

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



THE JAPANESE TABLE

Washoku and Health

Global Nutrition and Longevity

by Yukio Yamori

In 2013, Japanese cuisine, or washoku, was included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. This year, our Feature series will examine the relationship between washoku and health, from a medical perspective. This first installment considers how nutrition influences longevity.

4

SPECIAL REPORT:

Japanese Cuisine Around the World
Fumio Ito

—

6

MORE ABOUT JAPANESE COOKING:

Sea Bream with Yacon *Oroshi* Sauce
Gomoku-mame Simmered Beans and
Diced Vegetables

—

8

KIKKOMAN TODAY:

Kikkoman *Washoku* Initiative Part 3:
In Praise of Japanese Cuisine

Washoku and Health

Global Nutrition and Longevity



From left: Shish kebab, a common meat dish in the Caucasus; Grilled tofu stand in Guizhou, China

According to World Health Organization (WHO) statistics, Japanese women, who live to an average age of 87, currently hold the top spot in the world in terms of longevity. Japanese men, too, have moved into the lead, with an average age of 80. The average lifespan for both men and women, at 84, is the highest in the world.

Investigating Diet and Health

When I began my research in the field of medicine in the 1960s, however, the Japanese lifespan was short. Strokes had just taken over from tuberculosis as the leading cause of death in Japan. At that time, strokes—whether stemming from ruptured blood vessels, or blocked blood vessels in the brain—were considered vascular conditions that inevitably accompanied advanced age. Stroke is a condition found only in humans, and it was impossible to study the problem through experiments with animals. From among rats predisposed to high blood pressure, a condition suspected to be a cause of strokes, my colleagues and I were able to establish a new strain which could successfully develop stroke. These rats contributed greatly to the elucidation of the causes of stroke, and to the global development of new antihypertensive drugs. Our

study found, for the first time, that if hypertensive rats ingested large amounts of salt, they suffered from strokes within a short period of time; but strokes could be prevented if they were fed a diet of soy or fish protein, potassium-rich vegetables, magnesium, and calcium-rich dairy products. This discovery shed light on the relationship between nutrition and vascular conditions, and prompted the WHO to encourage further research in this area.

WHO CARDIAC Study

In 1985, in order to examine the relationship between health and the way people eat, I launched the Cardiovascular Diseases and Alimentary Comparison (CARDIAC) study, which surveyed over 60 different regions around the world (*see map*). Even now, nutrition surveys are carried out primarily through individual interviews. The CARDIAC study involved 200 men and women in their early fifties from each survey area. We recorded blood pressure figures and took blood samples on an empty stomach; but most significantly, we developed a special double-bottomed cup to collect 2.5 percent of voided urine throughout the day, and thus, for the first time in medical history, allowed for precise, accurate samples to be

collected over a 24-hour period from people going about their daily lives. Because of this original method, international comparisons of nutrition became possible.

At the time of this study, the Caucasus region, situated between the Black and the Caspian Seas, had some of the highest longevity rates in the world. Fruit was ample, and people consumed yoghurt regularly; they also ate about twice as much meat as Japanese, but it was grilled or boiled, reducing the amount of fat consumed, thus instances of excess blood lipids were few, and this seemed to be a factor in their longevity. There were also many centenarians among the Uighur people who lived in oases along China's Silk Road. They ate generous amounts of nuts and fruit, such as



A Masai *kibuyu* gourd, which holds cow's milk for making yoghurt.



This map indicates the 61 regions studied within 25 countries by Dr. Yamori's team during their examination of the relationship between health and nutrition. *WHO CARDIAC Study, 1985-2005. Map courtesy Yukio Yamori.*

grapes, along with rice cooked with plenty of vegetables. The water drawn to the oases from snowmelt off the Tian Shan mountains and the waters from this region's unique karez (Turpan) irrigation system were rich in magnesium and calcium, and instances of high blood pressure were few. The study also found that the Masai of Tanzania added no salt to their diet: their only sodium intake was through the two to three liters of yoghurt they drank daily, ranking as the world's lowest, corresponding to 2.3 grams of salt per day. Among men and women in their fifties, none had high blood pressure. Their average life expectancy was not recorded, but if not for infectious diseases, it would have been considerable.

