

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



THE JAPANESE TABLE

Japanese Noodles

Soba

by Ayao Okumura

Japanese cuisine includes many different types of noodles, each with its own history and traditions. In this third installment in our series about the diversity of Japanese noodles, we take a look at soba buckwheat noodles.

4

CLOSE-UP JAPAN:
Kaitenzushi

—

5

JAPANESE STYLE:
Chopsticks for Cooking

TASTY TRAVEL:

Yokosuka Kaigun Curry

—

6

MORE ABOUT JAPANESE COOKING:
Soba, Walnut and Watercress Salad
Deep-Fried Stuffed Eggplant
with *Somen* in *Tsuyu*

—

8

KIKKOMAN TODAY:
KFI 45th Anniversary and U.S.-Japan Food
Distribution Symposium/Wisconsin-U.S.-Japan
Economic Development Conference

Japanese Noodles

Soba



Soba, or buckwheat, originated in central Asia and was brought to Japan sometime between 1500-500 BCE. Rice grown in paddies became prevalent in Japan following this time, but soba continued to be cultivated mainly for food in impoverished rural areas, where rice could not be grown: poor farmers subsisted on soba and sold part of their harvest. Records dated 722 indicate that Japan's emperor ordered soba to be cultivated as emergency food when there was a scanty rice harvest.

Early Soba Dishes

Soba was originally eaten either as a gruel called *soba-gayu*, made by boiling hulled soba in water, or as thick *soba-zosui* porridge, made by flavoring the gruel with miso. As well, hulled soba groats were pounded into flour with a mortar and pestle; the flour mixed with hot water was kneaded and made into *soba-gaki*. *Sobagai-mochi* cakes consisted of flour and water mixed then baked in the hot ashes of a brazier or open fireplace. *Soba-gaki* and *sobagai-mochi* were sometimes eaten with miso.

Records from 1480 suggest that a noodle-like form of soba first appeared among the Kyoto aristocracy, but the most definitive record which clearly indicates the

appearance of soba noodles is dated 1574, mentioning soba as being made at the Joshoji temple, located in the Kiso district of the Shinshu region (present-day Nagano Prefecture). By the early seventeenth century, soba had been introduced in Edo (today's Tokyo), and there it flourished as never before. One reason was its proximity to areas where soba was grown, which included the greater Edo area. Another was that, by the end of the seventeenth century, the population of Edo had risen to over one million, as samurai and their servants, tradesmen and others from throughout the country gathered to build the city and engage in commerce. The majority of these were single men for whom soba was prized as a fast food. The spread of waterwheel mill-ground flour and the availability of simple hand-turned stone mills also facilitated the production—and thus the consumption—of soba noodles.

Soba Styles

Soba noodles were served in basically three styles during the Edo period (1603-1867): the first was in restaurant-like shops where furnishings and serving utensils were carefully selected. The noodles were freshly made, cooked and served to patrons

who were predominantly wealthy locals, members of the literati or those from the samurai class. The second was in *tsuji-uri*: these were shanty-like stalls that sold soba wherever people gathered—near temples, at river or canal docks and at construction sites. These stalls were stocked with dishes of pre-cooked soba noodles to which hot broth would be added upon ordering; the food was then eaten while standing. The third was in *furi-uri*, where peddlers sold soba from portable stands that were cleverly designed to hold drawers of pre-cooked soba, hot broth and a portable cook stove. Peddlers carried their stands from one place to another, hawking their noodles. Hailed by a customer, they set down their stall, placed the soba in a bowl and poured hot broth over it. Customers ate standing up in this case as well.

Soba Noodle Flours

The three basic kinds of soba noodles that are eaten today developed around the mid-1700s, according to how the flour was ground. *Inaka soba* (country-style soba) uses soba flour made from hulled soba, where the pellicle remains attached. This is a dark-colored but highly nutritious soba that was originally sold in shanty shops and by peddlers. *Sarashina soba*,

From left: *Tempura soba*; *kamo-namban soba*; *sarashina soba*; *cha soba*



the highest quality soba, is served at soba shops where the flour is made by refining the bran layer from the groats and grinding only the very center of the white inner part of the kernel. *Nami soba* (regular soba), the type most generally served in soba shops, is made from flour mixed with the remaining white inner part (not used in *sarashina soba*) and pellicle parts. Typically, 20 percent wheat flour is mixed with 80 percent soba flour to prevent the noodles from being crumbly in nature, as soba flour does not contain gluten. In some instances, however, the percentage of wheat flour is increased up to 40 percent, and occasionally grated *yamato-imo* (mountain yam) is mixed with the soba flour. Soba made of either 100 percent *sarashina* flour or *nami* flour is referred to as *ki soba* or *jyu-wari soba*—which literally means that the noodles consist of 100 percent soba flour; such noodles are served freshly made and freshly cooked, and are considered “gourmet” soba by connoisseurs. Another variation is *cha soba*, where ground green tea is added to the flour for fragrance and which imparts a light green color.

