

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



THE JAPANESE TABLE

Annual Events and Traditions

Summer: From *Hatsugatsuo* to *Tanabata*

by Yoichiro Nakamura

Our current series features special foods and traditions related to seasonal observances of the old lunar calendar. This second installment begins with the early summer season's first appearance of bonito (hatsugatsuo), and continues to the Tanabata festival on the seventh day of the seventh month.

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Summer: From *Hatsugatsuo* to Tanabata



Early Summer Foliage

Around the time the new foliage of early summer begins to emerge in the fields and the mountains turn green, the cuckoo can be heard calling in the woods, and schools of bonito travel the Kuroshio (Japan Current), which passes close by Japanese shores. A haiku written by poet Sodo Yamaguchi (1642-1716) captures these images, which Japanese so closely associate with early summer: *Me ni wa aoba / yama hototogisu / hatsugatsuo.* (*Green leaves everywhere / cries of the lesser cuckoo in the hills / first bonito of the season*). The people of Edo (present-day Tokyo) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries spent considerable sums to obtain the first bonito of the season. This fish remains an indispensable part of the diet, consumed not only as sashimi, but dried and smoked into blocks of *katsuobushi*, which provides essential umami for dashi and adds flavor in cooking. Today in Europe, *katsuobushi* is so popular that a Japanese company recently set up a facility in France to produce it there locally.

Rice Planting and *Koinobori*

In early summer, farmers prepare to plant rice. The rice seedlings are prepared, then groups of several seedlings are planted in rows in

the paddies. The busiest season of paddy planting (*ta-ue*) is around Boys' Day, which traditionally fell on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, now celebrated as Children's Day on May 5. This annual event evolved from traditions introduced from China, including the belief that the strong aroma of stalks of sweet flag would repel pestilence and misfortune. Placing sweet flag leaves on the eaves at the entrance to a house the day before Children's Day, then adding them to the bath that night, is thought to assure good health throughout the year. Another custom symbolizing prayers for healthy boys involves raising carp-shaped streamers called *koinobori* high on a pole in the home garden. As suggested by a legendary carp that swam up a waterfall and became a dragon, *koinobori* evoke the aura of a vigorous and auspicious fish. The origin of the carp streamers is similar to that of New Year's *kadomatsu* pine and bamboo festoons (*see Vol. 31 No.1*). To entice the deities of heaven to descend to the fields, assuring an abundant harvest, it was customary to erect a high bamboo pole affixed with tree branches or other garlands to serve as a welcoming abode for the visiting deity.

Kashiwa Mochi and *Chimaki*

Two foods customarily made for Children's Day are *kashiwa-mochi* and *chimaki*. *Kashiwa-mochi* is rice-flour dough dampened with water, steamed and kneaded, then wrapped around a ball of sweet adzuki bean paste. This is then folded into a preserved oak (*kashiwa*) leaf. *Chimaki* is rice flour and arrowroot (*kudzu*) powder dampened with water and kneaded into dough, then wrapped in bamboo leaves, bound with string and steamed.

During this time of rice planting, young bamboo shoots were harvested to eat, either by simmering or grilling. New buds sent forth by plants and trees in the early summer were considered precious and nourishing. Fern fronds (*warabi*) were soaked to remove harshness and simmered with seasonings, while buds of the Japanese angelica tree (*tara no me*) were plucked for tempura. The leaves of one species of cherry (*Oshima-zakura* or *Prunus speciosa*) are salted and fermented in barrels to bring out their distinctive aroma. These leaves are used to wrap glutinous rice cakes or a crêpe-dough layer filled with sweet adzuki bean paste to make *sakura-mochi*. Japanese were quick to take advantage of nature's rich bounty in early summer.

From left: *Hatsugatsuo* sashimi, first bonito of the season; *kashiwa-mochi* and *chimaki*; simmered bamboo shoots and *wakame* seaweed; *tanzaku* cards hang from a bamboo branch.



Gion Festivals and Dumplings

In the sixth month of the lunar calendar (July by today's calendar), Gion Festivals—the most famous of which is held by Yasaka Shrine in Kyoto—are held throughout the country. These fall in the middle of the extended rainy season when pestilence was likely to spread, and were thought to forestall the spread of disease. As the festivals coincide with the season for reaping barley, another important staple, offerings to the gods traditionally include *mugi-okowa*, steamed barley mixed with glutinous rice. A powder made of toasted and crushed barley was sprinkled in the path of *mikoshi* portable shrines paraded during the festivals. Another traditional offering is *komugi dango* (wheat dumplings), balls of wheat flour wrapped in broad leaves and steamed.

