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## Recommended Citation

Seigle, Cecilia S. Ph.D., "Gift Exchanges in Edo Castle" (2012). *Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations*. 6.  
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# Gift Exchanges in Edo Castle

## **Abstract**

The Japanese love of gift-giving was firmly established during the Edo period, specifically under the fifth shogun Tsunayoshi. This study was done as part of inquiry into the institution of Ooku, and I remark on the significance of gift exchanges as substitute social activities for the women of Ooku.

## **Keywords**

Gifts, Shogun, Ooku ladies

## **Disciplines**

East Asian Languages and Societies | Gender and Sexuality | Social and Cultural Anthropology

**This is an old essay that has never been published. It was Chapter VIII of my Ooku ms, but I have decided to take it out of it and post it as a separate essay. It is very unfinished and I shall appreciate someone's help.**

**Gift-Giving and Gift Exchanges in the Ôoku**  
**Cecilia Segawa Seigle**  
**University of Pennsylvania emeritus**

**Gift giving as Ritual**

Gift giving was a deep-rooted cultural component in Japan and an indispensable element in Edo period social relationships, but nowhere was it as vital and visible as in Edo castle and the Ôoku. Before the Tokugawa period, leading warlords like Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi loved to give and receive gifts.<sup>1</sup> However, their acts of giving and receiving were more spontaneous, no matter how despotic and overbearing. In Tokugawa Japan, as the bakufu under the early shoguns devised ways of stabilizing Tokugawa dominance, gift customs strengthened the underpinnings of the fundamental social structure of the upper samurai society.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the relationship between the shogun and his subjects could not exist without the custom of gift giving from the beginning of the Tokugawa reign; however, it was not so frenzied in early days as it came to be in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

Johan Huizinga, in his *Homo Ludens*, expounds that the ritual of gift giving comes from the human instincts for games and competition, a desire to excel over others and be praised.<sup>3</sup> He made a point of examining the Japanese attitude and spirit toward play, which according to him is at the root of Japanese culture, manifesting itself for example in language. He saw a significant relationship between the language and the life style of the upper class, which to this day uses the verb “play” (*asobu*, or *asobe*) as a respectful verbal form for any action of noble persons, indicating that for the aristocrats, any action was performed in the spirit of play.<sup>4</sup> The custom of gift giving, if underpinned by a spirit of games and competition, naturally thrived particularly in

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<sup>1</sup> European missionaries' accounts of visiting Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, Hidetada testified to their curiosity and delight with the gifts they received. Michael Cooper's books: *They Came to Japan* (96-97, 100-101, 111, 113-114, 118-121, 125), *This Island of Japan* (163), *Rodrigues the Interpreter* (88, 240), and *Joas Rodrigues's Account, The Japanese Mission to Europe, 1582-1590* (p. 207 and note 2).

<sup>2</sup> Marshall Sahlins says, “the entire political order is sustained by a pivotal flow of goods, up and down the social hierarchy, with each gift not merely connoting a status relation but, as a generalized gift not directly required, compelling a loyalty.” *Stone Age Economy*, p. 206

<sup>3</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, pp.46-75.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Huizinga, pp. 34-35.

times of affluence and luxury like the Genroku era, although not limited to economically prosperous times.

Gift giving at the socially high level certainly required a substantial degree of economic affluence such as prevailed during the prolonged peace and the remarkable growth of material wealth in the Genroku to Hôei eras of 1680 to 1709. Because of the fifth shogun Tsunayoshi's (1646-1709) great fondness for giving and receiving generous gifts, his reign is outstanding in gift-giving and exchange, and these customs became more ritualistic, eventually spreading throughout Japan as part of social protocol, but most markedly in the shogun's circle. The Ôoku played an important role in this phenomenon.

### **Gift-giving as Substitute Socialization**

In Western society of the same period, group activities including both men and women or even only women would have been considered essential, as a lubricant for human relations and social interactions. Tokugawa Japan totally lacked such social mores, or at least such activities were extremely rare. It was not that socializing was regarded as unnecessary; simply it had never been considered, because mixed socializing was fundamentally excluded from the Neo-Confucian view of the world, where gender separation was a basic rule. Not by choice but by natural development, what had come to substitute for acts of socializing was the act of gift giving.

There are volumes of published and unpublished Tokugawa documents that disclose extraordinary amounts of gift exchanges. In a way, Tokugawa documents serve as records of gift culture in the circumscribed society of samurai aristocracy. It is my contention that these exchanges had considerable social significance for the women of Ôoku who otherwise enjoyed very limited activities or public recognition. Important family events such as a wedding, engagement, funeral, seventh night celebration for newborn babies, and coming of age celebrations of the shogun's children, recovery from illness – some of these events in any part of the contemporary world, including Japan, would be considered now as important social events and occasions for an obligatory get-together.

These rituals did not necessarily have the same significance or requirements in the Ôoku as they do as norms for the Western and modern world. Weddings, funerals, birthdays, and coming of age are unquestionably important social events, but in Tokugawa Japan, even momentous occasions did not require or signify a midai's or other Ôoku women's physical participation to be necessary as they definitely would in modern Japan. Gifts substituted for women's participation, and they were as official and public as physical participation in other societies. Most of the time, these ceremonies took place without the midaidokro's (Shogun's legal wife) or any other female members' attendance; the ladies would merely send their male or female secretary to deliver gifts and messages. Since the names of the givers and receivers as well as the gift contents were officially entered in the bakufu records, the ritual of gift giving or exchanges that accompanied any

event became an important public affair. Although the lack of lively social participation in the gift exchanges, perhaps because they were not physically present, made symbolic participation through gifts all the more important to the Ôoku ladies.

What made these exchanges so noteworthy and satisfying was the exclusivity of the “gift-exchange circle,” never so named but obviously commanded by the shogun, announced and made public, and recorded. For the women of the Ôoku who did not move physically from their apartments, inclusion in the shogun’s gift-exchange circle was definitely a status symbol and a way of connecting with others in the Tokugawa world.

The frequency and abundance of frenzied sending and receiving gifts in the Ôoku was a surrogate social activity for its women. Giving gifts of money or material goods, for example for the memorial services of past shoguns or past consorts, or the births and funerals of close Tokugawa relatives, had an aura of social communication in addition to protocol obligations. What lent a special aura of importance was the fact that one could not decide to join in this process on her own but had to be granted the privilege of giving and being included by the will of the shogun.<sup>5</sup> Thus, winning the right to give enhanced the prestige and honor of those who were included in the gift-giving list or gift-exchange circle. It gave those on the list a special stellar status; they were participating in highly selective social exchanges without physically moving from their apartments in the Ôoku.

When a gift-giving occasion arose, the bakufu administration (usually the councilors), issued a directive: for example, that the shogun’s daughter will be wedded on such and such date. The memorandum would list the names of ladies who were required to offer gifts or money, the midaidokoro at the top and then the shogun’s mother (sometimes she was listed much below because of her commoner birth), the shogun’s concubines and daughters, sometimes some of the daughters preceding the concubines. The recipients of the gifts would be the shogun, the bride, the bride’s natural mother; the groom, the groom’s father, mother, brothers, sisters, and a number of staff who would be working for the wedding. But depending on the occasion, only the top persons on the gift-circle list, the midai and the shogun’s mother, or sometimes the first concubine, had to give to everyone. If it was money for flowers and incense for a funeral or a memorial service, the amount was graduated, the largest required from the person at the top. The order of these names was crucial and rigid because it designated one’s place in the hierarchy.

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<sup>5</sup> For the entire samurai society presenting a gift was a privilege which was closely tied with the family rank; daimyo or hatamoto had to consult with veteran bakufu leaders on the contents of the gift and protocol. Yamamoto Hirofumi, *Edo orusuiyaku no nikki* (Diary of the provincial domain Edo representative), p.35.

Sometimes the list included staff members of the highest rank.

