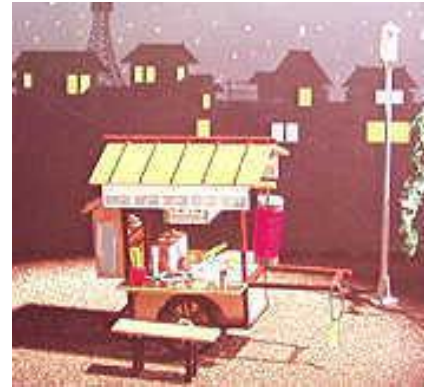


What time is it now?

In the Edo era, there were soba stands here and there called 'Ni-Hachi soba,' or '2-8 soba.' Because a cup of soba-noodles were served for 16mon (Mon was a fractional monetary unit in old days in Japan.)

One evening, a soba seller pulled his yatai (a small movable booth with a small equipped counter and a bench) to the road and waited for customers.

A man approached the soba booth, and said, "Hey, Soba man. "



"Good evening, sir, may I help you?" the soba seller said.

"What kind of soba are you serving? Oh, you are serving shippoku and hanamaki? I'd like a cup of shippoku. It's cold out, isn't it? I need something hot to warm me up."

"All right sir."

"How is your business?"

"Not so good," the soba man answered.

"Is that so? That's good for you?"

"Good? I said not so good."

"That's why I said it's good. After a good business, follows bad things, and vice versa. Everything in the world is rotating. Don't let it get you down too much. What you need is patience."

"You are right. I'll keep it in mind."

"Oh, look at your andon. (a paper-covered lamp stand) It has a good sign on it, a target and an arrow. I have plans this evening. Because I've just encountered this sign, I'm sure I'll be a lucky man. As I like soba noodles, whenever I see this sign, I'll come again.

"Thank you, sir. And here's your soba."

"Oh, so soon? Every soba man should serve like you do. We are quick-tempered. If the order doesn't come soon, we complain. If it still doesn't come, then we eventually lose our appetite." In this way he continued talking.

"Oh, you're using disposable chopsticks. I'm impressed. Most soba-sellers have used-chopsticks. I don't like the ones someone has already used, especially the ones whose tips are wet. Yucky! But these are nice---. (The man began to eat blowing on his hot noodles.) You use a good bowl. Soba in a good bowl gives you a good appetite, because it makes the food you serve look delicious. Even restaurants around here might not use bowls as good as this one. ---Smells good. You must use a lot of dried bonito for the stock. They say making good stock is a hard job. It isn't easy to make this taste. Some 'Ni-Hachi soba' is pretty salty---. I've tried soba here and there--- But--- uh, these noodles are really thin, very good. Soba noodles should be thin, but sometimes I encounter such thick soba noodles

they are like udon. We don't eat soba as a substitute for rice, so they should be thin. I don't like thick ones---I've never eaten such good soba as this. Oh, I'm not making lip service to you ---. Uh, your chikuwa (steamed fish cake) is thick. Do you make a profit from serving this thick chikuwa? You said all right, huh. Uh, somewhere I ate soba that was served with imitated Chikuwa-fu. (Fu is wheat-gluten bread.) I didn't like it. But it's all right for patients, you know. Yours is genuine---oh, how nice. To tell you the truth, the soba noodles here are so good, but I came here to kill the bitter taste I've had before. So I don't need another cup. Sorry."

"Oh, that's all right."

"How much do I owe you?"

"Well, it has some ingredients on the top, so it's 16mon."

"I only have small change, so I'll put them into your palms. Hold out your hands."

"Yes, sir, here you are."

"You said 16mon, right? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, what time is it now?"

"Well, nine, isn't it?"

"Ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen--- See ya," he said, and left.

Another true-born foolish Edo man, who was standing near the booth, saw it from the beginning.

"What a man he is! He spoke too much. He kept talking to the soba man from the beginning to the end. I wonder if he could eat soba noodles without talking," he thought to himself.

"He said, 'Hey, soba man. It's cold, isn't it?' Then what did he say? The low temperature isn't the soba man's fault.

'How is your business?'

'Not so good,' he answered.

'Is that so? That's good?'

