

The 2002 Food Culture Seminar Report

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The Food Culture of Edo The *Samurai* and Commoners Brought Together by Food Culture

Lecturer: Mr. Makoto Takeuchi,
Curator of the Edo Tokyo Museum



The 20th century is said to have been an Age of Quantity while the 21st century is said to be an Age of Meaning and Quality when people are raised to appreciate quality over quantity. We

find much of the same sort of beliefs in the Edo era with its lack of machinery and its culture based on handmade items. When taking another look at this period, we are surprised when we consider that the Edo era was based on a feudalistic society. Our return to an appreciation for quality and meaning rather than quantity seems to be a revival of the Edo era.

Today I would like to introduce a book titled *Edo Jiman* (The Pride of Edo) by Harada, a *samurai* of the Tanabe Clan in the Kishu (Wakayama) region. In the book, Harada writes of his own humiliations on a trip to Edo with the intent of informing his juniors how to avoid the same sorts of embarrassments. The book also includes a large amount of information on the foods of Edo.

We find such details as the fact that *natto* is not eaten in Kishu so the morning vendors of *natto* are very rare, that the sweets of Osaka are very good but the best *manju* (sweet buns) comes from Edo. Harada also points out that the way to eat soba (buckwheat noodles) in Edo differs from the way it is eaten in the countryside and illustrates the point with an embarrassing situation in which he found himself. The book also makes note of the rising popularity and use of Noda soy sauce.

At the most popular shops the *samurai* and the commoner both waited their turn in line. The social status of the *samurai* had no influence when it came to public shops and restaurants. In this way, the food culture of Edo put the *samurai* and the commoner on the same level.

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Fermented Foods of Korea *Kimchi* as a Medicinal Food Source,

Lecturer: Chi-Eun Che,
Korean Cuisine Researcher,
Korean Culture Coordinator



When Koreans think of food, they think of the medicinal properties of foods. While everyone must eat, the Korean people tend to choose their foods with not only the goal of satisfying the

appetite but also with the intention of using the gifts of nature to get into shape, maintain good health and even to heal specific ailments. For this reason, Korean cuisine has developed into a delicious and healthy balance of ingredients, spices and seasonings with medicinal properties. The dish most representative in all of these qualities of Korean cuisine is *kimchi*.

As a fermented, or “slow” food, *kimchi* was developed by an agricultural society very fond of vegetables. Already skilled in the art of preserving the meat and organs of marine fish and shellfish with salt, a wide variety of these products were added to seasoned vegetables to create various *kimchi* dishes. Chinese cabbage became popular as the base vegetable in *kimchi* due to the fact that it was cultivated in large quantities and readily available. It is even said that the word *kimchi* originally comes from the word *kimche* which means “salted vegetables.”

Kimchi is also a very healthy dish. The most common ingredients, Chinese cabbage, *daikon* radish, red pepper and garlic, are loaded with vitamins and thought by many to have medicinal properties. The fermentation of the ingredients not only increases the vitamin content, but the process also adds baccilli which improves digestion. The additional baccilli also seem to increase the appetite; a very beneficial aspect especially in respect to the elderly and those suffering from a poor appetite. In these ways, *kimchi* is not just a healthy food, but also a very good representative of medicinal foods.