All gifts under any circumstances purport to socialize. Gift giving is considered primarily an activity of women, because of “expressive” satisfaction such an activity provides.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, gift occasions did not provide these Ôoku ladies with the satisfaction of choosing the gift or the amount of monetary gift themselves, but the symbolic value substituted for the satisfaction of autonomy. Satisfaction was not, however, the stated purpose of a gift. It was only because of the pre-existing repressive conditions under which they lived that gift giving and exchanges coincidentally served for human contacts. As Takie Sugiyama Lebra notes, gift exchange’s “significance lies in the creation or maintenance of a social relationship rather than in the transfer of goods from hand to hand.”<sup>7</sup> Lévi-Strauss and others also pointed out repeatedly that it was the exchange itself that counted, not the material objects that were important.<sup>8</sup>

### **Sociocultural Significance**

Women in court societies in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe enjoyed mixed company parties, dinners, and balls, or the same-sex socializing. In modern Japan, too, women of middle-to-upper income class often enjoy the freedom of inviting each other to tea, lunch, or dinner, or going to a concert or theater together. In the days of the first shogun, Ieyasu, he took two of his concubines in palanquins to accompany him on his hawking trips and six or seven of their attendants following on horsebacks. These attendants wore traveling hats and covered their faces with a scarf.<sup>9</sup>

However, soon sporting or social outings were all discontinued for the women of the Ôoku, and they had no means of expanding their sphere of socialization outside their quarters. Prohibiting women of high social class to participate in the activities of the outside world was a custom not limited to Japan. In other coeval societies such as Korea, China, Turkey, Iran, and even

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<sup>6</sup> e.g., Befu Harumi, “*Social Reciprocity*,” 173 ff. Jacques T. Godbout, *The World of the Gift*, p. 66. Kurita Yasuyuki, “*Shinriteki hyôka to gokeisei ni tsuite*,” pp. 58-99. David J. Cheal, *The Gift Economy*, pp. 137-138. “Instrumentality” (pure utilitarian value) and “expressivity” (affection, loyalty, friendship, special significance) of the act of giving .... e.g. Befu Harumi, “*Theory of Social Exchange*,” pp. 44-45.

<sup>7</sup> Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss,” (1950) in Alan D. Schrift, ed., *The Logic of the Gift*, p. 59. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Gifts,” pp.25-27. Befu, “*Social Reciprocity*,” 169-170.

<sup>9</sup> Daidôji Yûzan, *Ochiboshû* (Ôraisha version), p. 70.

in post-revolutionary France, women were sometimes subjected to similar restrictions.<sup>10</sup> However, the high-born women of European countries had so much more freedom and contacts with the outside world. Even women in the Turkish seraglio had freedom to socialize.<sup>11</sup> We know that Princess Olga of Russia attended the wedding of a Byzantine empress in 957 (whose wedding was not clear)<sup>12</sup>; in the eighteenth century, eminent Ottoman ladies invited Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, wife of the English ambassador, to the seraglio of the Topkapi Palace and enjoyed an all-women dinner party.<sup>13</sup> It is said that the mother of Sultan Murad III, Sultan Validé Nurbanu, exchanged correspondence with Catherine de' Medici, the queen mother and regent for King Henry III of France.<sup>14</sup> Chinese women of the seventeenth century enjoyed socializing and correspondence through literature and learning.<sup>15</sup> Activities such as theater, music, and dance entertainment for the royals of other countries were also confined within the palace premises as they were for the shogun's ladies. But the ladies in most of Western society were not confined to restricted areas and compelled to tolerate the exclusion of men as were the Ôoku ladies. Ôoku women's diversions were extremely limited in quantity, quality, and scope.

It may be said that one does not substitute for what one does not have or know; therefore the women of the Ôoku might not have longed for socialization in the same sense that modern women do, East or West. However, they knew that the aristocratic women of the Heian period definitely enjoyed socialization, a limited but lively social intercourse with both men and women.

In the main the Ôoku women stayed within their apartments and the walled-in gardens, so an opportunity to receive news from the outside world or even within Edo castle through gift giving was a welcome diversion, a genuine social function. In order to enjoy this diversion and privilege, it was important for every member of the shogun's gift circle to maintain her status by giving properly at a proper time.

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<sup>10</sup> Kendall, pp. 97. Ebrej, pp. 21, 24, 25, 29,41, 43. Tual, p. 54. Reddy, pp.12, 71. Peirce, passim. However, even the Turkish harem women made visits and went out to the countryside and bazaar, Hanimefendi, *The Imperial Harem of the Sultans*, p.17, 111-115. In 18<sup>th</sup> century London, "the alcohol-less, innocent and harmless mirth" of men and women was not unusual. The respectable writer Harriot Stuart in 1750 (accompanied by her husband and another woman) attended the Ivy Lane Club's "whole night of festivity" initiated by Samuel Johnson and recorded by Sir John Hawkins. The alcohol-less, innocent mirth continued until dawn. Charlotte Lennox, *The Life of Harriot Stuart*, pp.145-146.

<sup>11</sup> Croutier, Alev Lytle, *Harem: The World Behind the Veil*, passim; Penzer, N.M., *The Harem* p.205.

<sup>12</sup> Ringrose, "Women and Power at the Byzantine Court." p. 72-73.

<sup>13</sup> Faroghi, Suraiya, *Subjects of the Sultan*, p. 205.

<sup>14</sup> Freely, John, *Inside the Seraglio*, pp.76-77.

<sup>15</sup> Ko, Dorothy, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 31ff. passim.

In the early 1709, Shogun Tsunayoshi and Midai Nobuko died within a month of each other, and in the fall, Yae-himegimi's<sup>16</sup> husband fell ill, and two months later he died at the age of twenty-five. Yae-himegimi was a widow at age nineteen, and she took down her hair and was named Yôsen-in a month later. In the meantime, the new shogun Ienobu and his midai Hiroko moved into the main building of Edo castle, and all Tokugawa relatives and major daimyo presented them with gifts in congratulation.<sup>17</sup> Screens, tea ceremony shelves, quilts, writing sets, reading desks, vases – the frenzy of gift giving took place between 11/1 and 11/7.

Yae-himegimi/Yôsen-in, could not participate because she was in mourning for her husband; but as soon as her obligatory mourning ended, she rushed to send proper gifts: a lacquered letter box filled with good writing paper to Ienobu, and lacquered decorative shelves for incense and an incense game set to Hiroko, accompanied by 2/1 (two kinds of fish and a pair of kegs of wine) respectively.<sup>18</sup> She sent each of the three concubines of Ienobu five double rolls of colored *habutae* silk with 1/1 (one kind of fish and a pair of kegs of wine), and the recipients all sent back appropriate return gifts. Even in her grief, she had to follow the expected convention of gift giving because she was a member of the Tokugawa family. For the rest of her life until her death in 1746, as an adoptive daughter of a shogun, she remained a regular member of the gift-giving circle on all family occasions through three more shogunal reigns.

To this day, the Japanese as a nationality group are not as outstanding in their social skills or social intercourse as people from Western cultures who have developed such skills through centuries of sophisticated socializing. Dorothy Ko speaks of the educated women of seventeenth-century China “extremely skillfully exploiting the social and ideological fluidities to expand their own social and intellectual horizons.”<sup>19</sup> In Japan, such a phenomenon was not seen until the nineteenth century in the outside world, but such excitement never occurred in the Ôoku.

If Ôoku ladies had a sense of socialization, it more or less denoted confirmation of the sense of “belonging” to an exclusive group, and this is the sense that gift-giving activities assured them. Sociologists and cultural anthropologists have repeatedly pointed out that the Japanese wish to belong to a group is particularly strong.<sup>20</sup> Albeit the warnings by scholars against

<sup>16</sup> Yae-himegimi (1689 -1746) was the daughter of Takatsukasa Sukenobu and niece of Shogun Tsunayoshi's wife. She was adopted by Tsunayoshi and Nobuko and was married to the heir to the Mito Tokugawa, Yoshizane, in 1697.