In Asia, people with low levels of sodium intake were the inhabitants of Guangzhou, which is famous for its food. People there eat abundant amounts of fresh vegetables and seafood, as well as tofu and other soy-based products. Their sodium intake was low, at six grams per day, a WHO target amount at the time, and high blood pressure was rare. In the province of Guizhou, adjacent to Guangzhou, the Miao minority are known for their longevity, so we conducted health examinations there in 1987 and 1997. This region is known for its karst topography

formed from the corrosion of limestone, and is ill-suited to rice cultivation. Staples there are a combination of corn and soybeans. (The origins of soy-based foods such as *natto* fermented soy beans and tofu can be traced to this region.) Particularly impressive in their diet is a type of noodle made from dried tofu, as well as freshwater fish. In Okinawa, where people eat tofu, fish and pork, the diet is a fusion of traditional Japanese and Chinese dishes. This area emerged in the 1990s as having the greatest life expectancy in Japan, and Okinawa Prefecture declared itself a "world longevity region."

How We Eat and Live

Our findings showed that deaths from stroke in Japan peaked in 1965, which was also the high point as far as blood pressure for both men and women. By the end of the Second World War, Japanese were suffering from malnutrition; but after the war, thanks to nutritious school lunches and hard-earned economic growth, protein intake increased. Salt intake was high, at slightly over 10 grams per day on average, but this gradually declined to the national target at that time of 10 grams. Thirty years later, by 1995, Japan's incidence of strokes had decreased to nearly 30 percent

of that in 1965. The inhibiting effect of protein on strokes first demonstrated by hypertensive rats was eventually corroborated through long-term analyses of more than 250,000 stroke patients, which took place over the course of 40 years. By the end of the twentieth century, improvements in the traditional *washoku* diet—once quite high in sodium and low in protein—were what granted Okinawa, and Japan as a whole, the world's greatest life expectancy. Food is the staff of life, and the way we eat today is precisely what determines how long we will live. ●

Translated by Lynne E. Riggs

cover

Typical Okinawa cuisine includes the popular *goya chanpuru*, a dish of stir-fried bitter melon with tofu and *ashi-tebichi* stewed leg of pork, seasoned with soy sauce, mirin and sugar.

Author's profile

Yukio Yamori, M.D., Ph.D.; born 1937 in Kyoto. Dr. Yamori is a pathologist specializing in preventative medicine and nutrition. After serving for many years as professor at the Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies at Kyoto University, he is currently professor at Mukogawa Women's University, as well as Director of the Mukogawa Women's University Institute for World Health Development, President of the Hyogo Prefecture Health Promotion Association, and professor emeritus of Kyoto University. In 1998, he was awarded Japan's Medal with Purple Ribbon. He has authored many books, including *Choju no Himitsu* ("Secret of long life") and *Daizu wa Sekai o Sukuu* ("Soybeans will save the world").



Düsseldorf

**SPECIAL
REPORT**
from Germany

Japanese Cuisine Around the World

Our annual Special Report takes a look at people who are introducing Japanese cuisine around the world. This issue features Fumio Ito, former sushi chef at Germany's very first Japanese restaurant, and later the founder of Restaurant KIKAKU in Düsseldorf. Here, he reminisces about his experiences in bringing the tastes of Japanese food culture to Germany.



Fumio Ito

Born 1937, Chef Ito began his apprenticeship in Tokyo at Ginza's Kikaku restaurant in 1953. In 1959, he worked as the first sushi chef in Hong Kong, then moved to Germany in 1964 to work at Nippon-Kan in Düsseldorf, Germany's first Japanese restaurant. In 1977 in Düsseldorf, he opened his own business, Restaurant KIKAKU, and currently acts as advisor to its management company, Dream Team Düsseldorf GmbH. In 2013, Chef Ito received the prestigious Minister's Award for Overseas Promotion of Japanese Food from the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.



