

FROM YOKOHAMA TO AMSTERDAM: MEIDI-YA AND DIETARY CHANGE IN MODERN JAPAN

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Abstract: In this paper I will focus on the early history of Meidi-ya, a leading shipping and trading company in modern Japan that specialized in merchandizing luxury Western foods and liquors. Established in 1885, Meidi-ya provided an important means for the spread of Western food culture among the Japanese upper and upper-middle classes, and played a pioneering role in introducing modern promotional strategies to Japanese retailing business. From around the turn of the century, the company expanded its role from that of an importer of foreign products to that of a retailer of domestically produced foods. A few years later, it also became involved in food processing. By entering these new domains, Meidi-ya began to play an increasingly important role in the domestication of Western food in Japan.

By analyzing Meidi-ya's marketing strategies, I will elucidate its role in the introduction and popularization of Western food in Japan, and the modernization of Japanese retailing and food processing. However, my aim is not to focus solely and simply on food. By examining changing consumption habits and the various socio-economic processes involved, I will also discuss the role of enterprises like Meidi-ya in producing new class identities and status sensibilities in Japan.

1. INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was one of the most dynamic periods in Japanese history, marked not only by turbulent politics but also by major economic and technological changes and various social transitions.¹ These changes began in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the new Meiji (1868–1912) government took far-reaching measures in order to modernize the country. By selectively adopting from European and American experiences, and accommodating new elements into the indigenous setting, the new government managed in a relatively short period of time both to lay the foundations of the modern Japanese state and to set the stage for the development of modern Japanese culture.

From the first decade of the twentieth century, the synthesis of native Japanese and Western elements began increasingly to have an effect on Japanese people's daily life, values and identity. An important component

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to David Ambaras and the participants of the Triangle East Asia Colloquium 2000 for their helpful comments.

of this transition was the Western-inspired commercial revolution that eventually led to the birth of a mass consumption society. A powerful force involved in this development was Meidi-ya, a leading shipping and trading company that specialized in merchandizing luxury Western foods and liquors.

Meidi-ya was established in Yokohama in 1885, and for decades it played a pioneering role in the modernization of Japanese retailing.² It was, for example, the first Japanese enterprise that traded directly with producers in Europe. It made use of modern advertising media such as train station posters, electric illuminations and hot-air balloons. Meidi-ya also set up stores in extravagant Western-style buildings, and lavishly decorated its shop windows as part of its strategy to position itself as a trend-setter. After the turn of the century, large department stores such as Mitsukoshi and Shirokiya began using similar methods to dominate the commercial, architectural, and cultural landscapes of large Japanese cities (Moeran 1998). Despite this competition, however, Meidi-ya retained its position as a leading dealer in foods and liquors for several decades, and its stores remained a major aesthetic attraction in fashionable urban districts.

In this paper I will focus on Meidi-ya as one of many players in the Japanese political, social and economic arena involved in the modernization of Japanese foodways. By analyzing Meidi-ya's marketing strategies, I hope to elucidate its role in the introduction and popularization of Western food in Japan. However, my aim is not to focus solely and simply on food. By examining changing consumption habits and the various socio-economic processes involved, I will also discuss the role of enterprises like Meidi-ya in producing new class identities and status sensibilities in Japan.

2. THE MODERNIZATION OF JAPANESE FOODWAYS

Before entering into an analysis of Meidi-ya and its role in the Japanese dietary transition, a brief explanation is necessary of the changes the Japanese foodways underwent from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

A long-term overview of the statistics can lead one to conclude that there was no change in food consumption in Japan in the years before the Pacific War (1941–1945) (Kaneda 1969). Statistical figures for the 1950s and

² Unless otherwise specified, all information concerning Meidi-ya's history is based on *Meidi-ya hyakunen shi*.

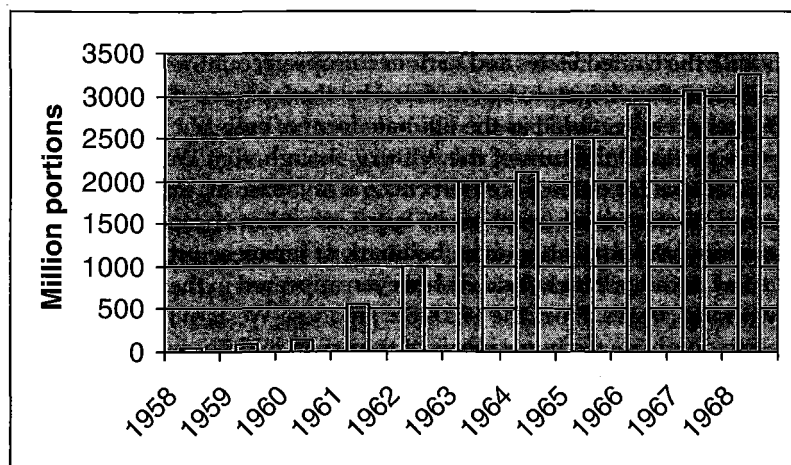
1960s, on the other hand, seem to indicate a drastic transformation. The Westernization of the Japanese diet is the most noticeable aspect of this change.

