

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



## THE JAPANESE TABLE

# Japanese Noodles Ramen

by Ayao Okumura

*Our 2018 series on Japanese noodles has taken a wide-ranging look at the distinctive histories and traditions of somen, udon and soba. With this issue, we conclude with ramen, one of the country's most popular noodles, which has fast become a global favorite.*

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# Japanese Noodles

## Ramen



Ramen noodles are made by adding alkaline water to flour that has a protein content of 9 percent to 11.5 percent. Typically, ramen noodles are boiled, drained, added to a seasoned soup made from meat stock, and served with various toppings.

### China Origins

The roots of ramen can be traced back to China, whose noodle-eating food culture was introduced in Japan during the 1860s, when Japan ended its national isolation and reopened its ports to the outside world. The Chinese method of making and cooking noodles eventually evolved into a unique Japanese style that became known as “ramen.”

In the late nineteenth century, many Chinese settled in the port of Yokohama—some as shopkeepers, others as laborers and still others as housekeepers and chefs for Western traders who were active in the city. Eventually, those Chinese immigrants established their own Nankin-machi—Nankin being the Japanese pronunciation of Nanjing. Nankin-machi later evolved into Yokohama’s own unique Chinatown. In Nankin-machi, restaurants and food stalls popped up to cater to the needs of workers and shopkeepers; by 1887 there were

about twenty Chinese restaurants in Yokohama which invariably served noodle dishes, including *chashao tangmian* soup noodles with sliced pork, and *rousi tangmian* soup noodles with thin pork strips. Not only Chinese, but Japanese locals patronized these shops, where the Japanese referred to noodle dishes as *Nankin soba*.

In 1910, a retired Japanese customs official who had been working in Yokohama opened his own Chinese restaurant in the Asakusa area of Tokyo. He hired Chinese cooks from Nankin-machi, changed the name of the noodle dishes from *Nankin soba* to *Shina soba*. He added toppings of *chashao*, or, as it eventually came to be called in Japanese, “*chashu*,” a type of cooked pork, and *memma* simmered strips of sweet bamboo shoots. Some years later, when the city of Tokyo was reduced to rubble

in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, portable stalls serving *Shina soba* proliferated, and the popularity of the dish was assured.

Far to the north in Hokkaido, the Chinese restaurant Takeya opened in the city of Sapporo in 1921, across the street from a university. A Chinese chef at the restaurant concocted a delicious version of *rousi tangmian* that was authentically Chinese and much sought-after by Chinese exchange students studying at the university. Whenever a dish was ready, the cook would announce *Hao le!* (“a delicious dish is complete!”). That *le* sounded rather like *ra* to the Japanese ear, and it was from this phrase that *ra* was paired with the Japanese word *men*, meaning noodles. Takeya’s “*ra-men*” noodles became tremendously popular, setting in motion a fad that swept through the entire city of Sapporo.



Pre-cooked and dried ramen noodles



Eating at a typical ramen shop counter



From left: *Miso ramen*; *shoyu ramen*; *tonkotsu ramen*; world's first instant noodles (1958) and world's first instant noodles in a cup (1971).

### Instant Fame

It was Momofuku Ando's (1910-2007) invention in 1958 of the world's first instant noodles—pre-cooked and dried ramen noodles sold in a packet—that spawned what would eventually become a global industry. At a time when television was just beginning to catch on in Japan, he aired instant noodle commercials constantly, familiarizing Japanese throughout the country with the product. In 1966, Ando traveled to the U.S. to pitch his instant noodles in supermarkets. Local supermarket staff removed the ramen noodles from the package, broke them in half and placed them in a paper cup, poured in hot water, and ate them with a fork. At that time, very few Americans owned noodle bowls or used chopsticks, and it was this episode that inspired Ando to develop new cup-type instant noodles. Today, some one hundred billion servings of instant noodles are consumed annually around the world.

