



### Korean Sikhae—Similar to Japanese Narezushi

In Korean cities, very good *nigirizushi* (hand-formed sushi) can be found in a number of Japanese restaurants. *Nigirizushi* is very popular among Koreans, who traditionally enjoy raw fish. A more popular type of sushi, however, is a type of sushi roll known as *kim cho bap* or *kim bap*. The difference between the two is that the rice used in *kim cho bap* is seasoned with vinegar while plain rice is often used in *kim bap*. *Kim cho bap* and *kim bap* are not filled with raw fish. Like large Japanese sushi rolls, the typical fillings are *tamagoyaki* (layered omelet), spinach, carrots, and sometimes broiled meat. One absolute filling is *takuan* (pickled *daikon* radish). Koreans love these uniquely Japanese pickles, which are commonly served, along with *namul* (traditional Korean vegetable garnish), in Korean restaurants to garnish foods.



Kim cho bap sold at a food stall



Ingredients for making Korean fermented sushi, sikhae. The fish shown here is flounder.



Ms. Kim from the Seoul Tourist Bureau showed me how to make *sikhae*.

Keelung at the northern tip of Taiwan. It was not mobile, but more an extension of the fish shop behind it. While the shop sells many kinds of fish, tuna is the only variety of *nigirizushi* sold by the stall. As Keelung is a port of call for tuna boats, those at the fish shop most likely learned how to make tuna



A sushi bar in Taiwan

# Summary of the article, North, Central, and South America, presented in Food Culture No. 12.

In the previous issue, I reported on the globalization of sushi, with a focus on sushi bars in North, Central, and South America. Having found Japanese sushi chefs nearly everywhere I visited, as well as frequent conveyor-belt serving systems, and even mechanical sushi chefs, these regions seem to have imported the entire Japanese sushi culture.

Moreover, sushi has begun to evolve overseas. In the United States, sushi rolls are frequently made with brown rice and a meat substitute, called *seitan*, made from wheat gluten. Vegetables are also used in abundance in response to the large vegetarian and health-conscious population. I also encountered extraordinary dessert sushi that looks like a sushi roll, but is actually shredded coconut filled with solid chocolate that is dipped in a chocolate syrup that resembles soy sauce and garnished with very thin slices of mango rather than pickled ginger.

The traditional sushi culture is also being transformed through assimilation with local ethnic cuisines, as evidenced by the use of chili paste as a substitute for *wasabi* (Japanese horseradish) and salsa dip, made from South American chilies, rather than soy sauce. In Mexico, I discovered a popular mobile sushi bar called Sushi Mobile. Considering this transformation, it's particularly interesting to note that *nigirizushi* (hand-formed sushi) originated in food stalls in Tokyo, long ago when the city was known as Edo.

Nigirizushi first appeared in Japan during the Edo period (1603-1867), and was preceded by oshizushi (pressed sushi). The earliest sushi can be traced back to narezushi (fermented fish sushi). Korea's food culture has long included a similar type of fermented sushi known as sikhae, in which the main ingredient is millet rather than rice, and chili pepper and garlic are also used. Sikhae is also the name of a sweet alcohol, and young Koreans today associate the word "sikhae" with this drink, as most are unfamiliar with the traditional fermented sushi.

Sushi arrived in Taiwan during Japan's occupation of the island. I came across a sushi stall in the port town of



nigirizushi from the crews of

Taiwan's food culture also

includes a type of fermented

sushi that the Atayals, an

aboriginal hill tribe, make

with freshwater fish. I've

also heard that fish is some-

times replaced with raw pork. Normally, pork cannot

be eaten raw, but presum-

ably, two weeks of pickling

The first Japanese restaurant

in Hong Kong opened in 1964, and was a branch of the long-established Tokyo restaurant, Kanetanaka. Within three to four years, the number of Japanese restaurants had increased to

Sushi was on the

menus of these restaurants, but it was extremely expensive, as the toppings and fill-

ings were flown in from

Japan and Japanese sushi

kills the normal parasites.

tuna

boats.

Japanese



Fermented sushi of the Atayals, an aboriginal tribe in Taiwan

#### Sushi Transformations in the Gourmet City of Hong Kong

five.



Sushi stall at Keelung (in front of a fish store). Tuna is the only variety of *nigirizushi* available.

chefs working in Hong Kong demanded high salaries. The majority of customers at these restaurants were Japanese businessmen working in Hong Kong, and Japanese, European, and American tourists. Local customers were limited to the wealthier citizens of Hong Kong. Sushi was prohibitively expensive to the common people, as the price of a single piece of sushi was equivalent to a serving of gruel or noodles.

