

# Japan Diary

## Moving with the Time

In Japan, like everywhere else, there's a spirit of renewal in the air in spring that controls people as well as nature. Just as the cherry blossoms are blooming, the tax man is licking his fingers to count profits and losses and people move on to the next stage of their development like blocks on a *shogi* board. In a Japanese spring, the wedding halls are full, the universities prepare to receive the new batch of freshmen, the graduates step into the companies, and the real estate agents heave a sigh of relief and pay the bills that have been mounting over the period of slack.

People have been on the move in Japan ever since the original inhabitants—the Ainu, the remaining few of whom are now settled mostly in Hokkaido—wandered around from place to place in search of food. The Jomon people, who came after them, were similarly nomadic, and when the agriculturist Yayoi people arrived to mix with the Jomons and the aborigines a compromise had been reached whereby some folks would stay home and tend the fields while others kept moving to invigorate the culture.

It was the Yayoi people—who at heart were farming people who never strayed too far away from the earth they loved—who created Shinto and the beliefs in the age of the gods. The early agricultural Japanese put their gods in grain store-

houses, the prototype of the buildings that are now the Izumo and Ise shrines, the two most sacred Shinto sites in Japan today. In true farming fashion, both gods and men believed that they must imitate the seasons and nature, so every twenty years they dismantled the grainhouses of the gods and rebuilt them from pure new wood. This tradition is still observed in Ise and Izumo today.

It wasn't just a spirit of renewal that governed this law. When Buddhism seeped into Japan from India via China in the sixth century, there emerged the philosophy that life was a journey, that desire was the base of all suffering, and that one must be prepared always for death. In a land known for earthquakes, floods and fires there were few who did not believe in the impermanence of life, for the early Japanese, like their counterparts in many parts of Japan today, watched in helpless gloom as time after time their houses, their lands and their children were snatched up by the vicissitudes of nature and dashed against the rocky shores. Nothing was forever.

In the age of the warrior, it was expected that at a moment's notice all available males would throw down their farming tools and take up the sword in defense of their lord. This idea became quite sophisticated under the rule of Japan's three great unifiers: Ieyasu Tokugawa, Nobunaga Oda and Hideyoshi Toyotomi. During the Tokugawa period especially, a rule that lasted two hundred and fifty years and closed Japan to the outside world, the shogun's expectations of each and every citizen, from the feudal lord right down to the 'non-human' buriers of the dead and eaters of meat, resulted in a

rigid feudal order that controlled everything from how each person was to live to his position in society.

The Tokugawas knew that the secret of unification after an age of civil wars was the control of the feudal lords, and Ieyasu himself separated the loyalists from the suspicious according to who had supported or opposed him during the famous Battle of Sekigahara in 1603. Lords of the Inner Circle were called *fudai* lords, and those on the Outer Circle were the *tozama* lords. After Ieyasu Tokugawa moved Japan's capital to Edo, now called Tokyo, from Kyoto where the Emperor had always ruled, he settled comfortably in Edo Castle with his Inner Lords around him. The Outer Lords stayed on their fiefs, but Ieyasu and his successors made it a rule that these outer lords visit Edo to pay their respects to the shogun at least once a year (later once every three years). To ensure they did this, the shogunate kept the wives and children of the lords as hostages in Edo.

This system, known as the *sankin kotai* system, changed the whole landscape. New roads were built to improve communications, and the merchants sprang up as a new and exciting force in the nation's economy, catering as they did to the great processions of feudal lords going back and forth to Edo from the provinces. These journeys greatly impoverished these lords and at the close of the Tokugawa period the *sankin kotai* system was blamed for the downfall of the samurai class in favor of the merchant or *chonin* class. Such were the loyalty codes of feudal Japan.

Today, too, those who move too often complain of being *hikkoshi bimbo*, that is,



poor from moving. It costs a lot of money to move in Japan, so the annual custom of digging up certain roots keeps the moving companies rich. For rented accommodation it is expected that a new tenant will pay one month's rent equivalent in agent's fee, one or two months' rent equivalent for deposit money, the same again for key money (which is not returned), plus one month's rent in advance and moving costs on top of that. In this way, each time he moves he must pay at least half a million yen. Sometimes his company will pay if they have ordered the move, but for the ordinary salaryman requested by his company to uproot himself, his wife and his children to move to another province in the company's name it is a burden as great as that of the poor *tozama* lords.

There is a special term for those poor salarymen who must move from one end of the country to the other for the sake of their company and as a pledge of loyalty to it: *tanshin funin*. *Tanshin* means 'single,' and *funin* means 'to take up an assignment.' This is an offshoot from the times when the whole family was expected to move, for nowadays with competition in education at its peak, most families are reluctant to uproot their children and take them out of a prestigious school that will ensure their future in the job market as a sacrifice to the husband's company. Therefore, in recent years, the men have been going it alone.