'Good? I said not so good'

'That's why I said it's good. After a good business, follows bad things, and vice versa. Everything in the world is rotating. Don't let it get you down too much. What you need is patience.' He is clever, isn't he? 'Oh, your andon has a good sign on it, a target and an arrow. I have plans this evening. Because I've just encountered this sign, I'm sure I'm going to be a lucky man.' He's going to be a lucky man? I don't think so. All his talk was nonsense. About disposable chopsticks, a good bowl, good stock, fine noodles, and thick chikuwa---. He talked so much I thought he would leave without paying his bill. If he'd left without paying, I'd have given him a lesson. But he paid. Ruts! I didn't enjoy it very much---. He asked, 'How much do I owe you?' Why did he ask the price? You know soba is always 16mon for one cup. 'I have some small change, so I'll put them on your palm. Hold out your hands.' The way he counted was--- like a child.

'You said 16mon, right? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, what time is

it now?' 'Well, nine, isn't it?' 'Ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen---.' Gee-whiz! He asked the time there. Very unusual. Why did he ask the time in the middle of counting? If I were him, I'd have miscounted. Very strange. 'How much?' '16mon.' 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, what time is it now?' 'Well, nine.' 'Ten, eleven, twelve---' I can't get why the guy asked for the time there. Wait a minute. How much?' '16mon.' 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, what time is it now?' 'Well, nine.' 'Ten---' Ten! It's not 'Ten', is it? See, he miscounted! 'Ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen---.' He counted one less! Actually he saved 1mon. How sly he is! The soba man will never notice. It went really smoothly. 'How much?' '16mon.' 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, what time is it now?' 'Well, nine.' 'Ten---.' Hmm, it sounds easy. I'll try it."

But he had to wait until the next evening because he had no change on him that night. The next day, he prepared some change and went out earlier than he did the previous night and waited for a soba man to come along.

"Hey, Soba man. I'm here. I've called you a couple of times, but you're going ahead so fast. What kind of soba are you serving? Oh, you are serving shippoku and hanamaki? I'd like a cup of shippoku. It's cold out, isn't it? I need something hot to warm me up."

"Well, sir. It's rather warm this evening."

"Oh, actually, it's warm. It's warm all right. But it was cold last night."

"You are right. It was cold last night."

"How is your business?"

"Not so bad. I have some good customers. So the business is going well." the soba man answered.

"Is that so? ---Oh, boy. I can't handle this conversation---. But you see, don't feel at ease. After a good business, follows bad things, and vice versa. Everything in the world is rotating. Don't let it get you down too much. What you need is patience."

"I think so too. I always keep it in mind."

"You seem like you know everything I'm about to say. Oh, your andon has a good sign on it, a target and an---. No. Your sign is kanji 孫 (mago, that means grand children) in a circle. What do you call it? Hmm, Magoya, or something? That's good. I have plans this evening. Because I've just encountered this sign, I'm sure I'll be a kind of magnet this evening. Never mind---. We are quick-tempered. What we ordered should come soon---. If it doesn't go that way--- Well, it's all right. Some Edo men can't wait, but I'm one who can wait. I can wait. I can wai---t. I can wai---t. Hey, you haven't finish yet?"

"I'm terribly sorry, sir. I didn't have enough hot water. That's why I needed extra time. Here are your soba noodles."

"Well, I finally got my noodles. Oh, you're using disposable chopsticks. I'm impressed. Most soba-sellers have used-chopsticks. I don't like the ones someone has already used, especially the ones whose tips are wet. But these are---. Boy, mine are a pair of used-chopsticks! Yucky--- Well, come to think of it, I don't need to break them. The most important thing is the bowl. Soba in a good bowl gives

