Edo Komei Kaitei Zukushi–Zoshigaya no Zu (Famous Restaurants in Edo–Zoshigaya Area) by Utagawa Hiroshige (property of the Tokyo National Museum)
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A Peek at the Meals of the People of Edo

Tracing the Diet of Edo—the Establishment of Japan's Culinary Culture (Part Two)

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Eateries to Feed the People of Edo

The population of 18th century Edo exceeded one million, with a male population 1.5 times that of the female population. The majority of the male population at the time was made up of unmarried men or those living away from their families. Edo must have had a large number of simple restaurants to cater to this large segment of the population.

As explained in Part One, a number of those peddling foodstuffs or seasonings, such as fresh fish, tofu, vegetables, soy sauce, and salt, began offering prepared foods and drinks, including charcoal-broiled eel and locusts, steamed sweet potatoes, buckwheat noodles, and sweet bean-paste soup with *mochi* (sticky rice cakes). Some used mobile stalls to peddle their dishes, while others settled stalls in one place and still others established simple restaurants.

Osaka playwright Nishizawa Ippo (1801–1852) compared the merchants of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka in Part Two of his book *Koto Gosui*. He noted that, with the exception of high-class restaurants, those serving food in Edo restaurants were rough-looking young men with an extremely polite manner of speech that was incongruent with their appearance. While a great number of cookbooks were published during this time, it was the enormous number of eateries ranging from street peddlers and stalls to high-class restaurants that allowed the people of Edo to enjoy the newly established food culture.

Nishizawa's book also noted that Edo had an endless list of well-known restaurants, and that more than half of the shops in a single neighborhood were eateries serving simple dishes like buckwheat noodles, sushi and tempura shops, or pubs. In terms of food, Nishizawa stated, Edo was by far the richest of the three cities and probably surpassed any city in China.

The Common People Learn to Enjoy Sake

Many of Edo's numerous eateries also served sake. The com-

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Summary of Part One

After the Great Fire of 1657, the city of Edo (Modern Tokyo) grew into a metropolis with an enormous consumer population that began with a great influx of single male laborers from rural areas throughout the country who came to help rebuild the city. At the same time, the ruling samurai class, from the shogun on down, were also in need of reliable food supplies. This led to the establishment of a system for providing daily commodities, centered on food, which grew both in scale and complexity, and the portion of the population engaged in food services expanded considerably.

In Edo, people began their day with bells, situated throughout the city, which rang six times half an hour before sunrise. The cries of *natto* (fermented soybeans), clam, and vegetable vendors soon began, and smoke from kitchen stoves in backstreet alleys lined with rowhouses could be seen rising toward the sky. At large stores on the main streets, kitchen employees were busy preparing breakfast for all in the store.

The meals of *daimyo* (regional lords) and other high-ranking samurai were much more opulent than those of the townspeople. Low-ranking samurai, however, often ate very frugal meals typically consisting of boiled rice, soup, pickles, tofu, and boiled vegetables. At Edo castle, two trays of sumptuous dishes were served even for breakfast. In terms of diet, the gap between the rich and the poor was extremely wide in Edo, especially in terms of rice. In the kitchens of regional lords, only high-quality rice was selected, and of that, only the best portion of the cooked rice—that taken from the middle of the pan—was served. Rice served to the shogun consisted only of the largest grains hand selected from the highest-quality rice.

mon people quickly adopted the custom of drinking with friends while snacking on inexpensive dishes. Though cold sake was common during the early Edo period, warmed sake gradually gained popularity as refined, or clear, sake became more and more common.

Sakikaete Asagao Nikki by Utagawa Kuniteru
(Edo Tempo Zufu, first edition 1850, property of Miki Shobo)

Although sake production had been an active industry since the Kamakura period (1192–1333), it was at the end of the Muromachi period (1336–1573) that brewing technology advanced remarkably. Sake leading to today's refined sake emerged with technical developments that included the infusion and blending of ingredients during cold winter months to control fermentation, the staggered addition of ingredients to allow for a gradual increase in alcoholic content, and low-temperature pasteurization to prevent spoilage.

