

Tokyo—Seaward Fringe

Story and photos by Bill Tingey

When Kyoto became the capital of Japan in the eighth century, most of the areas to the east of this ancient capital were seen as dark, uncharted mountainous lands, where few people lived and where life was decidedly uncultured. Beyond the mountains lay plains where those in Kyoto considered the "eastern barbarians" lived. Despite such insults, the warriors of these distant plains and uplands were feared and respected for their horsemanship. But this flood plain of marshes and mystery where the Sumida River drained into what was later to be called Tokyo Bay, were destined for development.

By the middle of the 15th century, a castle had been built to oversee these eastern provinces, while places such as Hibiya—now decidedly distant from the sea—were still part of this growing community's coastline. Then, when Tokugawa Ieyasu was formally installed in Edo castle in 1590, the ascent in prominence and stature of this settlement developed more or less



Above left: Futuristic architectural adventures across the water where timber was once pooled.
Left: With close to a quarter of a million square meters of exhibition and conference space, Tokyo Big Sight stands on land reclaimed in the last forty years.
Above right: An ensemble of rural coastal images typifies Tokyo brush resist dyeing.

in step with the rise of this prominent figure who became the Shogun and established a feudal system and society, which was to flourish for almost 300 years.

By the 1630s, Edo was a well defined focus at the head of the bay, zoned by decree into areas of commerce, blocks for temples and shrines, and allocated plots where samurai lords had their Edo residences. Most of these areas were flanked on one side or another by flooded moats. Originally, these were built to strengthen the fortifications of the seat of the Shogun and were incorporated in plans to orientate the city according to ancient beliefs related to direction. These moats and canals, of course, also served as waterways of

commerce.

It was in 1603, however, that a project was begun to improve the port of Edo, so that building materials might be more easily unloaded. As part of this project, some of the high ground in Kanda—the area now so well known for its secondhand book shops—was taken and dumped in the Hibiya inlet, making this the first major reclamation project to be undertaken in Tokyo Bay.

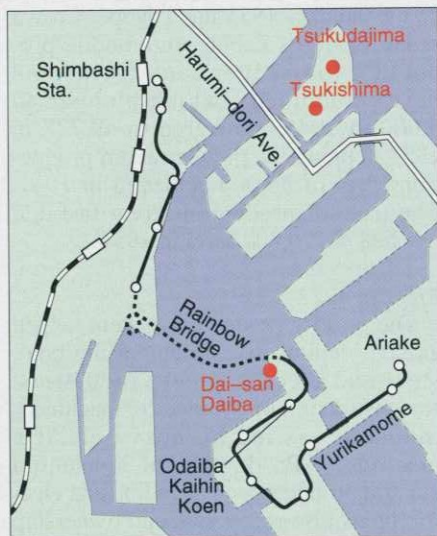
Despite such works, the coastline remained more or less 'natural' until the turn of the century, when reclamation of recognizable blocks of land began to the south of Tsukudajima, itself an area of mud flats, which were given true island status during the 17th century. Progressively, more and more areas have been reclaimed, until now there is very little of the coastline, which is not geometric in profile.

These 'frontier lands' provide old and new perspectives of Tokyo which, with a population of some 8.16 million, now ranks among the top-ten cities in the world. Take Tsukudajima and the reclaimed area called Tsukishima, for example. Here we find neighborhoods reminiscent of Tokyo's historical past, with narrow passageways flanked by wooden buildings that survived both post-Kanto earthquake fires and war-time incendiaries.

Still further out toward the sea proper and across the Rainbow Bridge, however, a totally different scene awaits us. Reclamation here began some forty years ago, although it is only recently that more than port facilities have occupied these areas recovered from the shallows of the bay.