It has always been necessary for a worker in a secure Japanese company to jump when his company called the tune, no matter what his age. Demonstrations of loyalty go much further than work quality in the race up the corporate ladder. To refuse to move when the company requires it would be tantamount to passing up promotion. A few companies have even introduced a clause in their employees' contracts stipulating that the employee may refuse *tanshin funin* if he wishes but it is on the understanding that he will forgo promotion after he has reached a certain level, and his pay raises each year will be cut by half. Statistics show that by age group, the highest number of men agreeing to *tanshin funin* is in the 40s to 50s group. This is the generation that grew up according to pre- and early post-war values that dictated the husband's first loyalty was to his company, not his family. But the younger generations are rebelling against *tanshin funin*, complaining that they want to spend more time with their families and insisting that such a move would be disruptive to their wives and children. But still, they are in the minority.

The current trend is for a couple to buy a house within a couple of hours' commuting distance from the nearest big city, which is the husband's place of work, and rent a small apartment in the city for the

husband to live alone in. In Tokyo, the capital, a fortune is being made on the building of one-room units complete with bath, kitchen, TV, washing machine, telephone, breakfast and dinner services, a cleaning maid, and 24-hour medical service. The fast-food trade is a multi-million dollar industry, mostly thanks to *tanshin funin* husbands who want quick and ready-to-eat food to consume on the premises or take home to their little units. These dual households are certainly a turn-around from the traditional system of three generations under one roof, but overall is not inconsistent with Tokugawa tradition that set the style of modern Japan. Some wives even complain their husbands learn to do far too well without them although the same could be said of some wives without their husbands.

(Ann Nakano)

## Taste of Tokyo

### Au Bateau Ivre

I can say with confidence that none of my readers will protest my selection of Bateau Ivre from among the numerous French-style restaurants and bistros in Tokyo.

Ryohei Higuchi, the owner and chef, studied cuisine in France. He opened his restaurant seven years ago with the determination to reproduce in Tokyo as closely as possible the food and mood of provincial France.

The bar at the right of the entrance, the wooden floor, the magnificent antique lamp, the white-and-black interior, the washroom with free eau de cologne—all are the result of his loving efforts to recreate a French provincial restaurant.

The name, *Bateau Ivre* (Intoxicated Boat), is a particularly appropriate selection. It comes from a famous poem by Arthur Jean Rimbaud, the roaming poet whose popularity is on the rise in Japan.

The menu features the cuisine of the Brittany region, with some offerings in the Spanish style. Particularly satisfying are the salad and meat dishes.

At lunchtime, *table d'hôte* starts from ¥1,900 up. Delicious also is the ¥2,900 course of *brocolis au beurre fondu*, *langue de bœuf sauce piquant*, dessert and coffee, and the ¥3,900 course of *moules à la provençale*, *confit de canard*, dessert and coffee.

The restaurant has a wide selection of wines, but I recommend the house wine, Barillet, which is a product of Côte-d'Or in the Bourgogne. ¥800 for a carafe.

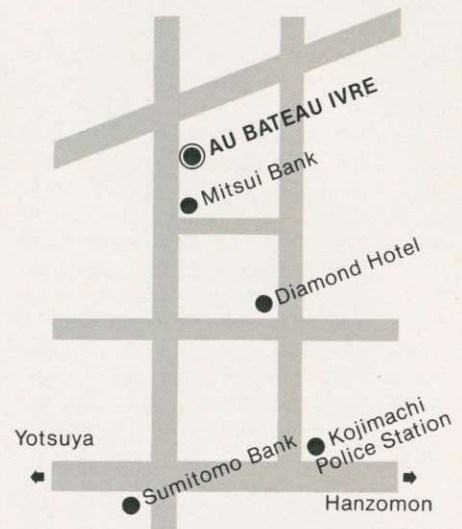
Popular dinner dishes are *salade de*

*gambas vinaigre de Xérès* (¥2,200), *magret de canard aux morilles* (¥4,800) and *tripes à l'espagnole* (¥2,600).

Owner-chef Higuchi explains his creed thus: "Most people have the impression that French cooking is expensive and for the gourmet. Real French dishes, however, are inexpensive and for the common people. I want our customers to enjoy regional French dishes which are both inexpensive and come in generous servings."

The cosy restaurant seats 25. Although quite chic, it has an unaffected, relaxing atmosphere. Reservations are necessary for lunch. The shop is located on a quiet, sloped road one block south of the British Embassy.

(Yoshimichi Hori, editor-in-chief)



Business hours: 12:00–14:00  
18:00–23:00  
Closed on Sundays and national holidays

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Tokyo  
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## Bookshelf

### Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan

Published by Kodansha  
November 1983, Tokyo  
9 vols.; US\$600 (¥140,000)

While it is Japan's massive trade deficit which garners most of the international attention, Japan has run an equally massive cultural trade deficit for the last century. Profuse numbers of foreign books are translated into Japanese, yet few are the Japanese works which go beyond Japan's shores. Japanese students and