Restaurant KIKAKU

Klosterstraße 38, 40211 Düsseldorf, Germany
Tel: +49 (0)211 357853
www.kikaku.de

Germany's First Japanese Restaurant

The Nippon-Kan restaurant was established in Düsseldorf in 1964, under the auspices of the Japanese government and the support of several Japanese corporations. The restaurant was envisaged as a project to introduce Japanese culture to Germany, and as a center of friendship and exchange. Nippon-Kan was Germany's very first Japanese restaurant: the first floor featured *zashiki* (a tatami room), a tea ceremony room, a tempura counter, table seating and a courtyard garden. My workplace, the sushi section with counter and tables, was in the basement. There were about 600 Japanese living in Düsseldorf at the time, mostly men posted overseas without their families. Our clientele consisted mainly of these men and the business people they brought in to entertain. At first, Germans would mostly eat tempura or sukiyaki, and try one or two single pieces of sushi afterwards, as they were

unfamiliar with eating fish raw. Only Japanese customers ordered sushi as a main dish.

Finding Ingredients

We had great difficulty getting ingredients in the early days of the restaurant. We could not import rice from Japan, and when we cooked locally bought rice, it wasn't sticky enough. We had no *wasabi* either, and had to make do with horseradish. For fresh fish, we would go to Hamburg, the closest German city on the sea. We could get cod, herring and flounder, but that was not enough for a good array of sushi, so we would go to Rotterdam or to Ostend port in Belgium. After a while, we began to drive about once a week to the Paris fish market as well, where they sold plenty of fish and seafood from the Mediterranean. In the beginning, we brought in our own *nori* dried seaweed, soy sauce, sake and other items by container shipment from Japan; later, things got easier when we began to purchase them



The sushi counter at Nippon-Kan (1964)



Opening of Restaurant KIKAKU (1977)

KIKAKU Sushi Lounge
at Düsseldorf airport



Nigiri-zushi as served at Restaurant KIKAKU



through Pacific Trading Co., Ltd. (today JFC Japan Inc.), a member of the Kikkoman Group.

Restaurant KIKAKU Opens

In 1977, I opened Restaurant KIKAKU in Düsseldorf, a Japanese restaurant featuring mainly sushi. At that time, Japanese restaurants here were expensive places where Japanese entertained clients, but Restaurant KIKAKU served sushi and home-style dishes at reasonable prices. Obtaining a business permit was an arduous process, and once I got past that stage, I had to raise funds to get started. We did our best to keep costs down, like painting the walls ourselves. From the time we opened, there were lines outside the restaurant for both lunch and dinner, which luckily has continued ever since. To accommodate guests outside in line, we only accepted reservations for seats within one hour from opening time. Dignitaries and celebrities came, but we asked them all to line up like everyone else. Sharing tables with strangers is generally not done in Germany, but



Making sushi for a company party (1985)

we explained this Japanese practice, and got people to adopt this custom.

The items on the menu that were most popular were home-cooked dishes like *tatsuta-age* deep-fried marinated chicken, *kinpira-gobo* sautéed burdock and carrot, and salmon dressed with *unohana* bean-curd lees. Sometimes we made *udon* noodles and even pounded *mochi* glutinous rice cakes. In the early days, I only slept about four hours a night, but luckily, just before opening, I had found an apartment in the same building as the restaurant, which made life much easier.

Sushi in Eastern Europe

The restaurant closed on Saturdays, when I would often travel to countries in Eastern Europe, responding to requests to make sushi for company parties or for special events. Once, I went to make sushi for the Japanese Club in Poland. I cooked the rice beforehand, placed it in a rice server (*ohitsu*) and had to put it into checked baggage. At the baggage claim carousel, I found that the server had broken and the rice had spilled out. Local households quickly helped out by bringing in their rice cookers, and we cooked up fresh rice.

Popular Sushi and Good Sushi

Today, 39 years later, 70 percent of our German customers order sushi or sashimi. Düsseldorf is more international than most other

German cities, so people here have no qualms about eating raw fish. In fact, sushi has really become part of the local fare, and is sold in supermarkets here. Restaurant KIKAKU also has a sushi shop at Düsseldorf airport, and one customer from Stuttgart who eats there about once a month says, "This is the only place I can get such good sushi." Now that sushi has become popular, it is important more than ever to provide really good sushi.

