

# food forum

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by Terutoshi Hibino

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## Sushi

# The History

*This year's Food Forum feature series takes up the topic of sushi, one of the most globally popular Japanese foods.*

—  
by Terutoshi Hibino

Assorted *nigiri-zushi*, accompanied by *gari* Japanese pickled ginger and soy sauce for dipping

**M**any different kinds of sushi have emerged throughout its long history, but perhaps what most commonly comes to mind today is the image of *nigiri*-style sushi called *nigiri-zushi*,\* a hand-pressed sushi made with a bite-sized portion of sushi rice topped with raw seafood. Although *nigiri-zushi* was developed in Japan, the invention of sushi itself did not take place here.

### Sushi origins

Sushi likely emerged from southern China or Southeast Asia centuries ago. Freshwater fish inhabiting rice paddies was used to make the earliest type of sushi called *nare-zushi*, salted fish which was then pickled in a wooden barrel packed with cooked rice. The rice used to make *nare-zushi* was not mixed with vinegar; rather, it was allowed to ferment over the course of several months to half a year, thus souring the fish and imparting it with an acidic flavor. The fully fermented salted fish resulting from this process was called *hon-nare*. Only

the fish was eaten, while the rice, broken down to liquid form, was discarded. What we consider to be the precursor of sushi, therefore, was originally a preserved fish, rather than the food we know today that features fresh seafood and rice.

It is unknown precisely when *nare-zushi* was first introduced to Japan, but the written *kanji* characters for sushi appear in Japanese documents dating from around the mid-eighth century. At the very least, it can be assumed that, prior to that time, some form of sushi would have existed in Japan. Rice cultivation spread widely in Japan during the Yayoi period (400 BCE–300 CE), and given that sushi at this time was made with fermented rice, sushi is therefore believed to have been produced from the Yayoi era onward. Early tenth-century records refer to different types of *nare-zushi*; namely, *funa-zushi* in Shiga Prefecture made with *funa* crucian carp, and *ayu-zushi* in Gifu Prefecture made with *ayu* sweetfish—both of which are still made today.

### “Faster” sushi

From this point, sushi proceeded to evolve and undergo numerous changes. References to *nama-narezushi*, called *nama-nare* for short, appear around the fifteenth century. *Nama* means raw in Japanese, and *nama-nare* refers to partially fermented fish: in this case, fermentation time was reduced to one or two months, and the rice used to ferment the fish, previously discarded in making fully fermented *hon-nare*, was consumed along with the fish. Today, most fermented sushi in Japan is a type of *nama-nare*. Given its abbreviated preparation time, *nama-nare* ultimately contributed to the broader



*Funa-zushi*, a type of *nare-zushi* from Shiga Prefecture

dissemination of sushi—yet people wanted to speed up this fermentation process even further. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fermentation-accelerator was added during the process: some added *koji* mold (primarily *Aspergillus oryzae*), and even today there are many kinds of sushi made using *koji*.

Others added sake or vinegar to accelerate the process. Vinegar was first used merely as a supplemental agent to fortify the distinctive acidic flavor rather quickly—a flavor usually generated through the process of slow fermentation. During the eighteenth century, however, vinegar gradually became the primary source used to create this characteristic sourness, thus reducing the time required for fermentation. By the early nineteenth century, inspired by this flavorful use of vinegar, and by accelerating the overall sushi-making process, non-fermented sushi had emerged. Rather than fermenting the fish, the rice itself was made slightly acidic by mixing in vinegar, creating the combination of vinegared rice topped with seafood that we know today. This was referred to as *haya-zushi*, or “fast-made sushi.” Many contemporary types of sushi arose during the nineteenth century, among them *hako-zushi* “box-pressed sushi,” *chirashi-zushi* “scattered sushi” and *maki-zushi* “rolled sushi.”

