

Backoround of Some Japanese Expressions about Food (2):

"*asser*" "*shari-shari*" and "*sara-sara*"

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Summary

The Japanese language has numerous expressions about food properties. In this article, I would like to explain a little about the historical, cultural and social background of some Japanese descriptive words for food.

"*Assari*" is an expression of light, delicate taste and/or flavor. It describes the flavors of *asaduke* (vegetables lightly preserved in salt or rice bran), *ochaduke* (rice with hot tea poured on it), etc. The origin of the word could be "*asai* (shallow)." "*Assari*" was in use by the Edo era (the 17th-19th century). In modern days the Japanese enjoy strong tastes and/or oily food much more than before, but they still enjoy the *assari* taste as well.

"*Shari-shari*" refers to the light, crisp and fresh textures of Japanese pear, lotus root, sherbet etc. The nuances of the word include refreshing and pleasantness. "*Shari-shari*" may have been in use as early as the Muromachi era (the 14th -16th century) because it was defined in "Nippo-zisho" (the Japanese-Portuguese dictionary compiled in 1603 by missionaries.)

"*Sara-sara*" is the sound or action of liquid moving lightly and smoothly. It has been used for a long time; it is seen in "*Kagero-nikki*" which was written in the Heian era (the 8th-12th century). "*Sara-sara*" describes the appearances and textures of *ochaduke* and *zosui* (a mixture of rice and soup in a bowl) etc. "*Ochaduke sara-sara*" is a fixed expression which means "*ochaduke* is boiled." However, our survey revealed that the young people don't use "*sara-sara*" as much as the elderly do. This expression may be slowly vanishing from the food lexicon.