Thoughts for Young Chefs

The basic spirit of service is a feeling of gratitude on the part of the person providing it, what we call in Japanese *omotenashi*, or "hospitality." Also, tidiness and cleanliness are essential to the restaurant business, so those are the very first things we make sure our young staff master thoroughly. Young people trained at Restaurant KIKAKU who later move on to other shops win praise, because they have mastered the fundamentals that prepare a person to be a professional chef. I hope that every young person who works in a restaurant will dream of owning their own. Some of our people have left Restaurant KIKAKU to set up business in Berlin, or even in other countries. If they have been properly trained and have confidence in what they do, customers will come to them, even if their shop might only have 10 seats. ◆



SEA BREAM WITH YACON OROSHI SAUCE



◆ Yacon

Makes 2 appetizers

91 kcal Protein 10.8 g Fat 3 g
(per piece)

- 100 g / 3 ½ oz. yacon
- 3 T apple cider vinegar
- 2.5 cm / 1 in. piece ginger, peeled and grated
- 2 t Kikkoman Light Color Soy Sauce*
- 1-2 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 100 g / 3 ½ oz. sashimi-quality sea bream filet (deboned and trimmed)**
- Salt
- Fresh coriander leaves, chopped
- Fresh lettuce leaves

- 1 To prepare garnish, peel yacon, cut 2 thin slices and julienne them; place in water and set aside. Grate the remaining yacon and reserve any juice.
- 2 In a microwave-safe bowl***, mix 5 T of the grated yacon together with its juice and 3 T apple cider vinegar. Microwave for about one minute at 800 watts until it comes to a boil.
- 3 Cool slightly, add the grated ginger and both of the soy sauces. Set aside.
- 4 Slice the sea bream filet into pieces about 3-4 mm / 1/8 in. thick (see photo) and cut each in half lengthwise.
- 5 Place the sliced fish in a bowl, add a scant pinch of salt and mix. Leave for five minutes.
- 6 Drain the julienned yacon and blot off excess moisture with paper towel. Sprinkle on a few drops of apple cider vinegar, mix and set aside.
- 7 Just before serving, stir 2 T of the yacon-vinegar mixture from Step 3 into the fish. Taste and add a little more of this mixture if needed****, followed by the coriander leaves. Mix lightly.
- 8 Serve on fresh lettuce leaves, garnished with the julienned yacon.



* If light color soy sauce is unavailable, substitute ordinary soy sauce.

** Instead of sea bream, cooked cocktail shrimp are a tasty option. Mix shrimp with 2 T of yacon-vinegar mix and allow to sit 30 minutes. Just before serving, stir in 1 T of yacon-vinegar mix and chopped fresh coriander leaves.

*** A large, deep bowl is recommended to prevent boiling over.

**** Unused sauce keeps several days in refrigerator.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto

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



GOMOKU-MAME SIMMERED BEANS AND DICED VEGETABLES

Gomoku means several mixed ingredients. Healthy *gomoku-mame* simmered beans and vegetables typically includes soybeans with root vegetables. Often made in advance and kept chilled for a few days, this is a type of pre-cooked side dish referred to as *kyōbi-sai*, also popular in bento lunch boxes.



◆ Soybeans

Serves 6

109 kcal Protein 6.9 g Fat 3.2 g
(per person)

- 1/2 C dried soybeans, about 100 g / 3 1/2 oz.
- 1,200 ml / 5 C water
- 2 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 100 g / 3 1/2 oz. burdock root
- 100g / 3 1/2 oz. carrot
- 1/2 block of konjac, 100 g / 3 1/2 oz.
- Kombu, 4 x 4 cm / 1.5 x 1.5 in.
- 2 T granulated sugar
- 2 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce

