

It is no secret that Japan's *nigiri-zushi* and sushi rolls have developed in unique ways in various countries and regions throughout the world. Pursuing this story, I have reported in **FOOD CULTURE** on the sushi situations in all of the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India and China). As Brazil and Russia were covered previously (Issue 21), India and China will be covered in this issue.

Staying Positive in the Face of Terrorism – Mumbai, India–

I flew with Malaysia Airlines from Tokyo's Narita Airport to Mumbai in western India, via Kuala Lumpur. As we took off at Kuala Lumpur, the cabin had already taken on the atmosphere of India. Before the in-flight meal was served, passengers were asked whether they preferred a vegetarian or non-vegetarian meal. Although some vegetarians in the world eat fish, vegetarians in India eat only grains, vegetables, and fruits. I was also told that most upper-class Indians were vegetarians.



Wasabi by Morimoto overlooks the India Gate and the sea.

It was for this reason that, aside from the capital of New Delhi where many Japanese live, it was widely believed that sushi restaurants would not be successful in India. In 2004, however, Masaharu Morimoto, better known as the Iron Chef, opened his restaurant "Wasabi by Morimoto" in the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower in Mumbai. He did so at the request of Ratan Tata, the owner of this signature hotel in Mumbai and chairman of the Tata Group. After four successful years, tragedy struck. In November 2008, the Taj Mahal Hotel was a target during a major terrorist attack in Mumbai, and the terrorists invaded Wasabi, turning the place into a battlefield. The restaurant was a total wreck, and it took an entire year to be refurbished. During



Wasabi by Morimoto in Mumbai

the renovation, Wasabi was moved to the banquet room on the top floor so it could stay open for business. In December 2009, it was reopened on the original second floor. I visited the restaurant in late October 2010. At the hotel entrance, guests are checked by X-ray scanners and metal detectors, much as they are at airports. I entered the bar on the first floor, and went to the back to use the exclusive elevator to the 2nd floor. There was no elevator here before, but this one was installed during the renovation for the convenience of the guests, not least those in wheelchairs. Wasabi is a small restaurant of 57 seats, with a *teppanyaki* counter as well as a sushi bar. Overlooking the India Gate and the sea from the window, the restaurant enjoys a supreme location.



Hirotaka Matsumoto

Born in Tokyo in 1942, he graduated from the University of Tokyo 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 include *Osushi Chikyu o Mawaru* (Kobunsha), *Oishi America Mitsuketa* (Chikuma Shobo), *New York Takezushi Monogatari* (Asahi Shimbunsha), *Samurai Shisetsudan Yoroppa o Shokusu* (Gendai Shokan), and *New York Kawariyuku Machi no Shokubunka* (Akashi Shoten).



Chef Kanda displaying his culinary skills at Wasabi

The sushi chef is Noriyuki Kanda. He worked at Morimoto in Philadelphia before coming here to work when the restaurant was opened. Morimoto entrusted him with the restaurant's management, as well. During the terrorist attack, Kanda narrowly escaped death. At around half past nine on the evening of November 26, he heard some loud bangs, like something crashing into the wall. Later he learned they were gunshots, but he couldn't figure out what they were at that time. Soon after the noise, the hotel management called him to warn, "Terrorist attack!" The restaurant was full of guests, and he immediately escorted them to the kitchen to let them out through the back door. No sooner did the guests escape than the terrorists came in, hoping to find some wealthy hostages. Looking back, Kanda pondered, "If their exit had been just a little later...."

Back on the subject of sushi, though. All fish, along with vegetables and rice, are directly flown in from the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo twice weekly to ensure that you can eat the same sushi as you would in Japan. For this, prices are naturally steep. One *nigiri-zushi* is priced at 425 rupiah (1 rupiah = 2 yen) for tuna, salmon, amberjack or conger eel, 450 rupiah for olive flounder, scallops, salmon roe or sea urchin, and 575 rupiah for *otono* (fatty tuna). One serving of assorted *nigiri-zushi* is 2,300 rupiah. Befitting the name of the restaurant, an abundant amount of genuine wasabi (Japanese horseradish) is grated for the *nigiri-zushi*. I was surprised to learn that 80% of the clientele were local Indians, and that hotel guests only accounted for the remaining 20%. I had simply assumed that almost all of the restaurant guests would be those foreign guests staying at the hotel. Kanda said, "We are fully booked by locals every day."