<sup>17</sup> *Jikki*, 7:63 for gifts exchanged.

<sup>18</sup> *Jikki* 7:65, and *Manabe Nikki*, Hôei 6, 1709/11/21. Midaidokoro sent 20 hiki (double rolls) of *habutae* silk and 2/2 to Yôsen-in, and Osume and Okomu sent her 5 rolls of heavy crepe de Chine and 1/1 each.

<sup>19</sup> Ko, Dorothy, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Nakane Chie, *Japanese Society*, p. 3. *passim*. Lebra, *Patterns of Behavior*, pp. 22-37. Doi



constructing national character stereotypes in the mold of *nihonjinron* (discourses on Japanese)<sup>21</sup> one can safely say that individualization in Japanese society is a relatively recent and totally modern impulse, and that even today, the majority of Japanese, especially women, seem to feel more comfortable identifying with a group than acting as individuals.

As for socializing for the people beyond Edo castle, men and women of the merchant class (so-called townspeople, “*chônin*”) or lower-middle-class samurai were much more familiar with social activities than the shogun and daimyo-class men and women. By the mid-eighteenth century, men from all strata of society belonged to various leagues and clubs.<sup>22</sup> Women commoners also belonged to organizations that offered female memberships, such as groups for poetry, haiku, flower arrangement, tea ceremony, music and dance, or savings clubs for specific religious purposes or traveling, and they went to the theater together as much as they could afford. Both men and women commoners had a distinct advantage over the men and women of the upper-class samurai society in the mid-Edo period where freedom and enjoyment of life were concerned.<sup>23</sup>

Of course gift giving for the upper-class women was a limited, imperfect way of assuaging desires for social contacts. In official courtesy gift giving, women of the Ôoku were deprived of autonomy for deciding on and selecting the recipients, occasions, and items to send. When a gift directive came from the bakufu councilors, an otoshiyori would show it to her mistress the midai and to the concubines in the gift-exchange circle, and she and other attendants would prepare the gifts designated in the notice. The communiqués recorded by the bakufu indicate that the otoshiyori often importuned the councilors with intentionally difficult questions concerning the gift content or the exact recipient or the time the gifts should be delivered. But the councilors dismissed most questions, telling the attendants to follow the precedents in the records because the particulars of the gifts had already been specified in them. These were

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Takeo, *Amae no kôzô*, p.41. Katô Shûichi, “Nihon shakai...,” p. 21-22, 29.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Mouer, Ross and Yoshio Sugimoto, “*Nihonjinron* at the End of the Twentieth Century” pp. 238, 240. Befu, “Four Models,” p. 220. Sugimoto Yoshio, “Kotae no nai hôteishiki” (Formula without an answer), *passim*. Minami Hiroshi, *Nihonjinron—Meiji kara konnichi made* (Theory on the Japanese – from Meiji to today), *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> There were groups for martial arts, poetry (both Japanese and Chinese styles, serious and comical), games, Nô, singing, musical instruments, band (*hayashi*), flower arrangements, tea ceremony, or kickball (*kemari*).

<sup>23</sup> However, Kyoto’s aristocratic women definitely had more freedom than the upper-class samurai women. Shinanomiya Tsuneko’s diary describes the free social life she enjoyed in the last forty years of the 17th century. Segawa (Seigle), *Kôjo Shinanomiya*, pp. 3, 9, 11, 12-20; 24-27, *passim*. Seigle, *Shinanomiya Tsuneko*, pp. 4, 6, 7, *passim*.

examples of minibattles of the sexes: while women tried to overturn men's authority, men always managed to control the exercise of will by women.

The gifts of the Tokugawa family were given individually, never to or from couples or groups such as a husband and wife, or siblings of the same gender, or children or a family as a group. Even an infant, male or female not yet a year old, had to give and receive appropriate gifts as a member of the Tokugawa family, when an occasion required such participation.<sup>24</sup> Here, the contradictory logic of the bakufu gave women a status equal to that of men. However, the bakufu's thinking was paradoxical. As pointed out already, while granting the status of individual to these women, the bakufu did not really give these women the freedom of selecting gifts on their own.

When giving private gifts, however, even Ôoku women did have more freedom in deciding, choosing, and giving whatever gift they wished to give where official occasions and duties did not enter the picture. This was amply seen in Shinanomiya's diary (*Mujôhoin-dono gonikki*) with her records of a constant flow of gifts from her daughter Hiroko and Hiroko's husband, the sixth shogun Ienobu, including life-size dolls for her granddaughter.<sup>25</sup> Hiroko would send individual gifts to everyone in her family including the maids, sometimes on consecutive days.<sup>26</sup> This indicates the considerable freedom she had for giving private gifts to her natal family members. But these gifts, too, were substitutes for her longing for the family she had not seen since her departure from Kyoto at the age of thirteen. As a young girl, she had witnessed her mother's and aunts' free socializing among Kyoto royalty/aristocracy. Not only Hiroko, but all midai and jôrô from Kyoto had freer social life before they came to Edo and must have felt deprived in the Ôoku.

It is interesting that under the sixth shogun Ienobu, female members of the Tokugawa family began to participate in socio-religious activities even more than under Tsunayoshi. On more occasions they participated in memorial services of family members by offering more than the customary gift of money, other accouterments for Buddhist services. For example, when Tsunayoshi's mausoleum was completed on the maple hill (Momijiyama) on the grounds of Edo castle, Midai Hiroko donated twenty Buddhist banners, Zuishun-in

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<sup>24</sup> E.g. When Tsunayoshi's midai Nobuko visited the Mito mansion after Yae-himegimi gave birth to Miyo-hime, in return for Midai's gifts to everyone, everyone presented gifts to her, including Miyo-hime, barely two weeks old. *Jikki*, 6: 688, Hôei 5, 1708/2/18.

<sup>25</sup> Segawa Yoshiko (Cecilia Segawa Seigle), *Kôjo Shinanomiya no nichijô seikatsu* (The everyday life of Imperial Princess Shinanomiya: Reading the Mujôhoin-dono diary), pp. 53, 222-223, 242.

<sup>26</sup> *Mujohoin-dono gonikki* (1666-1700), ms. Genroku 6, 1693/8/26, 8/29, 9/4; Genroku 8, 1695/1/24, 1/25; 6/30, 7/1, 7/3, etc.

(Tsunayoshi's concubine No. 1, Lady Oden), a purple tablecloth, Yae-himegimi, eight banners, Matsu-himegimi (Tsunayoshi's adoptive daughter No. 3), four *keman* (decorative Buddhist hangings), Take-himegimi (Tsunayoshi's adoptive daughter No. 4), a light blue tablecloth, and Jukô-in (Tsunayoshi's concubine No. 2, Ôsuke), an incense burner.<sup>27</sup>

Because Ienobu maintained close contacts with all these ladies of the gift circle by sending them thoughtful seasonal gifts of flowers, clothes, fruit, fish, money, and other items on each occasion, they must have been more aware of human contacts. Their participation in religious offerings in addition must have given them a sense of dignity and social and cultural significance, as well as an assurance in their membership in the closed society.

The social aspects of gift exchange seem to have increased even more in the reign of the child shogun Ietsugu. On the day of his shogunal investiture, the emissaries from Kyoto announced the promotion of Ienobu's widow Ten'ei-in to the First Rank Junior (Ju-ichi-i),<sup>28</sup> the same rank Tsunayoshi's mother Keishô-in was honored with eleven years earlier. This celebration is interesting in that it involved many more women than those of the inner circle. Whereas Keishô-in's gift exchange in 1702 listed numerous people from the Kyoto court, Ten'ei-in's celebration included almost entire roster of Kyoto royalty/aristocracy and major temples from Kyoto but also many Tokugawa female relatives who remained from the two previous reigns. On this occasion the child shogun Ietsugu, Ten'ei-in, and Gekkô-in sent and received gifts also to and from unrelated daimyo: Maeda, Shimazu, Date, Asano, and even Yanagisawa, as well as their respective wives. The crisscrossing of these gifts with appropriate protocol and gradations had an aspect of absurdity and frenzy, since the gift givers were basically exchanging the same items, such as money (silver pieces), rolls and rolls of silk fabrics, and 3/2, or 2/2, or 2/1, or 1/1 meaning so many kinds of fish and so many pairs of wine kegs.