Varieties of Soba

Until the sixteenth century, basic soba sauce was a liquid made by adding *katsuobushi* dried bonito flakes to *tare-miso*. *Tare-miso*

involved mixing miso with water, boiling it down and straining it. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it came to be replaced by dashi made from *katsuobushi* seasoned with *tamari* soy sauce and sake. From the late eighteenth century, basic soba sauce began to be made using *katsuobushi* dashi as a base with soy sauce and mirin, which produces the sweet savory flavor that is familiar today.

Then as now, ways of eating soba vary. *Zaru soba* is cooked and chilled, served on a bamboo mat called a *zaru* or a wooden steamer called a *seiro*. Each mouthful of noodles is dipped into a cool savory sauce. Contemporary variants of *zaru soba* include *kamo-seiro soba* accompanied by a warm dipping sauce containing morsels of *kamo* duck meat. Another is chilled *hiyagake soba*, served in a large bowl to which cool broth is added, accompanied by tempura or chopped long onion and other toppings. *Kake soba* or *atsukake* noodles are served in a hot broth, and *tamago-toji soba* is made by cooking a beaten egg into the broth. *Kamo-namban soba* is served in a broth cooked with duck meat and long onion. *Arare soba* is topped with small scallops, and *hanamaki soba* is topped with a generous helping of toasted and shredded *nori* seaweed—but the

most popular soba with toppings is *tempura soba*, featuring two tempura shrimp.

The trendsetters of old Edo showed their true spirit in transforming a food once used to stave off starvation into something urbane and chic. Today, itinerant soba peddlers have disappeared, yet countless soba shops remain, and stand-up soba counters can be found in train stations and on street corners. All over Japan, one can hear the sound of people enjoying soba: to better savor the fragrance and flavor of the soba, it is essential to slurp one’s noodles. ●

cover

Dainihon Bussan-zue (ca. 19th C.) by Utagawa Hiroshige III. This print depicts the process of making soba in the Shinshu region. Courtesy Waseda University Library

Author’s profile

Ayao Okumura, Ph.D. was born in 1937 in Wakayama Prefecture. A former professor at Kobe Yamate University, Dr. Okumura is a specialist in traditional Japanese cuisine. He is currently part-time professor at Osaka City University Graduate School, lecturing on the establishment and structure of Japanese food culture; as owner of cooking studio Douraku-tei, he is known for his authentic reproductions of historic Japanese dishes and menus. His various publications include *Nippon men shokubunka no 1300 nen* (“1,300 years of Japanese noodle food culture,” 2009; revised 2014).



CLOSE-UP JAPAN

Traditions and trends
in Japanese food culture



Selecting a favorite dish as it passes by on the belt



Empty plates pile up in front of diners to be tallied for the bill.

Kaitenzushi

There are two types of sushi restaurants in Japan: the typical *sushiya*, where customers sit at a counter or tables and order sushi directly from sushi chefs; and *kaitenzushi*, where sushi dishes travel on slow-moving conveyor belts directly in front of diners seated at a counter or tables—and when they see a dish they like, they simply pluck it off the belt.

The *kaitenzushi* concept originated in the 1950s and is said to be the brainchild of the owner of a casual stand-up sushi shop who, short of staff, streamlined the serving process by introducing moving conveyor belts—an idea possibly inspired by brewery production lines. When the very first *kaitenzushi*-only restaurant opened in 1958 in Osaka, the notion of displaying tempting, immediately available sushi dishes in motion was enthusiastically embraced and quickly won popularity. Since that time, *kaitenzushi* restaurants have

Kaitenzushi are
economical and
family-friendly

rapidly multiplied beyond Osaka and now can be found throughout Japan and around the world.

In some *kaitenzushi*, customers sit not only at the counter, but at booths within arm's reach of the moving belt. Dishes originate from the kitchen, where staff place standard sushi dishes on the belt and fill special orders. Diners may simply wait for a favorite dish to pass by or order specific items from staff or via touch panels. Special orders appear on the belt displaying an “ordered dish” tag for pick-up. Tea powder and hot water taps are placed along the counter for customers to make their own tea.