An especially ground-breaking production method established at the time was the use of polished white rice used in making sake. The high-quality sake produced using polished white rice was called *morohaku*. The use of polished rice originated in monasteries in Nara and Kyoto in the Kansai region. Sake brewers in the Itami (northern part of modern Kobe) and Ikeda (north of modern Osaka) areas of the Kansai region adopted polished rice for mass production. Itami's *morohaku* became so highly valued as to be served to the shogun. Sake production in Itami flourished until the middle of the Edo period.

Sake production, however, was often restricted by the Tokugawa government in times of severe famine due to rice crop failure caused by draught or cold, and encouraged when rice crops were bountiful. An edict issued in 1754 lifted restrictions, paving the way for a rapid increase in sake production in the Nada area (southern part of modern Kobe). Sake production in Nada, once dampened by conservative reform (1787–1793) by Matsudaira Sadanobu, regained momentum and expanded significantly with an 1806 edict encouraging production. Of roughly 780,000 barrels of sake delivered from the Kansai region to Edo in 1786, 320,000 were from Nada, versus 120,000 from Itami. In 1821, sake shipments to Edo marked a record high of 1,224,000 barrels, 680,000 (nearly 60%) of which were from Nada.

With such a large amount of the sake available in Edo coming from the Kansai region, more currency was flowing from Edo to Kansai than from Kansai to Edo. Deeply concerned by this fact, in 1790 the government loaned rice to eleven sake brewers near Edo with an order to produce 30,000 barrels of high-grade *morohaku*. Further, the government also allowed them to sell their own sake. Unfortunately, the quality of sake produced in the Kanto region could not rival the techniques that had been cultivated over many years in the Kansai region.

As the quality of sake is determined with very fine control over fermenting conditions, technical improvements could not

Stacks of popular Kansai sake dominate Edo store fronts, with only a few Kanto brands visible. (*Takasaki-ya Ezu* by Hasegawa Settan and Hasegawa Settei, property of the Bunkyo Museum)

be accomplished overnight. It wasn't until the end of the Edo shogunate that the Kanto region began producing high-quality sake.

Just how did the common people of Edo enjoy sake? European missionaries who visited Japan left many records in their reports home. In one of his works, Luis Frois (1532–1597) referred to Japanese sake as follows in comparing Japanese and European cultures.

> While European wine is made from grapes, all Japanese spirits are made from rice. While wine is chilled before drinking, the Japanese usually warm their sake, regardless of the season. Although getting drunk is considered very shameful in Europe, the Japanese seem to take pride in it.

Extreme intoxication was nothing out of the ordinary for the people of Edo, and was even known to result in murder. Frois' description indicates that the Japanese had already formed a very tolerant view of alcohol and its effects by the Edo period.

Feasts at Annual Celebrations

At the center of Edo stood Edo Castle surrounded by the residences of samurai warriors. The samurai district accounted for roughly half of the metropolitan area. With the farms and lands of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines taking up the majority of what remained of Edo, residential areas for the townspeople was restricted to less than 20% of the entire metropolitan area, making for extreme overcrowding. The townspeople lived in a variety of ways, from those who lived in main-street stores to those living in back-alley rowhouses.