This occasion, generating a tremendous amount of gift exchange, presented an appearance of vigorous and complex social activities like a square or folk dance where everyone criss-crosses to dance with everyone else. The ladies must have felt their definite place in the samurai-aristocratic environment in relation to this particular shogun, no matter how young and innocent he was. It is interesting to speculate where the idea and the directive including so many came from, because it was an unusually liberal move to open up the privileged list. Certainly not from the very young shogun; could it be Ten'ei-in, whose mother Princess Shinanomiya (wife of Konoe Motohiro) was an important social figure in Kyoto in the late seventeenth century; or possibly Gekkô-in, who craved attention and recognition as the child shogun's mother—the winner of the heir production race among the

<sup>27</sup> *Jikki*, 7: 115. Hôei 7, 1710/8/26.

<sup>28</sup> *Jikki*, 7:310-312. Shôtoku 3, 1713/4/2. Thereafter, she was called Lady of the First Rank.

several concubines of Ienobu? Or was it simply the shogun's councilors who were usually staid and conservative?

Granted, there is no way of knowing whether these women considered it important to be included in the gift-exchange circle. But any modern-age observer who studies the countless lists of gift exchanges in the bakufu records will see that this was a pattern of investing these women with a small measure of ritual socialization and a method of official recognition of their place in the Tokugawa inner circle.

### **Gift-Defined Hierarchy**

Gift obligations for both men and women were ruled by social and political positions in the hierarchical structure of the Tokugawa world. Giving and receiving, reciprocity or the lack of it, and the quantity and quality of gifts, were determined by the giver's relationship to the recipients in the hierarchy, from the shogun on down. All shoguns definitely differentiated the amounts and values of gifts they sent to the emperor, retired emperor, empress, crown prince and on down in Kyoto, or to their vassals of various ranks and importance. Therefore, the political and social hierarchy and the hierarchy of gift giving confirmed and solidified each other. What was appropriate for the lesser vassals was not appropriate for the top daimyo of the nation.

Among women, as official head of Ôoku the shogun's midai almost always occupied the top of the giving and receiving lists, warranted by her high birth and the acknowledged ceremonial status of her marriage. While the hierarchical positions of women in the Ôoku ruled the amounts and level of gifts, their positions were not necessarily permanent and *could* change by a shift in their circumstances. For example, Keishô-in, mother of the fifth shogun Tsunayoshi, followed Midai Nobuko on the list until 1702/3/9. On that day the Imperial Court conferred on her the rank of First Rank Junior, and the order on the list reversed, because Nobuko – like nearly all midaidokoro -- held the Third Rank. However, although the order of importance changed, Keishô-in and Midai Nobuko usually gave and received equivalent gifts.

Another anomaly occurred toward the end of the Tokugawa period in late 1866, after the fourteenth shogun Iemochi died and his midai Kazunomiya took the veil and was named Seikan'in-no-miya. The fifteenth shogun Yoshinobu's wife Mikako should have headed the list, because she was the legitimate wife of the reigning shogun; but, she was called *gorenjû* (name for the wife of a shogunal heir and the wives of Tokugawa collateral heads, meaning the lady behind the screens) rather than *midaidokoro* for a long time, and the list was headed by Seikan-in-no-miya followed by Tenshō-in, widows of the two previous shoguns. To congratulate Yoshinobu for conferment of the shogun title, daimyo were commanded by the bakufu to give scaled monetary gifts to the following personages in the following order:

Seikan-in-no-miya (widow of the 14th shogun Iemochi)  
 Tenshō-in (widow of the 13th shogun Iesada);  
 Gorenjū Mikako (wife of the 15th shogun Yoshinobu)  
 Honju-in (Mother of the 13th shogun Iesada)  
 Jitsujō-in (Mother of the 14th shogun Iemochi)<sup>29</sup>

This list was used again and again, but on some occasions, the last two ladies were not included, presumably because of their low birth.

On other gift giving occasions, the list ranked the same three ladies at the top, followed by the shogun's three daughters, who preceded the last two mothers on the list, both socially inferior of the shogunal daughters.<sup>30</sup> This second list was official and stable, each person positioned according to the social hierarchy, and within the same level, according to age in descending order. For example, although Aki-himegimi was the daughter of Prince Arisugawa and socially above most of the other women, she was an adopted daughter of the twelfth shogun and married to an Arima, less important daimyo than the Matsudairas, Maeda, Shimazu, or Date, and therefore listed after all the daughters of the eleventh shogun, arranged by age. The same list also continued in effect for some years for the shogun's gifts to the ladies.<sup>31</sup>

Mikako's title was officially changed from *gorenjū* to *midaidokoro* by a bakufu memorandum on 1867/9/27.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the list of gifts from the shogun Yoshinobu presented to all the ladies (of the second list) the next day used the title *midaidokoro* for the first time, quite long after Mikako entered the Ôoku.

The mother of the shogun's heir usually followed the midai immediately, regardless of her social position or seniority. The rest of the concubines were listed according to seniority. Exceptions did occur, such as Jitsujō-in (mother of Shogun Iemochi) who was placed last in

<sup>29</sup> *Zoku jikki*, 5:109, 1866/12/16.

<sup>30</sup> *Zoku jikki*, vol. 5. 1866: 12/23, 12/29. 1867: 1/1, 5/2, 6/17, 8/2, 8/17, 9/4, etc. Seikan-in-no-miya; Tenshō-in; *Gorenjū*, Yō-himegimi (Ienari's daughter, Mrs. Matsudaira [Maeda] Nariyasu); Sue-himegimi (Ienari's daughter, Mrs. Matsudaira [Asano] Naritaka); Seikō-in (Ienari's daughter, Kiyo-himegimi, widow of Sakai Tadanori); Seijun-in (Ienari's daughter, Naga-himegimi, widow of Hitotsubashi Naritsura); Aki-himegimi (Princess Aki of Arisugawa, wife of Arima Yoshiyori); Honju-in (Mother of Iesada); Jitsujō-in (Mother of Iemochi).

<sup>31</sup> e.g. *Zoku jikki*, 5: 216-217, Keiō 3, 1867/7/7. *Tokugawa shoka keifu* 1:114, also shows Ieyoshi's gift circle hierarchical order placing Aki-himegimi (Princess Arisugawa Akinomiya) second from the bottom, preceded by eight daughters of Ienari, above only one daughter of Ieyoshi born in 1842 and died 1843.

<sup>32</sup> *Zoku jikki*, 5: 268. Keio 3, 1867/9/27.

both lists, and also the concubines of the sixth shogun Ienobu. Jitsujô-in was said to be frivolous and drunk from morning hours on,<sup>33</sup> probably the reasons why she was banished to the end of the list.

The sixth shogun Ienobu had an unusually large Ôoku, because of the previous shogun Tsunayoshi's surviving concubines and adopted daughters, and the order of names in his gift list was not what one would have expected to be:

1. Midaidokoro Hiroko (Later Ten'ei-in)
2. Zuishun-in (Oden), the Late Shogun Tsunayoshi's No. 1 concubine
3. Yôsen-in (Yae-himegimi), Tsunayoshi's No. 1 adopted daughter
4. Matsu-himegimi, Tsunayoshi's No. 3 adopted daughter
5. Take-himegimi, Tsunayoshi's No. 4 adopted daughter
6. Okomu (Oheya\*), current Shogun Ienobu's No. 1 concubine (mother of the first son who died)
7. Osume (new Oheya\*), Ienobu's No. 2 concubine (mother of the 2<sup>nd</sup> son who died)
8. Sakyô, Ienobu's No. 3 concubine (Gekkô-in, mother of the only surviving son)
9. Jukô-in (Ôsuke), Tsunayoshi's No. 2 concubine
10. Seishin-in (Shinsuke), the last concubine of Tsunayoshi
11. Miyo-hime, daughter of Yôsen-in (Yae-himegimi) and Mito Yoshizane;

although strictly speaking Miyo-hime was not a member of the main house of Tokugawa, her name was sometimes added, showing how her mother Yôsen-in (Yae-himegimi) was regarded. Seishin-in was sometimes eliminated perhaps for her less-than commendable personality and behavior. (Discussed in Chapter VII of my Ôoku ms: Scandals of Shogunal Concubines).

