

Eating in Edo

April 1, 2023 - October 1, 2023

Culinary culture flourished in Japan during the prosperous Edo period (1615–1868), when Japan experienced its longest period of peace. These 18 woodblock prints explore the richness of Edo cuisine, its beautiful presentations, and the wide variety of ingredients from land and sea that contributed to its development.

Restaurants multiplied and cookbooks proliferated in the Edo period, signaling a booming food industry and a general appreciation and enjoyment of food. Festivals provided opportunities to indulge in symbolic dishes. In Japan today, New Year's celebrations, flower-viewing outings, and other occasions still feature artful arrangements of delicacies.

Wai Yee Chiong, associate curator of Asian art

RISD Museum is supported by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and with the generous partnership of the Rhode Island School of Design, its Board of Trustees, and Museum Governors.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION:

Utagawa Kunisada 歌川 国貞 (Toyokuni III)

1786–1865; b. in Edo, worked in Japan

Yamamotoya Heikichi 山本屋平吉, publisher

Edo, Japan; ca. 1816–1886

Hand Games and Flowering Sleeves (拳角力花の振袖 *Kenzumo hana no furisode*), 1830s

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates **13.1382**



Rice cakes, known in Japan as *mochi*, are eaten across East Asia during New Year's celebrations. Primarily made from glutinous rice flour and water, *mochi* can be sweet or savory. *Kagami mochi* (mirror rice cakes) are popular ornaments for the Japanese New Year. Their name comes from their shape, said to resemble ancient bronze mirrors. In this print, *kagami mochi* are stacked on a stand in front of a screen of plum blossoms. After being displayed, the cakes are broken, cooked, and eaten in broth or with sweet red-bean paste.

Kikugawa Eizan 菊川 英山
1787–1867; worked in Edo, Japan
Wakasaya Yoichi 若狭屋与市, publisher
Edo, Japan; 1794–1897

Two Women with a Tray of Sushi

From the series *Beautiful Women as the Six Poetic Immortals* (美人六歌仙 *Bijin Rokkasen*), ca. 1808

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1394



Here a woman carries a tray of sushi accompanied by grated radish and bowls of soy sauce. The sushi we are familiar with today, made with fish and rice seasoned with vinegar, was invented in the Edo period. Before refrigeration, it was essential that fish was consumed quickly, and combining slices of raw fish with vinegared rice both helped preserve it and made for a more filling meal. Stalls selling sushi were popular in harbor towns such as Edo.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川 広重
1797–1858; b. in Edo, worked in Japan
Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III) 歌川国貞 (3代豊国)
1786–1865; b. in Edo, worked in Japan
Maruya Kyūshirō 丸屋久四郎, publisher
Edo, Japan; mid-1800s

Yokogawa Takejirō 横川 彫武, block carver
Active in Edo in the mid-1800s

Hiratsuka (平塚)

From the series *The Fifty-Three Stations [of the Tōkaidō]* by Twin Brushes

(双筆五十三次 *Sōhitsu gojūsan tsugi*), 1854

Polychrome woodblock prints

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.2323



The landscapes in these prints depict sites along the Tōkaidō highway, one of the five major routes used during the Edo period. The backgrounds provide context for the scenes in the foregrounds. The prints highlight the many food options for travelers on the Tōkaidō, from elaborate trays laden with rice, fish, pickles, and soup to hearty bowls of simple braised dishes.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川 広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, worked in Japan

Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III) 歌川国貞 (3代豊国)

1786–1865; b. in Edo, worked in Japan

Maruya Kyūshirō 丸屋久四郎, publisher

Edo, Japan; mid-1800s

Yokogawa Takejirō 横川彫武, block carver

Active in Edo in the mid-1800s

Totsuka (戸塚)

