

Preparation of case study on the beginnings of public bathhouses

Yusuke Miyoshi^{1*} Shogo Kamei^{1,2}

¹ Advanced Institute of Industrial Technology

² The University of Fukuchiyama

*Corresponding author: Yusuke Miyoshi, miyoshi-yusuke@aait.ac.jp

Abstract The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the history of sento, and to examine the viability of sento in Kyoto, the birthplace of the bath, from the perspective of business succession. Some public bathhouses have been forced out of business despite being beloved by local residents. Interviews revealed that although demand for sentou still exists after Corona, the presence or absence of a successor has a significant impact on the survival of sentou, whether or not they go out of business.

Keywords business succession; public bath

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to first overview the history of the sento, and then discuss its viability from the perspective of business succession, focusing on sento in Kyoto, the birthplace of the bath. The origin of the bathhouse was the free public bath by temples for the purpose of purification of body and soul and for missionary purposes, such as treatment of illness, and it had a strong religious flavor. Later in Japan, steam bathing, in which the bath and washing area were separated, hot air bathing using earthen cans (Yase no Kamaburo), and hot spring bathing became widespread and could be seen in many places, but bathing was a luxury for the general public. As the phrase "to be treated to a bath" symbolizes, the word "bath" seems to have originated from the practice of wealthy commoners treating their neighbors to a bath.

The practice of public bathhouses, where people bathe for a fee as we know it today, dates back to the Heian period(794–1185), and descriptions of machiyu can be found in Konjaku Monogatari[2](Tales of Ancient and Modern Japan). In the Nichiren Goshuroku [6], there is a description of a bathhouse called "yusen", which indicates that machiyu had been established in Kyoto since the Kamakura period. This form of bathing service, in which common people paid a fee to bathe in the town, spread during the Edo period(1603–1867) as a combination of steam bathing and hot water bathing.

The bathhouse appeared in Tokyo in 1591, before the Edo period (1603–1868). At that time, bathtubs were for one person, with a sliding door that opened to allow entry and closed again, and a narrow space like a cupboard, filled with hot water up to about knee level and used for bathing only from the waist down (gyozui), with steam to steam the water (Illustrated book: The bustle of Oedo"[4]). For example, "Morisada Mankou [3]" states, Although the cupboard bath is rare in the three capitals (Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka), it is often found in public bathhouses in other countries. I once took a bath in Hyogo (Kobe). We have also seen them in Yakutou (medicinal baths) in Edo. The bathtub is very shallow, and the water is barely a foot deep. If you only kneel down, a sliding door is used to prevent the hot water from leaking out. The bathtub is very shallow, and the water is only a foot deep.



Fig.1 Public Bath (Machiyu for Edo period) source `Shokunindzushie shi`

In order to attract more people, improvements were made to the bathhouse, such as enlarging the washing area and venting the water, and by the Edo period (1603-1867), the prototype for today's sento (Figure1: Public Bath) was in place. In the Kansai region, on the other hand, the bathtub was a Goemon-Buro (Figure2), in which a cast-iron cauldron was installed at the bottom of the bathtub to heat the water, and a wooden floorboard served as a lid, which was pushed into the bottom with the user's weight when taking a bath. This type of bath was widely used until the Showa period (1926-1989) as home baths became popular. In "Tokaido Chu Hizakurige," there is a scene in which a man takes a "Goemon Bath," but does not know that he is supposed to sink a wooden plank into the bottom of the bathtub, which is too hot to handle, so he puts on geta from the bathroom and pulls out the bottom of the bathtub, forcing him to pay for it. The scene is called a "bath" in Kansai and a "yuya" in Edo (Tokyo).

In Edo, the cost of firewood for fuel was high, and in addition, it cost 200 ryo (about 26 million yen) to dig a well to secure water for each steam bath. Therefore, to save money, the general public would place a washbasin in their backyards and fill it with water in the morning, then bathe in the evening when the water was warmed by the heat of the sun.



Fig.2 Goemon-Buro

2 Current Japanese public bathhouses

According to "Rekisei Joso Kou [7]," bathhouses first appeared in Osaka in 1590. Also, according to "Sosoro Monogatari," the first public bathhouse was established in Edo the following year, in 1591. The Law Concerning Special Measures to Ensure Public Baths states that public bathhouses are "indispensable facilities in the daily lives of residents" and have played "an important role in promoting the health of residents. So what exactly does it mean to say that public bathhouses are indispensable facilities in the daily lives of residents?"

