



Oxford English Dictionary adds mouthwatering selection of words of Japanese origin

26 March 2024, Oxford – Oxford Languages announces its latest Oxford English Dictionary (OED) [update](#).

The Japanese language has long been a rich source of loan words for English and, this month, even more examples join the hundreds already recorded in the OED. We'll begin with a selection of cooking-related words – sharpen your [santoku](#) knife and join us in the kitchen.

The noun [hibachi](#) is not entirely new to the OED, having first entered the dictionary in 1933 with the same meaning that it has in Japanese: a large earthenware pan or brazier in which charcoal is burnt, especially in order to warm the hands or heat a room. Earliest evidence of its use in English dates back to at least 1863, however when small, portable, charcoal-heated grills from Japan were introduced to the North American market in the mid-twentieth century, they were given the name hibachi, thereby giving rise to a different sense of the word in English.

Hibachi also came to be used in North America to refer to a hot steel plate which forms the centre of the table in a Japanese restaurant. The word was later applied restaurants featuring such a hot plate, as well as to the Japanese or Japanese-style grilled food served there. These new senses all developed exclusively within North American English.

[Katsu](#) (a piece of meat, seafood, or vegetable, coated with flour, egg, and panko breadcrumbs, deep-fried, and cut into strips) is a good example of a Japanese-English reborrowing, or 'boomerang word'. It comes from the Japanese word katsu, the shortened form of katsuretsu, which itself is a borrowing into Japanese of the English word cutlet. Katsu is recorded earliest in the OED in the compound katsu curry (first seen in 1976), a dish of chicken, pork, or other type of katsu, served with boiled white rice and a mild curry sauce.

The noun [tonkotsu](#) has also been added with multiple meanings. Although now most widely used to refer to a savoury broth made with pork bone and typically served with ramen noodles, the OED also records an earlier, less frequent use of the word to mean a Japanese box or pouch typically used to

store tobacco. The 'pork bone' sense, first attested in English in 1977, is borrowed from the Japanese tonkotsu, which combines ton 'pork' with kotsu 'bone'. The origins of the 'tobacco box' sense, used earliest in English in 1907, is uncertain.

Several other Japanese dishes have been added in this update, including [donburi](#) (rice topped with other ingredients, typically including seafood, meat, or vegetables, served in a bowl which is also known as a donburi), [karaage](#) (Japanese-style fried chicken), [onigiri](#) (Japanese rice balls), [yakniku](#) (roasted or grilled meat), and [okonomiyaki](#) (a savoury pancake made with flour and eggs combined with other ingredients such as cabbage, meat, and seafood, cooked on a griddle, and served with various toppings).

For centuries, artists from around the world have taken inspiration from Japanese art. This influence is also clear in language through the number of art and craft-related words that English has borrowed from Japanese. [Kirigami](#), the Japanese art of folding and cutting paper into intricate, three-dimensional decorative designs and objects, is one such example. [Shibori](#), any of several Japanese manual resist-dyeing methods which involve folding, twisting, binding, stitching, or compressing cloth, and applying indigo or other dyes to produce a variety of patterns, is another. [Mangaka](#) (a writer or illustrator of manga), and [washi tape](#) (decorative adhesive tape used in a variety of paper crafts) have also been added.

The word [kintsugi](#), earliest seen in a 2008 issue of Nikkei Weekly, refers to the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by meticulously joining pieces back together and filling cracks with lacquer dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum, thereby highlighting the flaws in the mended object. The word subsequently developed an additional sense indicating an aesthetic or world view characterized by embracing imperfection and treating healing as an essential part of human experience.

Also included in this update are two words for distinctively Japanese forms of entertainment: [isekai](#) and [tokusatsu](#). Isekai is a Japanese genre of science or fantasy fiction featuring a protagonist who is transported to or reincarnated in a different, strange, or unfamiliar world. The word in Japanese was originally used in the literal sense of 'other world' in Haruka Takachiho's novel *Isekai no Yushi* (The Warrior from the Other World), published in 1975. A recent cinematic example is Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli film *The Boy and the Heron*, which has recently won the Oscar, Golden Globe, and BAFTA awards for best animated feature film.

Tokusatsu is a genre of Japanese film or television entertainment characterized by the use of practical special effects, usually featuring giant monsters, transforming robots, and masked and costumed superheroes. The word is short for tokushu-satsuei, which literally means 'special photography, special

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(visual) effects’, a combination of tokushu- ‘special’ and + satsuei ‘action of photographing’, or in film, ‘shot, take’. Director Eiji Tsuburaya pioneered practical special effects techniques in the 1940s and 50s which were used in such classic tokusatsu films as Godzilla (1954), as well as in several tokusatsu television series. Later tokusatsu TV series of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s were popular both in Japan and internationally. An early example of the genre, Masked Rider, first aired in 1971 and remains an enduring TV favourite in Japan to this day.

The editorial work on this batch of new Japanese words was carried out by OED editors in collaboration with research partners Professor Yukio Tono and Dr Ariane Borlongan from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies’ (TUFS) Institute of Global Studies. Etymology consultancy was also provided by the OED’s Japanese language consultant of long standing, Professor Nicholas Warren of Fukuoka Women’s University.

To learn more about words of Japanese origin in the OED, read [these release notes](#) (which detail the full list of Japanese words added in this update), and visit the [Japan page](#) of the [OED World Englishes Hub](#). There, you can also read the article, ‘[From anime to zen: Japanese words in the OED](#)’. Oxford Languages has commissioned a number of illustrations to accompany this update; they can be accessed [here](#).

For full definitions of words, and to arrange an interview with an OED editor, please contact:

Anna Silva, Oxford University Press
Email: anna.silva@oup.com
Phone: +44 1865 353240

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