From the series *The Fifty-Three Stations [of the Tōkaidō]* by Twin
Brushes

(双筆五十三次 Sōhitsu gojūsan tsugi), 1854

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates **13.2321**



The landscapes in these prints depict sites along the Tōkaidō highway, one of the five major routes used during the Edo period. The backgrounds provide context for the scenes in the foregrounds. The prints highlight the many food options for travelers on the Tōkaidō, from elaborate trays laden with rice, fish, pickles, and soup to hearty bowls of simple braised dishes.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川 広重
1797–1858; b. in Edo, worked in Japan
Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III) 歌川国貞 (3代豊国)
1786–1865; b. in Edo, worked in Japan
Maruya Kyūshirō 丸屋久四郎, publisher
Edo, Japan; mid-1800s
Yokogawa Takejirō 横川彫武, block carver
Active in Edo in the 1800s
Kanagawa (鎗持)
From the series *The Fifty-Three Stations [of the Tōkaidō]* by Twin
Brushes (双筆五十三次 Sōhitsu gojūsan tsugi), 1854
Polychrome woodblock print
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.2325



Pictured here is one of the most popular snacks in the Edo period—*dango*. The standing youth is happily eating these chewy rice-flour dumplings skewered on bamboo and brushed with a sweet soy sauce. *Dango* are still popular today, made in different flavors and accompanied by toppings such as sesame seeds and soybean powder.

Utagawa Toyokuni 歌川豊国
1769–1825; b. in Edo, worked in Japan
Nishimuraya Yohachi 西村屋与八, publisher
Edo, Japan; 1751–1869
The New Plum Estate on the Sumida River (隅田川新梅屋敷之図
Sumidagawa Shin Ume yashiki no zu), ca. 1825–1830
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1163



Picnics were popular in the Edo period, especially during flower viewing, or *hanami* outings. This triptych depicts one such excursion to a famous plum garden in Edo. Clad in colorful garments, women gather to enjoy the blossoms. A lacquer box with compartments for food and sake, commonly found in such gatherings, is pictured on the bench at center left. These boxes usually contain rice and egg dishes as well as pickled vegetables and raw fish, all beautifully arranged to show off the chef's creativity.

Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎

1760–1849; b. in Edo, worked in Japan

Nishimuraya Yohachi 西村屋与八, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1751–1869

Tago Bay near Ejiri on the Tōkaidō (東海道江尻田子の浦略図Tōkaidō

Ejiri Tago no ura ryakuzu)

From the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (富嶽三十六景Fugaku sanjūrokkei), ca. 1831–1832

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1199



During the Edo period, a variety of fish was harvested from the seas surrounding Japan, including mackerel, seabass, sardines, conger eels, and flounder. As shown in this landscape, fishermen often worked in turbulent waters to bring back their catch.

In the background of the print, workers make salt on the shores of Tago Bay. Salt-making has a long history in Japan, as it is widely used not only for culinary purposes but also to purify and cleanse in religious rituals.

After Maruyama Ōkyo 円山応挙
1733–1795; b. in Kyoto, worked in Japan
Peaches and Loquats in a Porcelain Bowl, ca. 1820–1840
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.070**



Katsushika Taito II 二代葛飾戴斗
Active in Edo ca. 1810–1853
Echigoya Chōhachi 越後屋長八, publisher
Edo, Japan; 1800s
Loquats, 1820s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.071**



Peach trees, celebrated in Japan for their beautiful blossoms, have always been an important symbol of longevity in East Asia. The peach fruit, however, was not particularly favored during the Edo period, as the variety available was sour and hard. It was not until later that Japanese farmers cultivated sweeter varieties.

Loquats, known as *biwa*, have been grown in Japan for centuries. Pear-shaped with a fuzzy skin, this orange-colored fruit grows in clusters, ripening in early spring. Their leaves, prized for their medicinal qualities, are used in teas and poultices.

Utagawa Sadahide 歌川 貞秀

1807–1878/9; b. in Shimōsa, worked in Edo and Yokohama, Japan

Ayu Fish and Bell Flowers, 1843–1847

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.319**



Kitao Shigemasa 北尾 重政

1739–1820; b. in Edo, worked in Japan

Ayu Fish and Yellow Roses, 1817

Polychrome woodblock print with metallic embellishments

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.372**



Surrounded by the ocean and endowed with plentiful lakes and rivers, Japan has an abundant supply of seafood all year round. The *ayu*, or sweetfish, pictured in these prints, are delicacies enjoyed in late spring and early summer. Often skewered whole and grilled on a charcoal fire, these small silver fish also lend themselves to poetry, becoming seasonal references in *haiku* poems.