Forming part of three Tokyo wards and comprising 448 ha of the total area of reclaimed land here, a city plan is now underway to develop sites, including the 234 ha assigned for the cancelled World City Exposition Tokyo '96. Some 20% of this development plan has been set aside for parks, and because several of the sites are still

Tsukudajima and Tsukishima can easily be reached on foot by the adventurous along Harumi-dori. Rainbow Bridge can be crossed on foot, by car, or by the Yurikamome Line, a new computer-controlled light railway starting from JR Shimbashi Station. One of the old fortified islands, Dai-san Daiba, is a park offering views across water where timber was once pooled, to beaches and the futuristic Fuji Television building. Examples of Tokyo brush resist dyeing can be seen at the Japan Traditional Craft Center, Minami Aoyama, Tokyo, Tel: 03-3403-2460. To see other examples of this dyeing technique and other crafts besides, take the Odakyu line from Shinjuku to Tamagawa-gakuenmae and visit the Silk Gallery, Tel: 0427-25-8034.



vacant, the air of spaciousness is a surprise in itself. With few, if any, restrictions on style, architects have embarked on stylistic adventures, which somehow reflect what Japan has become and what it might be.

That is not to say that there is no history here. Just below the gantries of the Rainbow Bridge are two of the

several fortified islands which were constructed to ward off foreign intrusion in the middle of last century. It is scenes here across the water that only vaguely hint at Tokyo's beginnings, but which are more graphically depicted in one of the capitals time-honored crafts, Tokyo brush resist dyeing. Such rural

tableaus are now ancient history but knowledge of their former existence brings color to the way we view what is becoming Tokyo's enduring frontier—its seaward fringe.



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TABLE TALK

Akasaka Szechwan Restaurant



People usually distinguish five tastes—sour, sweet, spicy, salty and bitter. If you can add *xiang wei* (aromatic taste)—maybe we should give credit to the tongue in this case—and *ma wei* (numbing taste) to this list, you are entitled to call yourself a “sharp taster.”

“Szechwan” means “land of four rivers.” The four rivers that flow through this province empty into the mighty Yangtze. Fragrance and pungency are two vital factors which distinguish the food of this region. One characteristic dish is *mabo-dofu* (pork and bean curd in hot sauce). And none can claim to know *xiang wei* and *ma wei* without first tasting Chungking, Szechwan Province, *hoko-nabe* (an unthickened stew of fish, meat, vegetables, etc., boiled in a metal pot on the dinner table).

I had an opportunity to dine on local Szechwan food during a trip to China—

On a 3,000-ton cruise ship, I traveled down the river from Chungking City to Wuhan City. This three-night, four-day journey included visits to ancient ruins that show the 5,000 year history of China, as well as a whitewater ride on the Sanhsia. The Sanhsia Dam construction, famous for its scale, is scheduled to be completed in 1999. The electric power generation plant along this dam will be the largest of its kind in the world, capable of producing 18.2 million kW, and is expected to be complete in 2009 and the water level is expected to rise by about 100 meters. More than 1.5 million residents along the river will be forced to relocate.

We started off from Chungking City, the home of Szechwan cuisine. Foods are abundant in the free markets, always lively with crowds of shoppers. I felt their passion for good food. I ate *mabo-dofu* and *hoko-nabe*. As soon as the food went down my esophagus, I began to sweat. The first chef to introduce Szechwan cuisine to Japan soon after World War II was Cheng Jian Min, a native son of Szechwan Province. After a tumultuous life of

wandering in Taiwan and Hong Kong, Mr. Cheng arrived in Japan. He had only a tourist visa, and planned to stay only for a short period. Japan, at that time, was on its way back to recovery after the war's devastation. His life took another twist when he met Mr. Okumura, then vice minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Okumura immediately recognized Mr. Cheng's extraordinary skill and Mr. Cheng eventually obtained Japanese nationality, and opened his first restaurant in Shimbashi. His franchise Szechwan restaurants spread throughout Japan. The Akasaka

restaurant became the center of his enterprise. Mr. Cheng proved himself to be an excellent teacher, having trained many Szechwan cuisine chefs. He died in 1990. His son Cheng Jian Yi, who took over the business, is a regular guest on a popular TV cooking program as an “iron man chef” of Chinese cuisine.

The most popular dishes at Akasaka Szechwan Restaurant are: sliced chicken with sesame and mustard sauce—¥2,000, well-done rice with vegetables—¥3,500, sliced pork with garlic—¥3,000, *Mabo-dofu* ¥2,000, and Szechwan-style smoked duck ¥4,000.

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