It was finally in the 1820s that the prototype of today’s familiar *nigiri-zushi* appeared. Originally, the rice was not topped with raw fish ingredients; rather, the fish used for sushi (referred to as *sushi-dane*) was marinated in salt, vinegar or soy sauce or it was boiled or grilled to prevent spoiling. This sushi was rather sizeable, to the point where just three *nigiri-zushi* would be considered a filling meal. During the Edo period (1603-1867), itinerant stalls in the streets of Edo (Tokyo) sold this sushi as a snack or light meal.

## Nigiri sushi

In the lean days following the Second World War, food—particularly rice—was scarce, thus an ordinance was passed in 1947 prohibiting the unrestricted sale of rice and other rice-related items on restaurant menus. Sushi shops

experienced a heyday. Upmarket and costly, *nigiri* assumed a prestigious and exalted role in the world of Japanese cuisine. Conversely, overshadowed by this formidable reputation, the homemade sushi that people had formerly made on a daily basis or as a festive dish

on special occasions began to experience a slow decline. It was not until the 1970s that the price of *nigiri-zushi* fell as shops began to offer takeout and *kaiten-zushi* conveyor-belt sushi, which became particularly popular with families and children.

## Sushi diversity

Reflecting on over 1,200 years of sushi history, it is striking to note that this dish has evolved from being a means of *preserving* fish over long periods of time, to being among the *least preservable* foods available today. *Nigiri* served in a sushi shop must be eaten immediately to appreciate it at its best. Many different varieties of sushi, each reflecting various locales and regions, are still made in Japan today, albeit less frequently; indeed, even *nigiri-zushi* can be enjoyed on different levels, from reasonably priced versions to expensive gourmet servings. Perhaps it is these diverse types of sushi that sustain the exclusive image of *nigiri-zushi* even today. ◆

\* *The pronunciation of “sushi” changes to “zushi” when a specific name or style is placed before the word “sushi.”*



A child begs for *nigiri-zushi* in the woodblock print *Shimazoroi Onna Benkei Ataka no Matsu* (1844), by Utagawa Kuniyoshi. From the series *Shimazoroi Onna Benkei* (Women in Benkei-pattern kimono). Courtesy of Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library

found a work-around by obtaining business permits as so-called food-processing contractors: for every cup of rice that customers themselves would bring in, the business agreed to make just ten pieces of sushi. This idea, devised by Tokyo sushi chefs, quickly spread throughout the country and became the overwhelming standard. Another postwar shift was the remarkable development in refrigeration technology, which led to the widespread use of raw fish as *sushi-dane*. The practice of dipping sushi in soy sauce before eating became normalized around this time.

During Japan’s rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, *nigiri* made at sushi shops

On the cover *Hamaguri* clams, featured in *Spirit of the Seasons*, page 5; and *nigiri-zushi* made with *maguro* tuna.

### Author’s profile

Terutoshi Hibino was born in 1960 in Gifu Prefecture. He received his BA and MA degrees from Nagoya University, and his PhD in Japanese Culture from Aichi University. He is currently professor at Aichi Shukutoku University and honorary chairman of the Shimizu Sushi Museum (Shizuoka). His publications include *Sushi no Kao* (Portraits of sushi; 1997); *Sushi no Rekishi o Tazuneru* (Following the history of sushi; 1999); and *Sushi no Jiten* (Encyclopedia of sushi; 2015).



# Neo-Yokocho

The Japanese word *yokocho* refers to an alleyway or narrow back street—but the term is more definitively associated with the image of shabby lantern-lit alleys lined with tiny, convivial bars and eateries. Their origins can be traced to the black-market stalls for goods and food that popped up throughout Japan after the Second World War, often around train stations. But as the country was restored, these markets disappeared, and cheap eateries took their place. These were to become the seeds of *yokocho* alleyways where, to this day, diners frequent traditional local *yokocho* pubs and casual restaurants that offer *yakitori*, *oden*, sushi, ramen and more—many of which are open through the night until daybreak. *Yokocho* shops are typically so compact they can accommodate only a handful of patrons, but this elbow-to-elbow intimacy is what makes them so appealing to those looking to socialize while eating or bar-hopping.