you a good appetite. It makes the food you are served look delicious. Even restaurants around here might not use bowls as good as---. Wow! It's dirty, and has some cracks. How does it keep soba in it without leaking? Well, it's all right if the soba is good. Smells good. You must use a lot of dried bonito for the soup. I was so sure that. (He slurped the soup. He almost threw up, but he just held himself.) Give me some hot water. The taste is rare. Sometimes I've had salty one, but this one is bitter---. They say good medicine is bitter. It must be good for my health---. Soba noodles should be thin, but sometimes I encounter such thick soba they are like udon. We don't eat soba noodles as a substitute for rice, so they should be thin. I don't like thick ones---. Look, my noodles are thick. They must be udon. What! You say that they are soba noodles? All right, all right. But these noodles look swollen. Maybe they are developing beriberi. Don't worry about that. I can eat thick noodles for a change. But too soft! They are as soft as oatmeal. Great! --- I have a weak stomach, so they are good for my stomach. Uh, where is my chikuwa? I can't find it anywhere. You really put one in the bowl? Oh, here it is. It's too thin. Maybe you planed the chikuwa. What did you say? You chopped the chikuwa with a kitchen knife? Really? How can you chop chikuwa this thin? Um, somewhere I once tried soba that was served with imitated Chikuwa-fu. I didn't like it. Oh, no! It isn't chikuwa, but imitated fu. I can't believe it---. (He finished eating.) Well, how much is it?"

"It has some ingredients on the top, so it's for 16mon, sir."

"I only have some small change, so I'll put them into your palms. Hold out your hands."

"Yes, sir, here you are."

"You said 16mon, right? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, what time is it now?"

"Well, it's four."

"Five six, seven, eight nine---"

Oh, oh---it seems like he paid far more than 16mon!

○客はどうやって「そば代」をごまかしたのでしょうか。

時そば

江戸時代、二八（にはち）そば屋と言うのがあちこちにありました。なぜ二八そばかと言うと、そば一杯が（二八の）十六文だったからです。

ある晩のことです。そば屋が屋台を道端に止め、客を待っていました。

そこへ一人の男がやって来ました。

「おい、そば屋。」

「へーイ。いらっしゃい。」

「何が出来る？おっ、花まき（焼き海苔をもんでそばにふりかけたもの）に、しっぽく（具がおかめの面のようなかたちでそばに

のっているもの）か？しっぽくをもらおうかな。寒いな。こんな日は熱いもんで体を温めるに限る。」

「かしこまりました。」

「商（あきな）いはどうだい？」

「ぱっとしませんね。」

「そうかい？そりゃいいや。」

「え？ぱっとしないと云ったんですが。」

「それがいいんだ。運がよけりゃ、運が悪くなる。運が悪けりゃ、運がよくなる。世の中そんなもんだよ。気を落とさなさんな。商いと言って、あきないでやることだな。」

「うまいことおっしゃいますね。覚えておきます。」

「おっ、行灯（あんどん）だね。いい屋号（やごう）がついてるな。的にあたり矢か。今晚は一稼ぎするぜ。この屋号を見たからついてるぞ。そばは大好きだ。この屋号を見たら、また来るぜ。」

「ありがとうございます。どうもお待ちどうさまです。」

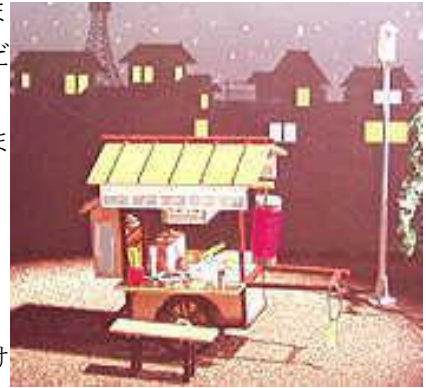
「おっ、もうできたかい。そば屋はこうでなきゃだめだな。わしら気が短いから、遅いとぶつぶつ言いたくなる。それでも出てこないと、もう食べる気がなくなる。」

