

food forum

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THE JAPANESE TABLE

Japanese Fusion Cuisine: The Introduction of Beef

by Yo Maenobo

Western-style foods have been steadily integrated into Japanese eating patterns for over one hundred years. Our new feature series looks at Japan's food culture from the viewpoint of wayo setchu: the fusion of Japanese and Western cuisines.

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Japanese Fusion Cuisine: The Introduction of Beef

“Civilization and Enlightenment”

Every nation has experienced at least one defining event or some pivotal turning point in its history—the French Revolution in 1789, or China’s 1911 Xinhai Revolution, for example. In Japan, that event was the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Simply described, the Meiji Restoration marked the end of Japan’s ancient and elaborate feudal hierarchy of warrior clans, to be replaced by a modern nation-state. Perhaps the greatest transformation to characterize the birth of modern Japan, however, was the country’s departure from its policy of national seclusion that had been in place for over 200 years, to a stratagem that called for the systematic introduction of Western culture and thought—the vigorous process of modernization known as “civilization and enlightenment.”

The term *wayo setchu*—literally, the blending of the Japanese and the Western—expresses the new culture that resulted from the mix of traditional Japan with new trends brought in from the West during the mid-nineteenth century. This term also provided a way of establishing a firm grip on Japanese identity, as the country was enveloped by waves of Western culture and technology. No less affected was Japan’s cuisine: when we look at what was happening in the realm of food, we can see that the new key ingredient incorporated into the traditional diet was beef.

Beef Pot Fusion

Many parts of the world have taboos against eating meat. In Japan, the custom of eating beef was rare: it had not been consumed for more than a thousand years prior to the Meiji Restoration. This was because of a number of factors, including the strong influence of Buddhist thought. As a reaction to this taboo, when beef was first introduced in the face of Japan’s ancient dietary restrictions it was quickly perceived to be the essential component of Western cuisine. This perception prompted the Emperor Meiji to add beef to his table soon after the Restoration—a decision which in turn led to the eager acceptance of beef by those who embraced “civilization and enlightenment.”

Obtaining ingredients for Western-style dishes was difficult enough, as was understanding the new cooking methods and manners of eating, and so the easiest way to eat this unfamiliar meat was through a *wayo setchu* compromise: the *gyu-nabe* beef hot pot. A literary work from 1871 entitled *Agura-nabe* (“Cross-legged at the beef pot”) comically portrays its characters dining at ease on *gyu-nabe* at a popular restaurant.

There were two varieties of early *gyu-nabe* beef pot: the more common featured beef slices cooked with *negi* (Japanese long onions) in a soy sauce-seasoned mixture; another, whose recipe was more complex, called for the pot itself to be rubbed with beef tallow before simmering the beef. These are

clearly similar to the two main types of *sukiyaki* that are common today.

The reason we refer to *gyu-nabe* as a fusion cuisine is that it was derived from the concept of an old-time dish, *gan-nabe*, or goose meat pot. Beef was simply substituted for goose meat, and ground *sansho* pepper, the preferred spice for goose meat, was initially used in *gyu-nabe*.

Japanese-Style Beef

One successful chain of *gyu-nabe* restaurants dating from the 1880s was known as *Iroha*. Its novel buildings featured windows with glass panes in five colors, and its *gyu-nabe* comprised an innovative balance of vegetables and meat together with a



Illustration of *gyu-nabe* from the novel *Agura-nabe* by Kanagaki Robun



Sukiyaki



Shabu-shabu hot pot

savory broth. We can get an idea of what the interiors of these restaurants were like from the 1932 painting *Gyu-niku-ten choba* (‘Entrance to a *gyu-nabe* restaurant’) painted by the restaurant founder’s sixth son, who was a Western-style painter (*cover photo*).

The prosperity of specialty restaurants like these would not have been possible without some stable supply of its main ingredient, beef. Between 1882 and 1912, statistics show an increase every 10 years in the number of cattle slaughtered annually for meat in Tokyo: 4,789 (1882); 12,223 (1892); 28,085 (1902); 34,219 (1912)—in all, a more than seven-fold increase over three decades. Considering that

until the Meiji Restoration, cattle had been used mainly for plowing fields and drawing carts—rarely as sources of meat for human consumption—it is impressive that beef cattle raised in Kobe, Omi (present-day Shiga prefecture) and Yonezawa (Yamagata prefecture) had already become famous in such a short period of time.

Most beef consumption during 1882 to 1912 could be attributed to *gyu-nabe* hot pot; only a fraction of Japan’s beef was prepared using ‘authentic’ Western cooking methods. Japanese consumers seeking the sliced meat used in *gyu-nabe* expected their beef from Kobe, Omi, or Yonezawa to be tender, reminiscent of the flesh of fish they were accustomed to eating. Japanese did not show interest in Western cooking methods that focused on making tough meat more tender and delicious; rather, they focused on developing methods of breeding cattle which yielded finely marbled meat. In fact, Japanese have since become so fond of eating thin slices of marbled beef, that expatriates may long for it if they can’t find it in supermarkets or butcher shops.