Year	Items in Grams						
	Rice	Meat	Eggs	Dairy Products	Sugar	Vegetables	Fruits
1946	254.0	2.6	1.0	4.3	2.0	151.0	19.0
1950	302.0	6.3	2.3	14.3	8.0	174.0	42.0
1955	302.2	8.8	9.3	33.0	33.7	225.0	33.6
1960	313.3	13.8	13.3	61.0	41.2	273.1	61.2
1961	319.1	17.4	17.8	68.4	43.6	256.7	63.8
1962	321.2	21.5	18.9	77.7	46.5	281.0	64.0
1963	317.7	21.6	20.4	89.8	45.7	304.8	70.3
1964	314.3	23.5	23.7	97.1	48.3	285.9	77.8
1965	302.6	25.0	24.2	102.8	51.5	300.5	77.9
1966	286.2	28.4	25.3	114.2	54.9	317.0	88.0

Tab. 1: Per capita daily consumption of selected food items in Japan, 1946–1966

Source: Yoshino (1971: 56)

As Table 1 illustrates, after 1962 the consumption of foods of Western origin such as meat and dairy products rapidly increased, while a demand for rice steadily diminished. In the same period, a considerable increase in the consumption of processed foods can also be observed (see *Tab. 2*).



Tab. 2: The rising production of instant-noodles in Japan, 1958–1968

Source: Schmidtrott (1997: 36)

Some scholars explain this drastic post-war dietary change as the effect of a change in the patterns of income distribution, a rise in the purchasing power of the population, and changes in the occupational composition and geographic distribution of the population. They also mention the massive exposure of the Japanese people to the influences of foreign consumption patterns during the American occupation, along with the rapid acculturation of these influences through the mass media (Kaneda 1969: 16–18). While these claims are correct, it seems unlikely that such radical changes in the consumption habits would have occurred within only two decades, even with all the above factors at play. In my view, the foundations for these changes were in fact laid down before the war.

A careful analysis of the consumption of food in Japan in the decades preceding the Pacific War suggests that it is necessary to distinguish between the lower social strata and the rest of the Japanese population. Generally speaking, before the Pacific War, the eating habits of the lower social strata, especially in rural areas, in Japan indeed showed little change at all – except, perhaps, that brought by a very gradual rise of the standard of living (Kaneda 1969; Ishige forthcoming). The diet of the upper and middle classes, however, and to a certain extent of part of the urban working classes, underwent major changes. It is important to note that this legacy formed the foundation of the large-scale post-war transformation, and accelerated its speed.

As I have argued elsewhere (Cwiertka 1998a, 1998b, 1999), the long process of the modernization of Japanese foodways began in the mid-nineteenth century, when a considerable number of Westerners settled in Japan as a result of the establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations with the United States and various European countries. Western dining customs soon began to be emulated by the Japanese elite, and by the 1870s they were regarded as the ultimate form of culinary refinement.

It was not until the turn of the century, though, that Western food became available for the less well-off citizens of Japan. By that time, hybrid Japanese-Western food (*wayō setchū ryōri*) served in cheap Western-style restaurants (*yōshokuya*) became a hallmark of Japanese urban modernity, and a few decades later hybrid dishes even appeared in the eating-halls of the working classes. From the 1920s on, Japanese-Western hybrid cooking began to dominate the home meals of the urban middle classes. Some hybrid dishes also made an appearance in army catering.

Japanese-Western hybrid cuisine emerged in the first place out of an urge in the general public to imitate the elite classes, the only ones who could afford to dine in the Western style in nineteenth-century Japan. Japanese servants employed in Western households who had learned how to cook Western dishes saw a business opportunity in opening cheap West-

ern-style restaurants that offered urban commoners food with a fashionable Western touch. As the increasing domestic production of Western foodstuffs reduced the price of eclectic food, sales increased. In 1923, there were about five thousand of these restaurants in Tōkyō and its vicinity (Ishige forthcoming).

