

Selections from NDL collections

Exhibition in the Kansai-kan (26): *Oh! Bento—Books about Japanese Lunches*



Exhibition poster

Do you know what a bento is? It is a popular form of single-serving meal that first became commonly available during the Edo period. Perhaps the classic example of a bento is the Makunouchi bento, which was sold at kabuki theaters to be eaten during intermissions. The bento tradition is a long one that features a wide variety of meals notable not only for their nutritional value but also for their cleverly devised appearance. A good example of this is the popular *kyaraben*—a bento arranged to look like an anime character. Another example, called *ekiben*, often feature regional specialties and are sold at railway stations, making them part and parcel of travelling in Japan. Convenience stores sell a wide variety of bento that are an indispensable part of everyday life for ordinary Japanese. In recent years, the word bento has become almost as well known around the world as sushi, anime, or manga.



This bento was prepared by Moyu Yabe



This character bento (kyaraben) was prepared by the exhibition staff at the Kansai-kan of the National Diet Library

Bento are a rich microcosm of life in Japan. This article features images and other content from the books and magazines that were included in exhibition at the Kansai-kan, a complete list of which is available in Japanese on the [NDL website](#).

Kiso kaido rokujukyutsugi

Kiso kaido rokujukyutsugi, illustrated by Ikeda Eisen and Utagawa Hiroshige, published in book form by Shineido ca. 1920-1921. NDL-Call No. 123-279.



Kiso kaido rokujukyutsugi nouchi Fushimi. Illustrated by Utagawa Hiroshige. NDL Call No. 寄別 2-2-1-5
* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).

Kiso kaido rokujukyutsugi is a series of *ukiyo-e* created by Ikeda Eisen and Utagawa Hiroshige in the early 19th century. It consists of 70 pictures depicting places along the Nakasendo, which ran from Nihonbashi in Edo to the Sanjo Ohashi in Kyoto. The image shown is of Fushimijuku station, located in Mitake-cho, Gifu, and depicts travelers resting in the shade of a tree as they eat their bento.

Katei sushi no tsukekata

Katei sushi no tsukekata (How to Cook Sushi at Home). Written by Koizumi Seizaburo (also known as Koizumi Ugai). Published by Okura Shoten, 1910. 【NDL Call No. 246-213】 *Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

sardine starch, mixed rice, and other items suitable for bento. All the recipes show the authors' painstaking efforts to provide children with as nutritious a meal as possible, using as many foodstuffs as were available at the time.

(Translated by Moyu Yabe and Mika Oshima)

Related articles from the NDL Newsletter:

- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(25\): *Marvels of the Human Body—past and present*](#) (No. 224, June 2019)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(24\): *Full bloom! The World of Gardening*](#) (No. 220, October 2018)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(23\) "Every dog has his book—From history to research and stories—"](#) (No. 217, April 2018)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(22\) "Making and utilizing light: from illumination to architecture and art"](#) (No. 214, October 2017)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(21\) "All kinds of Ume—Japanese poetry, paintings, and delicacies"](#) (No. 216, February 2018)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(20\) "Robots are evolving! —from myth, mechanical dolls to the latest robots"](#) (No. 209, December 2016)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(18\) "A collection of living creatures from all times and places: real, virtual and extinct creatures"](#) (No. 202, October 2015)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(17\) "Tomorrow's dinner will be a full-course meal: Find the recipe you want to cook"](#) (No. 199, April 2015)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(16\) "Dreams of Space, from the ancient view of the universe to the Hayabusa Project"](#) (No. 196, October 2014)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(15\) "Modernization of Japanese sake and domestic production of Western liquor"](#) (No. 193, April 2014)