Shoka Ebisu-ko (Merchant Honors Ebisu) illustration by Hasegawa Settan, text by Saito Gasshin (*Toto Saijiki*, No. 4, published in 1838)

The majority of these rowhouse dwellers lived hand to mouth. Edo did, however, offer a number of enjoyable places and occasions. In addition to amusement quarters and sightseeing spots, the streets leading to temples and shrines were exciting places with an air completely different from daily life. Temples and shrines located on the peripheries of the samurai district, including Kanei Temple, Zojo Temple, Senso Temple, Kanda Myojin Shrine, and Sanno Gongen Shrine, were patronized by the shogunate. The annual festivals held at Kanda Myojin and Sanno Gongen Shrines were always thronged with people. Other major annual festivals included the Senso Temple's Sanja Festival, and festivals held at Meguro Fudo Temple (May), Hikawa Shrine (June), Tomioka Hachiman Shrine (August), and Otori Shrine (November). Temporary teahouses and portable stalls selling cooked foods set up in neighboring streets were the sites of small drinking parties enjoyed by the common people during the festivals.

On festival days, large stores threw big parties, to which they invited their major clients, which lasted all day and well into the night. Sumptuous foods, never eaten with everday meals, and an overabundant amount of sake were served at these parties. The menu for June's Sanno Festival, for example, included sushi, fish and vegetable dishes, chilled vermicelli, and rice boiled with red beans. The festival honoring Ebisu, one of Japan's seven gods of fortune, held in January and again in October or December, was another opportunity for merchants to pray for prosperity in their business and to celebrate with their major clients.

Based on the advanced calendar systems originally established in China, these annual events developed as a way for the Japanese people to confirm the turning of the seasons, and to celebrate and pray for rich harvests by serving seasonal foods. New Year's was celebrated according to the Chinese lunar calendar. Just how was the New Year celebrated in Edo?

Edo Komei Kaitei Zukushi–Edo Sanya Yaozen (Famous Restaura
the Suntory Museum of Art)

A description of New Year's customs can be found in *Nihon Saiji-ki* (preface written in 1687) by Kaibara Ekiken (1630–1714). On New Year's Day, people purified themselves and prayed to all deities and the spirits of their ancestors. Then, dishes from the determined celebratory menu were served on a tray. Along with decorations of pine and bamboo branches and crane and turtle models, the tray was loaded with chestnuts, seaweeds, lobster, mandarin oranges, rice, persimmons, and other customary foods. The *Nihon Saiji-ki* explains that to make *zoni* (*mochi* rice cakes boiled in vegetable soup), which is still a traditional dish served at New Year's today, the rice cakes were boiled with *kombu* kelp, flattened strips of abalone, dried sardines, burdock, yams, turnips, chestnuts, dried cuttlefish, *daikon* radish, and aroid stems, and then served hot.

To celebrate good health and encourage long life, people ate hard or chewy foods that strengthened the jaw and helped keep the teeth firmly rooted, and sipped a medicinal sake called *toso*. Hard and chewy foods at New Year's had already become the custom during the Heian period (794–1185), but only among the aristocrats. By the Edo period, however, the

custom had spread to the common people, and *mochi* (chewy rice cakes), dried chestnuts, *daikon* radishes, beans, and dried persimmons had become the standard fare.

Toso, the medicinal sake drunk at New Year's, is prepared by soaking a powdered mixture of cinnamon, Japanese pepper, and other herbs in refined sake. *Nihon Saiji-ki* states, "*Zoni* and *toso* should be consumed from the first to the third day of the New Year. Maids and servants should also consume these items." This proves that the custom of consuming *zoni* and *toso* on the first three days of the year had already taken root by the Edo period. The Heian-period custom of eating rice gruel containing seven spring herbs on the seventh day of the New Year to prevent illness and rice gruel mixed with red beans on the fifteenth day of the New Year to banish evil spirits was still maintained during the Edo period.

