

# food forum

Kikkoman's quarterly intercultural forum for the exchange of ideas on food

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## THE JAPANESE TABLE

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by Terutoshi Hibino

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## Sushi

## Transition and Diversification

*In this final installment in our series on sushi, we look at the development of the contemporary identities of sushi, both in Japan and globally.*

by Terutoshi Hibino

*Kaitenzushi salmon nigiri-zushi*

From the latter half of the 1950s into the early 1970s, Japan was in the throes of rapid economic growth. During this time, sushi came to be considered an “ultra-luxury food,” and its high prices reflected this perception. Some sushi chefs were renowned for using very select ingredients, while the interior décor of many high-end sushi restaurants conveyed elegance and sophistication. The numbers of such places gradually fell as Japan’s economy flattened, but the idea had been planted that sushi was a food to be enjoyed on very special occasions.

### Price and accessibility

During those decades, however, sushi prices concurrently began to fall. One factor was the emergence of stores specialized in take-home sushi. Many take-out stores were established as part of larger chain stores selling pre-packaged sushi: these adopted a “central kitchen” business model, wherein preliminary ingredient preparation is performed at a centralized facility and follow-up processes of cooking, packaging and sales are handled by individual affiliated stores. Centralized mass production and streamlined operations made it possible to provide sushi at lower prices.

The advent of *kaitenzushi* conveyor belt sushi also led to lower prices and broader accessibility. The first *kaitenzushi* shop had appeared in 1958, but not until the 1970 Osaka Expo did the concept become widely known—and its spread throughout the country was a 1980s phenomenon. The *kaitenzushi* concept shocked conventional sushi shops, as it introduced a completely innovative serving style. Rather than making individually requested sushi at the counter on the spot, *kaitenzushi* is pre-made and set out on small plates that are carried around the counter on a conveyor belt, tempting diners to pick them up as they wish. Prices for sushi were often indicated as being “at market price,” without a clear listing on the menu, but *kaitenzushi* clearly indicates a set price per plate. Moreover, the sight of the conveyor bearing tantalizing dishes is especially entertaining for youngsters, making affordable *kaitenzushi* very popular with families. *Kaitenzushi* essentially automated the sushi counter business: today, the number of these shops continues to grow, not only in Japan, but globally.

### Acceptance overseas

It took a considerably longer time for sushi to be generally accepted in overseas markets. In the United

States, for example, the notion of eating raw fish was once considered “uncivilized,” with no possibility of accepting something like sushi. During the 1980s, more people became health-conscious and came to appreciate the healthy, low-fat Japanese diet. In the 1990s, globalization triggered a more nuanced perception of Japanese foods as being chic and trendy, especially in the world’s major cities. Sushi was first embraced by well-off diners and foodies before attracting the attention of the general public. On the heels of the now globally popular Japanese anime and manga subculture, interest in Japanese cuisine continues to grow apace, and sushi has come to be embraced by the broader strata of society. Today there is considerable attraction—not only in sushi itself—but in sitting at a counter across from a sushi chef and engaging in casual conversation. The notion of a special relationship between chef



*Packaged nigiri-zushi*

and customer, of eating sushi made specifically to one's individual taste, has come to hold great appeal. Sushi shops introduced the format of close communication between chef and customer that was previously unknown in Western restaurants.

### Appealing imports

There are many long-established sushi shops in Japan focused on upholding tradition, and which are reluctant to change—particularly those that have been passed down over a number of generations. Yet overseas sushi establishments have introduced some surprising culinary innovations. Hand-rolled *temaki-zushi*, for example, was once made only for kitchen staff behind the scenes in Japan as a meal, but overseas sushi chefs judged its flexible format ideal to try out unconventional sushi ingredients suitable for local palates. The now-ubiquitous California roll, formed with white rice on the outside and *nori* seaweed inside, was created in response to a sense that the black color of *nori*-wrapped sushi was unappealing to non-Japanese diners, and California rolls are sometimes sprinkled with bright orange *tobiko* flying fish roe for a dash of color and flavor. Newly created sushi concepts like the California roll and novel *temaki-zushi* combinations were later exported to Japan and popularly adopted; moreover, such inventive, offbeat rethinking of how sushi can be prepared has contributed to attracting new fans around the world.