*Yokocho* have long had a somewhat down-market reputation as places where middle-aged Japanese salarymen congregate for drinks after work, but recently, modern so-called neo-*yokocho* have grown

popular with younger crowds, tourists and families. Like their well-worn predecessors, neo-*yokocho* are crammed with affordable little restaurants that are rich in both authenticity (diverse menus, reasonable prices) and nostalgia (small, cheerfully crowded spaces). But these retro-chic *yokocho* are springing up in more upscale settings: near sightseeing spots, as part of redevelopment projects, and inside fashionable multiplex retail and office buildings. And along with this new reputation, neo-*yokocho* have also become magnets for hip new restaurants.

Neo-*yokocho* tend to revolve around a unique theme carefully curated by developers or specialty food producers. As an example, one neo-*yokocho* comprises restaurants that serve regional cuisines such as Okinawa *soba*, Hiroshima

*Yokocho are lined  
with convivial  
bars and eateries*



Modern *yokocho* in a commercial building in Toranomon, Tokyo

shell-cooked oysters, Hokkaido seafood-topped rice bowls, and the like. Another features famous Tokyo-based restaurants specializing in *yakitori*, *tonkatsu* pork cutlets and ramen. Some neo-*yokocho* are theme-based: diners can whet their appetites in a quaint European village, or amidst *matsuri* festival décor, or in a nostalgic Showa-era (1926-89) townscape. Yet trendy and novel though they may be, these modern *yokocho* are intent on preserving the same welcoming and easy-going spirit of their humble roots. ●



Neo-*yokocho* in Shibuya offer nostalgic atmosphere and a variety of tastes from around Japan.

# Cutting Styles

This year's *Fundamentals 101* explores Japanese cooking techniques, starting with the basics of cutting.

In Japanese cuisine, cutting technique is critical in determining the unique flavor, mouthfeel and presentation of a particular dish. Each distinct ingredient or cooking method calls for a specific cutting style. Such attention to sensory detail in turn produces a finer appreciation of the food itself. Cutting styles can refer to an object of similar shape; for example, when preparing vegetables, *icho-giri* means ginkgo-leaf (*icho*) cut (*giri*), *hangetsu-giri* is a half-moon (*hangetsu*) cut and *tanzaku-giri* refers to the shape of the *tanzaku* paper strips used to write wishes on during *Tanabata* star festival in July. There are also unique cases of assigning names to certain styles that are only applied to particular vegetables. For instance, burdock root is cut *sasagaki* style: shaving it into pointy bamboo-leaf (*sasa*) forms draws out the vegetable's earthy aroma and breaks up its tough fibers, making it easier to eat. *Shiraga-negi*, literally, "white-hair long onion," is finely shredded *negi* in a style that emphasizes its crispness and elegant presentation. ◆



Sen-giri thread-thin cuts



Kushi-giri comb-shaped cuts



Tanzaku-giri wish-strip cuts



Ran-giri random cuts



Hangetsu-giri half-moon cuts



Icho-giri ginkgo-leaf slices



Shiraga-negi long onion white-hair shreds



Jabara kyuri cucumber bellows cuts



Gobo no sasagaki burdock root bamboo-leaf shavings



Kimpira gobo sautéed sasagaki-style burdock root

# Hamaguri

はまぐり



Hamaguri clear soup

On our cover are *hamaguri* clams, a welcome herald of spring. Known as the hard clam or common orient clam, *hamaguri* are typically found along Japanese coastlines and are in season from February to April.

Remnants of *hamaguri* shells have been unearthed from ancient shell mounds, suggesting they were part of the human diet in Japan thousands of years ago.

Each shell is unique in size and shape: only the matching halves of a particular clam fit together perfectly, and so *hamaguri* are considered an auspicious symbol of marital harmony and happiness. It is therefore customary to eat *hamaguri* in clear soup on festive occasions such as weddings and during the *Hina Matsuri* doll festival, also called Girls' Day, in March.