At the end of the sixth month, local shrines perform *nanashi-noharae*, the “summer health and well-being ceremony.” The ancients believed that illness and ill-fortune were the result of defilement, and that by holding certain rituals, they could purify themselves and stay healthy. On the day of the ritual, a large wreath of fresh thatch is erected at the shrine's entrance, and people purify themselves by following a prescribed ritual for

passing through it. An associated practice was patting the body with a paper cut in the shape of a human figure, transferring to the paper any ailment or impurity, then entrusting the paper to the shrine. The priests of the shrine collected the papers and floated them downriver to banish disease and disaster, literally washing away trouble in readiness for the second half of the year.

Tanabata

Tanabata falls on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, and is today celebrated on July 7. This festival is based on an ancient Chinese legend that tells of two bright stars (Altair and Vega) on opposite sides of the Milky Way who meet once a year on this night. Throughout Japan it is customary to make special wishes on Tanabata: dew was once collected from the large leaves of the *satoimo* taro to make black *sumi* ink for writing one's wishes on long *tanzaku* cards which were hung from a branch of bamboo. The branches were then erected either under the eaves of the home or in the fields. In some regions, the gods of Tanabata were honored by making *yuri-meshi*, steamed rice with lily bulb (*yurine*), and were presented with offerings that included a fresh *yukata* summer kimono and *obi*

sash. In the emperor's court, the day's celebrations included making *sakubei* pastries of rice and wheat flour in the shape of a twist of silk thread, to be placed as offerings. That practice lingers in the custom of exchanging gifts of *somen* noodles (see p. 7) during this season. Among the distinctive Japanese practices for Tanabata, it was believed that the gods made the rounds of the rice paddies on that night to bestow a prosperous harvest, and so horses would be made of straw to facilitate the deity's movements. Much care and many beliefs surrounded the culture of rice, fostering customs of rice planting, weeding of fields, irrigation control, and other practices that culminated in a successful harvest. 🍀

Translated by Lynne E. Riggs

cover

Koinobori carp streamers represent prayers for healthy boys.

Author's profile

Yoichiro Nakamura, Ph.D.; born in 1943. A specialist in historical and folklore resources, Prof. Nakamura was formerly professor at Shizuoka Sangyo University (SSU), and is currently guest researcher at the SSU Institute of Research and Development. His major works include: *Iruka to nihonjin* (“Dolphins and Japanese,” 2017); *Myanmar: Ima, ichiban shiritai kuni* (“Myanmar: the country we're most curious about,” 2013); *Bancha to shomin kissashi* (“Bancha tea and the history of popular tea drinking,” 2015); and *Washoku bunka booklet 2: nenchu gyoji to shikitari* (“Washoku culture booklet, no. 2: annual events and traditions,” 2016).



CLOSE-UP JAPAN

Traditions and trends
in Japanese food culture



Clockwise from top:
Soba, tempura and
sushi food models

Food Samples

Outside the entrance to any variety of eateries—whether a family restaurant, café, sushi shop or ice cream parlor—chances are there is a showcase of realistic food models on display, literally illustrating the menu. People gather around the array of dishes and decide whether or not to enter, simply by looking over these true-to-life food replicas. Japan's food samples have long been famous among tourists who cannot read Japanese menus,

Designed to be
as tempting as
possible

helping them understand what is available and how to order.

Japan's food samples originated some one hundred years ago. In the early 1920s, triggered in part when urban department stores opened cafeterias, Tokyo's Shirokiya department store was the first to set out wax samples of their dishes so people could see in advance what to expect. Around 1990, those paraffin wax samples began to be made of more durable vinyl chloride, which allowed them to appear more authentic. Today they are a common sight at many restaurants, as well as in food shops where, for example,

customers may make their selections by comparing the different fillings of models of cut-open *manju* (adzuki-filled buns). Beyond restaurants and stores, miniature food sample accessories such as magnets and mobile phone charms are popular as collectibles or souvenirs.