Japan’s preference for tender,

thinly sliced beef eventually led to the creation of the beef shabu-shabu hot pot—a purely Japanese innovation. When dipped briefly in hot broth, very thin, delicate pink slices of meat change color slightly, and are then enjoyed with various sauces and condiments, including *momiji-oroshi* (grated daikon with red pepper). This novel *wayo setchu* beef dish won nearly instant popularity: the word shabu-shabu had not yet appeared in Japan’s major dictionaries in 1970, but by the end of that decade, the term was part of the popular lexicon, and has since found dining fans worldwide. ●

cover

Gyu-niku-ten choba depicts a glimpse inside a *gyu-nabe* restaurant, by Shohachi Kimura, 1932

Author’s profile

Yo Maenobo was born in 1943. He is a specialist in Japanese Intellectual History and the author of many publications and academic papers such as *Meiji Seijo Ryori Kigen* (The origin of Western-style dishes in the Meiji era), and *Kindai Nihon Kenkyu*, vols. 24 & 25 (Bulletin of modern Japanese studies), *Fukuo giden, moshikuwa engisuru kosei (ken, kon)* (Falsehood : a chronological biography of Fukuzawa Yukichi). His most recent publication is *Mogi-to-Shinsei* (Acculturation in Meiji era Japan).



Meat on display at a modern butcher shop



Japan's Road Stations



The country-wide symbol indicating a *michi no eki* facility.



People enjoy a hot-spring footbath at a *michi no eki*.

Road stations can be a lifeline



Michi no eki offer local products and cuisine.

In the past few decades, more and more people have been enjoying leisurely drives along Japan's charming back-country roads. In response, in 1993, government-designated rest areas called *michi no eki*—literally, “road stations”—were created. As of August 2011 there were a total of 977 road stations on Japan's secondary roads, and that number is steadily growing into an extensive, country-wide network.

Michi no eki are reliable: they must meet specific prerequisites, such as 24-hour parking and toilet facilities. But these stations are not just to stop and stretch—they provide an opportunity to experience small local communities, their produce and cuisine.

Michi no eki function as rest areas and furnish tourists and drivers with traffic information and facts about sightseeing spots. But most stations also have shops that sell regional goods and souvenirs, alongside restaurants that serve dishes made from local ingredients.

Each road station is run and supported by area people, and each reflects its own community by providing unique, locally based services that are often particular to the region: some have hot springs; others might give visitors the opportunity to pick vegetables or fruit. Some stations on the coast offer a chance to seine net for fish, while others have classes in traditional crafts.

Beyond these undertakings, road stations recently stepped up to help people following last year's Great East Japan Earthquake by playing a significant role in affected areas. A road station in Miyagi Prefecture with hot spring spa facilities escaped serious damage and continued to operate after the quake. Every day its huge parking lot was filled with the cars of those impacted by the disaster who came to bathe in the hot springs.

Supermarkets could not resume operations because of the fragmented physical distribution network. Road stations were not affected by this disruption and sold produce delivered directly by local farmers, while station restaurants prepared meals using this produce and fed those who had no other food resources.

Another road station in Iwate Prefecture sold primarily souvenirs prior to the quake; in response to urgent local needs, however, the station supplied fish, vegetables and fruit. In such times of need, *michi no eki* proved that they can serve as a valuable lifeline and essential resource for surrounding communities.

For some years, the World Bank has been studying the positive impact of Japan's road stations on local economies and communities, and envisions setting up similar networks in developing countries based on the beneficial *michi no eki* concept. ◆



Making *Nori-maki*

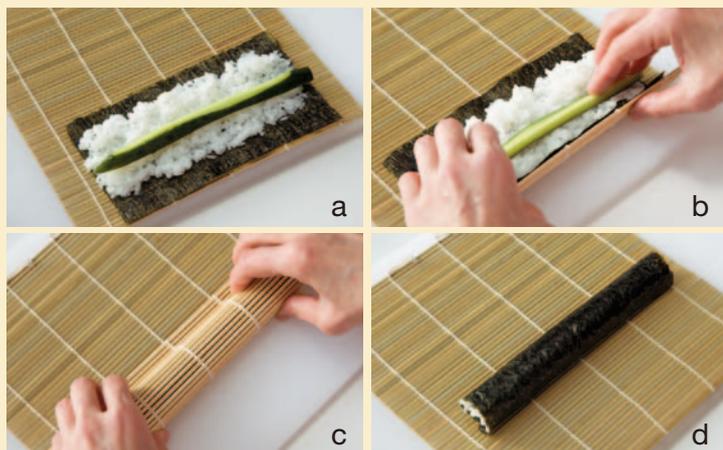
Nori-maki is a handy, easy-to-eat sushi roll. A sheet of roasted *nori* seaweed is tightly wrapped around rice and fillings, such as fish or vegetables. Basically, there are two types of *nori-maki*: *hosomaki*, thin rolls with a single filling; and *futomaki*, thicker rolls with several fillings. *Nori-maki* are served at sushi restaurants and also prepared and enjoyed at home. The following recipe explains how to make single-filling *hosomaki*.