*Hamaguri* are highly nutritious and rich in minerals, including calcium, iron, and taurine (amino sulfonic acid). Though often eaten in soup, these clams are also grilled, steamed with sake or simmered in soy sauce, mirin and sake to make *nihamaguri*, a classic topping on Edo-style sushi. ◆



# Clam-Vegetable Soup with Sticky Barley

## Serves 4-5

84 kcal Protein 3.6 g Fat 2.6 g  
(per serving)

- 300 g / 2/3 lb. *asari* Manila clams with shells, cleaned\*
- 3 T sake
- 700 ml / 3 C water
- 3 T sticky barley
- 1/4 large onion, 50 g / 1.7 oz.
- 40 g / 1.4 oz. celery
- 4 small *shiitake* mushrooms
- 20 g / 0.7 oz. carrot
- 2 slices bacon
- 1 T canola oil or pure olive oil
- 450 ml / scant 2 C dashi stock
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 T or more Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- Black pepper
- Sea salt
- Italian parsley or chopped green onion for garnish

**1** Wash the cleaned *asari* clams under running water, rubbing the shells against each other. Place clams, sake and water in a saucepan. Cover and cook over medium heat. When the shells of about half the clams open, remove from heat, set aside covered for a few minutes, then strain the broth to remove any remaining sand. Pick out 4-5 clams with shells to use as garnish. Remove the remaining clams from their shells and chop into small pieces.

**2** Boil the sticky barley for 15 minutes or according to package directions, then rinse the boiled barley briefly under running water. Drain and set aside (see photo).



**3** Cut onion, celery, *shiitake* mushroom caps, carrot and bacon into 3-5 mm / 0.2 in. cubes. Parboil the carrot cubes until soft; set aside.

**4** Add oil to a saucepan and sauté the bacon over medium-low heat. When it begins to change color, add the onion. When it turns slightly soft, add the celery and *shiitake* and sauté lightly. Pour in the reserved clam broth and dashi stock. Bring to a boil then reduce heat to low and add the parboiled carrots, chopped clams and bay leaf. Simmer until the vegetables are cooked. Skim off froth (*aku*). Add 1 T soy sauce and a dash of black pepper. Adjust to taste with soy sauce and sea salt; remove from heat.

**5** To serve, spoon about 1 T of the boiled sticky barley into individual bowls then pour in the soup. Garnish with parsley and whole clams.

\* Remove sand by soaking clams in 3% saltwater overnight in a cool place.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto



*This blend of clam broth and dashi stock is abundant in umami, while a touch of soy sauce enhances its gentle taste and aroma. Fiber-rich sticky barley makes this simple clear soup a satisfying, healthy choice.*



*Temaki-zushi is a fun and popular dish to make and eat at home. There are no rules to making temaki-zushi, and no limit to ideas for fillings and their combinations.*

# Temaki-zushi Hand Rolled Sushi

## Serves 4-5

400 kcal Protein 19.5 g Fat 5.6 g  
(per serving)

- 400 ml / 1 2/3 C japonica rice
- 480 ml / 2 C water
- 1 T sake
- 5 cm- / 2 in.-square kombu (optional)

### Sushi vinegar

- 4 T rice vinegar
- 1 1/2 T granulated sugar
- 1 t salt

### Tamago-yaki omelet

- 3 eggs
- 1 T granulated sugar
- 1/2 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1/5 t salt
- Vegetable oil

### Fillings\*

- 4-6 kinds of preferred seafood, e.g. sashimi-grade fish (tuna, squid), smoked salmon, ikura salmon roe, imitation crab meat
- Green vegetables, e.g. cucumber, lettuce leaf, shiso (perilla) leaf, sprouts, watercress, parboiled asparagus
- Takuan pickled daikon radish
- Wasabi paste

- 10 sheets roasted nori seaweed, about 21 cm x 19 cm / 8 in. x 7.5 in., cut in lengthwise halves
- Kikkoman Soy Sauce for dipping

**1** To make sushi rice, cook washed rice, water, sake and kombu together in a rice cooker. When done, put cooked rice in a large bowl, pour sushi vinegar mixture over it evenly, mix and then fan the rice to cool.

