

The Flavor of Edo Spans the Globe

—The Food of Edo Becomes a Food of the World—

Many readers were surprised by the article, "A Comparison of the Cultural Levels of Japan and Europe," presented in **FOOD CULTURE** No. 6. The widely held presumption that the average lifestyle of the Edo era was dominated by harsh taxation, oppression by the ruling shogunate, and a general lack of freedom was destroyed. The article in **FOOD CULTURE** No. 6 referred to critiques made by Europeans visiting Japan during the Edo era, who described the country at that time in exactly opposite terms. These Europeans seem to have been highly impressed by the advanced culture and society they found in Japan, placing Japan on a level equal with Europe. In this edition we will discuss the food culture of the Edo era, focusing primarily on the city of Edo itself. The food culture of Edo has expanded to become a food of the world.



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The Worldwide Japanese Cuisine Boom

In the summer of 2000, I spent a week traveling from England's Southampton to New York by Queen Elizabeth II. Though restaurant seating at every meal was by reservation only, passengers could choose a buffet-style lunch. At the lunch buffet every day, there was a space for various kinds of sushi including tuna, salmon, cucumber rolls and takuan pickle rolls. Of course pickled ginger, soy sauce and chopsticks were available with the sushi. At first I thought that this was a service provided for the Japanese passengers, though I later learned that of the one thousand passengers on board, not more than thirty were Japanese. The European and American passengers were using chopsticks to eat their sushi as naturally as if they'd been eating with chopsticks all their lives. Clearly sushi was provided in response to current trends in Europe and the U.S., not as a special service for the Japanese passengers.

Sushi seems to have become a "fast food" of the world. It can be found at Charles de Gaulle International Airport in Paris, at department stores in London, in Manhattan, and not just Europe and the U.S., but all over Asia, Australia and even South America.

Sushi is advancing as a symbol of "high-tech Japan." Even the word "sushi" has become part of the international language.

Sushi is not the only representative of Japanese cuisine to gain renown throughout the world. Beginning of course with soy sauce, sashimi, tempura, tofu, yakitori, gyudon (grilled beef over



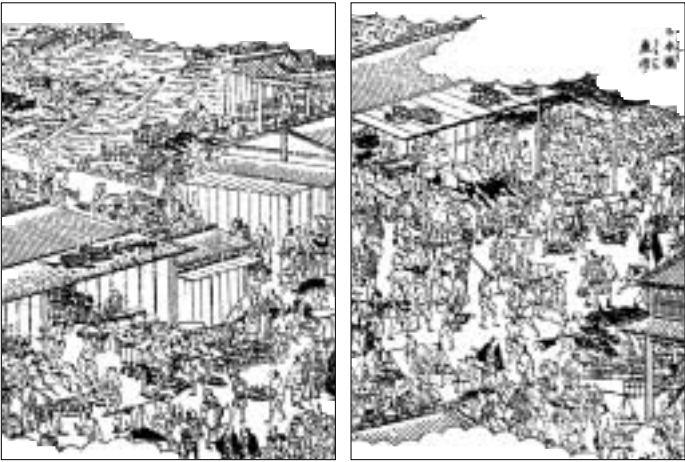
A sushi bar in London (Mappuru magazine, April, 2003 "London", Shobunsha)

rice) and even unadon (grilled eel over rice) are common Japanese dishes spreading around the world. It has been said that Japanese cuisine was not widely accepted worldwide because it was primarily centered around raw fish. The recent boom in Japanese cuisine, however, has shown this premise to be incorrect. Japanese cuisine has proven itself throughout the world to be excellent with dishes suitable to any palate. All of these dishes have a long history, dating from the Edo era, to endorse their quality and excellent flavor.

Starting From Zero

The food culture of the Edo era basically started from zero. The capital city of Edo had a very humble beginning. Edo became the capital city four hundred years ago in the year 1590 when the Tokugawa family moved there. At that time, Edo castle was small and desolate and it is said that there were fewer than one hundred households in the surrounding area. Once Edo was established as the seat of the Tokugawa shogunate, it developed into a complete castle town with nobility and their vassals from all over the country maintaining residences. As to be expected, the establishment of this castle town also demanded the services of various merchants, craftsmen and laborers so that by the beginning of the 18th century, the population of Edo had exceeded one million.

