

## The Impact of Chinese Food Culture on Japan

# Research on *Gyoza* Culture in Japan and China: How the Chinese dish fused into Japanese cuisine, and its historical background

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On January 28, 2017 Hideaki Otsuka, an expert in Chinese culture from the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba, came to Kikkoman's Tokyo headquarters, to deliver a lecture on the differences between *gyoza* in today's Japan and *jiaozi* in China, as well as to explain its historical background. He also described his experiences as a teacher in China.

### The Origin of *Jiaozi*

While China was already a rice consuming culture in the 5th century BC, wheat was not eaten. It was instead used to feed livestock, and was not intended for human consumption. This was because rice was fit for human consumption soon after threshing, but wheat had to be milled. It was likely not until the millstone was introduced via the Silk Road in the 5th to 3rd centuries BC that wheat production for human consumption took hold.

It remains unclear when *jiaozi* first appeared, but it is assumed to have been sometime during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Dried *jiaozi* (mummified *jiaozi*, so to speak), have been excavated from the ruins of Dunhuang. Scholars were surprised to learn that a food so similar to today's *jiaozi*, with the typical features of the folded dumpling with pleats, a semicircular shape and pointed edges, was eaten in the Tang Dynasty.



Mummified *jiaozi* unearthed in Astana Village, Turpan Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (source: Encyclopedia of Chinese Food Culture)

### Origin of the Name *Jiaozi*

There are different stories as to how the name *jiaozi* (餃子) came about. When kneaded, wheat flour is spread into a circular shape onto which a generous amount of filling is placed, and as the skin is folded in two, the edges are inevitably pointed. It is therefore said that this was why *jiao* (餃), meaning horn-shaped, was first used. Originally, a term using 角 (which means horn) was created, reflecting the shape of this food. However, the contracted sound fell out of use in China, and 角 and 交 came to be pronounced as *jiao*. Further, a food radical was later attached to the left of 交 to create the character 餃. The character 子, meaning diminutive, was added as a suffix to form the name we use today, *jiaozi* (餃子).

### *Jiaozi* Culture of China

It is no exaggeration to say that *gyoza* is a staple of Japan's national cuisine. Unlike the Japanese, though, the Chinese don't eat *jiaozi* quite so regularly. It is an essential dish, though, during the Chinese New Year. To phrase it in a way Japanese might understand, the *jiaozi* of China may be equivalent to *zoni* (rice cake soup) of Japan. *Jiaozi* is an indispensable dish on New Year's Day in China.

One theory has it that 交 and 子 of *jiaozi* (餃子) were a kind of word play, indicating an old year and a new year crossing (交) at midnight (子), an interpretation that resulted in *jiaozi* becoming a standard dish for New Year's Day. There is also the custom of adding a piece of gold or silver to the filling of one *jiaozi*. The person who gets that one will have good fortune in the coming year. *Jiaozi* is also served when there are guests. In addition, as the character (子) can also mean child, *jiaozi* suggests having a child. In any case, *jiaozi* in China is an auspicious food, and eaten on special or festive occasions.

*Jiaozi* is normally either boiled, steamed, pan-fried or deep-fried. In China, boiled *jiaozi* is usually served. In Japan, garlic is often mixed in with the filling. In China, however, garlic is served separately on the table. Guests bite into the garlic to add flavor while eating the *jiaozi*.

### *Gyoza* Culture of Japan

*Takushi Chohoho*, a cookbook published in 1778 during the Edo period (1603-1868), introduced three cooking



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methods for *gyoza*, namely deep-frying, pan-frying and steaming. However, it was only seen as a Chinese dish at the time, and was not usually eaten by Japanese.

In the Meiji era (1868-1912), Chinese dishes including *jiaozi* began to be introduced in Chinatowns in Yokohama, Kobe, and other cities, and spread to other parts of Japan. Still, frequent consumption of *gyoza* did not come until sometime later. After World War II, *gyoza* consumption spread as Japanese returning from China introduced what they had grown used to eating to various regions of Japan. In an essay *Teishu no Gekkyu-bukuro* ("Husband's Pay

Envelope") authored by Shintaro Okuno, published in 1956, one passage reads, "One of the things flooding the streets is *gyoza* restaurants...a phenomenon of the postwar period, sparked by the repatriation of so many Japanese from Mainland China. Eventually *gyoza* attained the popularity we associate with it today." Boiled *jiaozi* is common in China, its birthplace, whereas pan-frying is usual in Japan. *Jiaozi* is eaten as a staple food in China, but the Japanese often eat it as a side dish accompanying rice.



## Donated Books Related to Chinese Food Culture

The KIIFC received a donation of books from the collection of Tokiko Nakayama, professor emeritus at Ochanomizu University, who passed away on January 22, 2016. The donation was realized through the exceptional efforts of Mr. Hideaki Otsuka of the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba, and the second president of the Society of Japanese and Chinese Literature and Cultural Studies, which was established by Professor Nakayama. She was a supervising editor for Food Culture of China, Kikkoman Video Library, as well as a prominent researcher known as both an editor and author of a number of books about Chinese cuisine.

Professor Nakayama's studies of Chinese food culture stand out largely in three areas. The first is that she led the way for Chinese cuisine in postwar Japan. When we talk about the spread of Chinese cuisine in Japan after the war, our attention is directed to the active roles played by Mr. Chen Kenmin and other professional Chinese chefs. However, many Japanese chefs came out of the Chinese Cuisine Department of the Publication and Cultural Relics Distribution Organization in Yushima Seido, the successor to the Edo-era Shoheizaka Gakumonjo state-run school. The organization was similar to today's culture centers, started by Mr. Sanshichi Hara, a scholar of Chinese classics. Lectures were given not only on Chinese language and literature, but on cooking and fashion as well. Professor Nakayama studied Chinese language and literature at Peking University before the war, and was also taught by Mr. Hara, one of the prominent figures in Peking's cultural society of the time. In that connection with Mr. Hara, Professor Nakayama, after returning

to Japan, studied at the University of Tokyo and taught classes on Chinese language and cooking at Yushima Seido. She regarded Chinese cuisine as a culture, and published the renowned book *Chugoku-sai* (Chinese Dishes, 7 volumes).

The second area of note is that she studied and translated cookbooks that have been published in rapid succession in Mainland China. The culmination of this work is *Chugoku Shoku-bunka Jiten* (Encyclopedia of Chinese Food Culture), published by Kadokawa Corporation (a Chinese version has also been published). This was seen as a groundbreaking book around the world. The third area is that, as a leading expert, she introduced the Manchu Han Imperial Feast, which was replicated in Hong Kong. She also appeared in an NHK satellite broadcasting program featuring the feast.

After receiving a total of 942 donated publications (222 books and 118 magazines in Japanese, and 287 books and 315 magazines in Chinese), the collection of Chinese food culture materials at the KIIFC has been greatly enriched. The KIIFC cordially awaits your visit to view these items.



Tokiko Nakayama



Chugoku Shoku-bunka Jiten