Hong Kong's Kanetanaka closed in 1998 after thirty eight years. Today, genuine Japanese cuisine is served at Nadaman in the Shangri-La Hotel. A serving of assorted sushi costs HK\$320 and the prime assortment is HK\$420. Prices are naturally high because the Japanese sushi chefs use only fish



#### Hirotaka Matsumoto

Born in Tokyo in 1942. He graduated from the University of Tokyo's Department of Agriculture and worked at Sapporo Breweries Ltd. until 1969, when he moved to New York. After working in the purchasing department of the restaurant Nippon, and gaining experience in the wholesale fish business, he opened Takezushi, the first sushi bar in New York, in 1975. Mr. Matsumoto is currently the owner of the Takezushi sushi bar in Belgium, and travels around the world doing research as a food culture expert.

Mr. Matsumoto's published works are Osushi Chikyu o Mawaru (Kobunsha), Oishi Amerika Mitsuketa (Chikuma Shobo), New York Takezushi Monogatari (Asahi Shimbunsha), and Samurai Shisetsudan Yoroppa o Shokusu (Gendai Shokan). imported from Japan.

Hong Kong's general public began eating sushi in the 1990s. This was due primarily to the availability of a large supply of low-priced fish used in making sushi. In addition to low-cost Norwegian salmon and Canadian giant clams, fish from marine fish farms in mainland China's Fujian Province, such as yellow tail and sea bream, also became available at lower cost. Secondly, mechanical sushi chefs appeared, eliminating the need for highly paid human sushi chefs. Finally, employment of conveyor-belt serving systems greatly enhanced operating efficiency, allowing a larger number of customers to be served while reducing labor costs. Sushi bars equipped with conveyor-belt systems have become extremely popular in Hong Kong. As of 2000, there are twenty six Genroku Sushi bars, seven Genki Sushi bars, and a variety of independent sushi bars established by locals. The price of a plate of two pieces of sushi at Genroku Sushi is just HK\$15, making it significantly less expensive than prices at Nadaman.



Mechanized Genroku Sushi sushi ba

In addition to conveyor-belt sushi, takeout sushi has also become very popular. On the B2 floor of Hong Kong's Sogo department store, the Marufuku fish store has a takeout sushi section. Mr. Osamu Yoshimura, manager of Marufuku since 1993, says, "When I became the manager, the Daimaru department store had the top-selling fish department. I looked in on them almost every day, trying to find a way to top their sales. Within three or four years, I had succeeded in topping their sales, and now, no other store sells more fish than we do."



sushi department

Tuna, saury, sardines, yellow tail, abalone, clams, and freshwater clams are flown in three times a week from wholesalers in Fukuoka, Japan, and sea bream, amberjack, sea urchin, and ark shell are purchased from Hong Kong suppliers. One of Marufuku's takeout packs, consisting of seven pieces of sushi, including tuna, yellow tail, and salmon, one *inari*-



*zushi* (deep-fried tofu pouch filled with sushi rice), and a cucumber roll, sells for HK\$54, which is about the same as the price for its equivalent in Japan. Marufuku initially sets out an average of 400 packs per day, but depending on sales, may add to this as many as three or more times a day.

# Inexpensive Fish and Sushi in Guangzhou

To get to Guangzhou from Hong Kong, you must pass through Shenzhèn. From Shenzhèn, Guangzhou is less than two hours by express train or one hour by car via the expressway. Due to its proximity to Hong Kong, Guangzhou is readily influenced by Hong Kong, and the market economy has developed rapidly there.



In 2000, I happened to encounter the opening of Guangzhou's second JUSCO (a Japanese chain of supermarkets). This second store occupies two floors of China Plaza, a huge new commercial building with ten floors aboveground and four underground. In its fish department, salmon was selling for half of what it was at Marufuku in Hong Kong, and tuna for just a third of

Takeout sushi at JUSCO sells rapidly.

Marufuku's prices. These prices were remarkably low, even taking into consideration the income gap between Guangzhou and Hong Kong.