Hybrid Japanese-Western home cooking began to flourish when Western dishes and foodstuffs entered urban middle-class kitchens. This, however, did not reflect a wish to emulate the upper-class penchant for Western culinary culture, but was rather part of a broader social reform seeking to displace the upper classes as the vanguard of national progress and locus of cultural authenticity. The middle-class social reformers saw hybrid Japanese-Western home cookery as an important aspect of their vision of competent middle-class household management (Ambaras 1998). Their aim was to turn family meals into economical, healthy, and deliciously varied symbols of the middle-class moral leadership that would eventually lead Japan to progress and modernity.

In response to the popularization and hybridization of Western food in early twentieth-century Japan, the elite insisted on the consumption of Western cuisine in its authentic form. This emphasis on a culinary dichotomy between “Japanese-style” (*wafū*) and “Western-style” (*yōfū*) became a symbol of upper-class refinement, while hybrid Japanese-Western combinations (*wayō setchū*) came to be associated with modernity on a popular level. In other words, the distinction between consuming Western food in its authentic and its hybrid forms constituted an important factor in the development of new class identities in Japan.

In the course of this paper, it will become evident that Meidi-ya was partly responsible for the elite’s emphasis on authenticity in relation to Western food. By employing various strategies, which I will describe below, Meidi-ya cultivated an image of upscale exclusiveness for itself and the products it sold, and consequently also projected this image onto its customers. It can therefore be argued that through its commercial activities the firm contributed to the social status of its customers, and participated in the construction of their new class identity in a modern setting. This, in turn, had a great influence on status sensibilities within Japanese society as a whole.

3. MEIDI-YA AS A MODERN UPSCALE GROCER

Meidi-ya was established in 1885 by Isono Hakaru (1858–1897), a 33-year-old graduate of the Law Faculty of Tōkyō University. Isono had worked as a trainee in a trading company in London from 1880 to 1883, and this over-

seas experience turned out to be of crucial importance for his future. Iso-no's fascination with the revolution in retailing that took place in Great Britain at the time of his stay (Burnett 1989: 126–127) inspired him to initiate similar innovations in Japan. His personal connections with British producers and retailers enabled him to materialize his plans. Meidi-ya modeled its retailing methods and advertising strategies, as well as its appearance and assortment of goods, on the modern multiple-grocers that began to emerge in Great Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as the enterprises created by Thomas Lipton, John James Sainsbury and Charles Digby Harrod (Dale 1981).

Meidi-ya made its initial start as a specialized importer of Western wines and liquors. The import of high-class processed foods and tableware followed shortly. The store carefully maintained an exclusive image through a wide assortment of the most renowned foreign brands. As of 1910, for example, Meidi-ya imported a variety of white wines from the Bordeaux and Rein areas, red wines from Portugal, several kinds of sherry and champagne, brandy, gin and other liquors. The assortment of foods was huge, too large to be listed here, ranging from red cabbage and onions to raisins and Piccalilli pickle. In order to illustrate the shop's exclusiveness, however, it should be sufficient to mention that *foies gras pâté* with truffles and *foies gras purée* were directly imported from Strasbourg, and that customers were offered a choice of five different sorts of butter: American, Dutch, French, Danish, and one made locally in Japan (*Shikō* 1910.01 and 1925.09).

Food, drink, tableware and kitchen equipment sold by Meidi-ya were targeted mainly at the upper and upper-middle classes, who were very conscious of new trends in consumption and much concerned with maintaining an image of "good taste." The fact that the Westerners who resided in Japan regularly shopped at the store, and that the store's reputation of good service and high-quality goods had spread abroad, enhanced its authentic Western image. The appointment of Meidi-ya in 1899 as an official supplier of wine and liquors to the Imperial Court further enhanced the exclusive allure of the shop.

