Mandarin Oranges in Edo

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Mandarins are one of the most popular fruit in Japan and some regions were already noted for the fruit during the beginning of the 17th century. During the Edo period, mandarins were offered as gifts by the upper warrior classes and thus mandarins were produced by those regions to meet this demand. At that time mandarins has not yet gained general popularity. After mandarins sent from Kishu to Edo became popular, their production as a commodity increased in Kishu and in other districts, and this lead to a boom in mandarins; Edo's big population created the new demand and became the consumers of this mass production. During the end of the 18th century mandarins were distributed to cold, mountainous districts such as Shinano, that weren't suitable for production of the fruit, although not in such great amounts as for Edo. The demand for mandarins increased in many districts, may be along with the admiration for the culture of Edo. Although Kishu played a role in introducing mandarins to Edo, it lacked the capacity to correspond to the demands for mandarins as a fruit for the masses. During the latter half of the 18th century, the attempt to sell mandarins through direct sales by the government as a means to support the economy in the Edo market failed. Along with the popularization of mandarins, mandarin merchants in Edo worked as small stall-holders in the citizens' market around the streets near Edo bridge (Edobashi Hirokoji). This is because they were not merchants who supplied the demands of the upper warrior classes. Motoori Norinaga has an unfair reputation as a reactionary, but he actually had progressive ideas about history and to support this fact, Motoori pointed out the superiority of the modern mandarin to the ancient tachibana, another kind of orange. One symbolic example of a darker aspect of this historical progress was that the containers that were used to convey mandarins were also used to carry the deserted children who were so often seen in Edo. Nevertheless, a bright aspect of the Edo period is to be seen in the distribution of mandarins and the role of the city of Edo, which was not only the center of administrative power but also a city that functioned as the center of the life of the people.