

# Japan's Use of Flour Began with Noodles, Part 5

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## Noodles Took Their Current Form during the Eiroku Era

### The Transition from Stretching to Cutting

Shokoku-ji Temple, built by Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), the third shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate, was burned during the Onin civil war (1467–1477). For this reason, there is a gap of eighteen years in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku*, the compilation of daily records from the Onryo-ken hermitage on Shokoku-ji Temple grounds. Pre-war and post-war Shokoku-ji Temple records regarding noodles differ completely. After the war, somen and *hiyamugi* had become independent dishes no longer served as a requirement of the extremely formal and traditional *tenshin* (between-meal snack) and *toki* (lunch) served in Zen monasteries. Another distinct change was that *hiyamugi*, previously stretched into noodles as was somen, were now prepared by cutting the dough into noodles, a much simpler method.

These changes are indicated in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* entries. The March 15, 1489 entry mentions *kiri-hiyamugi*, literally "cut *hiyamugi*." The entry notes that this *kiri-hiyamugi* was served alone with sake and not as a part of *toki*. A May 17, 1489 entry detailing a gift of *tettaimen*, another type of noodle that is cut rather than stretched, from a visiting monk and novice monk tells us that *tettaimen* was by that time produced both inside and outside of Zen monasteries. The entry for July 14 of the same year tells of the master of Onryo-ken visiting Rokuon-in Temple's head monk. The master was offered *kiri-hiyamugi* and sake, but was upset at the break from tradition and refused to eat the noodles. It seems that he did not like the fact that the *hiyamugi* had been made by cutting dough rather than in the traditional method of stretching it. This entry makes it clear that *hiyamugi* was originally made in the same way as *somen*—stretched rather than cut—but without the oil. It is important to note that this type of *somen* made without oil came to be cut rather than stretched. Soon after, two types of *hiyamugi* could be found at *somen* shops: one made by stretching dough and the other by cutting dough. Though the names for the noodles varied by region, a clear awareness of the existence of the two types of *hiyamugi* is vital to understanding noodle history.

*Onryo-ken Nichiroku* also introduces a second issue regarding *hiyamugi*. For instance, the aforementioned

July 14 entry continues, "Onmen and five desserts were served. After having some sake, I left." Essentially, *onmen* is a general term for noodles served hot. Based on records mentioning *onmen*, many researchers have come to believe that *hiyamugi* is simply a general term for noodles that are served cold. However, this assumption is incorrect based on entries in *Rokuon Nichiroku* (compilation of journals kept by successive Rokuon-in Temple head monks) and *Yamashina-ke Raiki* (written by Osawa Hisamori and Shigetane, who managed the Yamashina family business) indicating that *hiyamugi* was sometimes served hot. Therefore, *hiyamugi* should be considered a specific type of noodle.

### Ascertaining the Course of Noodle History

At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, noodle production changed in the midst of the social upheaval of the Warring States period (1467–1573). There were large-scale uprisings by the peasantry and armed farmers in Yamashiro province (present-day southern Kyoto prefecture). In Kaga province (present-day southern Ishikawa prefecture), Togashi Masachika (1455–1488), the lord appointed by the Muromachi shogunate to govern the province, was killed in a revolt organized by a religious group, giving birth to a province governed by its farmers.

During this period of turmoil, there was a significant shift in the noodle business. *Somen* shops began emerging in villages, including Yamashina villages, away from urban areas. The July 6, 1463 entry in *Yamashina-ke Raiki* indicates that a local *somen* shop would deliver *somen* to customers' homes. Though the Yamashina family was charged with overseeing *somen* kugonin, *somen* suppliers for the imperial court, it seems that independent *somen* shops had emerged. These *somen* shops did not recognize the authority of the Yamashinas and in turn, the Yamashinas generally turned a blind eye.

In the city of Kyoto, dedicated *somen* producers emerged earlier than in the Yamashina villages. Granted a monopoly, the Nakamikado family was charged with controlling the distribution of *somen* made by these producers. In reality, however, the Nakamikados eventually lost control and commoners began establishing independent *somen* shops. These

shop owners did not recognize the authority of the Nakamikados, which had been delegated by the imperial court.