Taking Tokyo as an example, which is relatively easy to obtain data on, for example, according to "Deep Reading Ukiyo-buro" [1], there were 499 bathhouses in Tokyo in 1803, 523 in 1808, and 600 in 1814. At that time, only men's bathhouses in Edo had a second floor, where people enjoyed chatting, playing Go and chess, and selling tea and candy while resting after taking a bath. The number of public bathhouses in Tokyo was 602 as of December 2016. Incidentally, due to an incident involving a samurai fighting in a public bathhouse, samurai were forbidden to go to public bathhouses. According to records from 1693, the population of townspeople in Edo at that time was approximately 350,000 (excluding the population of samurai families and temples and shrines, which were not included in the population survey), while the estimated population of Tokyo in 2016 was 13.6 million, which is about four times larger. From these data, it can be inferred that public bathhouses were an integral part of daily life and functioned as a place for communication during the Edo period, as baths were not always available in the homes of townspeople and merchants.

On the other hand, the fact that Kansai was a "craftsman's town" with a thriving commerce and industry seems to have increased the

need for public bathhouses. Currently, there are 680 sento (public bathhouses) that are members of the Osaka Public Bathhouse Association, but about 50 go out of business each year. About 40 member bathhouses of the Tokyo Public Bathhouse Association also disappear each year. Live-in workers come from all over the country to work at the bathhouses, but there are no bathrooms in the houses. Did they use public bathhouses to clean off the dirt from their work? This is much like a laundromat. In some cases, condominiums have shared washing machines, and households that do not have drying equipment when it rains use laundromats.

Thus, the explanation is that public bathhouses would have been necessary in the days when there were no baths in dwellings, but since dwellings with baths have become the norm, public bathhouses are on the decline.

Table 1 Basic statistics for public bathhouses by region source 'SBCPHRB'

year	Number of public bathhouses	Number of customers per day	Distance to nearest public bathhouse	Average price per customer
Hokkaido & Tohoku	2002	78	127.63	413.4615385
Kanto & Koshuetsu	2002	195	127.03	353.1088063
Tokai & Hokuriku	2002	80	121.81	389.7435897
Kinki	2002	179	151.15	291.8079096
Chugoku & Shikoku	2002	49	127.59	401.0895565
Kyushu	2002	42	108.57	372.8199478
Hokkaido & Tohoku	2007	67	111.09	800
Kanto & Koshuetsu	2007	180	112.05	671.25
Tokai & Hokuriku	2007	113	113.54	757.5221239
Kinki	2007	142	130.45	492.9577465
Chugoku & Shikoku	2007	69	87.14	728.9855072
Kyushu	2007	67	94.26	741.0447761
Hokkaido & Tohoku	2012	48	165.6458333	1052.083333
Kanto & Koshuetsu	2012	74	151.2837838	993.9189189
Tokai & Hokuriku	2012	21	127.8666667	1080.952381
Kinki	2012	46	170.173913	727.173913
Chugoku & Shikoku	2012	18	94.61111111	1188.888889
Kyushu	2012	45	126.0666667	1136.666667
Hokkaido & Tohoku	2017	70	208.9714286	1225
Kanto & Koshuetsu	2017	89	187.0674157	1053.370781
Tokai & Hokuriku	2017	36	149.3055556	1191.666667
Kinki	2017	73	180.8128333	958
Chugoku & Shikoku	2017	22	99.3	1281.818182
Kyushu	2017	49	129.2265306	1203.061224

However, Table 1, which shows the average daily number of customers by regional block from 2002 to 2017 (source: "Survey of the Business Conditions of Public Hygiene-Related Businesses [5]" by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare), shows that the number of customers is growing in every district in Japan. How can we explain this phenomenon, in which the number of customers is growing despite the fact that the number of public bathhouses is on the decline? A decrease in the number of bathhouses does not mean a decrease in the number of customers per bathhouse, since there are no more competitors. In other words, since demand is not declining, deteriorating business performance is not a reason to close a store. However, if public bathhouses function as a place for the local community, even if the number of customers temporarily declines due to the Corona whirlpool, the familiar customers will return. Rather, it is more natural to assume that the lack of improvement in the working conditions of the public bathhouses is the reason why there are no successors. However, there is no case in the published data that investigates whether there are successors or not. Therefore, we will attempt to clarify the situation by interviewing sentou operators in the Kansai region, where sentou originated and have a long history.