こんな調子で男はしゃべりまくりです。

「おっ、割り箸だね。気に入った。たいていのそば屋は割ってある箸だ。人が使った箸は嫌だね。特に先がぬれてるやつは、ご免だね！ここはいい・・・（男はそばをフウフウしながら食べ始める。）いいどんぶりだね。いいどんぶりだと食欲が増すね。中身がうまそうに見えるぜ。この辺で、こんな上等などんぶりを使っているところはなかなかないぜ・・・いい匂いだ。汁（つゆ）にかつおぶしをいっぱい使ってるね。これだけの汁を作るのは大変だろ。この味を出すのは大したものだ。二八そばは塩っ辛いのが多いが・・・あちこちで食べてるが・・・ところが・・・うん、この麺は細いね。いいね。麺は細くなくちゃだめだ。時々うどんのように太いそばがあるが、めしの代わりにそばを食うわけじゃないから、麺は細くなくちゃだめだ。太いやつは嫌だね・・・こんなうまいそばは初めてだね。おっ、お世辞を言うわけじゃないが・・・うっ、ちくわが厚いね。こんな厚いちくわを出して、もうけはあるんかい？大丈夫？そうかい。おっと、どこかでちくわを麩でごまかしたそば食ったな。嫌だね。あれは病人用だぜ。ここは本物だ・・・うん、うまい。ぶっちゃけた話、ここのそばはうまい。けどな、他所（よそ）でまずいそばを食った口直しに寄ったんだ。一杯で勘弁してくれ。ごめん。」

「いいんですよ。」

「いくらだい？」



「ええと、具入りで、十六文です。」

「銭が細けえんだ。お前さんの手に置くから、手をだしてくんねえ。」

「へい。これに願います。」

「十六文だったな？ひー、ふうー、みー、よー、いつ、むー、なな、やー、何刻（なんどき）だい？」

「エー、ここのつ（九刻）で。」

「とお、十一、十二、十三、十四、十五、十六・・・じゃ、あばよー。」

男は立ち去りました。

さて、どこか間の抜けた江戸っ子が、屋台のかたわらで一部始終を見ていました。

「あの野郎！よく喋ったね。そば屋に向かって最初から最後まで喋っていたね。黙ってそばを食えねえのかい。」男は思いました。

「あの野郎、こう言ったね。『おい、そば屋。寒いな。』寒いのはそば屋のせいじゃないぜ。『商（あきな）いはどうだい？』

『ぱっとしませんね。』ときた。

『そうかい？そりゃいいや。』

『え？パッとしないと行ったんだんですが。』

『それがいいんだ。運がよけりゃ、運が悪くなる。運が悪けりゃ、運がよくなる。世の中そんなもんだよ。商いと言って、あきないでやることだな。』きざだね。『おっ、行灯（あんどん）だね。屋号がいいね。的に矢か。今晚は一稼ぎするぜ。この屋号を見たからついてるぞ。』ついてるか？そうは見えねえな。話がうますぎる。割り箸だとか。いいどんぶりだとか。いい汁だとか。ちくわが厚いとか・・・好きなことしゃべって食い逃げするかと思ったらちゃんと勘定払った。食い逃げでもしようものなら、お説教と思っただが。確かに払った。畜生！面白くねえ・・・あの野郎、こう言ったな。『いくらだい？』なんで値段を聞いたんだ。そば一杯一六文に決まってるじゃねえか。『銭が細けえんだ。お前さんの手に置くから、手をだしてくんねえ。』あの数え方・・・子どもじゃあるまいし。

『十六文だったな？ひー、ふうー、みー、よー、いつ、むー、なな、やー、何刻だい？』

『エー、ここのつで。』 『とお、十一、十二、十三、十四・・・』 おかしいぞ！あの野郎、あそこで時刻（とき）を聞いたな。なぜだ。何で勘定の途中で時刻を聞いたんだ？俺だったら間違えるな。実におかしい。『いくらだい？』 『十六文』 『ひー、ふうー、みー、よー、いつ、むー、なな、やー、何刻だい？』 『エー、ここのつで。』 『とお、十一、十二・・・』 なんだってあそこで時刻を聞いたんだ。待てよ。『いくらだい？』 『十六文』 『ひー、ふうー、みー、よー、いつ、むー、なな、やー、何刻（なんどき）だい？』 『エー、ここのつで。』 『とお・・・』 とお！十（とお）じゃねえ。ほら、まちがえた！『とお、十一、十二、十三、十四、十五、十六・・・』 ひとつ少なく数えたな。一文ごまかしたな。ずる賢い野郎だな！そば屋も気がつかねいや。実にうまくやったな。『いくらだい？』 『十六文』 『ひー、ふうー、みー、よー、いつ、むー、なな、やー、何刻だい？』 『エー、ここのつで。』 『とお・・・』 ふーん、かんたんじゃねえか。俺もやってみよう。」