Another sushi style that has grown out of imports is the popularity of salmon *nigiri-zushi*, an ongoing hit in *kaitenzushi* shops. Salmon was once shunned as a sushi ingredient in Japan, as locally sourced fish was believed to carry parasites. When it was found that Scandinavian salmon was uncontaminated, imports surged and fueled the tremendous popularity of salmon sushi, not only as *kaitenzushi*, but in regular sushi shops and take-outs.

### Individual style

During Japan's rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, many sushi dishes once prepared at home virtually vanished, replaced by low-cost store-bought *nigiri-zushi*. In this time when it was common for people to work long hours, many seem to have concluded that, rather than painstakingly make home-made sushi from scratch, packs of reasonably priced pre-made sushi were good enough to satisfy one's cravings.



California roll



Decorated *inari-zushi*

Recently, however, in light of society's changing attitudes on life-work balance, even busy employees are spending more time at home, and the number of those challenging themselves to make their own home-style sushi has increased. They may not attempt the kind of *nigiri-zushi* made by a professional, but tend to opt for making *maki-zushi* rolls, *chirashi-zushi* "scattered sushi" or pressed *hako-zushi* for a meal or special event, sometimes livened up with unique garnishes.

Another product of the times is the decorative *futomaki-zushi* thick sushi roll. These large rolls

incorporate original artistic designs such as flowers and patterns which are only revealed when the roll is sliced. Decorative *futomaki* originated as a local family tradition in Chiba Prefecture, where recipe competitions are held each year. The trend of making these creative rolls has spread across Japan, thanks to recipe books, social media and hands-on workshops.

*Inari-zushi* thin deep-fried tofu pouches filled with sushi rice is easy to make and decorate with

innovative garnishes.

Gourmet fairs around Japan feature inventive, locally made *inari-zushi* and invite children to create their own using favorite ingredients like cheese, ham, *nori* and more. Events like these allow people to individualize and enjoy sushi without complicated preparation or equipment.

Sushi has evolved over time amid considerable social change and continues to do so. From its image as a high-end gourmet counter experience to the current mass-market accessibility of *kaitenzushi*, today's sushi has gone definitively mainstream. Sushi prepared at home has also experienced transformations, from what are considered classic recipes to new, individualized forms with tempting, creative embellishments. The world of sushi has expanded and diversified, and its popularity shows no sign of waning. ●

**On the cover** Boiled *zuwai-gani* snow crab, featured in *Spirit of the Seasons*, page 5; and artistic designs revealed inside decorative *futomaki-zushi*.

#### 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).



# *Yaki-imo* Roasted Sweet Potato

Hot *yaki-imo* roasted sweet potato is Japan's iconic cold-weather snack. After being introduced to Japan in the seventeenth century, sweet potatoes were being cultivated as a resilient crop in many regions across the country by the eighteenth century. It did not take long for *yaki-imo*—nutritious, filling and tasty—to become the popular treat it remains today.

Cooking methods for preparing roasted sweet potatoes evolved from steam-roasting in earthenware ovens or pots to stone-roasting, following the Second World War. In winter, it was common to see street peddlers trundling stone-filled iron-box stoves on carts and hear their distinctive tuneful call of hot stone-roasted *yaki-imo* for sale. Until the 1970s, there were many such peddlers; today, that enticing aroma of fresh-roasted *yaki-imo* wafts behind small trucks that prowl the streets—accompanied by recorded versions of the peddler's old familiar voice.

For many in Japan, this sweet, smoky aroma and distinctive *yaki-imo* call evoke the nostalgic essence of winter. But that perception is being challenged, thanks to innovative cooking technologies, new potato varieties and creative dishes. While people once could only buy *yaki-imo* from roaming vendors in colder weather, it is now sold in supermarkets and convenience stores, freshly roasted in-store using special electric ovens. It can even be made at home in sleek portable roasters.

Agriculturally, selective sweet potato breeding has introduced new varieties to the market, each with unique sweetness, color and texture. The Beniharuka, for example, is sticky, rich and

*A sweet,  
healthy and  
nostalgic treat*



*Yaki-imo* truck

sweet as honey when roasted, whereas the Silk Sweet has a light, fluffy texture with a more subtle sweetness. A growing number of shops specializing in roasted sweet potatoes feature these new varieties topped with ice cream, butter or cream cheese, or in novel recipes like puddings, frozen shakes, shaved ice or *yaki-imo* salad—to name only a few. And while hot *yaki-imo* on a cold day is still one of Japan's simple pleasures, now, hot or cold, consumers can enjoy sweet potato sweets regardless of the season. ●