\*Oheya was a concubine who conceived a shogun's baby.

The first concubine of Ienobu gave birth to the first-born expected to be Ienobu's heir, but she was the sixth on the list (although the list was made before the boy died). Ienobu's third concubine Sakyô (Gekkô-in) whose son Nabematsu eventually became the seventh shogun, was believed by many to be the shogun's favorite, but she was the eighth on the list. Even after the first two boys died, the hierarchical order of Ôoku women did not change but remained constant in various documents,<sup>34</sup> with Sakyô's name following two concubines with seniority. Not until two months after Ienobu's death, after his mementos had been distributed to the ladies of the Ôoku, was the order finally changed and Sakyô/Gekkô-in moved up to follow Ten'ei-in.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *MEZ*, 3: 200-201; 8: 48-49.

<sup>34</sup> See *Manabe nikki*, 1709/8/4; 1709/8/6; 1709/8/21; 1709/9/3; 1709/9/13; 1709/11/2; 1709/11/4; throughout 1709, the order is the same. 1710/11/1, (*Jikki*, 7: 133); 1711/1/26 (*Jikki*, 7: 144); 1711/2/9 (*Jikki*, 7: 146); 1711/6/22, (*Jikki*, 7: 168); 1712/4/7, (*Jikki*, 7: 222).

<sup>35</sup> *Jikki*, 7: 282. Shôtoku 2, 1712/11/29.

As is clear from the above examples, even when the official hierarchical placement was not formally announced, everyone was made aware of it by various memoranda issued by the bakufu councilors to the Ôoku ladies, in which their names were addressed in descending order.

### **Gift Obligations under Tsunayoshi - Inheritance Gifts**

This section includes substantial discussions of men because of their obligations of gift giving to the ladies of the Ôoku. As noted earlier, the fifth shogun Tsunayoshi was particularly fond of giving and receiving gifts, as exemplified by his establishing the not-too-felicitous custom of building daughters' wedding trousseaux and wedging it into a bakufu tradition. In addition, he collected valuables on every possible occasion from his vassal daimyo despite the fact that they were in a permanent state of financial hardship. They were obliged to maintain a standard number of regular army men and pay their stipend; their fief land often suffered from bad weather and resulting famine; the bakufu often sent an inspection team for re-evaluation of tax obligations, and their fief land generally tended to diminish in size; the expenses in Edo for each daimyo generally came to 70-80% of the total cost of domain operation. For example, the Shônai domain's total operational cost from 1702-1706 was 198,400 ryô, of which 82% (162,500 ryô) was for expenses in Edo.<sup>36</sup> The expenses in Edo included gifts to the shogun regularly on arriving there from their domains and leaving.<sup>37</sup> They were also habitually charged for building and repair work of public and private infrastructures and edifices for the shogun.

Tsunayoshi's extravagance may be difficult to believe from the description of the early days of his rule when he assiduously eliminated all extra expenses in every aspect of bakufu operation, from the destruction of the luxury boat Atakemaru built by his father Iemitsu to not using fine fabric for his own garments and wearing old and soiled clothes.<sup>38</sup>

One example of Tsunayoshi's almost coercing gifts was on the occasion of a daimyo's death and his estate and title passing to his heir. In the days of the first shogun Ieyasu, there were few examples of someone choosing to present his father's memento to the shogun. For example, Lord of Chikuzen (present Fukuoka) Kuroda Nagamasa presented to the retired shogun Ieyasu his father Josui's two fine swords, one by Bizen Nagamasa and the other by Bizen (Osafune) Nagamitsu, and a tea caddy called "*Ki no maru* [or *Ko no maru*]." To the second shogun Hidetada (1578-1632), he presented a copy of the classic *Azuma Kagami* previously owned by Hôjô Ujimasa (1538-1590). Since the days of Ashikaga shoguns (1338-1573), there were occasionally ritualistic visits and

<sup>36</sup> Fujino Tamotsu, "Daimyo no keizai seikatsu" (Economic life of daimyo), in *Bushi no seikatsu*, p. 96.

<sup>37</sup> *Ofuregaki Kanpô shûsei*, pp.92-93, show the standard gifts to be presented to the shogun.

<sup>38</sup> Bodart-Bailey, *Dog Shogun*, pp. 94-95.

exchanges of gifts of swords and other arms between a shogun and a vassal, by which the loyalty of the vassal to the shogun was symbolically confirmed.<sup>39</sup> But in time, this type of gift seems to have taken on less pure, ulterior motives, though still voluntary on the part of the vassal. The retired Lord of Higo, Hosokawa Tadaoki, wrote to his son on several occasions revealing the reason for the extravagant gifts the above-mentioned Kuroda Nagamasa presented to Ieyasu and Hidetada; Kuroda was ambitiously working to bring about the marriage of his two daughters to Hidetada's sons Takechiyo (later Shogun Iemitsu, 1604-51) and Kunichiyo (Tokugawa Tadanaga), and failing that, he hoped at least one daughter would marry the Mito Tokugawa's head.<sup>40</sup> Kuroda failed in this attempt also because the Mito Tokugawa head, like the shogun and other collateral Tokugawa heads, took brides from royalty or aristocrats. He evidently had such ulterior motives in presenting these and other frequent gifts. On this occasion Ieyasu in return presented Kuroda with 200 pieces of silver toward his father's memorial service. But as was pointed out by the Italian Jesuit missionary Alessandro Valignano (1539-1607), Japanese lords made sure that they received "something worth twice as much as whatever" they gave their inferiors.<sup>41</sup>

The number of daimyo who presented gifts to please the shogun probably increased in the time of Iemitsu, who gave very generous gifts himself; but the daimyo's giving was not considered compulsory. Under Tsunayoshi, the voluntary gifts of precious family heirlooms of his vassals to the shogun at the time of daimyo's promotion, retirement, and inheritance increased greatly and presented an aspect of compulsory giving, which could not have happened without signs of encouragement from the shogun. An atmosphere prevailed that obliged the daimyo to collect treasured paintings, sculptures, calligraphy, objets d'art, tea ceremony paraphernalia of note, and classical literature or anthology handwritten by emperors, royalty or celebrated calligraphers among Kyoto nobility. Tsunayoshi countenanced these gifts, and although these were strictly nonreciprocal, one-sided gifts, and ostensibly presented by free will, the daimyo actually felt obliged to give up family treasures.

The value of the gifts a daimyo gave had nothing to do with his rank. It was largely ruled by the personal wealth of the daimyo and what had been collected by his forebears. In a semi-voluntary situation such as this, the daimyo who wanted to impress the shogun favorably would present him with the very best of the family heirlooms. If there was nothing in the heirlooms, from vanity and a desire to ingratiate himself he might have newly acquired something unusual and valuable and pretended it had come to him from his father or grandfather. Possession and purchasing of fine objects generated much competition since the

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<sup>39</sup> Takano Toshihiko, p. 99.

<sup>40</sup> *Hosokawa-ke shiryô*, Vol.1: Letters 207, 212, 215, 217; Vol. 8: Letters 16 and 36.

