

Critical Points in Noodle History

Somen, the First Noodle Sold Commercially

The historical record, *Kyoka Hitsuyo Jirui Zenshu* (hereafter, *Kyoka Hitsuyo*) mentions two varieties of *somen*, one made with oil and one without. The variety made with oil required a drying process to remove the oil, but once the oil had been removed, the *somen* could be stored for long periods of time. The earliest Japanese record of *somen* is the diary of one Nakahara Moromori. It states that Moromori received *somen* from two different monks on two separate occasions within a period of just over one month. *Kagen-ki*, a record from *Horyu-ji* Temple introduced in Part 1 of this series, also notes that *somen* was part of the reward that the soldier monk Kaiken received for distinguished service in battle. These records show that *somen* spread quickly from Zen temples and monasteries to those of other Buddhist sects, where it was readily accepted as a valuable preserved food. *Somen* was the first noodle to be commercialized due to the fact that it could be stored for long periods of time, was easily transported, had a nice appearance and pleasant taste, and had been originally introduced from China. *Somen* quickly became popular and highly valued. In addition to Buddhist temples and monasteries, *somen* was also produced at the Hahakabeho, Tanba (part of present-day Sasayama, Hyogo prefecture) estate owned by Gion-sha Shrine (later renamed Yasaka Shrine) in Kyoto. According to the July 7, 1343 entry in a shrine record, it was customary for the shrine to receive *somen* from the Tanba estate for its *Tanabata* Star Festival. This would indicate that *somen* had been made at Tanba since before 1342. Nakahara Moromori, who was not sure of the noodle's name when he wrote about it in his diary in 1340, was producing it himself nine years later.

The July 7, 1349 entry in Moromori's diary states, "Today is *Tanabata*. At home we offered *somen* made at Miawanosono to Vega and Altair." Miawanosono was an estate belonging to the emperor and managed by Moromori's brother, Moroshige. While assisting his brother, Moromori began producing *somen* himself.

Miawasono was located in the Tsuzuki district of Yamashiro province (present-day southern Kyoto prefecture), the same district as the Taka Shrine mentioned in Part 3 of this series. Wheat cultivation and the existence of facilities for making *somen* in the same district cannot be considered a mere coincidence.

It is thought that *somen* was produced in many places around the second half of the Kamakura period (Kamakura period ca. 1185–1333). *Somen* was transported to Kyoto, the capital of Japan at the time and a large consumer base, and sold by street peddlers. A document dated August 28, 1375 states that the Emperor Goenyu (1359–1393) authorized Nakamikado Nobukata, his head secretary, to impose and control fees on *somen kugonin*, indicating that there were many *somen* peddlers in Kyoto at the time. Checkpoints had been established and each time a peddler passed through one of these checkpoints, they were required to pay a toll. When they brought their product to a market, they were also required to pay a market charge. Nobukata took particular note of these fees, and granted *somen kugonin* special wooden tablets that served as identification and allowed them free passage through the checkpoints. In return, Nobukata received a form of dues from the *somen kugonin*. *Kugonin* were those privileged purveyors of specialty foods, such as poultry, fish, shellfish and *somen* to the emperor. They were exempted from various taxes and allowed free passage throughout

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Charcoal and seafood peddlers traversing the streets of Kyoto. Dried somen was also sold by peddlers like those seen in this illustration. (*Nihon Emaki Taisei* Vol. 26, Chuokoron-sha; property of the National Diet Library)

their routes. Nobukata capitalized on this system and his family retained control over *somen* distribution for 201 years. The July 1, 1576 entry in the diary of Nakamikado Nobunori, a descendant of Nobukata, states that he agreed to give up the family's control over the distribution of *somen* in response to the lengthy and persistent pleading of a *somen* vendor in Nara, allowing him to sell *somen* in Kyoto. It is uncertain whether Nobunori's decision was made under pressure from Kofuku-ji Temple, which controlled the monopolistic *somen* guild in Nara, or whether the decision was made in accordance with the open-market, open-guild policy of the warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582).