Around 1970, wood was apparently used to boil water. Therefore, it was necessary to remove soot from the chimney. Figure 3 depicts a

ladder for craftsmen to climb to the top of the chimney to remove soot. It shows the hard labor of the time. I asked the keeper of the public bathhouse about the reason why they had to remove soot. It seems that if you don't remove soot, the fuel consumption is low. In the old days, public bathhouses used wood (waste wood) for fuel, and tall chimneys were indispensable to burn the wood efficiently. Burning wood causes soot to accumulate, which weakens the power of the fire. Soot removal is essential for public bathhouses because it reduces the power of the fire. The job of removing soot from Bathhouse chimney(Figure 3) was to brush in from the top of the chimney to the fire opening and remove the soot, which was apparently done several times a year by a professional sweeper. I wonder if the blower also had an effect by sucking new air (oxygen) into the combustion kettle for the amount of smoke that rose up.

Most modern bathhouse facilities are boiler water heating systems using kerosene or heavy oil, so there is no need for a tall chimney for smoke exhaust. However, the tall chimney of a bathhouse has symbolic significance, so some bathhouses have installed chimneys, although they are not necessary today.



Fig.3 Bathhouse chimney 50-60 years old in need of soot removal by Photographer:deceased Kazunori Miyoshi

3 Hearing on Kyoto's old public bathhouses

Kyoto people consider Kyoto to be the birthplace of the public bathhouse, and it has always been a city of artisans along with Osaka, with many weavers, Ohara women, and tofu artisans. And even today, sento (public bathhouses) have taken over the sento culture and functioned as places to refresh the body and soul and to communicate with local people. Recent research studies have shown that soaking in a large bathtub, which is not available in the home, has a beneficial effect on the immune system and beauty, due to the effects of heat,

buoyancy, and hydrostatic pressure, while soaking in a spacious bathtub, free from daily life, to wash off dust and dirt, is hygienic and pleasant.

Minoru Muranaka (Kyoto Heirayu Owner) says it is a good idea. Although it is said that people are moving away from public bathhouses today, with young people spending most of their time in the shower instead of soaking in the bathtub, the area around Heian no Yu, where Muranaka's family runs the business, has long been home to tatami mat and furniture craftsmen, and is located behind a Kyoto university dormitory (Yoshida Dormitory), so there is potential demand for such facilities. In this sense, the conditions of no baths and craftsmen living nearby are met. However, Kasuga-yu, which is the same distance from the university dormitory, went out of business several years ago. In this sense, we would like to clarify the difference between the two through interviews.



Fig. 4 Night view of Heian no Yu (at Sakyoku)

Interview #1

M.M. (Kyoto Heian Yu 湯)

2023 0629 listener Y.M.

By using natural groundwater, the restaurant opens at 3:00 in the afternoon. They close at 24:00, but cleaning begins after the last customer leaves and they work until after 4:00 in the morning. He cannot support his family with just the bathhouse alone. He works part-time at Aeon from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. as a dual job. He sleeps about four hours a night. Since he was a student, he spends his time from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm. Other than that, I work. He goes to the gym, has dinner with friends and family (now his wife), and leaves the watchman to his father. My father is an old-fashioned person who is not very sociable. Because of this, I follow up with the customers when they leave. The public bathhouse has been renovated, and cleanliness is the first priority. He takes great care in replacing and disinfecting the hot water. So I don't want to have to close the store for a week because of an outbreak of legionella bacteria, which is the talk of the town.



Fig. 5 Beginning of business at Heian-no-Yu(p.m.3:00)

When the shop opens at 3:00, the clientele are all regulars. The combination of hot water (115 degrees), a sauna, and a kinky water bath of groundwater; to increase the clientele, we place old-fashioned bottles of coffee milk, fruit milk, ramune, and cider, which are popular among the regulars, and offer seasonal offerings such as a bath with sudachi (a Japanese citrus fruit) medicine, a bath with mikan peel, and, recently, natural mint.

Since there are many boarding houses without baths in the vicinity of the university, the restaurant is often used by students, but it also rents a parking lot for guests who come from far away. The parking lot is the former site of Marusan Shokudo, a restaurant that was popular with students but closed last year. I am the only son. I feel that I have no choice because I am the heir to the family business, but when I was young, I often quarreled with my parents about why I had to work so hard. But I intend to continue the store as long as customers need it. I want to preserve the traditions of Kyoto and support the local community.