As Edo became a melting pot of people from every region of the country, a new Edo food culture evolved. As people from each region brought their own food culture to Edo, the exchange and fusion of all of the dishes and cooking styles developed into an Edo food culture. While the population grew rapidly at the beginning of the Edo era, the Kyoto and Osaka region was considered the source of the best products and materials in the country. Local products and foods were considered inferior. By the end of the Edo era, however, this situation was reversed. Edo became the economic and cultural seat of Japan. Edo's food culture had also been firmly established. By the turn of the 19th century, Edo



Nihonbashi fish market (Edo Meisho Zue)

cuisine had reached full maturity and the dishes of Edo were considered the apex of Japan's food culture. On a trip to Osaka, a well-known playwright of the time wrote that of the three inferior aspects of the Kyoto and Osaka region, food was one of them. Similarly, an author of Noh plays from Osaka ranked the cuisine of the three major cities of Japan with Edo as the best, followed by Osaka and then Kyoto. It seems that even people from the traditional center of Japan considered Edo the source of the best food in the country.

Edo—A City of Consumers

A primary force behind the development and expansion of Edo's food culture lies in the nature of the population of Edo. Half of Edo's population of one million was made up of the samurai class. This entire class was supported by taxes collected from farmers and, therefore, a purely consumer class. As a rule, the samurai class was very extravagant in their spending and disdained detailed financial recordkeeping. The vanity and obstinacy of the samurai seemed to spread to even the general population of Edo. Leading figures of the shogunate and various clans often treated the merchants and business people with whom they had direct business relations to extravagant meals and receptions. These businessmen, in return, indulged the craftsmen working for them. The people of Edo therefore, were proud of the fact that they could spend all of a single day's earnings with no concern for the following day. It seems true that living conditions in Edo meant that money could always be earned.

Another factor behind the almost excessive use of money on food was the large number of fires in Edo. Often referred to as "the flower of Edo," great fires occurred with regularity every two or three years. In the two hundred seventy years of the Edo shogunate, there were approximately one hundred fires considered to be "great fires." With the destruction caused by fire always in mind, the carpenters, plasterers, craftsmen and laborers of Edo regarded expenditures on household furnishings as almost wasteful, and believed that as long as they had work, there was no need to save money. Though saving capital for the expansion of their businesses may have been beneficial for the merchant class, the craftsmen and laborers whose only capital was their own body saw eating as a priority and one of life's greatest pleasures. It was this way of thinking among the samurai, community leaders, craftsmen, tradesmen and laborers that created the incredible consumer society of Edo. Another prevalent factor was the extremely high ratio of men to women. In the 18th century, there were twice as many men in Edo as there were

women. The enormous single male population of Edo consisted of vassals of the nobility and men who came to Edo in search of success as businessmen, shop owners or laborers. Therefore, restaurants and establishments where the men could meet women were vital to the society. Clearly the combination of various factors led to the development of Edo as a strong consumer society in regards to food.

An Advanced Restaurant Culture

Even from an international perspective, the restaurant culture of Edo was very advanced. The first restaurants were not seen in Europe until around the time of the French Revolution (1789), while Edo is said to have established its first restaurants more than one hundred years earlier in the year 1657.

The first "restaurants" in Edo were very simple establishments serving dishes no more complicated than fried rice or greens. They gradually increased in luxuriousness, however, until all sorts of foods were available, furniture and tableware increased until finally restaurants offering private rooms and even gardens were born. Representatives of the nobility from around the country, famous authors and poets and well-known businessmen became regular customers at such exclusive restaurants so that by the end of the Tokugawa shogunate, the number and popularity of restaurants had increased exponentially.