Banquets of Warriors and the Cultured

Edo had numerous eating establishments of all types and sizes. *Ichi-wa Ichi-go*, by Ota Nanpo, published in 1807 notes, "There is an eatery for every five paces, and a restaurant for every ten paces." Some high-class restaurants functioned as meeting places and featured *kaiseki* dinners (now considered traditional Japanese course dinners). Yaozen was an especially prominent restaurant of this type. The owner, Kuriyama Zenshiro, reputed to be the best chef in Edo at the time, had wide cultural interests and his extensive personal network of men of culture made Yaozen's reputation even better.

ants in Edo–Sanya Yamazen) by Utagawa Hiroshige (property of

A great number of other high-class restaurants also emerged in Edo. *Meiwa-shi* (preface written in 1822), by Aoyama Hakuho, names famous Edo restaurants and describes them all as high-end establishments that were extremely expensive. They served course dinners, consisting of *miso* soup, assorted appetizers, sweet boiled and broiled dishes, sashimi, a second soup or side dish, and a final set of rice, soup, and one side dish, all meant to be enjoyed with sake. The dinners, which they called *kaiseki*, cost 37.5 grams of silver per person and included high-grade green tea and dessert.

A contributing factor to the high pricing at these restaurants was the tendency to value renowned chefs. *Kisen Joge-ko*, written by Iseya Sozaburo around the mid-19th century, mentions that restaurant selection based on the chef had been a trend since as early as 1804. Therefore, restaurants employed skilled chefs and paid them extremely well in order to attract customers. This trend was promoted by worldly and cultured men, as well as those of the samurai class with a certain level of sophistication.

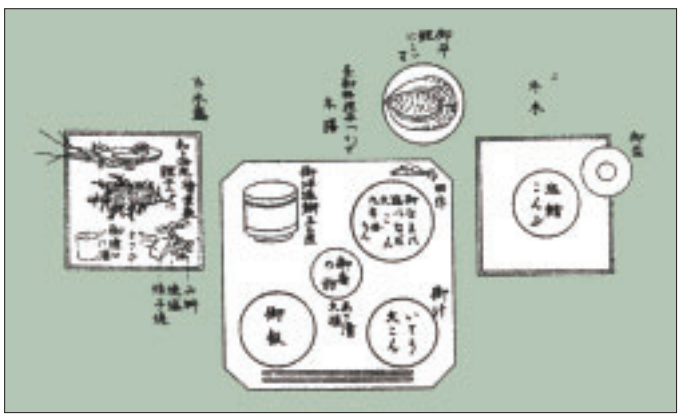
However, the sumptuous feasts of the samurai were subject to the financial situation of the Tokugawa government, as well as that of its respective domains. Thus, over the course of the Edo period, the samurai were forced to gradually reduce the frequency and extravagance of their banquets. As it was customary among the samurai to treat samurai guests to sake and dinner, lower-ranking samurai were often forced to pawn a kimono or *obi* (sash) for the sake and food needed whenever another samurai visited.

Ozaki Sadamiki, a low-ranking samurai and author of *Sekijo Nikki*, mentions in his journal that he had a drinking party every day from February 11 to 14. Regarding events of February 12, Ozaki wrote that the menu included cod with *kombu* kelp, clear soup, sashimi, cooked vegetables, buckwheat noodles, and boiled leafy vegetables. For Ozaki, whose meals were usually extremely frugal, such a meal must surely have been worthy of special mention. Sketches in his journal show that foods served at drinking parties were on large trays so everyone could share, and ordinary meals were served on individual trays.

Onari and Banquets to Affirm Shogunate Authority

Onari is the term used to refer to formal visits by the shogun to his leading vassals. *Onari* and the lavish banquets thrown by the hosting vassal were a traditional part of samurai society that affirmed the shogun as the top of the hierarchical society. Edo period *onari* were most common during the early years. The banquet menu consisted of 17 to 21 *kon* (a tray holding a flask of sake, a few appetizers, and a small sake cup). To reaffirm hierarchical rank, seating was strictly arranged with distance from the shogun indicating rank. Even the foods served to each guest varied to emphasize individual rank. Solidarity with the shogun and other members of the group was also reaffirmed, however, with dishes shared by everyone from the shogun himself to the lowest-ranking retainers.