### Ultimate Ramen

Bowls of fresh ramen are enjoyed in countless restaurants and shops throughout Japan that vie to create the “ultimate” gourmet ramen recipe. They constantly experiment with combinations of

soup flavor, noodle texture and various toppings. The noodles at such ramen shops usually consist of different types of high quality flour that has been skillfully blended. Ramen noodles vary in appearance: they can be thin, medium-thin or thick; some are straight, others curly. To make the noodles appear more appetizing, their yellow color is enhanced by adding *kuchinashi* gardenia colorant; but above all, it is the soup that is the most fascinating ingredient of ramen. Made with stock of primarily chicken or pork, Japanese cooks add kombu, *katsuobushi* dried bonito flakes, dried sardines or other dried fish, and dried shrimp or dried scallops, all of which release umami and greatly enhance the flavor. Some soups are made by simmering pork bones for days to produce a rich broth full of collagen and ash content. These robust soups are also popular with visitors from abroad, and some of Japan's major ramen chain restaurants have branches in cities around the world.

There are three main ramen varieties, according to soup base: *miso ramen*, the miso-based soup of Hokkaido; *shoyu ramen*, the soy sauce-based Kanto-style found mainly around the Tokyo area; and

*tonkotsu ramen*, the rich pork-bone salt-based soup popular in Kyushu. And throughout Japan, every locale offers up distinct ramen flavors: *chashu* cooked pork is a common topping, but regional versions of ramen often highlight a special local product, such as chicken, crab or shellfish. With Japan's seemingly endless variety of unique ramen styles, one can experience and enjoy a truly “gourmet ramen” journey, all the way from northern Hokkaido down to southernmost Okinawa. ◆

#### cover

A traditional-style ramen street stall

#### 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



Clockwise from top:  
*Bunashimeji, maitake, eryngii, shiitake and enoki*



Matsutake

# Japanese Mushrooms

A wide selection of mushrooms are available in Japan, and they appear in any number of dishes including hot pots, sautéés, rice dishes and soups. Mushrooms can be categorized into artificially cultivated varieties and wild mushrooms; in Japan there are estimated to be some 4,000 to 5,000 different types of wild mushrooms, and of these, only about 100 kinds are edible.

Mushrooms are largely divided into saprophytic mushrooms, which find nutrition in decayed vegetation; and mycorrhiza mushrooms, which grow in symbiosis with live tree roots. Artificially cultivated mushrooms are saprophytic. Mushroom cultivation



Rice cooked with mushrooms

Japanese have long  
included mushrooms  
in their diet

was adopted in Japan as early as the 1600s to grow shiitake mushrooms. Currently, some mushrooms including shiitake, enoki, *bunashimeji* and *maitake* are cultivated primarily in mushroom beds throughout the year; recently, *eryngii* and other mushrooms of foreign origin have been raised using this method. At present, some 20 types of mushrooms are cultivated and available here year-round.

Natural wild mushrooms, on the other hand, come into season in Autumn, and this is the time when people enjoy mushroom-picking in Japan's woods. Wild mushrooms also include poisonous varieties, and because some of these resemble

edible types, it is unwise to pick and eat wild mushrooms unless experienced or following the advice of a specialist. About two-thirds of the country consists of forested land, and the Japanese have welcomed wild mushrooms into their diet for centuries, including shiitake, which grow on stumps or fallen broad-leaf trees; the delicious *maitake*; and matsutake, which grow on the roots of Japanese red pines. With a very limited yield, matsutake are expensive, and are referred to as the "King of Mushrooms." More affordable matsutake available in Japan are imports. All mushrooms contain a considerable amount of umami. For example, sun-drying shiitake mushrooms produces guanylic acid, a constituent of umami, making it possible to experience a flavor that raw shiitake do not have. When cooking with dried shiitake, they are soaked in water and rehydrated for use in simmered dishes, while shiitake soaking water is used as dashi. ●



## JAPANESE STYLE

Perspectives on  
Japanese cuisine

# Wafu Dressing

A wide range of salad dressings are marketed in Japan, but it was only in the late 1950s that Western-style dressings debuted here. In the late 1970s, *wafu* “Japanese-style” dressing was introduced, consisting of mainly soy sauce, vinegar and vegetable oil. This launched a variety of *wafu* dressings flavored with traditional ingredients targeting Japanese tastes. Today’s *wafu* dressing varieties include *shiso* (perilla leaf), sesame, *yuzu* citrus, grated ginger, or grated daikon Japanese radish—most of which are added to a fundamental base of soy sauce, vinegar and vegetable oil. Good not only on salads,

