

Taking a Lesson from Foods of the Past

Japan has been considered a modern state for approximately one hundred fifty years. What changes has our food culture undergone during this time?

Last year (2003) was the 400th anniversary of the start of the Edo Shogunate, initiated by Tokugawa Ieyasu. The past year saw regions all over Japan hosting events with this anniversary as their theme, and offering a broad range of information and media to give us the opportunity to take a new look at the Edo Era.

2004 is the 150th anniversary of the 1854 signing of *The Treaty of Peace and Amity between the United States and the Empire of Japan*. At the time the treaty was signed, Japan took the first step in opening herself to other countries with the primary goal of being considered an equal with the nation states of the West.

However, we cannot forget that by the beginning of the 18th century, Edo had developed into the largest consumer city in the world with a population of over one million. At that time, Edo was far more prosperous than cities in the western world; a fact which could not be overlooked by even western leaders of the time. It was in Edo that the custom of dining out was born, and where food cultures from all over Japan met to form and finalize the standard Japanese food culture.

What effect did the new food cultures that found their way to Japan have on not only Japanese civilization and culture, but on Japanese cuisine? Today, sushi and tempura are standards in Japanese cuisine that have made their way to dinner tables around the world. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the signing of *The Treaty of Peace and Amity between the United States and the Empire of Japan*, we have planned several series that take a look at the changes Japanese food culture has undergone since the opening of Japan to present day. In this issue we offer the first two articles in our series, *The Acceptance and Modification of Foreign Cuisine Establishes and Spreads a New Food Culture* and *Crossroads of the Food Cultures of the World—A Personal Record of American Food Culture*.



A map of the Japanese islands by English mapmakers, circa 1861

YEDO (Edo), the capital of Japan had a population of 2,500,000. MEACO (Kyoto) had a population of 50,000 and according to Engelbert Kämpfer in a work on Japan published in 1733, 6,000 temples. Another work puts Japan's total population at this time at approximately 25,000,000. Property of Kochizu Shiroy Shuppan K.K