Records remain of *onari* feasts given by Tokugawa Yorinobu



Sketch of a dinner hosted by the shogun in December (*Tokugawa Reitenroku*, Supplement Vol. 24, published in 1881)

(1602–1671), tenth son of Tokugawa Ieyasu and head of the Tokugawa clan in the Kii domain, for his brother, retired second shogun Tokugawa Hidetada, and his nephew, third shogun

Tokugawa Iemitsu, at Yorinobu's Edo residence from January 23 to 28, 1624. First, a banquet was held in a tea-ceremony room. The main tray consisted of seven dishes: crane marinated in sake, abalone, sea bream, chestnuts, ginger, a mandarin orange, *kombu* kelp and mushrooms, as well as crane soup and rice. The second tray offered grilled plover, fanshell mussels, steamed fish, pickled vegetables, cod and *kombu* kelp soup, and seasoned sea cucumber intestines. Seven varieties of sweets were also served. After the banquet, a party was held in a reception room. The menu consisted of grilled fowl, *zoni*, *mochi*, various seafood and vegetable dishes, as well as other delicacies served with sake. During this party, gifts were exchanged. The retired shogun, Hidetada, presented a sword, silver currency, and clothes to the host family, and silver currency and clothes to the retainers. In return, the host presented Hidetaka with a sword, gold currency, clothes, and a horse. After gifts were exchanged, guests were entertained with dances, noh plays, and a comic kyogen play. After the show, money and kimono were presented to the entertainers, and buns with bean-paste filling and sake were given to the spectators. Finally, the main guests returned to the reception room, where a full-course dinner, consisting of three courses of seven, five, and three dishes respectively, was served. Such extravagant *onari* for the Kii Tokugawas were most common from 1615 to 1644. Due to the economic burden on the hosts, however, this custom gradually declined, even among the leading Tokugawa families. Similar banquets were also held among the leading regional lords to celebrate important occasions such as the New Year.

How was New Year's celebrated in Edo Castle? On New Year's Day, senior and junior government councilors were served an auspicious dish consisting of dried strips of abalone, dried chestnuts, and *kombu* kelp upon their arrival at the castle at 7:00 a.m. After a ceremony celebrating the New Year, hare soup and sake were given to the councilors. According to *Tokugawa Seido Shiryo*, the tradition was based on an episode when Tokugawa Ieyasu, long before he became the first shogun, treated those around him to soup made with a hare he was given. This tradition was interrupted for some time by an edict that prohibited the killing or abandoning of animals issued by the fifth shogun, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646–1709). The dish of dried abalone, chestnuts, and kelp was given on the first three days of the New Year. On the third day, the first noh chant of the year was held, followed by a banquet attended by regional lords. Details of the foods served are unknown, except that the 1834 menu consisted of 17 *kon* (a tray holding a flask of sake, a few appetizers, and a small sake cup).

At Edo Castle, year-end cleaning was done on December 23. On December 28, all of those who worked in the castle, including even the chore boys and palanquin carriers, were treated to a formal dinner given in thanks of their service, with the menu varying according to individual status. In addition to annual events such as this, a feast was held to mark important events in the life of the shogun and his family. The largest feasts were reserved for the shogun's children's wedding receptions.

Many of the Edo shogunate banquets followed traditions established during the Muromachi shogunate (1392–1573). However, the scale and time spent at banquets of all types and for all occasions gradually declined. Rather, smaller parties for specific groups of similar-ranking people, held at different places and with different menus, became more frequent. The keys to the durability of the Edo shogunate were the complex systems and mechanisms put in place to constantly remind each individual of his particular rank or standing. Events such as *onari* also played a role in maintaining hierarchical order.

This portion of *Shichi Nan Shichi Fuku no Zu* (Seven Happinesses and Seven Misfortunes), by Maruyama Okyo, illustrates a banquet. The formal dinner served by samurai families on important occasions was established during the Edo period. (Property of Shokoku Temple)

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All edited or written by Nobuo Harada

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