Well-known authors of the time often wrote about the large number of restaurants in Edo. One of these authors wrote that of the three major cities in Japan, Edo had the largest number and most variation in restaurants. Further, he felt the number and variety of restaurants comparable to that found in the entire country of China. Restaurants of all sizes spread, and the publication of restaurant guides, reviews and rankings were popular topics of conversation among the residents of Edo. In the sixth year of the Annei period (1777),



Restaurant ranking for the year 1861 (Kaiseki Kondate Ryoritsu)



An Edo restaurant serving food and tea (Edo Meisho Zue)

a publication listing the well-known products of the three major cities ranked the thirty-one best restaurants in Edo. Similarly, in the first year of the Kaei period (1848), nearly six hundred various restaurants were introduced in a publication listing Edo's best-known restaurants. In Europe, the Michelin guidebook is a well-known restaurant guide, but publication of this guide did not begin until 1900.

According to an investigation by the Edo shogunate administration in 1804, there were 6,165 restaurants in Edo. This number includes only established restaurants, not peddlers or stands selling prepared foods. A census including these mobile businesses was simply impossible. A book of the time describes even the complaining of women belonging to the lower classes regarding how much money they spent at restaurants and teashops while on trips and excursions. Among the residents of Edo, eating out with the family once or twice a month became a popular custom. It is interesting to note that coupons came into existence at this time as well. Coupons for use at a particular restaurant, or for a particular dish were often given as gifts.

If restaurants were the domain of the upper classes of Edo, the various types of mobile street vendors serving cooked food belonged to the lower classes, which comprised over half of the population. These mobile street vendors had been in existence in Edo since the beginning of its development as a capital city. Laws in existence since the middle of the Edo era, forbidding the transportation of fire or hot coals as required by vendors of udon, soba, sake and other food or drink that required cooking or heating, appear to have been largely ignored.

Large, mobile carts serving food and drink made their appearance in 1770. The number and variety of these carts increased so that by the 1780s, they could be seen parked in tight lines on either side of busy roads. These stands offered a wide variety of dishes including tempura, grilled eel, sushi, steamed rice with barley, dumplings, dried squid, rice cakes and so on. These mobile vendors traveled throughout the city offering their particular specialty with individual mantra-like songs. They found their way into every corner of the city and met a variety of customer demands. A fish vendor would cut a fish to the customer's specifications, as would a tofu vendor. Miso vendors would add onions and various seasonings to the miso paste, which they would then form into small balls so that a customer need only add hot water to make miso soup. A mixture of natto (fermented soybeans), finely chopped tofu and spices was also a popular item.

With such convenience and variety available to them, the people of Edo often preferred to make their meals from these mobile vendors rather than cook themselves. The especially high number of single residents and small families also meant

that it was more economical, as regards both cost and preparation time, for a large percentage of the population to eat from these mobile vendors than to prepare meals at home. As demand from the population increased, the number and quality of the mobile vendors also increased. The Edo cuisine so popular today seems to have been born from the food service industry of the Edo era.

The Appearance of Edo Cuisine

The four most popular dishes in Edo cuisine were soba (buckwheat noodles), grilled eel, tempura and sushi. Buckwheat, primarily grown in mountain villages, was originally eaten as a mash, gruel, a pasty cake or dumpling. Buckwheat came to be used to make noodles at the beginning of the Edo era. Though soba (buckwheat noodles) was known to be quite delicious, it was only eaten on special occasions because preparing the noodles was very time and labor intensive. When this "special occasion" food began being sold in restaurants in Edo, it was tremendously popular. This popularity is quite understandable when considering the fact that food reserved for special occasions in rural hometowns could be eaten cheaply in the streets of Edo.

Soba restaurants first made their appearance in the middle of the 17th century and were immediately popular with the lower classes. Though originally considered a dish below the standards of the upper class palate, soba soon gained recognition and was loved by people of every class. As the most popular food in Edo, there were some 3,763 soba restaurants in Edo by 1860. The population of Tokyo today is 12,000,000 with approximately 5,000 soba restaurants. Edo, with its population of 1,000,000 supported nearly 4,000 soba restaurants. Moreover, this number didn't include the mobile vendors of soba!