<sup>41</sup> Moran, J.F., *The Japanese and the Jesuits – Alessandro Valignano in sixteenth-century Japan*. pp.136-137.



days of Ieyasu.<sup>42</sup> Shogun Tsunayoshi's appreciation of finer objects encouraged such acts.

One noteworthy fact was that Tsunayoshi issued a directive insinuating that gifts be presented not only to himself but also to his ladies. Before Tsunayoshi's reign, the third shogun Iemitsu's wife Lady Nakanomaru received one gift from a daimyo, and the fourth shogun Ietsuna's midaidokoro Princess Akiko received such gifts several times, but generally daimyo did not feel obliged to give to the midai and other ladies. Under Tsunayoshi, a record is found of the 1696 notice to the daimyo: "When presenting gifts to Midaidokoro, Lady Keishô-in, Lady Kotani (No. 1 concubine, Oden), and Tsuru-himegimi, one should present himself to a councilor or a staff member among his acquaintances and follow his instructions. There should be no presents to any others. If [return] gifts are sent by these personages, one should present oneself to a councilor or an acquaintance [in the administration] to express gratitude...."<sup>43</sup>

Tsunayoshi thus suggested that daimyo's presents be extended to the ladies, and daimyo obediently added such gifts although they could hardly afford this largesse – they could not afford it but felt pressed to give, and many precious objects of art began to stream into Tsunayoshi's and his ladies' treasury.

Among all midais through the history of the Tokugawa dynasty, Tsunayoshi's wife Nobuko was the leading receiver of valuable and artistic gifts, thanks to her gift-loving husband, who remained in power for close to thirty years. As to the items of presentation, the daimyo must have had a fixed idea that Nobuko, a Kyoto aristocrat, loved classical poems and anthologies handwritten by royalty and aristocrats. She was given dozens of imperial anthologies calligraphed by emperors and aristocrats in their famed handwriting, as well as fine paintings by the best masters of the Kanô school and rare imported works of Chinese masters. Nobuko received at least 51 copies of the most popular of the classical anthologies, *Kokinshû*, whereas Keishô-in received 9 copies and the sixth shogun Ienobu's midai Hiroko, 8 copies of the same respectively. Nobuko and Hiroko received many duplicate items, calligraphed by the same emperor or celebrated nobles. This does not necessarily signify that they were forgeries (though some might have been), but certainly indicates that the impoverished aristocrats of the Muromachi and Sengoku periods were occupied with copying anthologies to supplement their income.

There might have been token return gifts from the ladies, although presumably they always acknowledged the gifts and thanked the donor; but basically these were nonreciprocal, one-way gifts. In consequence, most vassal daimyos and the husbands of the shogun's daughters were

<sup>42</sup> *Buya shokudan*, pp. 440-441. *Hosokawa monjo*, vol. 1: letters 148, 199, 262; vol. 2: letter 328; vol. 3: letter 740.

<sup>43</sup> *Jikki*, 6:266. 1696/7/10. *Ofuregaki Kanpô shûsei*, p. 98, #124, 1696/7th month. This order was repeated on 1704/12/15, *Jikki*, 6:558.

usually heavily in debt. Even before Tsunayoshi's time, under the reign of Iemitsu, letters of reputedly wealthy Hosokawa Tadaoki (520,000 koku) and his son Tadatoshi show that they were constantly borrowing money from each other and from their relatives.<sup>44</sup> But the Hosokawas' need of money was not yet due to the coerced gift giving to the shogun; the tea ceremony was the rage in the early seventeenth century, and the so-called *meibutsu* (tea ceremony paraphernalia with outstanding provenance), items such as cups, tea caddy, or teakettle were sought out for their own collections.<sup>45</sup> The *meibutsu* were the kind of gifts Tsunayoshi countenanced. These items could skyrocket family expenses.

The custom of presenting inherited objects to the shogun and his ladies continued through the next two shoguns, and even the early years of the eighth shogun Yoshimune.<sup>46</sup> Yoshimune's vassal daimyo must have found out his simple taste and preference for martial arts, because the daimyo's inheritance gifts began immediately to change to one sword, with only a few cases of an additional article such as a painting or a tea caddy. These, too, began to diminish, and in 1723 Yoshimune decreed the abolition of this custom altogether as part of his overall reform of extravagant gift and return-gift giving.<sup>47</sup>

### Formulas for Gift giving

In 1620, the youngest daughter of the second shogun Hidetada and Midai Oeyo, Masako, married Emperor Gomizunoo in a grand-scale wedding of extraordinary importance. Her trousseau was sumptuous and required an extremely large portage and long procession from Edo to Kyoto. The dowry of 10,000 ryô in silver was issued by the bakufu and her father, not collected from the vassal daimyo.

What is interesting about that time was the inchoate sign of what I term "a formula giving," a sign of impersonal standardization and formalization of mainly monetary gifts. A communiqué issued on 1620/8/28 stated "In congratulation on the wedding of the imperial

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<sup>44</sup> *Hosokawa-ke shiryô*, Vol. 1, Letters 67, 145; Vol. 2, Letters 445, 450; Vol. 7, Letter 1813. Sansai's father Hosokawa Yûsai had to pawn his tea ceremony *meibutsu* to borrow money. Daidôji Yûzan, *Ochiboshû* (Ôraisha version), p. 143.

<sup>45</sup> *Hosokawa-ke shiryô*, vol.1, Letters 67, 145, 148; vol. 2: letters, 158, 445, 450; vol. 7: Letter 1813. Hidetada begged for a *meibutsu* in Ieyasu's possession. Keichô 17, 1612/3/26, *Jikki* 1: 581.

<sup>46</sup> e.g., Kyôhō 1, 1716/7/5, Torii Tadahide's younger brother presented mementoes of his late brother to Yoshimune, Ten'ei-in, Gekkô-in, Zuishun-in, Take-himegimi, and Jukô-in. *Jikki*, 8:20-21.

<sup>47</sup> On Kyôhō 7, 1722/3/15, Yoshimune drastically reduced the amounts (minutely designated) of occasional and seasonal gifts, and totally abolished gifts on inheritance and promotion. Only rewards and private gifts were recognized. *Jikki*, 8: 265. Also *Jikki*, 9:146.

consort, daimyo above 10,000 koku will present fish and wine."<sup>48</sup> The quantities were up to the individuals, and the notice certainly was not coercive. The combination of fish and wine was the standard gift, and usually indicated as “1-sshu, 1-ka” (1/1 in the present text, meaning one kind of fish and one pair [2 casks] of wine). It does not state who suggested these presents; they could have been spontaneous simple gifts of fish and wine (which could be substituted for with money). The amounts were modest. At any rate, this is an early, if not the first, official mention of such mass gift giving taking place.

Then we notice that the third shogun Iemitsu began to use a scaled formula to suggest to the daimyo; first to send a small amount of money to his daughter Chiyo-himegimi on the occasion of her marriage. The idea of a formula for scaled giving according to the amount of fief the daimyo received was a simple solution to show a semblance of equitable treatment of daimyo, and a graduated formula became the standard for giving money or material gifts on various occasions. An example of this was recorded after the birth of Iemitsu’s third son Tokumatsu (later Tsunayoshi). All daimyo were commanded to present gifts to various ladies-in-waiting of the Ôoku:

Each 30,000 – 40,000 koku daimyo is to present :

To the Mother of Master Tokumatsu: two silver pieces

To the assistant (at the time of delivery) and Nurse: 300 hiki each

To wet nurse, 200 hiki; to Tokumatsu’s maids: 5 silver pieces to be shared

Each 50,000- 100,000 koku daimyo is to present:

To the Mother of Master Tokumatsu: three silver pieces

To the assistant (at the time of delivery) and Nurse: 500 hiki each

To wet nurse, 300 hiki; to Tokumatsu’s maids: 10 silver pieces to be shared

Each 110,000- 200,000 koku daimyo is to present,

To the Mother of Master Tokumatsu: five silver pieces

To the assistant (at the time of delivery) and Nurse: two silver pieces each

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<sup>48</sup> *Jikki*, 2:198. Genna 6, 1620/8/28. Joao Rodrigues explained, “a gift of wine must always be accompanied by something to eat, called *sakana*, because when wine is drunk, it is accompanied by food that whets a person’s thirst. Or instead of *sakana*, if there is none available, ancient custom dictates that they send as a courtesy certain shellfish, wrapped in paper, or dry squid, bonito fish, or something of the sort, along with the wine.” Cooper, Michael, *Joao rodrigues’s Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*. P. 206. Cooper, Michael, *This Island of Japan*, p. 162.