Although Meidi-ya's goal was to provide the customer with simply the finest quality goods, much attention was also paid to the diversity of its products. The assortment was changed regularly according to the season, and novelties from European and American markets were speedily introduced. Peanut butter, for example, was already on sale in 1911, and Coca-Cola in 1919. In the early 1930s the store offered a choice of eight imported breakfast cereals: Corn Flakes, Shredded Wheat, Grape Nuts, Rice Krispies, Puffed Rice, Quaker Oats, All Bran, and Cream of Wheat (*Shikō* 1933.08: 6–7), though it was not until approximately six decades

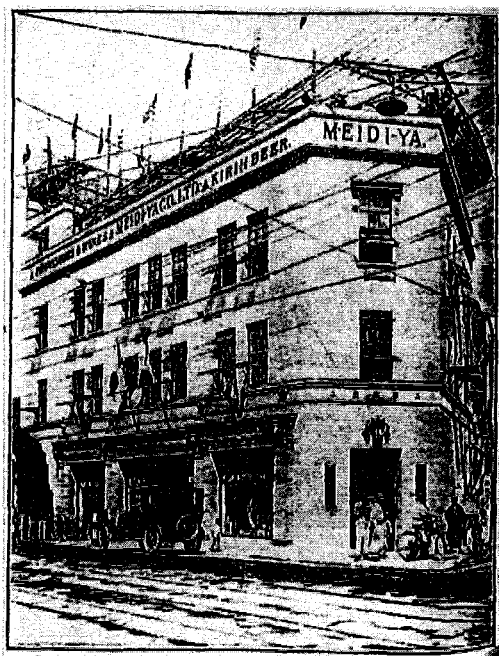


Fig. 1: Kanazawa
Meidi-ya store

Source: *Shikō* 1926.08

later that breakfast cereals began truly to gain a hold as a mass product in Japan.

Meidi-ya's business style, modeled after that of the upscale British grocers, included modern promotional strategies. Meidi-ya was one of the first companies in Japan to advertise through posters at train stations, and to enhance its "modern" image through the Western-style architecture of its buildings.

Starting in August 1909, Meidi-ya was also the first enterprise in Japan to use delivery vans for advertising. The so-called "Number One Automobile" (*nanbā wan jidōsha*), a delivery van whose name came from its registration number with the Tōkyō road police, was an object of fascination wherever it went on the streets of the city. Meidi-ya was also the first enterprise in Japan that made use of electric illuminations in order to advertise its products. In 1903, a four-and-a-half meter wide illumination showing the name of Kirin Beer – an important sales item at Meidi-ya – was placed in front of the Shinbashi station in Tōkyō. Shop-windows were another new forum of advertising (Fig. 2). The seasonally changing displays of the Ginza Meidi-ya store came to be one of the major tourist attractions of the city.

In its emphasis on exclusiveness and its dependency on an upper-class clientele, Meidi-ya resembled Harrod's store in London, which by the turn



Fig. 2: Shop windows at the Kōbe Meidi-ya store

Source: *Shikō* 1913.06

of the century had become the largest and most upscale shop in the city. In its nation-wide expansion, however, Meidi-ya followed the strategies of Lipton and Sainsbury. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Meidi-ya established, apart from its main store in Yokohama, branch stores in Tōkyō, Ōsaka and Kōbe, and in 1910, in Kyōto. By the third decade of the twentieth century, the company operated thirteen shops and dozens of sales outlets (*shutchōsho*) all over the country.

4. MEIDI-YA AND MODERN FOOD PROCESSING IN JAPAN

The above examples clearly demonstrate that Meidi-ya provided an important means for the spread of Western food culture among the Japanese upper and upper-middle classes, and played a pioneering role in introducing modern promotional strategies to the Japanese retailing business. However, as we shall see, Meidi-ya's contribution to Japanese modernization was in fact much more significant and far-reaching.