*wafu* dressings are also excellent as seasonings, enhancing the flavor of most ingredients and adding richness to a recipe. For instance, *shiso* dressing adds a unique flavor to udon or soba salad sauce. A flavorful *wafu* dressing can be used to marinate cucumber, cabbage and carrot to make lightly pickled vegetables (*asazuke*), while grated daikon radish dressing might accompany *shabu-shabu* hot pot. *Wafu* dressings are versatile in meat-based recipes as well. Marinate any meat in a *wafu* dressing, and its oil helps the flavor to gently penetrate the meat, while the vinegar tenderizes the meat. ◆



Pork shabu-shabu salad  
with sesame dressing



*Wafu* dressings are versatile enough to use as seasonings and in marinades. Some examples include, from left: Grated onion; Japanese long onion and salt; *yuzu* citrus and miso; onion; *shiso* and grated daikon; grated ginger; sesame; wasabi

## TASTY TRAVEL



Shizuoka, Shizuoka Prefecture



Shizuoka Oden

## Shizuoka Oden

Shizuoka *oden* is a specialty hot pot from Shizuoka City in Shizuoka Prefecture. Typical *oden* broth is made with kombu or *katsubushi* dried bonito flakes, but Shizuoka *oden*'s much darker broth involves simmered beef tendon and soy sauce. Its warming ingredients, served on skewers, include beef tendon, konjac, daikon, boiled egg, kombu and *chikuwa* tube-shaped fishcake. But this *oden* is most famous for its *kuro hampen*, or “black hampen,” a dark-colored paste of minced sardines molded into oval shapes. The dish is garnished with green laver and finely ground dried fish, along with a dollop of Japanese mustard. Shizuoka *oden* was traditionally eaten at casual street stalls, but nowadays, enthusiastic *oden*-lovers can enjoy Shizuoka *oden* in various restaurants and shops throughout the city. ◆



## RAMEN-STYLE CELLOPHANE NOODLE SOUP WITH SIMMERED PORK

Soup seasoning used by ramen shops consists mainly of reduced simmering liquid from cooking pork. This is ladled into individual ramen bowls, followed by clear soup. The character of ramen soup lies in its simple aroma and flavor, created not with spices, but by adding only green or long onions and ginger to the simmering liquid.



春雨

◆ Cellophane noodles

### Serves 4-5

314 kcal Protein 6.3 g Fat 7.4 g  
(per serving)

- Pork butt, 700-800 g / approx. 1.5 lb.
- Pure olive oil or vegetable oil

### Simmering liquid for cooking pork

- 6 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 500 ml / 2 C water, plus more if needed
- 1 T light brown sugar
- 1 knob ginger with skin (20 g / 0.7 oz.), cut in thin slices
- 2-3 green onions

- 50-100 g / 1.5-3.5 oz. potato or mung bean cellophane noodles; reduce or increase amount depending on preference

### Ramen-style soup

- 1000 ml / 4 C water
- 1 ½ T Japanese Tori-Gara chicken soup stock granules or powder
- 4 T or more reduced simmering liquid from cooked pork
- Green onions, cut slantwise, 5 cm / 2 in. for garnish

**1** Cut pork into two or three pieces along the grain of the muscle fibers. Pierce the meat lightly with a fork.

**2** Warm a small amount of oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Sear the meat until golden brown.

**3** Place the seared meat in a stock pot\* and pour in the simmering liquid ingredients to just cover the pork; add extra water if needed. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce to low or lower-medium heat, maintaining a steady simmer. After 3-4 minutes, turn the pork over. Cover with a drop-lid or parchment paper and continue cooking for 20 more minutes, turning once or twice. If the meat can be pierced easily with a skewer or bamboo stick, it is done. Turn off heat. Remove meat from pot, strain liquid\*\* then boil it down to about half. Return pork to the reduction, set aside to steep for 2-3 hours; remove and cut the meat into about 0.5 cm- / 0.2 in.-thick slices; set aside.\*\*\*

**4** Prepare cellophane noodles as per package instructions.

**5** To make the ramen-style soup, boil water and add chicken stock granules. Add 4 T of the reduced pork simmering liquid or more if desired.