Only wealthy people can afford to come to such a

premium restaurant, and wealthy people belong to the upper social class and are usually vegetarian. Yet they eat sushi here. Although not as strict as under Islamic law, drinking alcohol is admonished in India. However, there are some scattered bars and clubs, as well as liquor stores. The old traditions and customs seem to be giving way.

Wasabi thrived, and opened a second restaurant in the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower in New Delhi in 2008. MEGU, which gained prominence in New York and opened in Moscow in September 2010, is also scheduled to open in New Delhi and Mumbai in the near future. (Editor's note: data as of the end of October 2010)

There is a restaurant called Tetsuma in Mumbai that serves Asian cuisine, mainly based around Japanese dishes. I was told that the name Tetsuma means tornado in Japanese (actually, the word is *tatsumaki*). As it is not in a hotel, the guests are mostly local Indians. It was opened in 2006 by its Indian owner, and there are no Japanese employees. Although it does not have a sushi bar, sushi is on the menu. The sushi is listed in two separate categories, non-vegetarian and vegetarian. Those with fish are non-vegetarian, and one *nigiri-zushi* costs 222 rupiah for tuna, salmon or shrimp, or 444 rupiah for one California roll. For vegetarian sushi, 232 rupiah buys one *inari-zushi* (pockets of deep-fried tofu filled with sushi rice), while one shiitake mushroom *nigiri-zushi* costs 222 rupiah and one vegetable roll costs 400 rupiah. It suddenly dawned on me that even strict vegetarians could enjoy this sushi, and to make sushi popular in India, the focus should be on vegetarian sushi. *Inari-zushi* is a bit steep at Tetsuma, but the sushi with fish is less expensive than at Wasabi because the fish is a domestic haul brought over from Chennai (formerly Madras).

All-You-Can Eat Sushi in IT City - Bangalore, India-

A roughly two-hour flight southward from Mumbai brought me to Bangalore on the Deccan Plateau. Its location at 950 meters above sea level keeps the city cool, and it was once a popular summer retreat for the British. Today, the city is better known as the Silicon Valley of India, where Western IT companies such as IBM, Microsoft, Intel, GE, and Philips converge with Indian companies such as Infosys and Wipro.

In Bangalore, there was a Japanese restaurant called Dahlia that closed in the spring of 2011, though Dahlia's flagship restaurant in Chennai is still open for business. Chennai was once known as a distribution center for

seafood. A Japanese man who had been in the import/export business there opened the first Dahlia about 17 years ago. The restaurant gained fame as the first place in India to serve sashimi. The fish for sashimi were tuna, squid, shrimp and others caught in the sea around the west coast off Kochi (formerly Cochin), and were flown to Chennai. Dahlia's owner also owned a boat and started to catch fish off the east coast. He later began to ship fresh seafood to Mumbai. As the IT economy was booming in Bangalore, he



A serving of assorted *nigiri-zushi* is 600 rupiah at Harima in Bangalore.

opened up a restaurant there, which at one point was more successful than the main restaurant. However, increased competition in Bangalore made the second shop ultimately less profitable.

Harima is located near the IBM Corporation offices. It was started under Japanese-Indian joint management

five years ago, and its superb interior looks like what you would find in a top Japanese restaurant in Tokyo. Although it does not have a sushi bar, there is a Japanese sushi chef. Its prices are lower (assorted *nigiri-zushi* are 600 rupiah) than those in Mumbai because Bangalore is much closer to the port city of Chennai. Frozen fish can be delivered by truck instead of by air. Japanese people come to the restaurant with other Japanese or Westerners, something that is rarely seen in Mumbai.

The Leela Palace Kempinski is a first-class hotel whose guest list has included Russian President Putin and US President Clinton. The hotel has a pan-Asian restaurant called Zen, where Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Thai and other Asian dishes are served. They also have separate sushi and *teppanyaki* sections. Their sushi chef is a Thai national who served his apprenticeship at the Four Seasons Hotel in Bangkok. Fish is flown in from Bangkok, but this is not because the chef is Thai; Bangkok is much closer to Bangalore than Tsukiji in Tokyo is. Still, an assortment of 5 sashimi slices and 5 *nigiri-zushi* was priced at 1,250 rupiah. Its location in an opulent hotel may contribute to the high prices.