**2** To make *tamago-yaki*, mix the omelet ingredients in a bowl and heat the vegetable oil over medium heat in a small non-stick pan. Pour in the egg mixture all at once, stir slightly and cook until set. Place omelet on parchment paper and press gently into a flattened rectangular shape.

**3** Cut the omelet and all filling ingredients into 1 cm- (1/3 in.-) x 7-8 cm- (3 in.-) long pieces.

**4** Make the hand rolls as you eat. Holding a half-sheet of *nori* in one hand, spoon 3 T of the sushi rice and spread onto one side of *nori* in a tilted triangular shape. Spread small amount of wasabi on rice if desired. Add 3 or 4 pieces of your favorite fillings in the center of the rice (see photo). Roll up the *nori* (see photo) and dip in soy sauce to taste.



\* Select *temaki* ingredients depending on personal preference to create a balance of taste and color. Alternative fillings may include any *sashimi*-grade fish such as salmon, boiled shrimp, roast beef, cured ham or tuna salad.

Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation

1 C (U.S. cup) = approx. 240 ml; 1 T = 15 ml; 1 t = 5 ml





# Kikkoman Food Culture Exchange in China

Japanese cooking at Guangzhou Vocational School of Tourism & Business



Mr. Ma Jianxiong (front row, 2nd from left) and Mr. Hitoshi Kakizawa (front row, 3rd from left) with enthusiastic students from the Culinary and Health Department of the Guangzhou Vocational School of Tourism & Business

In November 2023, Kikkoman Corporation hosted a special workshop at the Culinary and Health Department of the Guangzhou Vocational School of Tourism & Business, an institute for secondary education in Guangzhou, China. Kikkoman has held annual workshops on *washoku* Japanese cuisine at this school for ten consecutive years, since 2014. Even during the pandemic, the exchange effort continued with online lectures. This workshop marked the first in-person session in three years. This event is a highly regarded example of one of Kikkoman's management principles: To promote the international exchange of food culture.

This year's guest lecturer was Mr. Hitoshi Kakizawa, who acted as general manager of the Kikkoman-operated Japanese restaurant "紫MURASAKI" which was featured at the Japan Industry Pavilion at Expo 2010 Shanghai China. Mr. Kakizawa introduced participating students to two traditional Japanese dishes: *kuwayaki-don* chicken rice bowl and *sawani-wan* clear soup. *Kuwayaki-don* involves stir-fried chicken seasoned with soy sauce, sesame paste and *sansho* Japanese mountain pepper served atop rice, while the soup is made with julienned vegetables and thinly sliced pork cooked in dashi stock seasoned with soy sauce.



*Sawani-wan* (left) and *kuwayaki-don* chicken rice bowl made by students

After a demonstration by Mr. Kakizawa, students practiced cooking these dishes in groups of four. They were highly motivated to learn about ingredients specific to Japanese cuisine, such as dashi stock, burdock root and wasabi, and approached him with questions about



Students cooking; Mr. Kakizawa advises them on their techniques.

handling these foods and their cooking techniques. In the Q&A session that followed, Mr. Kakizawa encouraged students to be inquisitive, to try many different foods, cooking methods and seasonings, and to ultimately seek their own gastronomic path. Mr. Ma Jianxiong, head of the Culinary and Health Department and representative chef of Guangdong Province, commented on this international exchange event, saying, "This activity will help students broaden their international perspective and gain a deeper understanding of Japanese culture—and also provide them with an opportunity to become a bridge between China and Japan." Through such events, Kikkoman continues to promote the international exchange of food culture by fostering future chefs and developing friendly relationships among food professionals around the world. 🍎