Hosomaki filled with tuna and cucumber

Makes 8 *hosomaki*

- 2 Japanese cucumbers, quartered lengthwise (average 18-20 cm / 7-8 in. long)
- 4 sheets of roasted *nori* seaweed
- 3 1/2 C hot cooked rice



Vinegar mixture

- 2 T rice vinegar
- 2 t sugar
- 4/5 t salt

- 1 Mix hot cooked rice with the vinegar mixture and cool.
- 2 Cut a sheet of roasted *nori* seaweed in half (on the longer end) and place it on a bamboo mat. Hold the vinegared rice gently in your palms so that the rice grains do not scatter. Spread rice out evenly on the *nori* sheet from left to right, but leave uncovered the top and bottom of the sheet. Lay out a strip of cucumber or selected filling, centered atop the rice (photos a, b).
- 3 Tightly roll up the *nori* sheet using the bamboo mat (photo c). Remove the mat from around the roll (photo d).
- 4 Slice the roll in half. Lay the halves side by side, parallel, and cut together to create 6 equal bite-size pieces.

If wasabi is preferred, spread desired amount alongside the filling in Step 2 or add a bit to individual pieces when eating.

DELECTABLE JOURNEYS

Tokyo *Fukagawa Meshi*

Fukagawa meshi is a bowl of rice topped with clams and Japanese long onions cooked in miso. The name *Fukagawa* comes from a town in Koto-ku, a ward in eastern Tokyo. During the Edo period (1603-1867), *Fukagawa* was a prosperous fishing town where many earned a living catching fish and clams, or gathering laver.

The coastal waters around *Fukagawa* were once abundant in *asari*—Japanese littleneck clams—considered the area's specialty. *Fukagawa meshi* is as easy to prepare as it is delicious and nutritious, and for the locals, this bowl of *asari* and rice was a daily treat—a kind of “fast food” for busy fishermen who enjoyed a quick bowl before casting off.

These days there is another type of *Fukagawa meshi* in which clams are cooked with rice. Both types, however, remain familiar favorites and count among Tokyo's culinary stars.





SAUTÉED SHRIMP AND SQUID WITH LEMON SOY SAUCE

Soy sauce is usually incorporated into sautéed or stir-fry dishes during cooking, but this recipe is unique in that lemon soy sauce is poured over the completed dish. Sweetened lemon adds sparkle to the great match of soy sauce, whole grain mustard and sake.

Serves 3 305kcal Protein 23.5 g Fat 13.7 g (per person)



● Snow peas

Lemon Soy Sauce

- 3 T water
- 3 T granulated sugar
- 6 slices of non-treated lemon
- 2 t whole grain mustard
- 1 T + 1 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 4 T sake

- 8-10 shrimp, 230-340 g (1/2 - 3/4 lb.)*, shelled and deveined
- 1 t sake
- 10 snow peas
- 1 T + 3 T olive oil
- 6 halved mushrooms (60 g / 2 oz.)
- 1/2 t lemon juice
- 10 cm/ 4 in. thick part of celery stalk, stringed and thinly sliced
- 1/2 clove garlic, cut in half
- 8-10 small fresh calamari, 230-340 g (1/2 - 3/4 lb.)*; head and body separated, cartilage removed, rinsed and patted dry
- Parsley, leaves only, torn into small pieces
- Salt and white pepper

1 Prepare the lemon slices for the sauce by putting sugar and water in a small saucepan; bring to a boil, then reduce heat. Add 6 lemon slices. After 10 seconds turn the slices over, turn off heat, set aside and allow lemons to steep and cool for at least 10 minutes. Then mince up the lemons and set aside until just before serving, when they will be added to complete the sauce.

2 To make sauce, mix whole grain mustard, 1 T + 1 t soy sauce and 4 T sake in a small milk pan. Bring to a boil and remove from heat; set aside.

3 Slice shrimp into two pieces each, using the *sogi-giri* cutting technique (long, thin diagonal cuts). Sprinkle 1 t sake over the shrimp and set aside.

4 String the snow peas; parboil in salted water, then plunge into cold water and drain.

5 In a frying pan, heat 1 T olive oil and sauté mushrooms over high heat. Add 1/2 t lemon juice and the celery slices; sauté until slightly softened. Remove from frying pan.