Many food samples are custom-made to reflect the unique ingredients and specialties of individual businesses and, given their tremendous influence on customer preferences, they are designed to look as tempting as possible: eye-catching compositions include a fork hovering over a plate of pasta, or chopsticks lifting noodles from a bamboo tray of soba. In fact, hyper-realistic replicas of foods such as fried rice, tempura or noodles are often the result of meticulous handcrafting, and their elaborate details stimulate the appetite. ◆



Miniature food sample accessories



Japanese Hotel Breakfast Buffets

The Japanese might categorize a typical breakfast as either Japanese-style or Western-style.

In Japan, many hotels serve both Japanese and Western dishes for breakfast, and even those who may not necessarily eat a Japanese breakfast at home may choose to do so when at a hotel.

Often, hotels serve buffet-style breakfasts, where



popular Japanese offerings include rice, miso soup, grilled fish, *kimpira-gobo* sautéed burdock root and carrot, *hijiki-no-nimono* simmered sea vegetable, tofu, *natto* fermented soybeans, pickles, nori and soft-boiled eggs. Accompanied by rice and miso soup, people enjoy creating a personal Japanese-style breakfast from this tempting variety of side dishes. ◆



Japanese-style breakfast choices: a tempting buffet (left); and typical set menu

TASTY TRAVEL



Shiga

Shiga *Funa-zushi*

Funa-zushi is a type of fermented sushi made using crucian carp from Lake Biwa, Japan's largest lake, located in Shiga Prefecture. This famous local cuisine is characterized by its strong scent and tart flavor, the product of fermentation by lactic acid. Descriptions of *funa-zushi* can be found in the *Engishiki* (927), a compendium of rules and procedures from the Heian period (794-1185); the dish was also paid as tribute to the Imperial Court. *Funa-zushi* is prepared preferably with female crucian carp with roe. It is salted for two to three months, layered with cooked rice and then pickled for another six months, during which time the meat and bones become soft. This fermentation method without vinegar is called *nare zushi*, and *funa-zushi* is considered the precursor to modern sushi. In recent years, the numbers of crucian carp have decreased, and *funa-zushi* has become expensive. To eat *funa-zushi*, the rice is removed if preferred, and the fish is sliced thinly. ◆



Funa-zushi



HOJICHA ROASTED TEA JELLY

Japanese typically drink a cup of tea following their meals to clear the palate. Western desserts can be rich, but this tea-infused jelly has a refreshing quality and is a particularly fine complement to a meal of fresh sushi or sashimi.



◆ *Hojicha* leaves

焙じ茶

Serves 6

59 kcal Protein trace Fat 0 g
(per person)

- 3 T *hojicha* roasted tea leaves*
- 600 ml / 2 ½ C boiling water

Hojicha jelly

- 9-10 g (0.32-0.35 oz.) unflavored gelatin powder
- 500 ml / 2 C *hojicha*

Syrup**

- 6 T light color honey, e.g. acacia
- 220-260 ml / about 1 C water
- 1-1 ⅓ T Kikkoman Soy Sauce

1 Place *hojicha* leaves in a teapot, pour boiling water over them. Cover and steep for 5 minutes.

2 Pour the hot steeped *hojicha* into a bowl, straining through a paper coffee filter. Measure out 500 ml (2 C).

3 From this amount, pour 50 ml (1.7 oz.) into a different bowl. Cool quickly by placing this bowl in ice. Sprinkle in gelatin and allow to stand for 1 minute.

4 Add the remaining 450 ml of hot *hojicha* to the bowl, mix to dissolve gelatin completely and allow to cool. Pour this *hojicha*-jelly liquid into a container and refrigerate until set.

5 In a fresh bowl, add honey and whisk well with 60 ml (¼ C) of the water. Add the remaining water and soy sauce little by little; adjust amounts of soy sauce, water and honey to taste, depending on honey variety and thickness.

6 After it has set, spoon out the *hojicha*-jelly into individual serving bowls. Serve with plenty of syrup poured over the jelly.

* *Hoji* means "roasted." *Hojicha* is a distinctive type of Japanese tea made by roasting green tea leaves; it contains less caffeine than other Japanese teas.

** This syrup is very light and not too sweet.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto

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



GOSHIKI FIVE-COLOR SOMEN NOODLES

Somen are very thin, delicate noodles, often enjoyed as a summer dish in Japan and eaten cool. In this recipe, *goshiki* literally means five colors, and this dish features five different-colored topping ingredients: cucumber, surimi, tuna, shiitake mushrooms and egg.