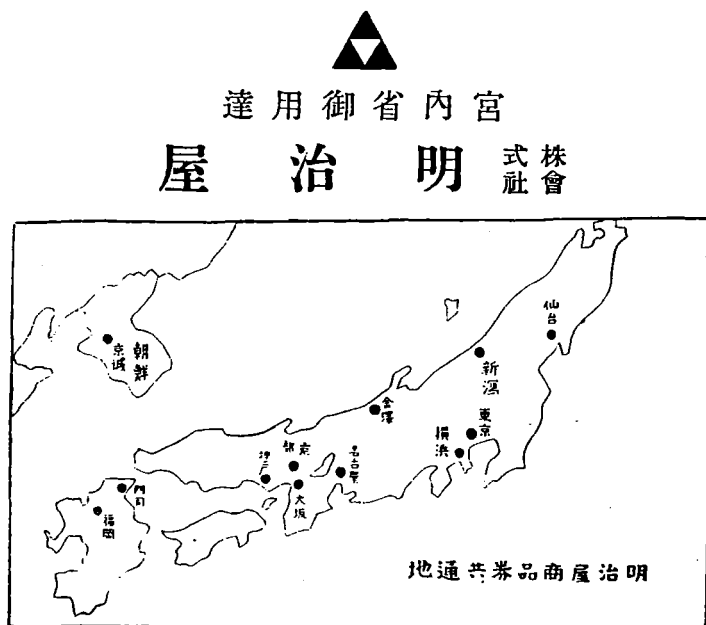


Fig. 3: Meidi-ya chain stores in the late 1920s

Source: *Shikō*

Although initially only imported Western foods and liquors were sold at the store, it was not long before Meidi-ya started to sell locally produced Western-style foods such as dairy products, jams, cured meats and confectionery. Already from 1888, Meidi-ya was acting as a sales agent of Kirin Beer produced by Japan Brewery, retaining sole rights for selling the beer inside and outside Japan until the end of 1926. Kirin Beer was the axis of the advertising strategies of Meidi-ya for over thirty years.

After 1899, the enterprise also acted as a special sales agent for confectionery produced by Morinaga. In 1902, it acquired the sole selling rights for Koiwai Butter. The firm was also involved in the marketing of Hokkaidō-based Snow Brand (*Yukijirushi*) butter and Gekkeikan sake. By expanding its role from that of an importer of foreign products to that of a retailer of domestically produced foods, Meidi-ya's responsibility as an innovative force in the Japanese economy increased. The company not only became involved in shaping new trade relations within Japan: it also played a part in developing and maintaining local Japanese economies. Hokkaidō is a prime example of this process.

The development of Hokkaidō as the birthplace of modern Japanese dairying, and its popular association with dairy products, was made possible by the nationwide promotion of the milk, butter and cheese produced on the island through Meidi-ya's channels. Thanks to the association with Meidi-ya, which by the early twentieth century had become a symbol of high quality and exclusiveness, domestically processed foods acquired a chance to compete with foreign products, and became firmly established as leading Japanese brands.

This competition with foreign foods on Meidi-ya's shelves was made possible in the first place by technological improvements in the production processes, which automatically led to the improvement of the quality of Western-style foods produced in Japan. Another factor that contributed to the expansion of domestically processed food was the European food crisis caused by World War I. Limited export of European products created an entry for Western-style foods produced in Japan on the domestic market. It also meant new possibilities for American and Australian producers to sell their products in Japan.

Apart from marketing domestically produced foods, Meidi-ya also became involved in food processing. 1909 saw the introduction of strawberry jam, the first product processed under Meidi-ya's brand name, and this was followed by macaroni, icing sugar, and a variety of canned foods. From the 1920s onwards, the store considerably enlarged its assortment of freshly made cured meat.

Product's name	Price per 100 gram in yen
Hard salami sausage	1.60
Black pudding sausage	0.90
Browns Wick sausage	1
Hunting sausage	1.25
Mortadella sausage	1.10
Frankfurt sausage	1
Vienna sausage	1
Tress Head sausage	1
Oxford sausage	1
Liver sausage	0.90
Bacon	1
Boiled ham	1.50
Smoked ham	1.40
Cassel ribs	1.30
Smoked beef	1.70

Tab. 3:
The prices of Meidi-ya's cured meat sold in the early 1920s

Source: *Shikō*

The outstanding quality and variety of the cured meat sold at Meidi-ya were a result of the establishment of a sister company, Meiji Provisions & Co., Ltd. (*Meiji shokuryō kabushiki kaisha*), which thereafter coordinated the production and processing of foods to be sold at Meidi-ya. In 1922, a cured meat factory was set up in Yokohama. The factory operated under the supervision of a highly qualified German butcher, Herman Wolschke. Vienna sausage, Oxford sausage, bacon, smoked ham and smoked beef are only some of the exclusive novelties Wolschke produced in Yokohama.

By becoming involved in the retailing of domestically produced food, as well as in the production, Meidi-ya began to play an increasingly important role in the domestication of Western food in Japan. It had a great impact, for example, on the popularization of canned food among the Japanese population.

The first canned foodstuff ever produced in Japan, manufactured in Nagasaki in 1871, was sardines in oil (Yamanaka 1962: 28). Later on, the variety of canned foodstuffs increased to include canned beef, seafood, fruit and vegetables, among others. However, a generally negative image of domestically processed foods prevailed among the Japanese population until the third decade of the twentieth century (Shōwa 1971: 292, 670). This image was justified, as domestically produced cans were of bad quality, and their contents often unpalatable and sometimes even poisonous. Until the late 1920s, the Japanese armed forces consumed the bulk of canned foods produced in Japan. From the 1930s on, however, with the popularization of military catering among the general public (Cwierka 1998a, 1999), canned food became a regular item in Japanese households. Meidi-ya's involvement in the production of canned food provided an important stimulus for the improvement of the quality of domestically produced cans, and its marketing activities bolstered the image of the Japanese canning industry.