Hasegawa Sadanobu II 二代長谷川貞信
1848–1940; b. in Osaka, worked in Japan
Turnip and Carrot, 1850s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.399**



Isoda Koryūsai 磯田湖龍齋
Active in Edo 1769–1790
Mount Fuji, Hawk, and Eggplants, ca. 1775
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.542**



Mori Shunkei 森春溪
Active in Osaka 1800–1820
Corn, Spider, and Beetles
From *Shunkei Picture Album* (春溪画譜 *Shunkei gafu*), 1820
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.603**



Vegetables were a large part of the Japanese diet in the Edo period. From crops that had been cultivated for centuries, such as turnips and eggplant, to newly imported produce, diverse ingredients were met with delight. Carrots and corn were introduced to Japan in the 1500s and 1600s. Brought to Japan from the Americas by Portuguese traders, corn was originally used as animal feed but later gained popularity as an ingredient.

Turnips and eggplants have been cultivated for centuries in Japan and were widely consumed in the Edo period. Eggplants were considered auspicious. Pictured here with Mount Fuji, the eggplant was and still is associated with the New Year and blessings of good health, luck, and prosperity.

Unidentified maker(s) working in Japan
Edo period (1615–1868)
Murataya Jirōbei 村田屋治郎兵衛, publisher
Edo, Japan; ca. 1659–1844
Cormorants on a Boat and Pinks, 1770s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.544**



Sweetfish were sometimes caught from rivers by cormorants. Working for the fishermen who trained them, these birds are leashed so that they will return to the boat with their catch. This traditional method of fishing, known as *ukai*, usually occurs at night, with the fishermen holding up torches to attract fish to the water's surface.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川 広重
1797–1858; b. in Edo, worked in Japan
Takenouchi Magohachi 竹内 孫八, publisher
Edo, Japan; 1833–1850
Minaguchi: Famous Gourd Strips (水口名物干瓢 Minaguchi meibutsu kanpyō)
From the series *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (東海道五十三次之内 Tōkaidō gojūsan tsugi no uchi), ca. 1833
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **41.080.51**



In this landscape, workers busily cut and dry gourd strips. Known as *kanpyō*, these strips are sliced from the calabash, a type of gourd harvested in late summer. After the strips are preserved by drying, they are used for a variety of dishes.

The print depicts Minaguchi, a town located on the Tōkaidō highway during the Edo period and now part of the Shiga prefecture. In Minaguchi today, *kanpyō* are boiled with green peppers and offered as a special dish to the ancestors during the Obon festival.

Ryūryūkyō Shinsai 柳々居辰斎
Active in Edo 1799–1820
Lobster and Cup, 1820s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf **56.039.21**

New Year's celebrations were occasions for much feasting. Staples were foods with auspicious names, made from ingredients that symbolically ensured longevity and good health. In this print, a lobster's shell becomes a platter holding fish cakes and mushrooms. The spiny lobster (*ise ebi*) was and still is a much-coveted delicacy. Harvested off the coast of Japan, it has a lifespan of 20 years, making it a symbol for longevity. A sake cup decorated with the character for longevity (寿) complements the lobster arrangement.



Nagayama Kōin 長山孔寅
1765–1849; b. in Akita prefecture, worked in Kyoto and Osaka, Japan
Cakes Wrapped in Oak Leaves, 1822
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf **56.039.54**

Kashiwa mochi, a round rice cake filled with red-bean paste and wrapped in a *kashiwa* (oak leaf), is commonly eaten on the fifth day of the fifth month during the festival known as *Tango no Sekku*. The oak leaf, which symbolizes strength and prosperity, is not eaten. During the Edo period, these cakes featured salty red-bean paste, as sugar was a luxury. Sweet red-bean paste became popular over time and today is the conventional filling in *kashiwa mochi*.