However, according to one work published in 1842, actual soba restaurants didn't appear until the Kyoho period (1716—1735). It seems that while udon had long been the most popular noodle dish in Edo, it was soon replaced by soba. Initially, Edo was inhabited by people from southern Japan who preferred udon (thick noodles made from wheat). As the number of people from northern Japan gradually increased, a natural shift to soba as the preference took place. Along with the shift in noodles came a corresponding shift in the soup from the light soy sauce flavor preferred in the Kyoto and



A reception for business associates (Toto Saijiki)

Osaka region to the stronger soy sauce flavor preferred in the Kanto (area surround Edo and modern day Tokyo) region.

While today the word "edomae" (an adjective used to describe a dish as being truly representative of Edo cuisine) is most often used to describe sushi, it was originally used to refer to a place where eel was caught. Edomae eel, so-called because it was caught in the Edo area, was of the highest quality, while eel caught in other regions was considered far inferior. The people of Edo often bragged that kabayaki (grilled eel) made from edomae eel was the best in Japan. It should be noted, however, that kabayaki first made its appearance in Kyoto during the Genroku period (1688—1703) and did not find its way to Edo until the beginning of the 18th century. The Kyoto method of preparation was to skewer the eel on a gold spit and apply a flavoring sauce during grilling. The people of Edo originally used this same method, but gradually added to the process. The people of Edo felt that the original method left too much fat and made the meat tough. Their new process called for grilling the eel once, then steaming it and applying the sauce, and finally grilling it a second time. This new method removed much of the fat and made the meat much softer.

Eel caught in the slow-flowing rivers of the Kanto region tended to have a muddy flavor not found in eel caught in the fast-flowing rivers of the Kansai (area surrounding Osaka and Kyoto) region. However, by steaming the eel, this bad flavor was removed. The knowledge of cooking methods held by the people of Edo becomes clear from their ability to create a delicious dish that overcomes negative factors of their environment. Steaming the eel also called for changes in the skewering method. While the Kansai process called for a single spit through the stomach of the eel, the Edo method required opening the eel by slicing the entire length along the back and skewering it with four spits. The steaming of eel for the preparation of kabayaki is said to have been introduced during the Bunsei period (1818—1829). The addition of this step is recognized as finalization of the Edo method for preparing kabayaki.

Changes were also made to the sauce used to flavor kabayaki. Originally, the sauce was a mixture of soy sauce and sake. Mirin, or sweet sake, came to be an ingredient in this sauce. The strong soy sauce preferred in the Kanto region and mirin made their appearance in Japan at approximately the same time. The addition of mirin significantly improved the flavor, aroma and appearance of kabayaki, and marked the birth of a new edomae flavor.

The Japanese have long held the tradition of eating eel on special occasions. Various eel dishes such as unadon (grilled eel over rice) were first developed in Edo. The disposable wooden chopsticks so common in Japan today also got their start in eel restaurants of Edo and the first successful eel farm was established in Fukagawa in 1880.

Another representative Japanese dish today is tempura. Tempura was the first western food to find its way into the Japanese diet. Tempura was first introduced to Nagasaki in the 16th century via the trade conducted there with the Portuguese and Dutch. By the beginning of the Tokugawa shogunate, tempura had made its way to Kyoto and tempura made with sea bream was very popular. Legend has it that the first shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, after hearing news of this delicious new dish tried it and soon died with an upset stomach. In Osaka, fish meat basted in sesame seeds was deep fried and sold in the streets. This dish found its way to Edo at the end of the 18th century, was called tempura and

quickly became the most popular food sold in the streets. The base for this tempura was switched from the expensive sea bream popular with the nobility in Kyoto to less expensive, yet fresh fish, shrimp, eel and shellfish caught in the Edo area. A theory still popular today regarding the preparation of tempura is that good tempura is seventy percent dependent upon the base ingredient and thirty percent dependent upon the skill of the cook.

As a delicious, nutritious and inexpensive dish readily available from street vendors, tempura gained rapid and tremendous success in Edo. Originally eaten off of sticks in shish kebab fashion, the first sit-down tempura restaurant appeared in the Taisho period (1912—1925).