Ohnogi Sushi is an exact copy of conveyor-belt sushi bars in Hong Kong

Wandering through the store, I was reminded of a visit to Urumqi and Turpan in western China, where I was astonished to find a tank of live saltwater fish, despite being in a desert 2,000 kilometers from the nearest ocean. As these fish were flown in from Guangzhou, and alive at that, the price for a dish utilizing these fish is equivalent to nearly an entire month's salary for the local Chinese. I was told that the majority of those ordering such dishes were Chinese customers who became wealthy almost overnight with oil development in the Tarim Basin.

Back at Guangzhou's JUSCO, the sushi department sells its sushi by the piece rather than in packs. Each piece is wrapped

in plastic and customers can purchase as few or as many as they like. As with fish, sushi was extremely low in price, at just 3 yuan per piece for tuna and salmon and 2.5 yuan for *inari-zushi*. Prices may have gone up, however, since the store's grand opening sale.

Guangzhou also has conveyor-belt sushi bars. Ohnogi Sushi is a local conveyor-belt sushi chain that opened its first sushi bar in 1996. I was told that the sixth would be opening soon. Ohnogi Sushi was an exact copy of similar sushi bars in Hong Kong, with mechanical sushi chefs behind the counter, Chinese chefs wearing sanitary masks and gloves, and a number of video units airing music programs. However, its prices were much lower than those in Hong Kong. For example, two pieces of tuna or salmon sushi were selling for just 10 yuan, compared to prices nearly two-thirds higher in Hong Kong. This low pricing is due to the low cost of fish in Guangzhou.

## Sushi in China's Two Largest Cities

The first Japanese restaurant opened in Shanghai in the late 1980s. However, at that time, the Chinese would not eat sashimi or sushi. It wasn't until the grand opening of a Yaohan (a Japanese supermarket chain) store in the Pudon District in 1995 with the cooperation of the Shanghai Number One department store that the residents of Shanghai got their first taste of sushi. The food court on the ninth floor offered a variety of restaurants serving cuisine from around the world. One of these restaurants served Japanese food Sushi was included on the menu and soon became the talk of the town. The number of Japanese restaurants in Shanghai rapidly increased until there are now approximately 200. Strict competition introduced all-you-can-eat and all-you-can-drink policies to attract more customers. Some are so inexpensive as to make me wonder how they are able to stay in business.

Despite the low prices, these restaurants are not self-service buffets Rather, waiters and waitresses take orders and deliver dishes to the tables. Their menus, of course, include sushi.

Sushi is prepared in the kitchens, and customers order as many as they can eat. Even with China's low labor costs, salaries for waiters and waitresses at these restaurants must amount to a considerable figure.

The conveyor-belt sushi bar chain Genroku Sushi established



SUMO SUSHI in Shanghai offers an all-you-caneat lunch.

its Chinese headquarters in Shenzhèn, where it opened nine sushi bars. Thereafter, Genroku Sushi expanded its operations to include three sushi bars in Shanghai by 2000. SUMO SUSHI is a local conveyor-belt sushi bar chain in Shanghai, with six sushi bars throughout the city. All-you-can-eat service, for just 58 yuan, is available at lunch time and after 9:00 p.m. An all-you-can-eat



meal will pay for itself in just four plates, with two pieces of sushi each of sea urchin sushi, individually priced at 15 yuan per plate. However, expensive sushi, like sea urchin sushi, is rarely placed on the belt, while tuna salad sushi and crab salad sushi, individually priced at just 5 yuan per plate, is very common.

In the early 1990s, there were only about ten Japanese restaurants in Beijing. This number increased to eighty in 1996, exceeded 150 in 1998, and has now reached approximately 250. As in Shanghai, the majority of these restaurants are managed by Chinese people who went to Japan as exchange students. They consider Japanese restaurants to be a profitable business because as long as a dish is labeled as Japanese cuisine, even common dumplings can be priced five times higher than they are in Chinese restaurants.



Fukusuke is the first conveyor-belt sushi bar in Beijing.

The first conveyor-belt sushi bar in Beijing was Fukusuke, which opened in November 1998. Fukusuke is a joint venture between Okiura Kensetsu (a Japanese construction company based in Hiroshima) and a Chinese company that owns the Sanshiro Japanese restaurant in Beijing. Fukusuke does not use mechanical sushi chefs but rather Chinese chefs. Four preparation tables allow four chefs to work simultaneously when the sushi bar, with seating for sixty five, is busy. Five types of sushi (two pieces per plate), ranging from *tamagoyaki* (layered omelet) for 5 yuan per plate to abalone and sea urchin for 150–230 yuan, are available, proving that conveyor-belt sushi bars are much cheaper.