While Zen monks played a leading role in the beginning of Japan's noodle history, that role eventually shifted to the common people. Noodle shops were simply businesses that had to respond to the demands of their customers. They must not only conform to the mainstream, but also implement natural transitions that occur over time. An overall view of these transitions clearly identifies the course of noodle history. The following major changes in noodle history occurred during the period of 1463 to 1622.

1. *Somen-ya*, or *somen* shops, emerged (evidenced by the July 6, 1463 entry in *Yamashina-ke Raiki*)

2. *Somen-ya* sold *kirimugi*, or cut *udon* (evidenced by the July 7, 1537 entry in *Rokuon Nichiroku*)

3. *Kirimugi-ya*, or *kirimugi* shops, emerged (evidenced by the June 8, 1588 entry in *Tokitsune-kyo Ki*)

4. *Udon-ya*, or *udon* shops, emerged selling *sobakiri* (cut buckwheat noodles) as well as *udon* (evidenced by the December 4, 1622 entry in *Matsuya-kai Ki*)

References to noodles in historical documents are only meaningful to those who are aware of these developments that occurred over a period of 160 years. In addition to the changes noted above, other transitions—the switch from stretching to cutting and from the use of dried noodles to fresh noodles—can be seen. The basic economic principle of supply meeting demand was the basis of these transitions, and it was the common people who led the way.

## Private Records Preceding Noodle Shops

Approximately sixty years before the July 7, 1537 entry in *Rokuon Nichiroku*, which tells of *somen* shops producing and selling *kirimugi*, the private record, *Yamashina-ke Raiki*, mentions the transition from stretching to cutting noodles in Yamashina villages. The July 7, 1480 entry in *Yamashina-ke Raiki* was the last to mention *kirimugi*. Thereafter, cut noodles mentioned in this document are referred to only as *udon* or *hiyamugi*, indicating that *kiri*, or “cut” was no longer a distinction that needed to be made. According to this July 7 entry, even a commoner with no connection to a monastery or the noodle business made *kirimugi* for the *Tanabata* Star Festival. By this time, the transition to cutting noodles meant that anyone could make noodles rather quickly. In addition, individuals could cut their noodles as thick or as thin as they liked. In the Yamashina villages, thicker *kirimugi* noodles were referred to as *udon* while the thinner noodles were

called *hiyamugi*, thus eliminating the need for the word *kirimugi*, or “cut noodles”.

This same transition was seen in other areas as well. While stretching dough into noodles and then drying the noodles required quite a lot of space and time, making noodles by simply rolling out the dough and then cutting it into strips with a knife was so simple that noodles made in this way quickly spread throughout much of Japan, becoming an indispensable part of the diet of subsistence farmers. *Somen* shops were also forced to respond to this new trend. In addition to dried noodles made in the conventional way, the shops began selling fresh cut noodles in response to customer demands.

This sort of transition in the noodle business was much faster and more prominent in urban areas with a larger, more demanding consumer base. In the June 8, 1588 and July 5, 1596 entries in his diary, *Tokitsune-kyo Ki*, Yamashina Tokitsune mentions *kirimugi* shops in Osaka and Kyoto, respectively. Another private record introduces this trend even earlier.

The Matsuyas were a wealthy family of lacquerware artisans and merchants in the Tegai villages of Nara. Hisamasa, Hisayoshi and Hisahige Matsuya were the heads of the family for three generations. Each kept records of tea ceremonies that the family held with other wealthy merchants of the Kyoto-Osaka region during the period from 1533 to 1650. These records are collectively known as *Matsuya-kai Ki*. The April 2 and April 25, 1559 entries in *Matsuya-kai Ki* were the last records where both of the words *hiyamugi* and *kirimugi* were used. Afterwards, the word *hiyamugi* disappeared completely and only the words *kirimugi* and *udon* were used.