The flour foods introduced to Japanese Zen monasteries by Eisai (1141–1215), founder of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, and Dogen (1200–1253), founder of the Soto school of Zen, as a means to assist monks in their practice of Zen tenets evolved into the *somen* industry during the Nanbokucho (Northern and Southern courts) period (1331–1392), and eventually led to the commercialization of *somen*. In this way flour foods

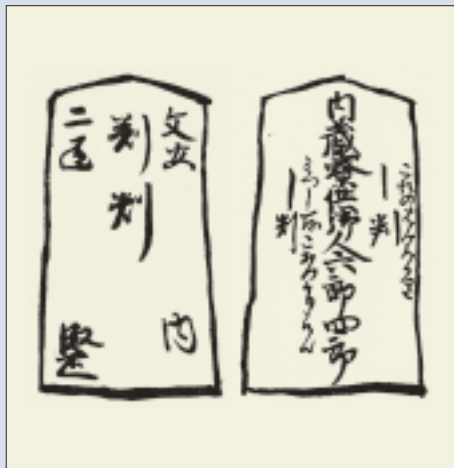
grew steadily as a culture with depth and breadth.

Shokoku-ji Temple, a Trove of Noodle Records

The northern and southern courts of the Nanbokucho period were in constant conflict. The northern court was established by Ashikaga Takauji (1305–1358) in Kyoto and was the court of the Ashikaga shogunate, while the southern court was established by the Emperor Godaigo (1288–1339) in the Yoshino district of Nara prefecture. Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), the third shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate, appointed Muso Soseki (1275–1351), a prominent monk of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, to resolve disputes between the two courts. This allowed the Zen sect to further develop and expand with close ties to political power. In addition to establishing a three-tiered hierarchical structure that allowed for five temples at the top level, ten at the second level, and remaining temples at the third level, Yoshimitsu also established the posi-

tion of *sorokuzu* for overseeing temples and monks. The *sorokuzu* had the power to appoint and dismiss head monks, determine monk ranks, and grant and expropriate estates to and from temples. This allowed Yoshimitsu to build an organization that governed Zen temples and monasteries through the *sorokuzu*.

Yoshimitsu appointed Shunoku Myoha (1311–1388), a disciple of Soseki and Yoshimitsu’s mentor in Buddhism, as the first *sorokuzu* and head



Nakamikado Nobukata, a court noble, issued kugonin wooden tablets that served as identification to *somen* peddlers in return for a payment of dues. (*Yamashina-ke Raiki Dai-ichi*, property of Yagi Book Store Co., Ltd.)

monk of Shokoku-ji Temple. Shokoku-ji Temple was located adjacent to Hana-no-Gosho (Flower Palace), the luxurious and spacious palace built by Yoshimitsu in 1378. Myoha lived in Rokuon-in Temple within the Shokoku-ji Temple complex. The master of Rokuon-in Temple’s *Onryoken**, a small hermitage on the temple grounds, was appointed vice *sorokuzu*. Successive *sorokuzu* and vice *sorokuzu* kept daily records, which were later compiled as Rokuon Nichiroku and *Onryoken Nichiroku*.

Onryoken Nichiroku records were kept by Kikei Shinzui between 1435 and 1466 and by Kisen Shusho between 1484 and 1493. Rokuon Nichiroku is a compilation of journals kept by successive Rokuon-in Temple head monks between 1487 and 1651. As temples and monks were under the control of the shogunate, both documents can be considered more official records than personal diaries.

It seems that there were many visitors to Onryoken and Rokuon-in Temple. Monks often gathered there and new foods were introduced from China. *Hei* (an unleavened bread-like food

known as *bing* in Chinese) and noodles were often served with *toki* (lunch) and *tenshin* (a between-meal snack). While the two temple documents mentioned above were the original source of information on *hei* and noodles in Japan, *Yamashina-ke Raiki*, written between 1412 and 1492 by Osawa Hisamori and Shigetane, presented information from Zen monasteries to the general public. The noble Yamashina family owned an estate in present-day eastern Kyoto city, and was responsible for overseeing *kugonin* and ensuring that the emperor received his monthly supply of specialty foods.

The Osawas, who wrote *Yamashina-ke Raiki*,



Nobunaga’s open-market, open-guild policy eliminated monopolies on distribution, as well as many taxes, to promote economic activities in castle town markets. (Photo: courtesy of PPS)

managed Yamashina family business. They had close ties with both the imperial court and Zen temples and monasteries, and their duties often put them in contact with the general public.

*Onryo in Onryoken (the structure) and *Onryoken Nichiroku* (the record) is sometimes read *Inryou*.

