

The Production of Food Culture in Europe

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Hirotsugu Yamazaki was born in Fukuoka in 1939. After graduating from the Faculty of Education at Waseda University, he worked at Tokyo Cinema, a company producing scientific films. He later became a freelance film director and writer. His many works include: *Owara Bon Festival for Appeasing the Spirits of the Wind*; *Story of Famous Western Confectionery*; and *Wheat and the Japanese*. A recent work is his five-part documentary film *Food Culture in Japan*, which considers Japanese food culture ranging from *kaiseki* (tea ceremony cuisine) to ordinary food of the common people. His next work, *Food Culture in Europe*, is currently under production. Yamazaki is the recipient of various awards, including the Grand Prize at the International Industrial Cinema Contest and the Gold Award in the Movies Introducing Japan Contest.



Grand Hotel, Paris (completed in 1862)

FOOD CULTURE

As a child, I would be more excited by the film previews in the movie theaters than by the feature itself. I wonder if, as a sort of preview, you could tell us about your current film, *Food Culture in Europe*.

Yamazaki

The five-part *Food Culture in Europe* follows the films *Food Culture in China* and *Food Culture in Japan*. The first two parts of *Food Culture in Europe* are already complete: the first is “The Golden Age of French Food,” which deals with French Belle Epoch cuisine. This is based on the culinary philosophy of the genius Escoffier and said to be the epitome of magnificence in the history of global food culture. The setting is Paris and southern France from 1850 to 1914, just prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

FOOD CULTURE

In Japan that would be the period from the Meiji Restoration (1867) to the early Taisho years. In those days, Japan was frantically working to achieve the appearance of a modern state.

Yamazaki

It is interesting that the menu of Tokyo’s Tsukiji Hotel, constructed immediately after the advent of the Meiji enlightenment, featured French cuisine.

The lore of French culinary arts had already spread throughout the world by then, thanks to Escoffier. From the mid-19th century, the growth in French industry and her colonial expansion were on course and the glories of the age were being sung. This was the background against which the radical transformation of Paris was achieved: it was reborn as a scenic city and charmed the wealthy from all over the world. While the French economy suffered temporarily as a result of the Franco-Prussian War, recovery was swift. A world exposition was held to declare its economic recovery to the world, and the President of the Republic hosted a banquet. This was the beginning of culinary diplomacy. The tradition survives to this day in the dining room of the Palais de l’Élysée. It is against this historical backdrop that Escoffier and Ritz, the manager of the Grand Hotel, appear. Ritz constructed luxury hotels worldwide, reflecting the needs of the age, and positioned French cuisine as the center of attraction. Escoffier modernized French cooking while acceding to the wishes of Ritz. This film recreates Escoffier’s menu which was enjoyed by Edward VII and Sarah Bernhardt. This was a difficult task that required some creativity. I think it will attract considerable attention.

FOOD CULTURE

The second part of the film is entitled “The Large Table Awaiting the Host.”

Yamazaki

To approach European food culture, we cannot avoid an overview of European history. This is a really difficult task. So I thought that if I looked closely at the table, history might perhaps become apparent. What brought me to this way of thinking was a painting of a family at the dinner table. In Japan, such paintings did not exist before the Meiji period—in other words, scenes of a family at the dinner table relate to a culture that is foreign to Japan. But this does not necessarily mean that such family dinners have existed for ages overseas. Apparently the tradition began with the Reformation. In this way, the second volume deals with understanding the painting of a European dinner table scene through a consideration of history.

FOOD CULTURE

The filming of the third part has just been completed. What is your concept regarding the fourth and fifth parts?

Yamazaki

The third part of the film highlights the French cooking that comes after Nouvelle Cuisine, what is called post-modern. Nouvelle Cuisine took the



From Escoffier’s cuisine: Wild quail Perigueux grilled in a stew pan, salad of red lettuce, artichoke core with Parmesan cheese.

culinary world by storm, but has receded of late as a result of much debate. Traditional cuisine is said to be making a comeback. And the stage on which this drama is being played is Lyon, the source of all information on French food culture. It was in Lyon that I met the young up-and-coming chef Christophe Marguin. Training the camera on him gave me a feeling that I had begun to understand what French cuisine is targeting today.

The fourth part of the film will highlight food ingredients in Europe and will be set in Perigueux, France. The various issues that are internalized in food ingredients will also become clear in this part. The fifth and final part will feature Italian food, which is as popular and delicious as it is healthy. We’ll be presenting the daily foods of the Italian people. All five parts should be completed by the early summer of 2000. Going back to the preview image: “Coming soon; don’t miss it!”



Part of the menu of President Loubet’s banquet during the Paris Exposition of 1900; beef tenderloin Bellevue style.

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Supervised by Shosaburo Kimura
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