood pressure for those who identified as Japanese (39%) was nearly double that of the overall Asian population (21%). A diet rich in antioxidants and grains is necessary to prevent high blood pressure and other health-related diseases. Traditionally, Japanese food is relatively low in fat, but high in sodium. High levels of sodium directly affect the cardiovascular system, potentially leading to stroke, heart disease, and heart failure. The nutritional value of a Japanese diet — primarily based on wheat, rice, fish, and soy — lacks vital nutrients found in nuts and whole grains. But, small changes like eating low-sodium alternatives can help to decrease risk for high blood pressure and heart disease.



1. Madison O'Connell, *THE IMPORTANCE OF DIET FOR THE TOP DISEASES IN JAPAN*, DOI: <https://borgenproject.org/top-diseases-in-japan/>
2. Ying-Ying Meng, *HEALTH AND HEALTH BEHAVIORS OF JAPANESE AMERICANS IN CALIFORNIA: A SIGN OF THINGS TO COME FOR AGING AMERICANS?*, DOI: <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publications/Documents/PDF/2015/Japanese-Americans-report-apr2015.pdf>

Center for Asian Health Equity (CAHE)

Spotlights

Community Partner

Xilin Association



XILIN ASSOCIATION



The Xilin Association serves families across Chicagoland through a variety of services for children and adults, including in-home services, congregate meals, afterschool programs, and dance classes. Through their Naperville location, Xilin partnered with AHC to bring the CARDIO Program to the Chinese community in the Western suburbs, encouraging heart healthy lifestyle changes through online education classes in Mandarin.

CAHE Staff

A native of Japan, Chieko joined the CAHE team in the fall of 2016 after earning her Master's in Urban Studies and working in academic settings. Chieko is a Public Health Research Specialist/Data Manager. She works with a collection of data files, processing, organizing and storing them securely. She also enjoys looking at data files and analyzing them while working closely with the CAHE researchers and the team.