Shokoku-ji Temple’s Flour Mill and Noodle Making Facilities

No mention of noodles has been found in Zen monastery records from the Kamakura period since Dogen’s mention of *men-rui* (general reference to all types of noodles) and *hei* in *Fushuku Hanpo* (written in 1246). Part 2 of this series referred to *Zenrin Kouta*, Ryoyo Shogei’s criticism of the Zen sect written around 1370 to fill in the void of information from this time. In his work, Shogei mentioned *somen*, *udon*, *hiyamugi* and *zat-*

somen (noodles made from the flour of less common grains). Therefore, it can be assumed that these varieties of noodles existed in Zen monasteries during the Kamakura period. Shogei also indicates that Zen monks were making *manju* (steamed buns) and noodles themselves. In fact, Shokoku-ji Temple had its own mill for grinding wheat into flour using waterwheels, as well as facilities for producing *udon* and *hiyamugi*. Uncho-in Temple, within the Shokoku-ji Temple complex, was in charge of *hiyamugi* production. Uncho-in Temple began producing *hiyamugi* on April 14 every year. As this variety of noodle

constructed in 1382, when the temple was initially built. From the beginning, they were used to polish rice and make wheat flour. Clearly, Shokoku-ji Temple had all of the necessary facilities to make noodles a regular food for its monks.

The Transition of Noodles at Shokoku-ji Temple

Likely due to the fact that it served as an official record, *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* does not include descriptions of the noodles served to its monks on



The inside cover page and text from *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* (Eitoku-sha, 1953)

was served chilled, it was a favorite on hot summer days. Shokoku-ji Temple's Untaku-ken, a building on the temple grounds, produced *udon*. However, there is no indication that Shokoku-ji Temple had facilities for making *somen*. *Somen* production requires skill and a large space. Taking into account the fact that *somen* was already being produced in many places by this time, it is reasonable to consider that its production had already transferred from Zen temples and monasteries to commercial facilities. It is clear that Shokoku-ji Temple had its own mill for producing flour. The mill's waterwheels were

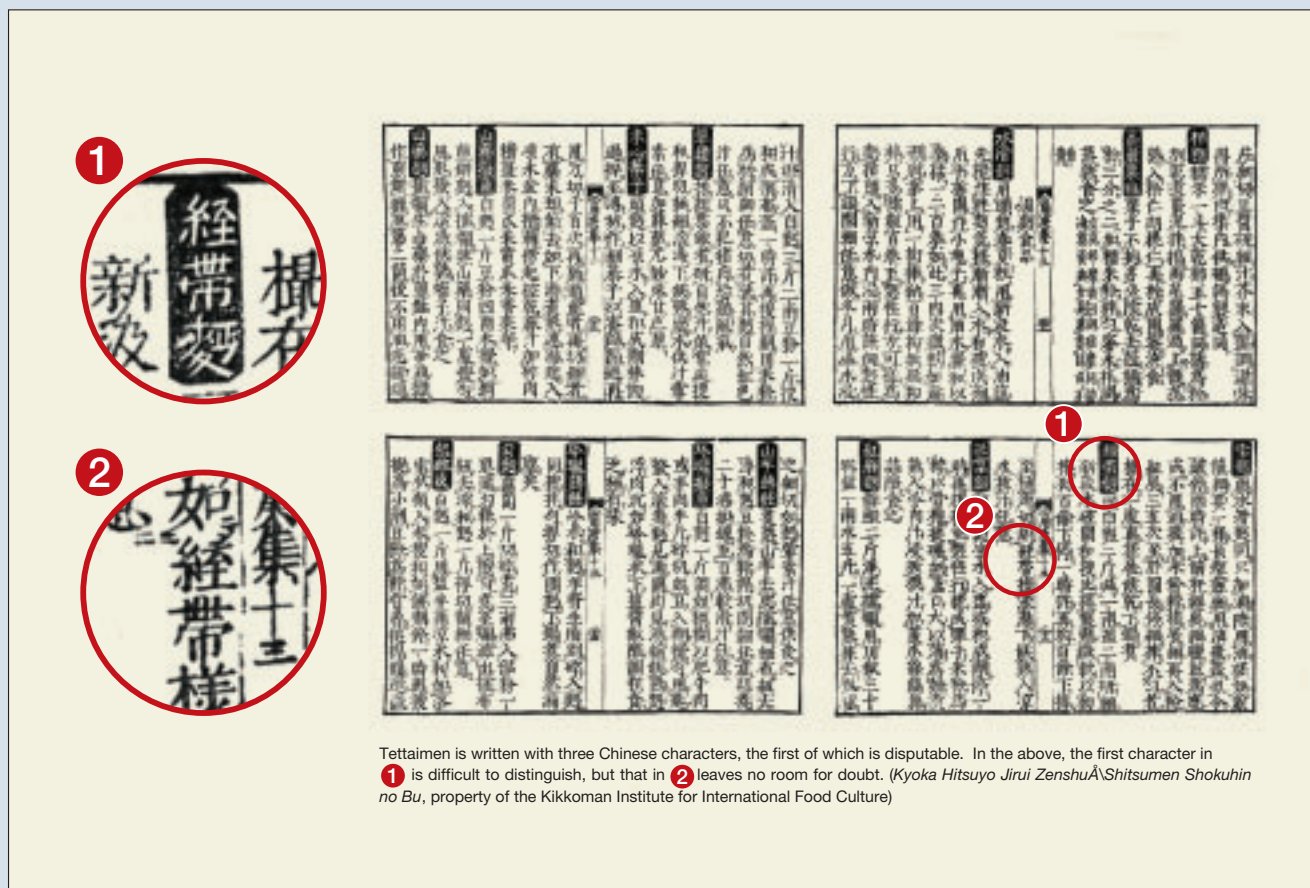
a daily basis. It only mentions the use of noodles in a standard formal manner. However, visitors and guests were routinely served *hiyamugi* with *toki* (lunch) and *somen* with *tenshin* (between-meal snack). Though hot *udon* noodles may have been preferable on chilly days, there was no variation in the dishes served. *Hiyamugi* was served with *toki* regardless of the weather, sometimes causing guests to refuse the dish. The same can be said for *tenshin*. The January 25, 1459 entry in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* describes the *tenshin* served to Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1436–1490), the eighth shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate, at his