The fact that initially Western-style processed foods, such as sardines in oil, canned green peas and tomato purée, prevailed among the products of the Japanese food industry contributed to the diffusion of Western foodstuffs and dishes in Japan, especially in rural areas. By the 1930s, however, a wide variety of Japanese-style and hybrid Japanese-Western style processed foods also became available. Advertisements for canned *shiruko* [a sweet soup made of azuki beans, *Vigna angularis*], canned *mitsumame* [a kind of dessert made from sweet beans and fruit], instant powdered *mochi* [steamed rice pounded into a paste], canned *miso* soup, canned *chazuke* [green tea and rice], and famous Kyōto pickles can be found in the magazines of the time.³ This development indicates that Western-style food-

³ *Shikō* (1929: 6); *Shikō* (1931: 1); *Shikō* (1932: 9); *Asahi guraifu* (1937: 20); *Shikō* (1938: 2).



Fig. 4:
Meidi-ya brand strawberry
jam

Source: *Shikō* 1912.11

processing technologies had become rooted in Japan. They formed the basis for dietary innovations that took place in the following decades.

5. MEIDI-YA AND SOCIAL STATUS

Despite the increasing presence of domestically produced food at the store, Meidi-ya continued carefully to maintain its exclusive Western image. It not only made extensive use of English on its signboards, but also made every effort to give its domestically produced foods a clearly Western appearance. Labels were printed in English, often including the Meidi-ya brand name written in roman letters, for example "MEIDI-YA CO. LTD", "KABUSHIKI KAISHA MEIDI-YA" or "MY brand" (see Fig. 4).

From the third decade of the twentieth century onwards, however, Meidi-ya began to offer an increasing number of traditional Japanese foods, often sold in cans. *Fukujinzuke*, strips of *daikon* [giant white radish; *Raphanus sativus*] pickled with *shiso* leaves [*Perilla frutescens* var.], is only one out of many Japanese-style processed foods that appeared on Meidi-ya's shelves in the 1920s (*Shikō* 1922.09: 14). Over the years, salt-pickled eggplant, salted herring roe, sea urchin, soy sauce, and *shiruko* were also sold in cans at Meidi-ya's stores. It is not entirely clear why such a variety of Japanese-style foods appeared on Meidi-ya's shelves at this time. It is pos-

sible that the company was exploring new market opportunities, or that its motive was to prevent the loss of its significant market share to the food halls of the nation's burgeoning and expanding department stores.

A careful analysis of Meidi-ya's sales items and strategies in the 1920s and 1930s suggests that it was the store's deliberate policy not to merge Japanese and Western culinary styles but rather to maintain a strict division between them. Symbolically this distinction was maintained through the two main Japanese products sold at Meidi-ya: Kirin Beer and Gekkeikan Sake. Meidi-ya acquired exclusive rights to sell the Gekkeikan brand in 1915, and this date overlaps with the company's expansion policy to embrace more traditional Japanese foods.

The hybridity of tastes, ingredients, and culinary styles, widely practiced by the urban middle-classes and popular restaurants at the time, was rarely reflected in the goods available on the shelves of Meidi-ya, and it is hardly ever suggested in Meidi-ya's promotion material. This emphasis on the authentic Western character of Meidi-ya's products also made itself felt in the recipes included in the company's advertising magazine *Shikō* [Taste] distributed to the clients each month. *Shikō* began publication in August 1908, and after more than three decades was discontinued in September 1940 due to the wartime shortage of paper.⁴ The magazine included information on Meidi-ya's products and activities, as well as articles describing the characteristics and history of certain food items and foreign eating habits, and short stories unrelated to food.

The recipes that featured in *Shikō* were not hybrid Japanese-Western ones, as was the case in popular middle-class magazines, but were direct translations from cookbooks published in Europe and the United States. The names of the recipes were often written in English with pronunciation in *katakana* indicated next to the text – a practice never found in magazines and cookbooks targeted at middle-class readers, which customarily featured recipes with names already translated into Japanese.