**6** In individual serving bowls, place desired amount of noodles and sliced pork, then ladle soup over both. For a stronger ramen flavor, add more of the reduction. Garnish with green onion to serve.

\* Pot should be just the right size to fit the meat.

\*\* To remove fat from simmering liquid, cool it in refrigerator, then remove the congealed fat.

\*\*\* Consider using any remaining simmered pork in fried rice or other recipes.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto

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



## RAMEN SALAD



◆ Ramen noodles

### Serves 4

181 kcal Protein 4.9 g Fat 8.0 g  
(per serving)

- 120 g / 4 oz. fresh ramen noodles\*
- 4 lettuce leaves
- 4 cherry tomatoes
- 1/2 bunch watercress
- 4 coriander sprigs
- 4 sticks imitation crabmeat

### Dressing

- 2 T mayonnaise
- 1 1/2 T *surigoma* ground white sesame
- 1/2 T granulated sugar
- 2 t sesame oil
- 2 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 T vinegar
- 4 T water

- 1 Prepare noodles as per package instructions. Drain and rinse the noodles with running water, and then drain again. Cut the noodles into 7-8 cm / 2.5-3 in. lengths. Set aside.
- 2 Tear the lettuce into bite-sized pieces. Cut the cherry tomatoes in half. Pick off the tender portions of the watercress and coriander. Tear the imitation crab sticks into bite-sized pieces.
- 3 Mix the dressing ingredients together.
- 4 Place the cooked noodles in a serving bowl. Add the lettuce, tomatoes, watercress, coriander and imitation crabmeat.
- 5 Just before serving, pour desired amount of the dressing over the salad.

\* If unavailable, thin udon noodles or pasta may be substituted.

Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation



# KIKKOMAN LIVE KITCHEN TOKYO Kikkoman Opens Fusion Concept Restaurant



From left:  
KIKKOMAN LIVE  
KITCHEN TOKYO;  
Gift Shop; Cafe & Bar

One of Kikkoman Corporation’s business principles is “To promote the international exchange of food culture,” and we have been actively engaging in this practice for more than half a century. As part of this ongoing initiative, the company unveiled its KIKKOMAN LIVE KITCHEN TOKYO concept restaurant in Tokyo’s Yurakucho district on November 1, 2018.

“Fusion” is the key concept at LIVE KITCHEN. In the process of expanding the global soy sauce market, Kikkoman Soy Sauce has been introduced into many diverse food cultures, generating countless new and delicious flavors; in fact, Kikkoman has always intended for people to use its soy sauce in their daily lives and fuse it with ingredients and dishes specific to their own countries and regions.

At LIVE KITCHEN, diners experience the essence of this international exchange of food culture with all five senses. “Cooking Live” events are held on a special kitchen stage, providing the opportunity to observe at first hand the expertise and manual dexterity of professional chefs. As these chefs comment on their real-time food preparations, diners can enjoy dishes while listening and learning how to enhance the unique qualities of the food itself.

Each month, two or three famous guest chefs from different genres collaborate to create new dishes that will be available only at LIVE KITCHEN. The menu changes monthly, and the restaurant occasionally holds Special Days where the guest chefs

discuss recipes and demonstrate cooking techniques on the kitchen stage. The restaurant uses exceptional and distinctive food ingredients, thanks to partnerships with regional municipalities throughout Japan and Tokyo-based foreign embassies. There is also an adjoining Gift Shop and the Cafe & Bar where, if they prefer not to visit the restaurant, visitors may savor wines provided by the Kikkoman Group company, Manns Wines, as well as limited edition Japanese sake.

Kikkoman hopes that as many visitors as possible will experience this memorable “international exchange of food culture” and enjoy a new world of delicious flavors that can be found only at KIKKOMAN LIVE KITCHEN TOKYO. ◆



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[www.kikkoman-livekitchen-tokyo.com/en/index.html](http://www.kikkoman-livekitchen-tokyo.com/en/index.html)



For Reservations