To wet nurse, one silver piece; to all maids: 20 silver pieces to be shared

Each 210,000- 300,000 koku daimyo is to present,

To the Mother of Master Tokumatsu: ten silver pieces

To the assistant (at the time of delivery) and Nurse: three silver pieces each

To wet nurse, two silver pieces; to all maids: 30 silver pieces to be shared

Each 310,000 koku and above daimyo is to present,

To the Mother of Master Tokumatsu: twenty silver pieces

To the assistant (at the time of delivery) and Nurse: five silver pieces each

To wet nurse, three silver pieces; to all maids: 50 silver pieces to be shared

All those who are in Edo and in the provinces are to present the above; however, those who have parents, children, siblings and relatives who are ailing with smallpox or measles will present their gifts at a later date.<sup>49</sup>

This type of formula-giving obligation for daimyo occurred periodically. Since there were some 260-270 daimyo in Japan, the total take for each celebratory occasion was quite considerable for Ôoku women. But they were not only at the receiving end but also on the giving side. For example, for the memorial service of a former shogun or midaidokoro, the Ôoku ladies from the gift-giving circle gave a set number of silver pieces, the midaidokoro the largest amount, and the number decreasing according to the order on the list.

After Tsunayoshi, this type of giving or receiving money or material presents took place constantly in Edo castle, and while it occasioned added expenses, it also meant official recognition of these ladies' status, equating their positions to the daimyo of graduated fiefs, as it were. One can be certain that each of the ladies was well aware of her position in the Ôoku.

In the eighteenth century, both the form and contents of gift-giving, ritualistic by nature to begin with, grew even more formalized and ossified, and the system became seemingly a meaningless social routine. Yet, it was not really meaningless or just a routine to the participants, although in most later cases the gift exchanged were identical. For example, when the eighth shogun Yoshimune's (1684-1751) son moved from the Kii mansion to the Second Pavilion in the castle, Ten'ei-in, Gekkô-in, Zuishun-in, Yôsen-in, Matsu-himegimi, Take-himegimi, and the three other concubines of the former shoguns all sent their male secretaries to the shogun with the gift of fresh *tai* (sea bream), and separately to his son. In return, the shogun also sent fresh sea bream to each of the ladies in Ôoku, as did his son in the exactly the same manner.<sup>50</sup> It seems that no one was permitted to be original or individualistic.

<sup>49</sup> *Edo bakufu nikki*, 1646/6/6.

<sup>50</sup> *Jikki*, 8:25. 1716/8/4.

All these people sending the same kind of fish to the shogun and his son, and they in turn sending each lady the same kind of fish, seems pointless and ridiculous. Yet omission of these acts would have been considered a political faux pas and violation of social protocol.

The post-1868 records about Ôoku state that a large portion of gifts of food arriving in the Ôoku were not used by the recipients: the shogun and midai. No matter how rare or valuable, for safety, food presented by outsiders was not served to the shogun and midai.<sup>51</sup> If the gift was fresh fish, most of it became perks of the heads of the kitchen in the *ohiroshiki* (Ôoku's administrative office) area, who were hatamoto. For example, around the third month, the first 1000 *katsuo* (bonito) of the season arrived at Nihonbashi fish market from the fishermen. Fish purveyors presented the first catch to Edo castle without fail, about 100 bonitos, ostensibly for the midai and shogun, but what the shogun or midai would actually taste was one or two morsels. The kitchen heads inspected the fish one by one, rejecting most of them, which became their perks.<sup>52</sup> Thus the kitchen staff and Ôoku women had the privilege of tasting the best first bonito of the season. Other fresh edibles were shared among Ôoku staff.

It is said that women in their living quarters (*Naga-tsubone*) seldom ever had to buy anything because so much food was delivered all the time.<sup>53</sup> When there were large quantities

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<sup>51</sup> *Kyûji shimonroku*, p. 155.

<sup>52</sup> *MEZ*, 3:111-112. Edoites made a fetish of eating first catch bonito of the year, and it sold at ridiculously high prices. The price of *katsuo* on the first delivery at the fish market was 2.5 kan per head [1 kan =1000 mon; 1 ryô was 4000 to 6000 mon, depending on the period]. From the second delivery, the price dropped, and gradually, one head came down so low that the proportion of the prices of bonito at the beginning and end of the season was 25: 1. For daily supplies, Nihonbashi fish merchants had to present fresh fish to the midaidokoro at low prices. This was difficult on days of bad fishing, but they had the privilege of vast rent-free land in remuneration. *Kyûji shimonroku*, p. 41. It is said that the kitchen staff of the Nakaoku (the shogun's private living area) pocketed 50 persons' meals daily. Ichikawa Toshio, et. al ed., *Pictorial Edo 1: Edojô to Ôoku*, p. 53. According to *Ryûei bunin* (appointments of the Tokugawa bakufu), vol. 39), there were 138 directors of kitchen (*zen-bugyô*) in charge of the general management of shogun's and midaidokoro's meals between 1641 and 1862. However, there was a period when this position was abolished. Forty-four kitchen managers worked for the West Pavilion between 1724 and 1852. There were also 91 *omakanai-gashira* (head cook) between 1661 and 1865, but for the West Pavilion, only 24 head cook between 1732 and 1844 because this position was discontinued from time to time.

<sup>53</sup> *MEZ*, 3:49.

of gifts to the Ôoku, they were divided and distributed to each apartment, carried by a privately employed little errand girl (*kozô*) on a tray. Gifts from provincial daimyo had a tendency to accumulate; many items had little practical use or attraction for the staff. The food the Ôoku women disliked particularly such as *daikon* (turnap) from the Owari Tokugawa, Japanese honeysuckle wine (*Nintô saké*) and *Tsurube sushi* from the Kii Tokugawa; dried octopus from the Mito Tokugawa. In general they disliked things such as dried and skewed *namako* (sea cucumber), dried sea bream, and salted fish. They all ended up in the gift brokers shop (*Kensan'ya*) in town who resold them at a low price.<sup>54</sup> Items that were favored by Ôoku women were, season's first salmon from the Mito Tokugawa; oranges from the Kii Tokugawa; Kaga silk from the Kaga Matsudaira (Maeda); Hôsho papers from the Echizen Matsudaira; Ryûkyû *tsumugi* silk from Shimazu of Satsuma; Basho cloths, dried bonito, sugar crystal candy from Ryûkyû (Okinawa); Hakata *tsumugi* silk and woven Hakata *obi* from Chikuzen (Fukuoka Pref.); Mihara saké from Aki (Hiroshima Pref.); ceramics from Hizen (Saga Pref.); mosquito nets from Isetsu; Naruto cloths from Awa (Tokushima Pref.); dried bonito and colored writing paper and other paper products from Tosa (Kôchi Pref.); silk *chijimi* from Nakatsu; *tatami* mat and throw mats from Fukuyama; and leopard skin from Tsushima.

This information also clearly confirms that the custom of gift giving was largely a ritualistic procedure for the purpose of expressing respect, gratitude, congratulations, or condolences, and the gift content had less significance than the act of giving itself. All gifts have ritualistic meaning for establishing human relationships. By then, gift giving had become as common and routine as kowtowing before the shogun, gifts of food and seasonal produce like an obeisance to the shogun and midai to which they nodded lightly in acknowledgment.