Hana-no-Gosho residence. It was typical of the tenshin frequently served, and included a hot herbal drink followed by a hot stew, steamed bun, *somen*, dessert and green tea. Noodles other than *somen* were never served with *tenshin*.

The October 12, 1438 entry in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* represents a breakthrough in the previously strict adherence to precedence with its mention of *soba* (buckwheat noodles). The entry, the earliest record to mention *soba*, states that the master of Onryo-ken received a box of *matsutake* mushrooms and a box of *soba* from Rinko-in Temple. It is interesting to note that *soba* had emerged

14th, 19th, 24th, 29th), as well as on the eve of the anniversary of Eisai's death.

After the Onin civil war (1467–1477), the formal restraint evident in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* entries seems to have disappeared. A wide variety of noodles began to appear as if the monks had been freed from their adherence to tradition, formality and precedence. The influence of Chinese Zen Buddhism was completely eliminated, and meals and refreshments served at Japanese Zen temples and monasteries became more Japanese in content and style, closer to those seen today. While there was less variety in the dishes served with *tenshin*,



Tettaimen is written with three Chinese characters, the first of which is disputable. In the above, the first character in ① is difficult to distinguish, but that in ② leaves no room for doubt. (*Kyoka Hitsuyo Jirui Zenshu*/Shitsumen Shokuhin no Bu, property of the Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture)

independent of the three varieties of *zatsumen* (noodles made from the flour of less common grains) mentioned by Ryoyo Shogei in *Zenrin Kouta*.

The rarity with which *udon* is mentioned in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* is strange given the fact that Shokoku-ji Temple maintained facilities for producing the noodles. Though previous adherence to rules and precedence prohibited the serving of *udon* with *toki* at Shokoku-ji Temple, it is now the long-established custom of all Rinzai school Zen monks throughout Japan to have *udon* on all dates of the month ending with a four or nine (4th, 9th,

multiple servings of *somen* were possible, or the *somen* was served in several trays stacked one on top of the other in a fashion similar to the way in which noodles are often served today. *Toki* served at the temple underwent an even greater transition. It is surprising to note that sake, previously forbidden, came to be served rather frequently with *toki*. The July 14, 1486 entry states that while the usual *hiyamugi* was served, sake was also served for the first time. The serving of sake quickly became so common that the master of Onryo-ken was finally forced to prohibit those undergoing religious training from drinking sake

for the benefit of the sect. Though prohibiting some from drinking sake, the master of Onryo-ken often drank sake himself with soba. Noticing the hypocrisy, the imperial court took action.

The March 7, 1492 entry in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* cites an official order issued by the imperial court to Kyoto's Zen temples and monasteries. The order instructed monks to observe frugality. Only one variety each of noodle and stew, five side dishes, and three varieties each of tea and desserts were to be served with *tenshin*. Soups and dishes served on additional trays were limited to three varieties each. No sake was permitted on temple or monastery premises, regardless of their size or ranking. The entry further states that all Kyoto temples and monasteries must strictly observe the order.