Interview #2

S. T. (retired from Kyoto Kasuga Yu 湯)

2023 0731 listenerY.M.

A dry sauna and water bath at no extra charge are also provided in Kyoto's public baths. Although this is a student town, it was not very crowded and tended to be used by people in the neighborhood. There was a coin-operated parking lot nearby where several cars could be parked. The facilities are old, but they are cleaned frequently and neatly. It was open until 24:00. Even if 80 people a day visited the restaurant, the monthly sales would be about 1.2 million yen. If energy costs and other expenses are subtracted from that, there is almost no profit. However, in order to continue, they need to replace the aging boilers and machinery, which will cost at least 10 million yen. The cost of fuel oil is also high, and the 440 yen bath fee alone is not enough to make the bathhouse profitable.



Fig. 6 Kasuga no Yu (Sakyouku)at that time in the shopping arcade Current chimneys are found in Kasuga no Yu.

Although public bathhouses receive subsidies, taxes, and preferential water rates, they are unable to change their fees. As a result, even if they wanted to hire part-time workers, they cannot, and the elderly owners are forced to do all the heavy lifting, including cleaning. In general, public bathhouses become exhausted trying to do everything as a family. They are so occupied with running the business that services are put on the back burner, and they told that their children (daughter and son) don't want to take over because it's too harsh. Because there is no successor, along with physical limitations and aging facilities, the public bathhouse closed in November 2019. He then closed the store while he still had the funds to demolish the facility and changed his policy to real estate management with students.



Fig. 7 Kasuga no Yu in the days when it was open for business

These are the interviews we conducted with the current and recently closed bathhouses in Kyoto City, respectively. Some bathhouses become popular by renewing their facilities if they have a son who will succeed them, but it is clear from the interviews that it is quicker and more profitable to switch to another type of business (landlord) than to look for a successor to renovate or renew the facility in the first place. And unlike Tokyo, Kyoto Prefecture does not have stores that

set a separate 'sauna fee,' which may tend to make management more difficult than in Tokyo's public bathhouses. However, Kyoto is a highly populated urban area and every sento has a sauna, so it can be said that the city is benefiting from the sauna boom. If there are no saunas in public bathhouses in the area, it is to be expected that it would be even more difficult for them to survive as public bathhouses. We therefore turned our attention to the depopulated northern region of Kyoto Prefecture, Nakatan (northern Tamba region and southern Tango region), to make a comparison with the "hinodeyu" in the fishing town of Nishi-Maizuru.

Interview #3

I. T. (Hinodeyu in Nishi-Maizuru)

2023 0820 listenerY.M.

It originally started as a public bathhouse run by the town. It has been in operation as a public bathhouse since the 1890s, and was run by a different person (Mr. Yoshida) at the time. My grandfather on my mother's side purchased the property, and it has been in the family business for three generations since his grandfather's generation. In the old days, the area was crowded with fishermen, and there were more than two dozen public bathhouses in Maizuru, but now there are only two. This is the only remaining public bathhouse in the fishermen's town. It is located in an alley at the end of the moat where boats are moored. Because of the daily income, there were three liquor stores in this small area, making it a very lively place.

The water is pumped from a well and heated with heavy oil. The water is submerged in bincho charcoal. The operating age of the bath facilities is over 100 years. There is a parking lot nearby. After retiring as an elementary school teacher, he helped with the family business and took over the public bathhouse from his mother. Every day, from polishing the tiles to heating the baths, the work is grueling physical labor. The bathhouse is open from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m.



Fig. 9 Scenery of Hinodeyu that has continued since the Meiji Era

4 Conclusion

In the past, public bathhouses have been said to be losing their popularity due to the proliferation of apartments with bathtubs. However, the number of customers per bathhouse has not decreased as more and more establishments have closed down their bathhouses. Nonetheless, we interviewed three Kyoto sentou establishments to find out if there is another reason for their closure. The interviews revealed that the survival of sentou depends on whether or not the problem of succession can be solved. For those bathhouses that have no successors, we can conclude that it is difficult to take over the business without the cooperation of relatives who have been involved in cleaning the bathhouses since childhood and know how the bathhouses are run.

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Fig. 8 Beginning of business at Hinode Yu (in Maizuru)



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