The ritualistic and symbolic nature of gifts is revealed in the descriptions of João Rodrigues about the gifts exchanged among daimyo of the warring fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. Simulated gifts of no value were often sent: for example, long cardboard sticks with the appearance of rolls of silk fabric were packaged beautifully, but the contents were poor crude linen. The commoners who customarily exchanged fans would not hesitate to give unusable fans that do not open: pieces of paper inserted in the split bamboo.<sup>55</sup> What was important was the appearance, the exterior decoration, the way of presenting the gift,<sup>56</sup> and the number of items, which should be three or another odd number. The daimyo of the very late Tokugawa period embodied these external rules of presenting the customary gift of swords to

<sup>54</sup> Nagashima & Ôta, *Chiyodajô ôoku*, 2:62-63.

<sup>55</sup> Rodrigues, João, *Nihon kyôkaishi* (History of Japanese [Christian] church), vol. 1, p.454. Rodrigues also attributed the sham presents to the poverty of even the daimyo class at that time. Cooper, Michael, *João Rodrigues's Account*, p. 206.

<sup>56</sup> Cooper, Michael, *Ibid.*, p. 207. Cooper, Michael, *This Island of Japan*, p. 163-166.

the shogun; instead of a real sword, a stick of wood painted black as a short sword was placed on the salver or presentation table. Such ersatz objects were mass-produced strictly for ritual presentation purpose.<sup>57</sup> What happened to these useless wooden swords afterward is anyone's guess. Evidently there were merchants who sold and bought back all these ritualistic pseudo-gifts. The silver pieces that were given by the shogun on strictly ceremonial occasions also had no numismatic value and could not be used as actual currency, although silver for stipends or tips were numismatic coins. The ceremonial gold pieces had ten-ryô written on them, but they actually yielded only 7.5 ryô if they were minted in the Keichô era (1596-1614), and were only worth 4.5 ryô if they were from the Genroku era (1688-1703) because of differences in their gold-copper ratio. The symbolic value was what mattered.

Gift giving had become so entrenched as part of samurai society culture, it moved the economy in a large, predictable annual pattern. The economy of Edo society would have shrunk considerably without the ritual of gift giving, which was seasonal and created patterns of transactions in Edo commerce, particularly in the samurai society, but the custom and economic dynamics had infiltrated other parts of social segments and come down to contemporary Japan. It is safe to assume, however, that without this custom the upper to middle samurai class would have had an easier life financially.

### **Gifts and Bribery**

However, the gift culture of modern or past Japan in some respects is no different from the various gift cultures discussed by Marcel Mauss. Setting aside the Edo period shoguns (who did not necessarily return gifts), a gift does usually call for a return gift. But a gift given with a hidden motive and expectation is not a true gift. If it were considered so, a gift with an innocent appearance could have some deep-hidden motive behind it to gain something in return, which the recipient of the gift feels compelled to give or to perform. If we follow this line of thinking, a gift and a bribe are difficult to differentiate when there is something to be gained by giving a gift. There is even a maxim in Japan, "baiting a sea bream with a small shrimp," which refers to a way of giving something small and receiving something more valuable in return.

If gifts are true gifts, return favors should not be expected, and all gift cultures do not suggest simultaneously thriving bribery cultures. However, in the atmosphere of constant giving and expecting favors during the Edo period, it was a natural progression that the high-ranking ladies-in-waiting of the Ôoku received bribes frequently for acting as intermediaries for the daimyo, hatamoto, and bakufu purveyors. Such customs and mindset have formed a truly regrettable material culture in Japan. Some of these are discussed in the

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<sup>57</sup> Ono Kiyoshi, *Tokugawa seido shiryô* (Data on the Tokugawa political system), 198-199.

Ôoku manuscript Chapter X, Ôoku Economy and Women's Resources.

### Marriage Gifts

Shogun Tsunayoshi's urge to build trousseaux for his daughter and adopted daughters was extreme, but the general marriage gifts in the Tokugawa clan as part of the culture also merit discussion. A wedding is a universal and natural occasion for gifts. Japan is no exception, and the idea and custom of presenting marriage gifts that existed since the Heian period was firmly if gradually established during the Edo period.<sup>58</sup>

The first grand wedding of the Tokugawa family after Ieyasu's appointment as shogun was that of his granddaughter Sen-hime to the son of Hideyoshi, Toyotomi Hideyori. Sen-hime was six years of age when she left for Kyoto and Osaka, accompanied by her mother Oeyo, Hidetada's wife, who was close to the time of her parturition. This wedding was notable for its simplicity and the lack of festivity before or on the day of the wedding, 1603/7/28. Some daimyo at Osaka castle proposed a sumptuous wedding, but Katagiri Katsumoto (1556-1615), the leading vassal daimyo of Hideyoshi, counseled that the Tokugawa shogun liked thrift and disliked extravagance, so ostentatious preparations were totally avoided.<sup>59</sup> There are no records of gifts, even among the family members, much less from the vassal daimyo of either side.

After the debacle of Osaka Castle and the death of Hideyori, his widow Sen-hime married Honda Tadatoki (d.1626) but there were no gifts except for 100,000 koku from her father as "cosmetic expenses," a term often used for a dowry. When she became a widow again, now called Tenju-in as a nun, she went back to Edo with her daughter Katsu-hime, who was adopted by her grandfather Hidetada and married to Ikeda Mitsumasa (1609-1682), the Lord of the Bizen (Okayama) domain.<sup>60</sup> No wedding gifts were collected from the daimyo group on her behalf.

Marriage gifts meant more than the trousseau gifts I have been discussing. As in the case of some weddings in the United States, much of the Tokugawa family's wedding celebrations were not for the young couple but for the family head and other leading members of the clan. This should already be clear since I have discussed the amounts of obligatory gifts the family members were expected to give to one another.

One outstanding example was the case of Maeda Toshinaga, who went to Fushimi with his young son Saruchiyo (Toshitsune) for the child's first audience with the second shogun Hidetada and to thank for the betrothal of Hidetada's second daughter, the two-year-old Tama-hime (Nene-hime, 1599-1622) to Maeda's young heir. Her engagement preceded Hidetada's oldest daughter Sen-hime's marriage to Hideyori. Toshinaga presented the shogun 5000 pieces of gold,

<sup>58</sup> Wedding presents existed already during the Heian period (794-1185) but mainly among the aristocracy.

<sup>59</sup> *Jikki*, 1:85. Keichô 8, 1603/7/28.

<sup>60</sup> *Jikki*, 2: 424-425. 1628/1/26.



500 rolls of Kaga silk, and 100 sets of seasonal clothes; to the retired Ieyasu 3000 pieces of gold, 300 rolls of Kaga silk, and 50 sets of suits.<sup>61</sup> Such extravagant gifts were possible only for the wealthy Maeda and definitely set them apart from the ordinary daimyo of 10,000 to 50,000 koku stipends. In return, the two shoguns gave swords to the Maeda father and son. It was obvious who was supposed to be more grateful to whom. There was no reciprocity for this potlatch game.

These early gifts from major daimyo to the shogun and his family had an appearance of a spontaneous and voluntary act. Such actions became less spontaneous and less voluntary as years went by, and finally obligatory by the command of Shogun Tsunayoshi.

These Edo-period gift activities defined or even symbolized the sociocultural positions of the top residents of the Ôoku. Their secure but rigid positions were re-enforced by their efforts to adhere to obligatory social protocol of giving the correct, prescribed gifts to the designated recipients. It ensured maintaining a status in the exclusive circle and gift giving was its symbol. In other words, because of the restricted position governed by hierarchy and tradition, the Tokugawa women had little power to exercise their free will, but as long as they obeyed the rules and followed the prescribed pattern of activities, the confinement assured their prestige and safety. The year-in year-out gift giving was a manifestation of its continuity.

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<sup>61</sup> Gifts, *Jikki*, 1: 387, Keichô 10, 1605/4<sup>th</sup> month. Marriage, *Jikki*, 1: 383. Keichô 6, 1601/9/30.

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