その晩はあいにくこまかいのがなくて次の晩まで待つことにしました。昼間こまかいのを用意して、昨晚より早く出かけ、そば屋が来るのを待ちました。

「おい、そば屋。待て。何度も呼んだけど追いつけねえや。何ができるん？おっ、しっぽくに花まきか？しっぽくをもらおうかな。寒いな。こんな日は熱いもんで体を温めるに限る。」

「いえ、親方。今日は暖かいほうで。」

「うん、なるほど、暖かい。まったく暖かい。昨日は寒かった。」

「そうですね。昨日は寒うござんした。」

「商いはどうだい？」

「おかげさまで。ご贔屓（ひいき）のお客さんもおりまして、商いはうまくいっております。」

「そうかい？・・・ちきしょう、あれが使いねえ・・・でも、いいかい、油断しちゃだめだよ。運がよけりゃ、運が悪くなる。運が悪けりゃ、運がよくなる。世の中そんなもんだよ。気を落とすな。商いと言って、あきないでやることだな。」

「その通りです。いつも気に留めております。」

「俺の言おうとすることお見通しだな。おっ、行灯（あんどん）だね。いい屋号がついてるな。的に・・・違うな。丸に孫か。（丸損）なんて呼ぶんだ。孫屋とか何とかか？そいつはいい。今晚は一稼ぎ、この屋号を見たから今晚は取られちゃうかな。気にするな・・・。わしら気が短いからな、たのんだもんは早くなくちゃいけねえ・・・そうじゃねえと・・・まあいいか。江戸っ子は待てねえ、でも俺は違うぞ。待てるぞ。待て・・・る、待て・・・、おい、まだかい？」

「誠に申し訳ございません。あいにくお湯が切れてしまいまして、余分な時間がかかってしまいました。はい、おまちどう。」

「よし、来た、来た。おっ、割り箸だね。気に入った。たいていのそば屋は割ってある箸だ。人が使った箸は嫌だね。特に先がぬれてるやつは。でもここのは・・・ちょい、この箸、もう割ってあるぞ！おい・・・まあ、いいか、割る手間が省けて。どんぶりがよくなかつちやいけねえな。いいどんぶりだと食欲が増すね。中身がうまそうに見える。この辺で、こんな・・・どんぶりを使っているところはなかなかないぜ。おい！きたねえな。ひびだらけだ。よくそばがこぼれねえもんだな？まあ、いい、そばがよけりゃ。いい匂いだ。汁にかつおぶしをいっぱい使ってるね。きつと。（汁をすする。吐き出したくなるが、我慢する。）お湯を足してくれ。めずらしい味がする。塩っぱいのは食べたことがあるが、これは苦いよ・・・良薬口に苦しか。体にいいか・・・。麺は細くなくちゃだめだ。時々うどんのように太いそばがあるが、めしの代わりにそばを食うわけじゃないんだから、麺は細くなくちゃだめだ。太いやつは嫌だね・・・おい、これは太いぞ。うどんと違うか。え？これがそば？いいだろ、いいだろ。そばがむくんだみてえだ。きつとこのそば、脚気（かっけ）をわずらってた。気にしない、気にしない。よし気晴らしに食べてやるぞ。しかし、ぐにゃぐにゃだね！まるでそばのおじやだぜ。なんでえ、これは！・・・おいら、胃弱だからな。おいらの胃にいいだろうよ。おっと、ちくわはどこだ？みづからねえぞ。どんぶりにちゃんと入れたのか？おっ、あった。薄いね。鮑（かんな）で削ったんじゃねえだろうな。え？包丁で切った？本当？よくもこんなに薄く切れたね。いつかちくわを麩でごまかしたそば食ったが。嫌だね。おっ、なんだ！ちくわじゃねえぞ、麩だ。信じられねえ・・・（食べ終わる）えい、いくらだい？」

「ええと、具が入って、十六文です。」

「銭が細けえんだ。お前さんの手におくから、手をだしてくんねえ。」

「へい。これに願います。」

「十六文だったな？ひー、ふうー、みー、よー、いつ、むー、なな、やー、何刻だい？」

「へー、四刻（よつ）で。」

「いつ、むー、なな、やー、ここのつ・・・」

あれ・・・余計に払ってるぞ！（古典落語より）