As previously mentioned, the term edomae is most commonly used these days to describe sushi. Sushi as a food evolved from a method used to preserve fish. This method called for the fermentation of rice, which then acted as a natural preservative for fish. This concoction was then eaten. At the beginning of the Edo era, rather than wait for the rice to ferment naturally, vinegar was poured over rice, fish placed on top of the rice and heavy stones placed over the fish. This sushi was then left overnight.

By the end of the 17th century, this method for making sushi had made its way to Edo from Kyoto and was sold by street vendors. A revolution in the sushi world took place at the beginning of the 19th century. Sushi appeared for the first time in the form we see today of small handfuls of rice with the fish, shrimp or shellfish sitting on top as the creation of a sushi chef, Hanaya Yohei, in the Honjo district of Edo. Once this new version of sushi appeared in Edo, the original "pressed" version all but disappeared.

The quality of sushi is said to be completely dependent on the ingredients used. Rice from northern Japan, vinegar from the Wakayama region, fresh seafood from the sea off of Edo and seaweed from Asakusa were said to be the best ingredients. It was said that one or two sushi restaurants could be found in every neighborhood throughout Edo. Inarizushi (vinegar rice in flavored pockets of deep fried tofu) made its way from Nagoya to Edo at the end of the Tempō period (1830—1843), and mobile vendors had a unique song for calling children to their carts. It is this same sushi, the exquisite and very simple combination of rice, fish and shellfish, and wasabi (Japanese horseradish), developed in Edo that has become the primary symbol of Japanese cuisine throughout the world today.

Another well-known product of the Edo era was a method of cooking that allowed for the preservation and storage of many types of food. Known today as tsukudani, this process originally developed when fishermen boiled the fish too small to be sold in the markets with soy sauce and took the mixture home for their own meals. At the end of the Tokugawa shogunate, a businessman improved on the flavor and began to sell this preserved food with the name tsukudani. Excellent flavor, low cost, and the fact that tsukudani could be stored made it a welcome addition to most households in Edo. Tsukudani spread quickly throughout the entire country, as it became an excellent souvenir of Edo for the nobility and their vassals returning to their own lands. Today, the popularity of this product continues so that nearly every region of Japan has its own version of tsukudani.

The Formation of *Edokko* and the Edo Flavor

Edokko or "children of Edo" is a term that has been used to describe true natives of Edo and their descendants since the 19th century. With the formation of the word Edokko came acknowledgement of the establishment of Edo's unique

flavor. As the economic and cultural center of Japan shifted from the Kyoto and Osaka region to Edo, the food culture of Edo also discarded the influences of Kyoto and Osaka to develop its own individual flavor. This process is most clearly illustrated by the history of soy sauce in becoming the fundamental seasoning of Japanese cuisine.

Soy sauce was introduced to Japan in the Kyoto-Osaka region during the Warring States period (1482—1558). It then made its way to the Kanto region at the beginning of the Tokugawa shogunate from the Kishu region (Wakayama) with fishermen traveling through Choshi in Chiba prefecture. Soy sauce developed in the Tonegawa basin, especially in Choshi and Noda (present home of the Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture). From there it advanced into Edo during the Genroku period (1688—1703). Until the Kyoho period (1716—1735) however, seventy to eighty percent of the soy sauce sold in markets came from Kyoto and Osaka. As mentioned before, Edo was initially populated by emigrants from the southern half of Japan who preferred a lighter soy sauce. As the number of people from the north gradually increased, however, the flavor of Edo's soy sauce became stronger and stronger. The thin and

beef first arrived in Japan, the methods for preparing it were adjusted to suit traditional cooking styles. Gyunabe (a type of stew made from a variety of ingredients, including beef) became the representative meat dish in Japan, though other preparations included beef sashimi (raw beef), salted and grilled beef, and a version of tsukudani made with beef. Sukiyaki (beef stew with a soy sauce and mirin base) soon became a typical Japanese dish.