I have long speculated that dramatic shifts in noodle history, including cut noodles becoming more prominent than stretched noodles, fresh noodles becoming more common than dried noodles, and *kirimugi* shops overtaking *somen* shops, took place during the sixteen years between 1558 and 1574. In my book *Tsurutsuru Monogatari*, published May 20, 1987, I stated that during the Tensho era (1573–1593), cut soba (buckwheat) noodles called *sobakiri* had spread widely among the common people. The discovery of *Josho-ji Monjo*, a record of Josho-ji Temple dating back to 1574, five years later confirmed that statement. I had speculated that there were already a number of *kirimugi* shops in existence during the Eiroku era (1558–1570) in the Kyoto-Osaka region. These shops would have made the *udon* and *soba* noodles they served their customers themselves. Visitors from other parts of the country would have seen the noodles being made and taken the information home with them. Further study seems to



Chikujo-zu Byobu illustrates the town's excitement at construction of a castle in the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1603). A man in a temporary food stall at the center of the right panel kneads dough while a person who appears to be a customer eats noodles from a vermilion-lacquered bowl. (Property of the Nagoya City Museum)

prove this speculation correct. The folding screen titled *Chikujo-zu Byobu* from the Azuchi-Momoyama period (ca. 1568–1603) illustrates the bustle of castle construction. At the top of the right panel is a *kirimugi* shop with a customer eating *udon*. Therefore, I am confident that these noodle shops, called *kirimugi-ya* or *kirimugi* shops, were already in existence during the Eiroku era. The December 4, 1622 entry in *Matsuya-kai Ki* mentioning an *udon* shop selling *sobakiri* as well as *udon* seems to indicate the emergence of *udon* shops (listed above as the fourth major change to occur between 1463 and 1633). This, however, would probably be a misunderstanding. More likely, this simply means that the common people had stopped calling such shops *kirimugi* shops and begun calling them *udon* shops. Essentially, *kirimugi* shops sold raw noodles, as well as serving cooked *udon* and *soba* noodles to their customers. The August 22, 1591 entry in *Tokitsune-kyo Ki* mentions a *fune*, or wooden box, of fresh *udon* noodles received from the wife of an acquaintance. Today, the wooden box in which cut *soba* noodles are placed is called a *fune* in the Kanto region. As this word was used in *Tokitsune-kyo Ki*, it would seem likely that this custom had already been established by the Tensho era. We now know that people were already eating *udon* and *sobakiri* as early as 1558. What Zen monks referred to as *hiyamugi* had changed from dried noodles to fresh noodles. Moreover, these fresh noodles were boiled and served in public shops. This was how *kirimugi*

shops did business in urban areas. *Somen* shops that specialized in dried *somen* noodles in these urban areas succumbed to the flourishing *kirimugi* shops and began to decline. All forms of noodle production still seen today were established during the period around 1558–1574. This was a very turbulent time in Japanese history as the warlord Oda Nobunaga campaigned for control of the Kinai region (five provinces in and around Kyoto and Nara) in an attempt to achieve his goal of unifying the country.

### Kyono Jinbei Brings Inaniwa *Udon* to Akita

Inaniwa *udon*, the product of Akita prefecture, is considered among the best *udon* in Japan. How did this *udon* come about?

On May 8, 1602, the fiefdom of Satake Yoshinobu (1570–1633) was transferred from Hitachi province (present-day Ibaraki prefecture) to the Akita domain in Dewa province (present-day Akita prefecture) by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate. Prior to the transfer, the fiefdom was valued at 545,800 *koku*<sup>1</sup>. After the transfer, it was valued at just 205,000 *koku*. In the April 14, 1612 entry in his diary, Umezu Masakage, the chief retainer of the Satake family, noted that he had received a report on damages incurred by a fire. Two *kirimugi* shops were included in the report.

As a samurai family with a long history dating from the

Kamakura period (ca. 1185–1333), the Satake clan always included noodles in their New Year’s celebratory dishes, a tradition of court nobles since the Heian period (794–ca. 1185). This is confirmed by Masakage’s diary. It is easy to imagine that the reduced value of their holdings from well over 500,000 *koku* to just over 200,000 *koku* placed the Satakes in some financial distress. Yoshinobu attempted to improve the family’s situation with silver and gold mining. However, the domain did not yield enough rice to feed the laborers brought in from other parts of the country. It is reasonable to consider that the Satakes may have tried to overcome their rice shortage by introducing *kirimugi* shops in their domain. In addition to the two shops destroyed by the fire, there were likely many other *kirimugi* shops throughout the Akita domain.