Overwhelmingly, the recipes in *Shikō* were British and American. Their selection by the editorial board of the magazine was made according to the season. Salads and ice creams prevailed in summer. In June 1910, for example, recipes for Blackberry Icecream, Nasturtium Punch, Maple Mousse, and Pineapple Cream were suggested as an appetizing refreshment on a hot summer day (*Shikō* 1910.06: 5–7). The July 1929 issue included Savory Melon Salad, Green Pea Salad, Asparagus and Egg Salad, Rainbow Salad, and Melon and Watercress Salad (*Shikō* 1929.07). The November editions were regarded as suitable to introduce beef recipes

⁴ The magazine resumed publication fifteen years later, in September 1955.

such as Roast Beef Pie, Beefsteak Pie, Fizzled Beef, and Flank Steak (*Shikō* 1912.11).

Whether the recipes that appeared in *Shikō* and other kinds of pre-war Japanese household literature were in fact followed, however, remains doubtful. It is impossible to assess whether the Western and hybrid Japanese-Western dishes introduced through the media really ended up on Japanese tables – and this applies both to upper- and middle-class homes. The fact that a clear difference in style existed between the upper-class and middle-class oriented cookery columns does nevertheless suggest that deliberate class strategies were followed in the construction of the consumption patterns in early twentieth century Japan.

The columns of *Shikō* are also valuable as a source of information on the kind of clientele that shopped at Meidi-ya. The editorial board of the magazine wanted to make sure that it did not include anything unsuitable for a “respectable family” (*ryōka no katei*), a phrase that as good as implied upper-middle and upper-class households. From the presence of the English names of the recipes it may be presumed that Meidi-ya’s customers were not entirely unfamiliar with roman characters. The contents of the featured articles suggest that Meidi-ya’s clients belonged to a well-educated portion of Japanese society.

While other popular magazines generally classified all foods into the three categories Japanese, Chinese and Western-style, Meidi-ya taught its customers about the diversity of food cultures all over the world. In 1912, for example, *Shikō* described the characteristic features of French, German, Austrian, Italian, Spanish, Indian, South African, Canadian and Australian cuisines (1912.10: 1–4). Turkish, Austrian, Mexican and Hungarian cuisines were featured again in separate articles over the next two years (*Shikō* 1913.04, 1913.07, 1914.02, 1914.09); and Greek and Persian food habits were described in the 1930s (*Shikō* 1932.01, 1932.02).

The columns of *Shikō* featured articles on various aspects of Western food culture, on the history and production methods of foods, such as macaroni and mustard (1910.06, 1912.10), dairy products (1931.03) and also sugar (1930.10). The magazine reported on the domestic production of Western-style foods, such as canned fruit and vegetables (*Shikō* 1930.11, 1934.09) and cheese (*Shikō* 1937.05).

Customers of Meidi-ya had an opportunity to be educated in Western cooking skills through cooking courses and demonstrations organized by the store. In May 1927, for example, a cooking course took place at the Kōbe store of Meidi-ya (*Shikō* 1927.06). The prepared recipes were designed to represent an authentic Western upper-middle class menu:

Menu 1: Fish Chowder / Fried fish in breadcrumbs with tartar sauce / Chicken and macaroni Italian style / Cold pork and salad / Steamed pancakes with strawberry sauce

Menu 2: Lobster in American sauce / Spanish boiled beef / Canelon of beef and German fried potatoes / Curried crab with rice / Chocolate bread pudding

These and other strategies of the store suggest that Meidi-ya consciously refrained from becoming associated with the popular hybrid Japanese-Western style of consumption. Instead, by separating the Western and the Japanese culinary styles, the company secured an exclusive position as an authentic upscale store, as well as an exclusive upper-class status for its customers. By carefully separating Japanese and Western-style food and by linking this distinction to an elite lifestyle, Meidi-ya strengthened its image as culinary innovator and trendsetter in early twentieth-century Japan.

6. CONCLUSION: MEIDI-YA AS A CULTURAL BROKER

Most social scientists agree that social life is largely made possible by material objects: it is their manufacture, exchange and consumption that provide the framework and means of most forms of social interaction and cultural interchange (see Appadurai 1986, Miller 1994). Material objects are closely linked to a sense of identity and social status.

Food is one of the domains in which social competition expresses itself most clearly. Individual food choices often serve as indicators of social standing and mark the distinction between groups within the society (Bourdieu 1986), as conflict and social competition often find articulation in social display and conspicuous consumption (Mennell 1985). The richest sections of a population have often eaten differently from commoners in order to validate or prove their special status. Rare and costly exotic foods are a means of self-differentiation from the rest of society, and this is one reason that the elite circles in hierarchical societies have basically always been cosmopolitan.