Though many western foods and cooking methods made their way to Japan, preparation of these foods in Japan was often difficult due to a lack of ingredients. Though Japan had meat cows, milk cows had to be imported if the people were to drink milk, as did pigs if pork was to become a staple. As for vegetables; cabbage, onions, potatoes and tomatoes were all new to Japan and weren't grown domestically in any abundance until the latter half of the Meiji era (1868—1911). In addition to the lack of ingredients was the complete absence of the tools commonly used in preparing western dishes such as frying pans and ovens. All of these factors meant that while importing some aspects of western cuisine, they were all adjusted to suit conditions in Japan.

One example of this is bread, which didn't seem to suit the



Noda soy sauce factory (Yondai Katsu Bunsai, Noda Museum of History)

generally weak flavor of the Kyoto and Osaka region was replaced by a very aromatic and strong flavored soy sauce made with large quantities of wheat. The change in the flavor of the local soy sauce also meant a gradual change in the general flavor of Edo cuisine.

Of the 1,250,000 barrels of soy sauce brought into Edo in 1821, only twenty thousand were from the Kyoto-Osaka region. The remaining barrels all came from the Kanto region surrounding Edo. By the end of the Tokugawa shogunate, nearly all of the soy sauce sold in Edo was from the Kanto region.

In addition to the strong soy sauce preferred in Edo, mirin (sweet sake) also developed as one of Edo's primary seasonings. Mirin came to Edo via the Edogawa river from Nagareyama in Chiba prefecture. One work of the time notes that mirin was added to tuna broth to create a distinctly Edo seasoning. Mirin became an indispensable ingredient in the sauce used for kabayaki and tsukudani, and is said to show the advanced level of cooking techniques of the Edo era. From the switch from udon noodles to soba noodles, the original "pressed" sushi to the type we see today, and from light soy sauce to heavy soy sauce, it is clear that these changes combined to establish the distinct flavor of Edo cuisine at the end of the Edo era.

The Influx and Conversion of Western Cuisine

The introduction of meat into the Japanese diet seems to represent a civil enlightenment in Japanese society. When

Japanese people. Bread did not become popular until anpan (a bun filled with adzuki-bean paste) was praised in a popular book. In 1875, a tremendous boom developed when Ginza Kimuraya, now a well-known pastry shop, combined traditional adzuki paste with western bread in an attempt to gain the curiosity of the people while conforming to the Japanese palate. We see many other curious examples of the combination of western and Japanese ingredients and methods of preparation. Some of these are curry-flavored miso soup, taro fries, loach (a long freshwater fish resembling an eel) and tomato stew, iced tofu with oyster sauce, sashimi with mayonnaise, chocolate rice cakes and so on. Through various methods of trial and error, Japanese versions of western dishes have been produced and taken firm root in the Japanese diet. The three most common "western" dishes in the modern Japanese menu are curried rice, pork cutlets and croquettes.

Curry rice was first introduced to Japan at the beginning of the Meiji era (1868—1911), but did not become popular until the end of the era. As a dish with a rice base and a western dish that could be eaten easily with a spoon, curry rice gained overwhelming popularity with the people.

Pork cutlets, as they are served today, with grated cabbage are said to have been introduced by a restaurant called Ginza Renga-tei in 1895. In the West, pork cutlets are thin slices of meat fried with a small amount of oil, but at the beginning of the Meiji era, the Tokyo method of preparation was to deep fry rather heavy slabs of meat. This dish was then sold with

the name tonkatsu. While the western method of preparation calls for the use of a fork and knife, the thick chunks of tonkatsu prepared in Tokyo could be easily eaten with chopsticks. This new "western" dish soon gained great popularity and is prepared and eaten in the same manner today. Known as korokke in Japan, croquettes were introduced to Japan at a time when there were no appliances for mincing meat and breadcrumbs were unknown. Initially meat was pounded into a mash using a knife and bread was smashed to make the breading. By the end of the Meiji era, however, appropriate appliances for mincing meat and the fine bread crumbs necessary for making croquettes had become better known in Japan. Along with the increase in potatoes, these factors gave rise to the uniquely Japanese potato croquettes still popular today. The aroma of a sauce developed using soy sauce as a base made croquettes even more appetizing to the Japanese palate and rapidly led to the dish becoming the cheapest "western" dish available.