The final bill is determined by the color or pattern of individual dishes, each of which denotes a different price. The values of the empty plates are added up, and payment is made at a cashier.

Because *kaitenzushi* are economical and family-friendly, menus include alternative dishes for children and those preferring something besides sushi, such as ramen, *udon*, french fries, fried chicken and ice cream. Some *kaitenzushi* provide entertainment like roulette games, which diners play based on the number of plates they consume. Challenging the classic low-budget *kaitenzushi* restaurants, however, are an increasing number of gourmet *kaitenzushi* that not only offer fresh-caught seafood, but also locally sourced “farm-to-table” products. Today, as both budget and gourmet *kaitenzushi* flourish, diners are faced with ever-more appetizing sushi options to satisfy both wallet and palate. ●



Chopsticks for Cooking

Chopsticks play an essential role not only during a meal, but also while cooking and presenting Japanese food. Depending on ingredients and preparation methods, chopsticks of varying materials, thicknesses and lengths are used. Cooking chopsticks are referred to as *saibashi*, the most common of which are made of bamboo or wood. *Saibashi* are normally about 30 centimeters long—much longer than chopsticks used for eating—in order to keep hands far from the cooking flame. Most households use them for a

variety of food preparations, including stirring and mixing. Serving chopsticks called *manabashi* are about 18 centimeters long. These have pointy tips and are made of metal or bamboo, and are used to place and lay out food such as sashimi on serving plates. *Manabashi* made of bamboo are used with lacquerware and other delicate dishes. Chopsticks used when frying, called *agebashi*, have handles designed not to retain heat and metal tips to prevent the absorption of oil. ●



From top: *Agebashi*, *saibashi*, *manabashi* and regular chopsticks



Mixing eggs with *saibashi*



Frying tempura using *agebashi*

TASTY TRAVEL



Yokosuka, Kanagawa

Yokosuka Kaigun Curry

Yokosuka Kaigun (Navy) Curry is a famous local “gourmet dish” from Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture. The Japanese Navy had been based here since the nineteenth century, and its forces were served Japanese-style curry. In 1908 an official Naval cooking reference book was published, which included curry recipes. Today the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force is based in Yokosuka, and they serve curry on Fridays. In 1999, Yokosuka popularized this curry to promote and revitalize the city. Official gourmet Yokosuka Kaigun Curry is based on a recipe in the official cooking reference book that calls for curry powder, flour and beef tallow, instead of ready-made curry roux; it includes beef or chicken, carrots, onions and potatoes, with chutney served on the side. Variations of this curry can be found throughout Yokosuka, as individual restaurants strive to create their own unique signature dish. To be considered official Yokosuka Kaigun Curry, however, the dish must be accompanied by salad and a glass of milk to make it nutritionally balanced. ●



Yokosuka Kaigun Curry



SOBA, WALNUT AND WATERCRESS SALAD

Soba is sometimes eaten with a dipping sauce made with ground walnuts. This soba salad features greens and dried fruit as tasty variations to complement the walnuts. While perfect for vegans and vegetarians, if a heartier appetizer is desired, cooked chicken or pork slices may be added.



播
胡
麻

◆ *Surigoma*

Appetizer serves 2-3

248 kcal Protein 9.3 g Fat 8.0 g
(per serving)

- Dried soba noodles, 120 g / 4 oz.
- 1/2-1 t vegetable oil
- 2 C of mixed watercress, rocket or wild arugula
- 12 shelled walnuts, roasted and unsalted
- 1-2 dried figs

Dressing

- 4 T soymilk
- 1 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 T *surigoma* ground white sesame

- Dill, Italian parsley or other fresh herbs, optional
- About a dozen (1 T) dried cranberries or raisins, or both

- 1 Break dried soba into halves and cook following package instructions. Drain, rinse with cold water and drain again.
- 2 Sprinkle soba with vegetable oil and mix well.
- 3 Pick off the soft tips of the watercress and set a few aside, along with 3 or 4 rocket leaves for garnish. The remaining greens will be mixed with the soba and the dressing.
- 4 Coarsely chop 2 or 3 walnuts and set aside for garnish. Finely chop the remaining walnuts.
- 5 Cut the figs into small pieces.
- 6 Mix the ingredients for the dressing.
- 7 Just before serving, place the soba, finely chopped walnuts, watercress, rocket and optional herbs in a bowl. Spoon all of the dressing into the bowl and mix.
- 8 To serve, place the salad on a serving platter. Sprinkle the coarse-chopped walnut, figs and other dried fruit* over the salad. Garnish with watercress and rocket.