A Satake record from 1613 tells us that Umezumi Masakage received a report of noodle tax paid in installments, and mentions Kyono Jinbei as the person responsible for the payments. When he moved to Akita with the transfer of his fiefdom, Satake Yoshinobu brought Jinbei, a noodle shop owner from Kyoto, with him. This was before noodle shops had come to be called *udon* shops in the Kyoto-Osaka region. Yoshinobu had Jinbei bring a number of *kirimugi* and *somen* shop owners from the Kyoto-Osaka region to live and open shops in Akita. Jinbei was assigned the task of overseeing them. These *kirimugi* shops primarily made *udon* for the silver miners that came to work in the Satake domain, which was not suited to rice cultivation. It can be presumed that the noodle shop owners Jinbei brought from the Kyoto-Osaka region included *somen* shop owners specializing in stretched somen. Jinbei himself may have made stretched *udon* rather than cut *udon*. Therefore, Inaniwa *udon* was developed by these noodle shop owners from the Kyoto-Osaka region who came to Akita at the request of Satake Yoshinobu and Kyono Jinbei.

1.A historic unit of volume defined as enough rice to feed one person for one year.

### Oil-free Somen Becomes More Complex

All noodles made by *kirimugi* shops were cut noodles. In addition to serving prepared fresh noodles in their shops, they also sold the raw noodles. On the other hand, production of the stretched noodles sold in *somen* shops was very complex. In his diary, *Tokitsune-kyo Ki*, Yamashina Tokitsune mentions *ki-somen* in the entries of September 9, 1589 and May 7, 1590, a time when he was living in Osaka. Tokitsune returned to Kyoto in 1591. *Ki-somen* is also mentioned after that. The *ki-udon* previously mentioned refers to fresh *udon*.

So what is *ki-somen*? From the description, “a tray of *ki-somen*” in the July 20, 1593 entry and “five bundles of *ki-somen*” in the August 29, 1605 entry, we know that *ki-somen* placed on a tray is fresh *somen* and bundled *ki-somen* is dried *somen*. Whether fresh or dried, *somen* ready for cooking is *somen* made without oil. Yamashina Tokitsune used the prefix “*ki*” to mean pure, oil-free *somen*. However, *ki-somen* was not a term coined by Tokitsune. *Somen* shops in the Kyoto-Osaka region used the word to distinguish *somen* made without oil from that made with oil. The May 12, 1606 entry in *Tokitsune-kyo Ki* states that Tokitsune received some *somenkiri* (cut *somen*). Fresh *somen* made with oil was never cut and eaten without having been dried first. The *somen* called *ki-somen* by *somen* shops was made without oil and known as *hiyamugi* in Zen monasteries.

The July 30, 1661 entry in *Kakumei-ki*, a diary kept by Horin Shosho (1593–1668), a prominent Zen monk, states, “Gensaido visited this evening. We shared some oil-free somen.” This entry astonished me. In my book, *Tsurutsuru Monogatari*, I wrote that there are two types of *somen*, one made with oil and one made without. For convenience sake, I used different terms each. Shosho explicitly stated that *hiyamugi* was *somen* made without oil. In Zen monasteries, *hiyamugi* further referred to oil-free *somen* that was stretched. This oil-free, stretched *somen* was called *futo-somen* (thick *somen*) by *somen* manufacturers, and *ki-somen* by Tokitsune.

Despite the growing popularity of *kirimugi* shops, *somen* shops continued to produce *somen* made without oil. In addition to *somen*, they also made dried *udon* as indicated in the February 22, 1646 entry in *Kakumei-ki*, “After bathing, we shared some dried *udon*.” *Somen* shops attempted to improve their business by expanding their products to include *somen* made without oil and dried *udon*. However, the trend at the time was for fresh cut noodles. At the same time, the main business of *kirimugi* shops in urban areas was shifting from the sale of raw noodles to be cooked at home to serving cooked noodles in the shops. As *udon* quickly became popular with the common people, it was inevitable that *kirimugi* shops came to be called *udon* shops.

### The Emergence of *Udon*

Just as noodle production methods were being finalized in the Eiroku (1558–1570) and Tensho (1573–1593) eras, a new type of flour food called *udon* appeared suddenly. From the Edo period (1603–1868) to the present, no flour food has confounded noodle commentators as much as this one. To date, no one has been

able to precisely explain *undon*. So, I would like to take this opportunity to explain exactly what *undon* was.