● *Somen*

Serves 4

436 kcal Protein 18.1 g Fat 8.9 g
(per person)

- 4 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 120 ml / ½ C water

Simmering liquid

- 120 ml / ½ C shiitake soaking water
- 1 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 2 t granulated sugar

Tsuyu sauce

- 120 ml / ½ C Kikkoman Hon Tsuyu*
(dipping sauce for noodles)
- 360 ml / 1 ½ C water

- 1 Japanese cucumber
- 6 surimi imitation crabmeat sticks
- 1 can of solid tuna in oil, 70 g / 2.5 oz.

- 1 egg
- 1 t granulated sugar
- Salt
- Vegetable oil

- 300 g / 10 oz. *somen* noodles
- Green onion or scallion, cut into thin strips
- Ginger, grated

1 In a bowl, soak dried shiitake mushrooms in water for 3 hours. Drain, reserving the soaking water, and remove the stems. Pour soaking water into a saucepan with soy sauce and sugar, add shiitake and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce to low and simmer until the shiitake have absorbed almost all the liquid, then cut them into thin strips.

2 Mix Hon Tsuyu with the water to make *tsuyu* sauce.

3 Cut the cucumber into thin strips 5 cm / 2 in. long, and loosen surimi sticks for easy eating. Drain canned tuna of excess oil and break into pieces.

4 Beat egg; add granulated sugar and a pinch of salt. In a small lightly oiled non-stick frying pan, pour in just enough egg to thinly coat the bottom. Cook over low heat and flip when egg surface sets; remove from pan and cut into thin strips 5 cm / 2 in. long. Repeat this process until all the raw egg is used.

5 In a pot, boil *somen* noodles following package instructions. Drain, rinse with water and drain again.

6 Place *somen* in individual serving bowls with shiitake, cucumber, surimi sticks, tuna and egg. Garnish with green onion and ginger. Pour *tsuyu* sauce over the *somen* just before eating.

* If unavailable, *tsuyu* sauce can be made by bringing to a boil the following: 360 ml / 1 ½ C dashi stock; 60 ml / ¼ C Kikkoman Soy Sauce; 2-3 T Kikkoman Manjo Mirin. Allow to cool.

Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation



LuciPac™ A3 Detects Invisible Contaminants



Lumitester™ (left) and LuciPac™ A3 indicate contamination levels.



Clockwise from top: LuciPac™ A3 used to monitor hygiene in a hospital; monitoring food factory machines; wiping a knife with the special swab stick.

In April 2017, Kikkoman Biochemifa Company, a Kikkoman Group company, launched the LuciPac™ A3, a new reagent for use in monitoring hygiene. The new A3 reagent applies the same light-emitting principle as fireflies, which Kikkoman has been studying since the 1980s. It has long been understood that the use of firefly luciferase, an oxidative enzyme that produces bioluminescence, enables the highly sensitive detection of invisible contaminants such as microorganisms and trace amounts of food residue, and is therefore effective in monitoring food hygiene. However, as luciferase is generated only within the body of a firefly, mass production of luciferase was considered difficult. In 1988, Kikkoman succeeded in reproducing artificial luciferase in mass quantities. Since then, the company has utilized this technology to develop various hygiene monitoring systems.

In April 2017, Kikkoman developed a testing reagent which can simultaneously detect ADP (adenosine diphosphate), AMP (adenosine monophosphate) and ATP (adenosine tri-phosphate); ADP and AMP are unable to be detected by conventional testing reagents. ATP, the energy used by all living organisms, is considered a contamination

index. ATP can be broken down into ADP and AMP through fermentation, enzyme reactions and reactions to changes such as heat. Kikkoman's technology led to the successful development and launch of the new reagent LuciPac™ A3, which features super-high sensitivity detection properties. The use of the reagent is simple. Wipe any object using the special swab stick, return the stick into the LuciPac™ A3 and shake well. Within about 10 seconds, the degree of contamination is measured by the Lumitester™. In conventional ATP wiping tests, detection of ADP and AMP is not possible, but the LuciPac™ A3 can measure both ADP and AMP in addition to ATP, and detects even minute quantities of microorganisms and food residue of meat, fish, processed foods, etc. There are high expectations for the use of this new technology in areas where hygiene monitoring is indispensable, including food factories, restaurants, school cafeterias, and cleaning management in medical practices and health education services. "Providing products and services related to food and health" is one of Kikkoman's business fields. By expanding this technology, the company aims to contribute to a healthy and enriched dietary life for people around the world. ◆