* Use only a modest amount of the dried fruit; more may be added depending on individual taste.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto

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



DEEP-FRIED STUFFED EGGPLANT WITH SOMEN IN TSUYU

In this recipe, the cooking liquid acts as the traditional *tsuyu* sauce for the *somen*. Since a substantial amount of this liquid is needed to prepare the eggplants, any remaining sauce may be served as *tsuyu* to accompany extra servings of *somen*, if desired.



Green onion

Serves 4

300 kcal Protein 10.8 g Fat 18.3 g (per person)

- 4 Japanese eggplants, each 80-100 g / 3-4 oz.

Filling

- 200 g / 7 oz. minced chicken
- 2 T chopped onion
- 1 t chopped ginger
- 1/2 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 t sake

Cooking liquid

- Cornstarch
- 1 bundle *somen*, 50 g / 1.8 oz.
- Oil for deep-frying

Cooking liquid

- 300 ml / 1 1/4 C dashi stock
- 3T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 2 T Kikkoman Manjo Mirin
- 1 1/2 T granulated sugar

- 2 green onions or scallions, chopped

1 Without removing the stems of the Japanese eggplants, trim loose parts and slit the eggplants lengthwise criss-cross into quarters, taking care to keep the four pieces attached to the stem.*

2 In a bowl, mix the filling ingredients and set aside. Dust the inner sides of the eggplants with cornstarch to help the filling stick. Fill the insides of the eggplants with the chicken filling (*see photo*).



3 Tie one end of the *somen* bundle with cooking twine. Place into a pot of boiling water and cook as per package instructions. Keep the twine tied to drain and rinse the *somen* well with running water, and then drain again (*see photo*).



4 Preheat oil to 170 °C / 335 °F. Deep-fry the eggplants until the meat turns light golden brown. Place on paper towel to remove excess oil.

5 In a saucepan heat the cooking liquid to warm, and add the deep-fried stuffed eggplants. Cook over medium heat for 4-5 minutes and then remove.

6 Cut the stuffed eggplants in half crosswise. Cut off the tied end of the *somen*. Place one eggplant and one quarter of the *somen* into each of 4 individual serving dishes. Pour over just enough cooking liquid to cover the bottom of the dish and garnish with chopped green onion.

* If the eggplants are large, cut into 1 cm / 1/2 in. round slices. Lightly dust the inner sides of the sliced eggplant and sandwich the filling between the slices.



KFI 45th Anniversary and U.S.-Japan Food Distribution Symposium/ Wisconsin-U.S.-Japan Economic Development Conference



From left: U.S.-Japan Food Distribution Symposium; Wisconsin-U.S.-Japan Economic Development Conference

Operations at Kikkoman Foods, Inc. (KFI; headquartered in Walworth, Wisconsin), a Kikkoman production base in the United States, first commenced in June 1973. June 2018 marked the 45th anniversary of KFI, and two notable events were held in commemoration. The U.S.-Japan Food Distribution Symposium, jointly sponsored by Kikkoman and the Distribution

Economics Institute of Japan, and the Wisconsin-U.S.-Japan Economic Development Conference, jointly sponsored by KFI, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp., were held in Fontana, Wisconsin on June 7 and 8, respectively.

The theme of the U.S.-Japan Food Distribution Symposium was "Evolving Consumer Behavior and Food Retailing Strategy." Panel discussion topics included how to comprehend changes in market and consumer behaviors owing to the rapid development of e-commerce and the expansion of new types of business, and how to react to them. Panelists comprised corporate managers and researchers from the distribution industry in Japan and the U.S. On the following day, the Wisconsin-U.S.-Japan Economic Development Conference explored the theme "Economic Perspectives for Sustainable Growth." Its six

panelists included Mr. Taichi Sakaiya, Japanese author and economic commentator, and The Honorable Scott Walker, Governor of Wisconsin.

At a press conference held prior to the Wisconsin-U.S.-Japan Economic Development Conference, Honorary CEO and Chairman of Kikkoman Mr. Yuzaburo Mogi announced that in commemoration of the 45th anniversary of KFI, the company will make a \$600,000 gift to endow scholarship funds to six area high schools near the plant. Mr. Mogi stated: "We're delighted to be able to support deserving students in our local community as they pursue their dreams of higher education. Kikkoman is always looking to the future and striving to set an example as a good corporate citizen. We believe part of our role is to help prepare the leaders of tomorrow by supporting education." ◆



Mr. Yuzaburo Mogi announces a \$600,000 scholarship fund for six Walworth County high schools.