Beniharuka *yaki-imo*



*Yaki-imo* topped with ice cream

# Puréeing

*Our overview of Japanese culinary techniques continues with puréeing.*

Traditional Japanese puréeing involves pressing food with a spatula through a fine mesh sieve or strainer—an indispensable process when preparing Japanese dishes and confectionery, which often call for a delicate texture and elegant presentation. Japanese puréeing removes lumps and fiber for a smooth, creamy consistency. The sieve mesh is often made of stainless steel and comes in a range of sizes: the finer the mesh openings, the smoother and more consistent the purées. To purée using a mesh sieve, place it over a bowl and rub boiled or softened foods against the mesh with a spatula, pressing the food through the sieve into the bowl at the same time. This technique is often used when preparing sweet potato and tofu; for example, the traditional Japanese New Year's dish of *kuri kinton* sweet potato paste with sweetened chestnuts. ◆

## Sweet potato

Puréed sweet potato becomes smooth as its fibers break down. It should be puréed quickly after boiling, as its starchy ingredients tend to harden and turn sticky as they cool, making it more difficult to pass through the mesh. Press small amounts of sweet potato at a time with the edge of a spatula, sliding it towards you.



## Tofu

Place a small amount of drained tofu on the sieve and press through the mesh. The tofu becomes velvety and consistent when puréed, making it easier to mix with other ingredients. Creamy puréed tofu is typically used to make *shira-ae* vegetable dishes dressed with seasoned tofu and ground sesame seed.



*Kuri kinton*

# Snow Crab



Crab hot pot

**Our cover features the Japanese**

**snow crab**, one of four major crabs in Japan. Snow crabs, called *zuwai-gani*, are a gourmet winter delicacy typically sourced from the cold waters of Hokkaido and the Sea of Japan. To protect snow crab populations, strict fishery regulations designate permitted fishing periods, capacities and crab sizes, based on the type of crab and the region.

Snow crabs are marketed and sold under a “branded” designation and are referred to by specific names based on their origin. For example, *Echizen-gani* are male snow crabs caught in Fukui Prefecture, largely from the Echizen coast; those caught off the coast of Ishikawa Prefecture are known as *Kanou-gani*; and those from the San’in region, including Tottori and Shimane prefectures, are branded as *Matsuba-gani*.

Though the shells of all male snow crabs are larger than those of the female of the species, the distinctive long legs of both are packed with meat. Healthy, protein-rich snow crab meat is tender with a delicate texture and a sweet, umami-rich taste. It can be served raw, grilled or boiled in dishes such as *shabu-shabu* and hot pots. ◆



# Crab and *Yuba Ankake* Rice

## Serves 3

581 kcal Protein 30.7 g Fat 14.7 g  
(per serving)

- 50 g / 1.8 oz. bok choy
- 20 g / 0.7 oz. dried *yuba* tofu skin (sheet, bite size pieces or layered pieces)\*
- 6-8 medium brown mushrooms
- 320 ml / 1 1/3 C dashi stock
- 200 ml / 5/6 C soymilk
- 2 t Kikkoman Light Color Soy Sauce
- 1 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 1/2 T cornstarch mixed with 1 1/2 T water
- 30 g / 1 oz. freshly boiled crabmeat, shelled (canned or frozen can be used)
- Salt
- 400 g / 2 1/2 C hot cooked rice
- 1 t grated ginger

**1** Parboil bok choy and drain. Cut white stems 1 cm / 0.4 in. wide and leaves 2 cm / 0.8 in. wide.

**2** Prepare dried *yuba* sheet by breaking into roughly 5 cm- / 2 in.- square pieces.



**3** Cut brown mushrooms into slices 2 mm / 0.08 in. thick.

**4** To make *ankake* sauce,\*\* pour the dashi stock, soymilk and soy sauces into a saucepan with the sliced mushrooms and heat over medium-low heat. When it begins to simmer add the pieces of dried *yuba* and reduce heat, then stir in the starch mixed with water until the sauce thickens. Add the crabmeat and bok choy with a pinch of salt.

**5** Portion out the cooked rice into individual bowls. To serve, spoon the *ankake* sauce over the rice and garnish with grated ginger.

\* *Yuba*, also known as tofu skin, is the thin film that forms on the surface when soymilk is heated. This recipe calls for dried *yuba*; if it has thick layers, soak in water to soften before use.

