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San'ei-chō and Meat-eating in Buddhist Edo

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There have been a number of recent reports about the excavation of large amounts of animal bones from sites within and just outside the city of Edo. These finds prove that animal meat was eaten in the Edo period, although there is no mention of this in historical records.

Land mammals are most prominently represented among the bones discovered. Since the eating of animal meat was considered unclean during premodern times in Japan, the common assumption has been that meat consumption was severely restricted, and avoided if at all possible, until after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. However, the Edo-period animal remains – including those of large numbers of wild boar, *shika* deer, and bear, along with dogs, monkeys, and horses – show that despite the assumed social taboo, mammal meat was being quite widely eaten during this period (KANEKO 1992). One site in which such remains were found is San'ei-chō 三栄町, excavated in 1985 and 1986 by the Shinjuku Board of Education. The report concerning the faunal remains of the site was published in 1991 (KANEKO & NAGASHIMA 1991).

The Faunal Remains at the San'ei-chō Site

The remains at the San'ei-chō site (Tōkyō-to Shinjuku-ku San'ei-chō 22) date to the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. The site was located a little to the west of the city of Edo, close to the Kōshū highway which led west from the city and into present-day Yamanashi Prefecture. This location is significant, in that it would have made San'ei-chō an excellent place from which to redistribute meat into the city itself from animals brought from the mountains west of Edo.

Details of the structural remains on the site have not yet been pub-

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lished, but due to the lowlying waterlogged context of the site the faunal remains were very well preserved. The many small mammals, birds, and fish whose remains were found would have come from a variety of coastal and inland habitats. It is clear that these food sources were obtained from a variety of locations and subsequently routed to the market through a distribution system, creating the wide circulation of goods that is one of the characteristic features of modern society. Cod (*madara, Gadus macrocephalus*), for example, which is well represented among the remains, is thought to have been caught off the Japan Sea coast and transported to market preserved in salt (see KANEKO 1992, p. 236).

Certain of the animal remains found at San'ei-chō (notably shellfish and birds) have also been discovered at other Edo-period sites, such as the Edo estate of the Kaga fief which dates to the eighteenth century and is located on what is now the Hongō Campus of the University of Tokyo (see KANEKO 1992, p. 237). Other small wild animals, such as the fox (*kitsune, Vulpes vulpes*), raccoon dog (*tanuki, Nyctereutes procyonoides*), and otter (*kawauso, Lutra lutra*), are not often found elsewhere, but their presence at San'ei-chō demonstrates that such animals were, in fact, being eaten. Canine remains (including three burials) have also been found, though the evidence shows that these particular dogs were not butchered for their meat. Dog-eating does, nevertheless, appear to have been rather widespread during Edo times (HAMMOND 1991)

Many objects made of bone and antler were also discovered at the site, indicating another aspect of animal use in the Edo period. These objects include combs, hairpins (including the ornate *kanzashi* type), *kōgai* 笄 (spatula-shaped implements used to arrange the hair when the head became too itchy), and gaming pieces. These were mostly made out of deer antler, but on occasion bird bones were used as well. These objects show that animal bone was being used for implements in everyday life.

An even more important point about the San'ei-chō site is the sizable accumulation of bones from large mammals. The block of bones shown in plate 1, which measures about 2 m by 1 m, dates to the latter half of the eighteenth century. Calculating the minimum number of individuals represented (MIND), there were:

wild boar (*inoshishi, Sus scrofa*)	97
shika deer (*shika, Cervus nippon*)	71
serow (*kamoshika, Capricornis crispus*)	11
bear (*tsukinowaguma, Selenarctos thibetanus*)	3
wolf (*ōkami, Canis hodophilax*)	3

Plate 1. The Accumulation of Animal Bones at the San'ei-chō site.

The remains of the deer, serow, and boar were not complete—only the hind legs, forelimbs, and a few vertebrae were found—indicating that the rest was either carried off elsewhere, or that only certain portions were brought to this site. It is possible that the animals were caught in the mountains to the west, and after processing were brought along the Kōshū highway to San'ei-chō. These bones have few of the butchery marks usually seen on bones from sites since the Jōmon period, but since the deer skulls show signs of having had their antlers removed, it is quite likely that the meat was used as well. Meat-eating continued throughout the Edo period in spite of the general aversion to the practice, with meat-based cuisine being sold through shops known as *momonji-ya* ももんじ屋. Such meat was euphemistically called "medicinal," both because it tasted good and because a certain sense of guilt was associated with eating it (see SUZUKI 1985a). The animal bones from the San'ei-chō site are direct evidence that this kind of meat-eating was going on.

Meat-eating in Edo

The general aversion to meat-eating in premodern Japan has been attributed to Shinto and Buddhist traditions. Shinto beliefs about the defiling nature (*kegare*) of death and the dead combined with Buddhist injunctions against the taking of sentient life to form a social attitude that viewed meat-eating as barbaric and unethical. This attitude, however,

did not become widespread until the Edo Period.[1] In 675 the government did indeed pass religiously motivated laws against the consumption of meat, but this legislation did not cover wild boar and deer (only the times when they could be hunted was restricted), and therefore did not ban meat-eating totally (see YOSHIDA 1992, pp. 8-33; SUZUKI 1985b).

There have been suggestions that the taboo against meat-eating may have been manipulated by the shoguns for more worldly objectives. YOSHIDA Tadashi (1992, pp. 16-17), for example, relates the issue of meat-eating to the suppression of Christianity by the Tokugawa government in 1613. The ostensible reason for the suppression was Christianity's opposition to Buddhism, the official religion of the shoguns, but among the other underlying factors was, apparently, the Christians' reputation as meat-eaters. In rural Japan at that time horses and oxen were the main form of agricultural traction, and were thus vital to the shogunate's plans for expanded of rice cultivation. The government thus had a clear economic motive for doing what it could to discourage the eating of meat.

Summary

Meat-eating is often assumed to have been a practice alien to premodern Japan, one that first appeared along with other cultural imports from the West at the time of the Meiji Restoration. The recent archaeological evidence from San'ei-chō and other excavations within and just outside of Edo indicates that the eating of animal meat during the Edo period was far more widespread than generally believed. This includes large, four-footed mammals, the consumption of which is generally thought to have been taboo in premodern Japan.

The aversion to meat-eating may have applied not so much to meat in general as to certain types of meat. It is interesting, for example, that among the remains at the various sites thus far excavated no bovine bones have been discovered. The real change in eating habits that occurred may have been not so much the introduction of meat-eating in general but beef-eating in particular.

[1] Official legislation against the killing of animals reached its apogee after 1680, when the Tokugawa shogunate introduced laws with stringent punishments that forbade even the squashing of mosquitoes. This tendency, however, reflected the inclinations of the current shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (r. 1680-1709), and should not be taken as indicative of society as a whole throughout the Edo period. In fact the ordinance was generally despised and caused much anti-shogunate feeling. Tsuneyoshi himself ended up with the sobriquet "the dog shogun" (*inu kubō*).

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