Fish used to make the sushi includes perch and flounder from Dalian, amberjack and sea bream from Fujian, and sea urchin from Korea. Tuna, abalone, and other varieties of fish are delivered daily by wholesalers who import them from Japan. The same wholesalers also deliver fish to Chinese restaurants as more and more Chinese people have taken to eating sashimi as appetizers. Just as Americans used to believe that eating raw fish was barbaric and a custom of those with no culinary skills, Chinese people who used to believe they would never eat anything uncooked have come to love eating sushi.

### Thailand—the Source of Sushi Fish

With growth of the Thai economy beginning in the late 1980s, the Thai people began to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle, making Japanese cuisine, which had previously been prohibitively expensive, easily affordable. At present, there are more than 1,000 Japanese restaurants in Bangkok. S & P is a family restaurant chain with thirty restaurants throughout the city, and its menu includes sushi and other Japanese dishes. Especially popular in Bangkok are four OISHI restaurants with a Chinese owner. Both Chinese and Japanese dishes are available from a buffet with a rich variety of sushi and sashimi. These restaurants are always crowded with young customers who enjoy the all-you-can-eat buffet for just 449 bahts.



OISHI's giant billboard is overwhelming.

Conveyor-belt sushi bars in Bangkok include Sakae and Genki Sushi, which are headquartered in Singapore, and Kobune, a domestic restaurant. Prices range from 38 bahts for two pieces of tuna or salmon sushi at Sakae to 800 bahts at a restaurant that uses fish flown in from Japan. In addition to the traditional methods of having fish flown in from Japan, Thailand also employs a unique system utilizing human transporters. These Japanese people purchase fresh fish at the Tsukiji Fish Market in Tokyo and then fly to Bangkok with the fish checked as luggage. In Bangkok the fish is sold to Japanese restaurants with which the transporters have established relationships.

Although fish is frequently flown to Thailand from Japan, Thailand is actually a popular supplier of fish used in making sushi. The UFM Fuji Super supermarket, a joint venture between Thailand and a Japanese retail company, opened in 1985 and emphasizes a rich lineup of fresh fish. I was told



UFM Fuji Super attracts customers even from neighboring countries.



that Japanese expatriates residing in fish-hungry countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, India, and even the Middle East, purchase fish from UFM Fuji Super. The Isetan department store, a well-known Japanese department store, also improved its fish department recently to attract more Japanese customers.

Production and export of frozen sushi fish is big business in Thailand, the world's largest producer of cultured shrimp. Thailand also farms tilapia, a freshwater fish sometimes generally referred to as "whitefish" or "perch," and cuttlefish is caught in the local waters. Thailand also imports tuna from the Philippines, Taiwan, and Indonesia, and deep-sea shrimp from Greenland. These fish are processed for use as sushi toppings and frozen for export. Many sushi shops in Japan use these processed fish, imported from Thailand, as well.

## Nga Chin for the Common People



Since Myanmar was closed off to the world for thirty long years, beginning in the 1960s, I assumed that there would be no Japanese restaurants in that country. Much to my surprise, however, there are more than ten Japanese restaurants in Myanmar's largest city, Yangon. Only five of these restaurants, including Benkei at the Hotel Nikko, Kanpachi

Mr. Eto, of Benkei, is the only Japanese chef in Myanmar

at the Equatorial Hotel, Tategoto at the Traders Hotel, and Furusato, which has a Japanese owner, serve sushi. The sushi at these restaurants is very expensive when you consider that a serving of assorted sushi costs about US\$28 and all-you-you-can-eat Burmese food costs just US\$1.



Making nga chin. Nga chin is wrapped in leaves and tied with string before it is sold.

Mr. Shozen Eto Eto of Benkei, the only Japanese chef in Myanmar, told me that sushi prices are so high because the fish has to be transported overland from Bangkok. Mr. Eto goes to Bangkok two or three times a month to buy approximately 100 kg of fish. Preserving this fish so that it lasts for ten to fifteen days is another difficulty adding to the cost of sushi. Myanmar's general population, of course, cannot afford to eat such expensive Japanese sushi. They do have their own version of sushi, similar to Japanese *narezushi* (fermented sushi), called *nga chin* ("sour fish"). Carp, shrimp, or other types of seafood undergo lactic fermentation when mixed with rice. This mixture is then wrapped in a large leaf and tied with a string for sale at storefronts. Four pieces of carp *nga chin* sells for US\$0.20 and three pieces of shrimp *nga chin* for US\$0.40, making it affordable enough to eat everyday.