\*\* *Ankake* is any dish covered with a savory, broth-like sauce thickened with starch. The sauce may be enjoyed over rice, noodles, tofu, omelets, fish or meat.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto



*The combination of dashi and soymilk creates a rich and creamy taste. The thick ankake sauce brings all the ingredients together to make this an easy-to-eat rice-bowl dish.*



*Shinjo steamed fish cakes are often made of white fish or seafood paste; adding grated yam creates a fluffy texture. The light clear dashi soup adds a subtle, elegant flavor to this dish.*

# Crab *Shinjo* Steamed Fish Cake with Dashi Soup

## Serves 4

268 kcal Protein 52.2 g Fat 1.7 g  
(per serving)

- Several fresh watercress stems\*

## Shinjo cakes

- 100 g / 3.5 oz. freshly boiled crabmeat, shelled (canned or frozen can be used)
- 200 g / 7 oz. fresh white fish filet
- 2 T grated *nagaimo* Chinese yam
- 1/2 egg white
- 1 T cornstarch
- Salt

## Dashi soup

- 960 ml / 4 C dashi stock
- 1 t Kikkoman Light Color Soy Sauce
- 1 t salt

- Yellow yuzu citrus zest for garnish

- 1 Parboil the watercress stems and cut into pieces 3 cm / 1.2 in. long. Set aside.
- 2 Flake the crabmeat and set aside. Finely mince the uncooked white fish with a knife.
- 3 Using a *suribachi* mortar and *surikogi* pestle,\*\* grind the minced fish into a smooth paste. Add 2T of the grated yam to the mortar and mix with the pestle until well blended. Next, incorporate the egg white, cornstarch and a pinch of salt into the paste, mixing until the paste is uniform. Fold in the crabmeat using a spatula until evenly combined.
- 4 To make the *shinjo* cakes, divide the crab-fish paste into four equal portions. Wet hands with water to form each portion into a cake. Place the four cakes on a heat-resistant tray in a steamer for 10 minutes over medium-high heat.
- 5 While steaming, warm the soup ingredients in a saucepan.
- 6 Place each *shinjo* cake in an individual soup bowl and gently pour in the soup from the side of the bowls. To serve, garnish with the watercress and yuzu zest.

\* Authentic *shinjo* soup is garnished with *mitsuba* Japanese parsley; watercress is substituted here.

\*\* If *suribachi*/*surikogi* are unavailable, use food processor to make smooth paste.

Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation

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





# Kikkoman Global Website Presents "Kikona's Kitchen"

*Introducing Videos Featuring a Day in the Life of Kikona*



Kikona is Kikkoman's official brand mascot, created in 2010 to convey concepts related to the Kikkoman corporate slogan, "seasoning your life." Recently, Kikkoman has posted animated Kikona videos on the "Kikona's Kitchen" page of our global website to introduce and familiarize audiences with this cheerful character.

On the site, currently there are eight short, light-hearted videos that run about ten seconds each and feature Kikona in various situations. In "Kikona is Kind to Vegetables," after accidentally dropping some vegetables, she rushes to pick them up. In "Master of Kitchen Knife Skills," Kikona skillfully carves a carrot into the familiar shape of a Kikkoman Soy Sauce bottle.

More Kikona videos will be added in the future, while Kikkoman will continue to share the Kikona character with consumers to foster positive feelings towards cooking and eating—including not only "delicious," but also "fun," "happy" and "enlightening," thereby contributing to creating memorable food experiences and enriching the dietary lives of people around the world.

## "seasoning your life"

This is Kikkoman's core corporate slogan. In a time of constant change, some things remain the same—among them, the delicious memories created through the tasty encounters, enjoyment and fun that all come from sitting down to a meal with family and friends. "Seasoning your life" embodies Kikkoman's aim to fill the world with the joys of food and provide ever more delicious memories.

## About Kikona

Kikona is Kikkoman's official brand mascot, whose design evokes the image of a red-capped Kikkoman Soy Sauce tabletop dispenser. With Kikona's help, we wish to share our joy of food with our customers and encourage the next generation of young people to take an interest in food and become aware of its importance.



## About "Kikona's Kitchen"

Find out all about Kikona, plus read unique content that encourages us to think about what it means to eat well. Kikona shares tips for making fun recipes, including colorful "Deco Maki" decorative sushi rolls and seasonal "Deco Ben" decorative bento lunch boxes. ◆



<https://www.kikkoman.com/en/culture/kikona/>



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