All of these western dishes share two common characteristics. First of all, they go well with rice. Next, they are easily eaten with either a spoon or with chopsticks. With rice as the continuing foundation of the Japanese diet, a unique and new style of Japanese cuisine was developed with the modification of traditional western dishes to suit the Japanese people.

Chinese dishes including a version of soba and wantons also gained broad and rapid popularity beginning with the end of the Taisho era (1912—1925). Japanese cuisine had been expanded in such a way that a standard meal in Tokyo at the end of the Taisho era may have consisted of dishes originating anywhere in Japan, the West or China.

Japanese Eating Habits Adopted Overseas

Japan became a nation with great variety in its diet. It is said that while European and American adventurers and researchers to the Antarctic take approximately three hundred varieties of foods with them, their Japanese counterparts take seven hundred fifty varieties.

Not only is there great variety in the types of dishes prepared in Japan, but the assortment of ingredients used to create these dishes is also very extensive. Though the Chinese are very proud of saying that they will eat anything that flies except an airplane and anything with four legs except a desk, the total number of ingredients thought to be used in their cooking is only around eight hundred. Japan, on the other hand is thought to use approximately 1,400 different ingredients. A primary characteristic of Japanese cuisine is the use of a wide variety of fresh ingredients with very little processing or additional seasoning so that the natural flavor of each ingredient comes through.

Modern advances in preservation technologies such as freezing and vacuum sealing, as well as the development of high-speed air transportation have made the worldwide circulation of fresh ingredients possible. Narita airport in



Popular Vegetable Sushi Combo (Rurubu, 2004 "New York", JTB)

Chiba prefecture is the entry point for vacuum-packed fresh fish and vegetables from all over the world. Fresh fish caught in Japan is also transported around the world from the Tsukiji wholesale fish market in Tokyo. A new form of transport service has even

arisen as people are seen to buy fresh fish in Tsukiji and fly it back to sushi restaurants in Bangkok as carry-on luggage. Such technological innovations act as the backdrop for the advancement of Japanese cuisine made from fresh ingredients the world over.

Increased attention to a healthy diet seen throughout the world has also led to the advancement and popularity of Japanese cuisine. From a western point of view, the food of Japan must be extremely healthy as it supports a society where obesity is rare and lives are long despite the high percentage of cigarette smokers, social customs that call for drinking alcohol in large quantities until the early morning hours, and people who exercise very little. Westerners troubled by diseases related to a high-calorie, high-fat diet see nutritionally well-balanced Japanese cuisine as an ideal response to their concerns.

Japan, with its well-balanced diet has used its advanced technological power to develop into one of the world's leading economic powers. The world is now taking notice of Japanese culture in a variety of fields. One often finds westerners who say that; "the Japanese are smart because they eat fish." The accumulation of various factors including technological innovation, concerns regarding health and economic development have all led to the proliferation of Japanese cuisine, including sushi, throughout the world.

While Chinese food is popular with the general population of many countries, Japanese food has become somewhat of a status symbol with the new younger generation of highly educated and financially successful elite around the world. However, Japanese cuisine is not accepted in its true and original form.

Take the example of sushi. California rolls made with avocado and imitation crab, sushi rolls containing tempura, and croissants filled with sushi rice are variations accepted throughout the world, though very surprising adaptations to the native Japanese person. The method for eating Japanese dishes has also been adapted.



Sushi purchased at a supermarket in Switzerland (photo courtesy of the author)

In France, a meal at a sushi restaurant begins with a dish of seaweed flavored with vinegar, sushi is eaten with red wine, various dishes including salad, cheese and bread are offered along with the sushi, and the meal may be finished with dessert or coffee. Similar, therefore, to the manner in which western foods were introduced to Japan and then adapted to harmonize with the Japanese diet, Japanese foods are being adapted throughout the world to suit many diets, cultures and traditions.

In the U.S., restaurants that unite cuisines from around the world are said to be gaining popularity. It seems that food cultures of the world are becoming combinations of a variety of influences; just as Edo cuisine developed by combining the foods from various regions of Japan and further responded to the influences from western and Chinese cuisine. Now, the flavor of Edo is circulating throughout the world as Japanese cuisine.