#### An Incredible Fish and Sushi Network



In Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, Nakajima Suisan is a fish and sushi shop in the Japanese department store Sogo. Next to the block where fish is cleaned, a mechanical sushi chef makes and wraps sushi. The sushi chef at the Equatorial Hotel's Kanpachi is Chinese Malaysian. He has experience working in Japan, speaks passable Japanese, and even looks a little

Mr. Ryo of Kanpachi in Kuala Lumpur looks Japanese.

Japanese. There are four Kanpachi restaurants throughout Malaysia-in Penang, Bangi, Malacca, and Kuala Lumpur, in addition to the one in Myanmar.

Sushi King is a Japanese chain of conveyor-belt sushi bars.



Sushi King is the largest chain of conveyor-belt sushi bars in Malaysia.

After opening its first sushi bar in Kuala Lumpur in 1996, Sushi King added new sushi bars in rapid succession. Presently there are nineteen sushi bars in Malaysia, with eleven in Kuala Lumpur and eight in other cities throughout the Malay Peninsula. In Singapore, Genki Sushi is very well known. Mr. David Ban, a Singaporean business tycoon, witnessed the thriving business done at Genki Sushi in Japan and quickly acquired permission to open franchises in Singapore. Mr. Ban opened the first Genki Sushi in Singapore in 1994 and then extended his business to many other cities throughout





culture

Southeast Asia. As of 2001, Mr. Ban has six Genki Sushi sushi bars in Singapore, four in Malaysia, seven in Hong Kong, and two in Bangkok. With an additional two in New York managed by his son-in-law, Mr. Ban owns a total of twenty-one Genki Sushi sushi bars.



Mr. Tetsuya Wakuda is the owner-chef of Sydney's tremendously successful Tetsuya's

city and even in Sydney. As a result, Mr. Shindo's sales have dropped by 40%.

Melbourne's Chinatown in 1995. The shop became so popular that a total of 100 kg of rice was cooked fifteen times a day. Despite this popularity, Mr. Shindo concentrated solely on his one shop and never attempted to expand or develop his business into a chain. Seeing his success, other entrepreneurs copied his style to establish similar shops throughout the

Genki Sushi in Singapore, the chain's launching point into other Southeast Asian countries.



Sakae in Singapore is another busy sushi bar.

#### **Changing Aussie Food Culture**

Mr. Tetsuya Wakuda, owner-chef of Tetsuya's, and Mr. Toshihiro Shindo, owner of Sushijin in Melbourne, are known as men who have changed the food culture of Australia. Mr. Wakuda has impressed gourmets from around the world with his lavish use of raw fish in French and Japanese fusion dishes. Mr. Shindo became known for his development of sushi that can be eaten on the go. Mr. Shindo's sushi consists of small rolls filled with the same ingredients as ordinary sushi rolls but of a diameter and length that makes them easier to handle, even while walking.

Mr. Shindo established his small shop in the food court near



Sushi rolls are placed in to-go bags with their cut sides up.



Mr. Shindo and his Japanese employee at Sushijin

On a side note, Mr. Shindo told me that he once worked for ten months in the kitchen of one of my restaurants in New York twenty-five years ago. I felt truly sorry that I did not remember him, but I found it very interesting that sushi should bring

us together again a quarter of a century later and halfway around the world in Melbourne.

#### Getting to Know the World's Sushi

Does the rest of the world follow Japanese sushi culture by serving sushi with soy sauce, *wasabi* (Japanese horseradish), and pickled ginger? Is sushi served on the traditional small wooden block or tray? Is it eaten with chopsticks? All high-class restaurants throughout the world serve Japanese soy sauce, with Kikkoman being the most common brand. In contrast, busier and cheaper restaurants tend to use less expensive and inferior-tasting soy sauce made in China or Southeast Asia. While sushi bars with Japanese owners serve soy sauce in small, fancy pots, other sushi bars emphasize their use of high-grade soy sauce by serving it directly from the red-capped table bottles. Similarly, high-class establishments offer chopsticks with paper covers printed with the restaurant or sushi bar's name, while less renowned establishments simply offer chopsticks with ready-made paper covers. The small wooden blocks or trays, known as *geta*, on which sushi is traditionally served, are becoming harder and harder to find. They are being replaced by plastic trays because it is too difficult to have them re-planed once they've become stained from extended use. To be continued in the next issue of **Food Culture**.

All photos in this article were taken by the author.

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