Keijo Shurin, the head monk of Shokoku-ji Temple's *Rokuon-in* Temple, wrote in the October 27, 1543 entry in *Rokuon Nichiroku* that he ate *undon* at the dormitory for ascetics. This is the earliest record known to mention *undon*.

Although Keijo Shurin used the correct Chinese characters for *udon* in the September 25, 1543 entry, he used incorrect characters for his entry on October 5, 1543. Therefore, I simply assumed that rather than using the characters for *udon*, he mistakenly used the characters for *undon* in the October 27 entry mentioned above. However, the August 27, 1592 entry in *Rokuon Nichiroku* mentions *unton*. With this I suddenly realized that *unton* and *undon* were the same thing, meaning that there was no mistake in the October 27 entry.

Though the word *undon* continues to appear in *Rokuon Nichiroku* through the Bunroku era (1593–1596), there is no indication of what *undon* exactly was. The word appeared more and more frequently during the Keicho era (1596–1615).

It was Saisho Shotai who provided the best clues to *undon*. Shotai was the head priest of Shokoku-ji Temple and head monk of *Rokuon-in* Temple. After the death of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Oda Nobunaga's successor and Tokugawa Ieyasu's predecessor), he was also Tokugawa Ieyasu's diplomatic adviser. The March 27, 1597 entry in *Rokuon Nichiroku* mentions that Shotai had *udon* for lunch. Two days later, Shotai writes, "Minato Hachibei came again and we had *undon* and some pickles." Clearly, Shotai did not make a mistake in the Chinese characters he used. The March 20, 1601 entry describes the way in which *undon* was eaten. It seems that a dinner was held at Onryo-ken and *undon* was served first. Those attending the dinner each helped themselves to six or seven *undon*. This description indicates that *undon* was more like a wonton than *udon*.

When noodles were introduced in China during the Southern Sung period (1127–1279), a flour food known as *konton* in northern China was brought to southern China where the name was changed to wonton with a new set of Chinese characters. The Japanese read the characters for wonton as *undon*. Japanese Zen monks then applied yet another new set of Chinese characters to the word. Though the combination of characters used by the Zen monks was quite witty, commoners often confused the characters for *undon* with those for *udon*, another combination established by a Zen monk and so complex that commoners could not possibly write it. As a result, commoners used the simpler

Chinese characters for *undon* to refer to *udon*, not realizing that the two were completely different foods. This, of course, led to misinformation and proves to be a major stumbling block for food and noodle historians. A number of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints from the Edo period (1603–1868) depict merchants with paper lanterns on which *undon* is written. From these prints, we tend to believe that the misinformation mentioned above must have occurred during the Edo period. However, these errors had occurred even before the establishment of the Edo shogunate. *Nippo Jisho*, a Japanese-Portuguese dictionary published in Nagasaki in 1603 lists both *Vdon* (*udon*) and *Vndon* (*undon*). Evidently, the word *undon* was already in common use before the Edo shogunate. The word and its Chinese characters continued to be used until the end of the Edo period.

The antiquarian Ise Teijo (1717–1784) was the first to point out the common mistake in the use of the word *undon*. In *Jojo Kikigaki Teijo-sho*, published in 1766, he wrote, "One book notes that *konton* is also known as *undon*. Today, calling that which is made by cutting dough prepared with flour into thin strips and then boiled *undon* is incorrect. This food should be called *kirimugi*, a variety of noodle." The book to which Teijo referred was published during the Genna era (1615–1623). Referring to this book as the foundation of his argument, Teijo explained that *undon* was the same as wonton and that it was incorrect for commoners to call *kirimugi undon*.

Some modern researchers claim that Ise Teijo's explanation is wrong, though there is nothing incorrect about his statement. It is a pity, however, that he used the word *kirimugi*. In Teijo's time, *kirimugi* was used to refer to both *udon* and *hiyamugi*. As these two types of noodles differed in thickness, perhaps he should have concluded by saying, "This food should be called *udon*, a variety of noodle."

Though there are additional noodle and flour foods that I would like to cover, it seems that we have run out of space. Though this series, "Japan's Use of Flour Began with Noodles," ends here, I am determined to continue my study and research of the topic.

\*References omitted. Request the list of documents referenced for this article via e-mail to  
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