Around ten years after the Onin War, noodles began to be served independent from *toki* and *tenshin*. Some see this change as a break from tradi-

desired thickness) previously described in *Kyoka Hitsuyo* began to appear in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku*. *Shaken Nichiroku* is a diary kept by Riko Taishuku in his old age. After retiring from the position of head monk at Tofuku-ji Temple in Kyoto, Taishuku served as the head monk of Kaie-ji Temple in Sakai, to the south of Osaka city. In the January 1, 1486 entry in his diary Taishuku notes that he had *nyumen* (hot somen cooked and served in a seasoned soup) for *tenshin*. The May 22, 1468 entry reads, "It's a fine day. I had *kirimugi* [cut noodles] that was very refreshing." The June 20, 1491 entry in *Onryo-ken Nichiroku* was the first time that *kirimugi* appeared in Shokoku-ji Temple records. So why would Riko Taishuku's diary mention noodles such as *nyumen* and *kirimugi* before Shokoku-ji Temple records? This is likely due to the official nature of temple records. Noodles of many varieties were so familiar to Zen monks that



A newspaper article reporting the discovery of historical materials proving that *sobakiri* was eaten by common people during the Tensho era (1573-1593; The Shinano Mainichi Shimbun, December 13, 1992)

tional formality or a form of liberalization within Zen monasteries. However, it represents a fortunate turn of events for the development of noodles. Varieties of noodles never before mentioned began to appear on the pages of *Onryo-ken Nichiroku*.

The *tettaimen* (broad, thin noodles made from flour, water and salt) and *suikamen* (thicker noodles made from flour, water, oil and salt that were soaked in water before being stretched to the

specifying the various types in official records was not considered appropriate. For example, the October 29, 1467 entry in *Rokuon Nichiroku* states that a monk at a mountain temple served noodles to Keijo Shurin, head monk of Rokuon-in Temple at the time, and the January 23, 1488 entry notes that noodles made at Rokuon-in Temple were given to the master of Onryo-ken. As indicated by Ryoyo Shogei, all Zen monks knew how to make and prepare noodles because

they were such a regular part of the monks' diet. So how were the common people introduced to noodles?

Noodles Outside of Zen Temples and Monasteries

The nobleman Yamashina Noritoki made the following entries regarding noodles in his diary:

June 3, 1405: "We received *udon* and sake."

June 19, 1405: "Genseido came to visit.

We offered him some *hiyamugi*."

March 7, 1407: "We had *kishimen* for *tenshin*."

July 10, 1408: "Today we gave Kurabe and Ionushi noodles and sake in observance of *iki-mitama*."

This diary mentions *udon* and *hiyamugi*, as well as *kishimen*, which was never mentioned in records from Zen temples and monasteries. As Noritoki uses the word *tenshin*, it is clear that he learned about noodles from a Zen temple or monastery. The Yamashinas seem to have enjoyed noodles, adopting the dishes from the temples without adhering to the traditional Zen formalities.

Kishimen was made from pieces of round, flat dough also introduced by Zen monasteries. Three or four bamboo stalks with their cores shaved clean were used as cutters. Although *kishimen* is not mentioned in any Zen temple or monastery records, Noritoki's reference to *kishimen* serves as evidence to support the presumption that Zen monks routinely made and ate this flour food.

Iki-mitama was the custom of offering elders a meal or *somen* in gratitude for their daily help and guidance. These offerings were made around ten days before the summer *Bon* Festival, a Buddhist event for honoring one's ancestors. Clearly, noodles had already established a role in common Japanese manners and customs by the beginning of the 15th century.

The discovery of *Josho-ji Monjo*, a record dating back to 1574 that mentions *soba*, put the *Josho-ji* Temple of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism on the map as the birthplace of *sobakiri* (cut buckwheat noodles). The same record also mentions other noodles more than 150 years prior to its first mention of *soba*. A July 1422 entry in *Josho-ji Monjo* mentions a *somen* vendor, and the February 1, 1438 entry confirms the existence of a steamer for making *mushimugi* (a steamed noodle).

Noodles were also common at the imperial court. However, the ladies serving at court had their own special terms for various types of noodles and noodle dishes. *Daijoro Onna no Koto* (1450) names and identifies the terms used by these ladies.