- 1 Rinse the soybeans and soak overnight in 1,200 ml / 5 C water in the refrigerator.
- 2 To reconstitute the dried shiitake, soak for one hour in enough water to completely cover the mushrooms. Drain, then discard the tough ends; cut the mushrooms into pieces 7 mm / 0.3 in.
- 3 Scrub the burdock with a brush. Cut in half lengthwise (or, if very thick, cut in quarters lengthwise), then into pieces 7 mm / 0.3 in.
- 4 Peel the carrot and cut into cubes about 7 mm / 0.3 in. Cut konjac into 7 mm / 0.3 in cubes. Parboil in a pot for one minute, then drain.
- 5 Dampen kombu with water to make it easier to cut; using kitchen shears, cut into pieces 7 mm / 0.3 in.
- 6 In a saucepan*, place soybeans in water to barely cover them, and bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce to low heat and continue to simmer for about one hour until soybeans are softened, while skimming off foam (*see photo*). While simmering, top up with water if necessary to barely cover soybeans.
- 7 To the already simmering soybeans, add shiitake, burdock, carrot, konjac and kombu. Simmer over low heat for about 10 minutes, until vegetables are tender.
- 8 Add granulated sugar and simmer for 10 minutes; add soy sauce and simmer another 10 minutes. Increase to medium-low heat and continue to simmer until liquid has almost evaporated, then remove from heat.
- 9 Before serving, allow the saucepan to cool so the flavor of the various seasonings can penetrate into the ingredients.



* Saucepan diameter 18-20 cm / 7-8 in.



Kikkoman *Washoku* Initiative Part 3: In Praise of Japanese Cuisine



Kikkoman's *washoku* panel discussion; from left: H. Kakizawa, T. Takahashi, H. Nakahigashi, Y. Takahashi and N. Yanagihara

In December 2015, Kikkoman sponsored a panel discussion in Tokyo titled, "Praising the Appeal of Japanese Cuisine: *Washoku* is Wonderful! Part 3," in which four young chefs of Japanese cuisine participated. This event was first held in 2013, when "*washoku* traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese" were added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. This third iteration of the Kikkoman *washoku* forum involved panelists from both previous sessions, including Mr. Takuji Takahashi of Kinobu; Mr. Hisato Nakahigashi of Miyamasou; Mr. Yoshihiro Takahashi of Hyotei; and Mr. Naoyuki Yanagihara of Kinsa-ryu Yanagihara School of Traditional Japanese Cuisine. The panel was led by coordinator Mr. Hitoshi Kakizawa, and included discussion on the theme, "The future of *washoku* domestically and internationally—how *washoku* will evolve."

Panelists focused on Japanese cuisine overseas, and they touched on their observations and experiences during

Expo Milano 2015. One talking point, also demonstrated at the Expo event, was that *washoku* places particular emphasis upon the appropriate selection of ingredients. The chefs reflected on how they choose local ingredients and determine cooking methods in order to retain the essence and appeal of authentic Japanese food. They also considered other topics, including: techniques that create various food textures by using specific knives for each ingredient; how Japanese dietary culture appreciates fresh fish; and how the characteristics of Japanese cuisine reflect and express nature and its seasons.

Comments by the panelists made it clear that, by participating in events in Milan during the Expo, and through a variety of other overseas activities, they strongly recognize that Japanese cuisine is spreading worldwide, and that overseas culinary students have a high level of interest and competency to learn Japanese *washoku* techniques.

In closing this event, participants shared the following concepts: *washoku* must be passed on, building on the knowledge of previous generations; to work on *washoku* laboriously is to prepare it with care for the sake of those who taste it; and *washoku* generates pleasant times and touching moments through food-related communications. This final concept is based on the notion that *washoku* produces *wa*, a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere, through *shoku*, food. With *washoku* characterized by such concepts, we must continue to convey it to future generations.

Some days following their panel discussion, the four chefs held a series of cooking classes under the theme, "*Washoku* dishes we want to pass down." Among their topics, they examined how such *washoku* dishes should be presented, and how they should reflect a sense of the seasons. Through dialogue and cooking class opportunities such as these, Kikkoman hopes to create a chance to discover—and rediscover—the appeal of *washoku*.

Kikkoman is committed to promoting the international exchange of food cultures as part of its management philosophy. The company supports the tradition of Japanese food culture by communicating its appeal both domestically and internationally, and so contributes to the rich and varied global food culture. ◆



Cooking demonstration by Chef T. Takahashi, who introduced a home cooking menu (right).