6 Put 3 T olive oil into the same frying pan, add garlic and cook slowly over low heat. Remove the garlic from the pan when it becomes aromatic. Add the shrimp. When both sides turn slightly red, add calamari. Stir briefly over high heat.

7 Return reserved mushrooms and celery to the pan; add snow peas and parsley, as well as a light seasoning of salt and pepper; stir.

8 Add the minced lemon to the sauce and mix. Drizzle the sauce over the dish to taste and serve immediately with the remaining sauce on the side.

* The amount of shrimp and calamari should total 340 to 460 g (3/4 to 1 lb.). If more shrimp is preferred, reduce the amount of calamari.



BEEF YAWATA-MAKI (GOBO BEEF ROLLS)



● Gobo

Serves 4 305kcal Protein 18.4 g Fat 14.7 g (per person)

- 1 gobo (burdock) root (200 g / 7 oz.)
- 8-12 thin slices* of beef rib loin (360 g / 12 oz.)

Simmering liquid

- 1 1/2 C dashi stock
- 2 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 2 t Kikkoman Manjo Mirin

- Flour
- 1 T vegetable oil

Seasoning

- 2 T sake
- 2 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 2 T Kikkoman Manjo Mirin
- 1 T sugar

1 Scrape off outer skin of *gobo* with the back of a knife; cut the root into 10 cm / 4 in. pieces then cut lengthwise into quarters. Soak in water for about 5 minutes.

2 Add simmering liquid ingredients and burdock to a pot; simmer until burdock softens, about 15-20 minutes. Set the pot aside to cool.

3 Slightly overlap two or three slices of beef and dust lightly with flour. Place 4 quarters of burdock to form the shape of the whole root atop the beef slices and roll up.



4 In a frying pan, heat vegetable oil. Add the beef rolls, rolled ends facing down, and sauté the rolls evenly over medium to high heat by rolling them in the frying pan. Add seasoning ingredients and roll to coat evenly.

5 Remove rolls from pan before beef is overcooked. When slightly cooled, cut into bite sizes and serve.

* Each slice should be 7.5 cm (3 in.) x 15 cm (6 in.) in size, if smaller, use more slices.

Note: Any dish in which simmered *gobo* is rolled up with beef, eel or other ingredients is called *yawata-maki*, referring to Yawata, a town near Kyoto known for its *gobo*.

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

Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation



Redefining Soy Sauce

In its corporate plan titled Global Vision 2020, the Kikkoman Group has developed four basic strategies whose goal is "Making Kikkoman Soy Sauce a Truly Global Seasoning." Indeed, thanks to the company's multifaceted marketing of soy sauce to complement local tastes and food products around the world, Kikkoman Soy Sauce is already becoming known as a global seasoning.

At home in Japan, Kikkoman is creating various seasonings in response to the ever-growing diversity and simplification of the mainstream diet. These include the Uchi-no-Gohan series, an easy way to help create authentic Japanese dishes. The company has also designed innovative soy sauce containers to preserve the delicious taste of its raw soy sauce. Kikkoman's "Always fresh tabletop soy sauce bottle" is an

airtight container that maintains the fresh flavor of soy sauce for up to 90 days after opening, at room temperature.

Kikkoman is also promoting the research and development of various types of soy sauce, including freeze-dried soy sauce and gelée (jelly) type soy sauce, in order to identify new potential and expanded uses that cannot be achieved with liquid soy sauce.

Among these are the oil-based Taberu-Chomiryo, or "seasoning eaten as food," a combination of freeze-dried soy sauce flakes with fried garlic and other ingredients. This versatile seasoning can accompany boiled vegetables, salads, pasta, cooked rice and many other foods as a topping or by mixing it into the dish. Its crunchy texture and appetizing aroma have the potential to make it an "addictive" seasoning.

In February 2012, Kikkoman introduced a new gelée type soy sauce with a jelly-like texture, vivid soy sauce color and mild aroma. Unlike liquid soy sauce, the gelée does not drip or soak into food ingredients, and so can be used to season only selected portions of food. It can be used as a topping or mixed into a wide range of recipes, including salads, tofu or sautéed chicken making the dish delicious as well as attractive.

Kikkoman is committed to actively stimulating domestic demand for soy sauce through advanced product development, while maintaining high quality as the manufacturer of the top soy sauce brand. Kikkoman continues to expand the possibilities for soy sauce, make proposals for dietary styles to suit the times and different cultures, and promote the notion of healthy mind and body. ◆



Soy sauce with the fragrance of freshly shaved dried bonito



(Clockwise from top) Freeze-dried soy sauce flake, chicken stock flavor, fresh yuzu (citrus) flavor



Gelée type soy sauce ginger flavor and ume (plum) bonito flavor