

Food Culture Seminars

The Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture sponsored six seminars focusing on food and the culture surrounding food. We were pleased to host a large number of guests at all of the seminars. Here we offer a summary of the contents of each seminar.

Held March 22, 2001

Fermented Foods and the Wisdom of Mankind

Lecturer: Takeo Koizumi, Professor at Tokyo University of Agriculture



It is not at all necessary to note that the utility of fermented foods has received great attention recently.

In studying the natural process of fermentation, one comes to have great admiration for the deep wisdom of predecessors who were able to make good use of this process. They captured the natural benefits of the preservation qualities, flavor, and infusion of nutrients that fermentation adds to foods by utilizing the process. *Natto* (fermented soy beans) can be used as an example of their ingenuity, and can truly be called a "food of wisdom."

In the Edo period, *natto* was added to *miso* soup to create "*natto* soup." People in the Kansai region also ate *natto* soup regularly. Tofu was also a standard ingredient of *natto* soup. Looking at the Japanese people's capabilities in processing soy beans from a purely nutritional point of view reminds us of just how great those capabilities are.

Though the art of fermentation was a contribution to food culture through the 20th century, I believe that fermentation will make contributions to more than just food, but also to the field of energy production in the 21st century.

Held April 13, 2001

Japanese Cuisine Crosses the Ocean—New York Style

Lecturer: Elizabeth Ando, Food Journalist



Though "eating" is a process performed around the world, the details of what is eaten, where it's eaten, when it's eaten, and how it's eaten differ greatly. This seminar compares the ingredients, preparation, menu, layout, and the transformation undergone since the development of New York Style Japanese Cuisine.

For example, though Japanese people use their right hands to eat with chopsticks, the chopsticks are laid out with the "handle" portion on the left, while in New York it is presumed that people will eat with a fork, chopsticks are laid out with the "handles" on the right. In addition, the same foods, prepared in a variety of ways such as raw and broiled, are laid out on a small tray, but to a western person, this is inconceivable.

The same can be said for foreign foods which have come to Japan. Many of these dishes have become something different than what they originally were. While the original concept of the "one bowl of soup and three vegetable side dishes" breakfast has been replaced in some households by a breakfast of bread, soup, fried egg, ham, and salad, to an American, this sort of meal seems more like lunch.

Though the food culture of one's own country seems obvious and reasonable, to people of another country, this may not be the case at all.

Held June 27, 2001

The Worldly Flavor Bound by Soy Sauce

Lecturer: Michiko Yamamoto, fifth owner of Murakami Kaishido



One often hears as well as sees that soy sauce has become a seasoning used worldwide.

As a judge in a soy sauce recipe contest for foreign residents of Japan from 1981 to 2001, I have seen the level of recognition of soy sauce rise dramatically over the past 20 years. When the contest first started, whether it was because people were unsure of using soy sauce for flavoring or not is unclear, but most people used a blend of soy sauce and Worcestershire sauce in their recipes. Today, such blends are not even mentioned in the cookbooks of foreign countries. An example that illustrates the current wide use of soy sauce is a description of a method for removing soy sauce stains on the homepage of America's master homemaker, Martha Stewart.

While stains are troublesome for anyone, the fact that soy sauce is considered a problematic stain among Americans is proof that soy sauce has become an everyday item in that country. I have the feeling that the fact that soy sauce has become an everyday item is an announcement that new ways of using soy sauce, which has laid down roots in other countries, are on their way to Japan.

Held August 24, 2001

The Food Culture of Okinawa—A Fascination with Health and Longevity Foods

Lecturer: Hiroko Nao, Dean of the University of the Air's Okinawa study center



There are two leading factors responsible for the long lives of Okinawan people (not simply living a long time, but rather living healthfully and energetically for a long time). The first factor is a climate where the difference between high and low temperatures is very small, making Okinawa a place easy for humans to adjust to. The second factor, based on a long history of trade with the Chinese mainland, lies in the belief penetrating the food culture that foods are medicinal.

With such factors as average age at death, rate of population 100 years or older, and mortality rate due to lifestyle diseases being used as indications of "longevity," a comparison of data throughout Japan places Okinawa unquestionably in the number 1 position in terms of the second factor, rate of population 100 years or older.

The traditional Okinawan diet includes foods such as pork, soy beans, *goya* (a bitter cucumber-like vegetable), ginseng, and red potatoes, which contain a number of beneficial elements including collagen, soy lecithin, and anticyanine. The Okinawan diet is also very low in sodium.

The root of longevity in food culture stems from a consciousness of the body as well as taking responsibility for what one puts into their body.

Held November 16, 2001

Illnesses of White-collar Workers

Lecturer: Yoshiro Kubota, MD, Chief Doctor at Kikkoman General Hospital



Though we refer to "Illnesses of White-collar Workers," there is no specific illness implied in this phrase. In other words, we want people to have knowledge of methods of preventing illnesses related to lifestyle.

The most common causes of death in lifestyle-related illnesses are cancer, heart disease and stroke. We want people to be aware of eight important ways these lifestyle-related diseases and deaths can be prevented. They are: 1. no smoking, 2. limited intake of alcohol, 3. eating breakfast, 4. getting a minimum of 7 hours of sleep a night (on average), 5. not working more than 9 hours a day (on average), 6. exercising regularly, 7. maintaining a nutritionally-balanced diet, and 8. ridding one's self of stress.

The most important means of preventing such lifestyle-related diseases is by getting regular physicals and following the advice of the physician to make healthy changes in lifestyle. Following the eight suggestions listed above is also very important in creating a new and healthy lifestyle.

Held January 25, 2002

The Charm and Future of Takoyaki—The Wisdom and Powder Food Culture of a Food from Osaka

Lecturer: Mana Kumagaya



It is thought that the roots of *takoyaki* extend from *akashiyaki*. *Akashiyaki* was born in the middle of the Meiji era in the city of Akashi, when the metal molds used for creating *akashidama* (imitation coral) were used as cooking pots called *nabe* (the popular name referring to the utensil used for making *takoyaki*) to fry a mixture of flour and eggs called *tamagoyaki*, which were then sold.

On the other hand, in Osaka, people from Fukushima prefecture were selling a flour and water mixture called *rajioyaki* which contained other ingredients such as dried shrimp, *konyaku* (jelly made from potato starch), and meat, and flavored with soy sauce in street stalls. It is said that a person visiting Osaka from Akashi saw this *rajioyaki* and thought that octopus was a more appropriate ingredient than meat, thus inventing *takoyaki*. The sauce that tops *takoyaki* today was first introduced after WWII. Until that time, *takoyaki* was flavored with soy sauce.

Crispiness of the outer crust, softness of the inside, and hardness of the octopus are three textures which are very important to the creation of good *takoyaki*.