Scholars Jack Goody, Sidney Mintz and Stephen Mennell, the founding fathers of contemporary food research, all agree that prestige has been the primary incentive and driving force in the developments in the craft of cooking, and also of table manners (Goody 1982, Mennell 1985, Mintz 1985). Two distinct but inevitably related tendencies can be distinguished in the relationship between social stratification and the spread of culinary innovation: a tendency towards social distinction from those lower on the



Fig. 5: Amsterdam Meidi-ya store

Source: Author's collection

social scale, and a tendency towards social imitation of those higher up on the social scale.

Meidi-ya's case study demonstrates that Western food played an important role as a status marker in modern Japan. In the late nineteenth century, the Japanese elite emphasized its image as cultural model for the rest of the population by emulating Western consumption habits. In the early twentieth century, when hybrid Japanese-Western forms were evolving into a discursive space in which the Japanese people gradually constructed their own modernity, the upper classes tenaciously maintained the Japanese/Western dichotomy in order to distinguish themselves from the more "common" hybrid fashion.

This symbolic connection with authentic Western cuisine at the top of the social ladder can be interpreted as indicating a certain degree of diffusion of Western food among the general Japanese population. As Appadurai has pointed out, an emphasis on authenticity is usually a reaction to the growing availability of previously exclusive foreign commodities (Appadurai 1986: 44). The criterion of authenticity in this situation enhances the value.

The encroachment of capitalism, along with the Westernization policies imposed by the Meiji government, resulted in socio-economic changes

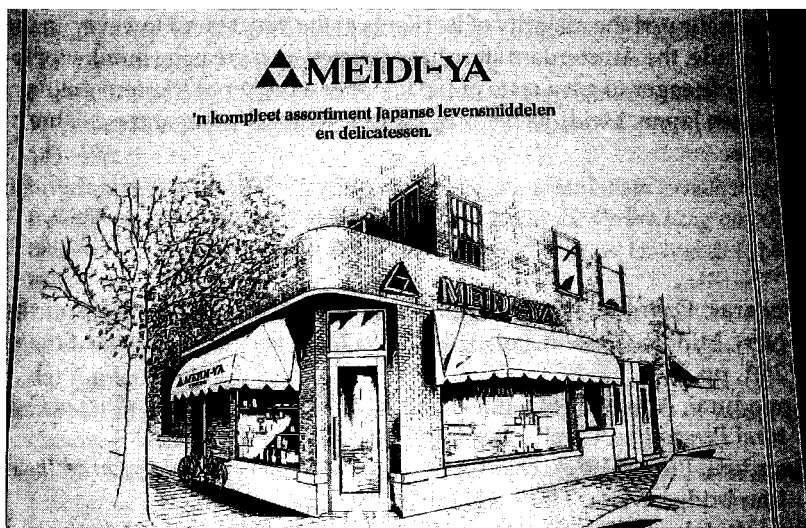


Fig. 6: Design on a shopping bag of Amsterdam Meidi-ya

Source: Author's collection

that transformed Japanese lifestyles, including food habits. This situation created favorable circumstances for Meidi-ya to emerge and to grow. At the same time, however, Meidi-ya participated in the shaping of a new social context in Japan.

In many respects, Meidi-ya resembles exclusive Japanese department stores, such as Mitsukoshi, Takashimaya, Shirokiya and Matsuzakaya. Like them, Meidi-ya carefully cultivated a certain kind of high-class clientele, trying to create fashions to spur on consumption. By doing so, it was involved in producing new class identities and status sensibilities in Japan.

By fulfilling the commercial goals and dreams of its managers, Meidi-ya provided Japanese people with an impetus for culinary progress, and greatly contributed to the development of modern food processing and retailing in Japan. And although by the late twentieth century its role as the leading culinary broker of Western culture in Japan came to an end, changes in consumption habits in other countries now allowed it to take up a new task on the other side of the world. In 1984, almost exactly hundred years after the company opened its first shop in Yokohama, it opened its first (and so far its only) overseas store in Amsterdam. Here, Meidi-ya sells Japanese sake, fresh sushi, and a wide assortment of Japanese foodstuffs and processed foods. Its customers of course include Japanese expatriates,

who constituted the majority of its clients at the very start. However, in the last decade, the Amsterdam store has attracted an increasing number of local people eager to get a taste of Japan. Once a broker of Western culinary culture in Japan, Meidi-ya has now become a broker of Japanese cuisine in Europe.

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