Soba (buckwheat noodles)—*Aoi*

Soba no kayu (buckwheat porridge)—*Usuzumi*

Somen (very fine noodles like vermicelli)

—*Zoro*

Hiyamugi (fine noodles usually served cold)

—*Tsumetai zoro*

Kirimugi (cut noodles)—*Kirizoro*

Only *udon* seems to be missing from the list of noodles commonly served at the imperial court.

The Yamashina family, which was responsible for ensuring that the emperor received his monthly supply of specialty foods, had a close relationship with the common people. A number of 1463 entries in *Yamashina-ke Raiki* mention noodles, clearly indicating that the use of flour was firmly rooted in the life of the common people. Entries describe *mushimugi* and *manju* (a bun-like confection) that were made and delivered to the Imperial Palace. At that time, flour was known as *udon-ko* (*udon* flour), which is an indicator of the popularity of *udon*. Other entries state that a laborer from Kawachi (present-day eastern Osaka prefecture) brought *somen* to give as a souvenir, and that buckwheat seeds were delivered to the Imperial Palace. Flour foods, noodles in particular, were firmly established in the lives of people in Yamashina villages.

Entries mentioning noodles are even seen in *Yamashina-ke Raiki* during the period of the Onin War (1467–1477). For example, the February 19, 1468 entry reads, "I drank with Eshu at Jison-in Temple and was given a folding fan. At Ho-on Temple I was served *nyumen*, sake and many other dishes." The March 8, 1468 entry mentions *sobagaki* (*soba* dumpling): "Shukubei and I ate *sobakayumochi* [*sobagaki*] at Shokan's house. Several entries, including that of November 17, 1471, tell us that Osawa Hisamori, one of the authors of *Yamashina-ke Raiki*, made a business of serving *udon* and sake at gatherings. Clearly, *udon* was overwhelmingly popular.

Kirimugi (cut noodles) first appeared in *Yamashina-ke Raiki* with the entry of June 2, 1480. The entry of July 7, 1480 tells us that as it was the *Tanabata* Star Festival, Hisamori made *kirimugi* and that one of his relatives also made

kirimugi that he delivered to Hisamori's house. With *hiyamugi* for lunch and *kirimugi* for supper, Hisamori had his fill of noodles that day. The July 23, 1480 entry reads, "I got a cask of sake and a tray of soba at Sairin-an [Sairin Hermitage]. We all enjoyed them." The soba mentioned here may well be the *zaru-soba* (cold buckwheat noodles served on a sieve-like bamboo tray) so common today.

The *hei* and noodles mentioned in *Yamashina-ke Raiki* during the Onin War included *manju*, *udon*, *somen*, *suikamen*, *kirimugi*, *hiyamugi*, *soba* and *sobagaki*. This proves that the predecessors of today's noodles could be found in Yamashina villages.

Similarities and Differences between Noodle Varieties

While the variety of *somen* made with oil required a drying period to remove the oil, the variety that was not made with oil could be eaten immediately, or dried for preservation. The difference between the two varieties is the thickness of the final noodles. Because water evaporates, the *somen* dough made without oil is more brittle and breaks sooner with stretching into noodles than the dough made with oil. Zen monks called noodles made without oil that were stretched until just before the breaking point *hiyamugi*. These fine noodles were to be eaten cold. Thicker noodles—those made with less stretching—were called *udon*, and were to be eaten hot.

This differentiation, however, existed only within Zen temples and monasteries. The name *hiyamugi* was only used by Zen monks. Outside of temples and monasteries, the common people distinguished *somen* made with oil from that made without oil by the names *hoso-zomen* (thin *somen*) and *futo-zomen* (thick *somen*) respectively.

For commercialization, noodles had to be dried. However, thick dried *udon* noodles would not boil properly, so producers eventually began to flatten the noodles before drying. Most Zen temples and monasteries, as well as individual households, made fresh noodles whenever they wanted *hiyamugi* or *udon*.

The process for producing *somen* with oil has remained basically unchanged to this day. On the other hand, *udon* and *hiyamugi* dough made without oil is no longer stretched into noodles. This stretching method was eventually abandoned as people began cutting the dough into noodles. The names of the noodles remained unchanged despite changes in the production method. Therefore, as the names of noodles have not changed, it is of vital importance to be aware of the proper evolution of noodles. The precise type of noodle or flour food indicated may differ significantly depending upon the era of the document or record in which it is mentioned.

*References omitted.

Request the list of documents referred for this article via e-mail to shoku@mail.kikkoman.co.jp.