The sushi section at Zen, in the opulent Leela Palace Kempinski

The restaurant Edo recently opened in the 5-star ITC Royal Gardenia Hotel in September of 2010. It has separate *robatayaki* (Japanese-style barbecue) and sushi sections. The sushi section is lavishly designed, with a rock waterwall behind the counter. There were two Japanese chefs when I visited, one for sushi and the other for other Japanese dishes. As fish is flown from Japan, an assortment of 7 *nigiri-zushi* and 2 sushi rolls cost 2,500 rupiah, which put it at the same price level as Wasabi.

Shiro is on the 3rd floor of the UB City Mall. This restaurant is operated by JSM Corporation, which is also a franchisee of the Hard Rock Café, Trader Vic's, and other famous establishments in Bangalore. The interior work of Shiro is simply splendid. The head of Buddha hanging from the ceiling of the three-story atrium reminded me of Megu in New York.

A popular lunch selection at Shiro is the all-you-can-eat dim sum and sushi for 750 rupiah. They don't have a sushi bar, but Indian chefs make sushi in the kitchen using fish that comes from Chennai. A regular serving of sushi costs 675 rupiah, but for an additional 75 rupiah you can eat as much as you want of *shumai*, *gyouza* dumplings, pork buns and other items. The



At Edo in the ITC Royal Gardenia, fish is flown in from Japan.

guests were all Indian, and many young couples were among them. Since the salaries of IT company



A popular lunch selection at Shiro is all-you-can-eat sushi (750 rupiah).

employees are generally better than average, this price range allows them to dine without having to think too much about cost.

These examples tell us that Bangalore far surpasses the merchant city of Mumbai in the field of sushi.

What Did the Dear Leader Eat? –Dalian, China–

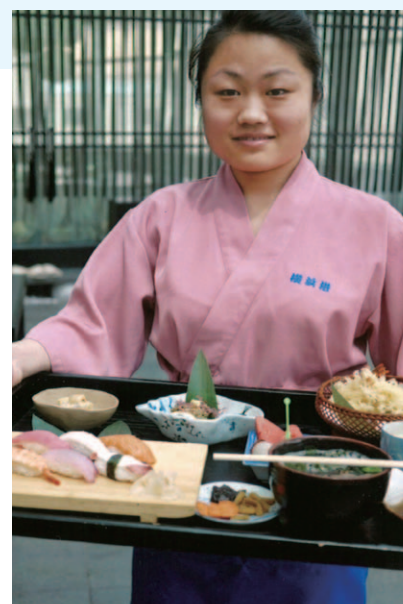
In early May of 2010, North Korea's ruler Kim Jong-il paid a surprise visit to China. Crossing over the Yalu River on the border of China and North Korea, he entered Dandong in Liaoning Province. After visiting Dalian's harbor facilities and the Dalian Development Area, he had a meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao in Beijing and then returned to North Korea via Shenyang and Dandong. Two weeks later, I decided to take a trip around these three cities. I first flew to Dalian and visited the Furama Hotel, one of the city's finest hotels, where Kim Jong-il was said to have stayed. The hotel has a Japanese restaurant called Yokohamako.

It was widely known that Kim Jong-il greatly enjoyed eating sushi, and that he had his private chef prepare sushi with tuna flown in directly from Japan. I suspected he may have eaten sushi from Yokohamako, and so I went there and ordered a sushi set menu for 92 yuan (1 yuan = 14 yen). It was a bit pricey for China, but it is a restaurant in a 5-star hotel. At a restaurant in town, 24 shrimp *gyouza* dumplings, although small, cost only 12 yuan.

The food I received, however, was very good for the price. The set contained seaweed salad, rolled egg, tempura, *chawan-mushi*, noodles topped with seasoned beef, *tsukemono* pickles, and sushi, followed by fruit and coffee. There were six pieces of sushi served with the set, and the ingredients were

reasonably good. Recalling the day Kim Jong-il stayed at the hotel, the waitress told me in her imperfect Japanese that they had no customers. The hotel was on high alert and everyone except hotel guests was completely shut out.

Another Dalian restaurant, Wasabi, serves marvelous sushi. This Japanese chain has a restaurant in Tokyo and two locations in Shanghai (with a third to open soon). Their second location in Dalian was scheduled to open shortly. True to their sign that proclaimed "Tuna Specialist" at the entrance their tuna was simply superb. They import Pacific bluefin tuna from Japan, which means they are not cheap. *Nigiri-zushi* made with *otoro* cost 48 yuan each, and with *chutoro* (medium fatty tuna) cost 39 yuan. However, the 46-yuan sushi set included the red part of Pacific bluefin tuna, which is a true customer pleaser. Kim Jong-il should have ordered a delivery from this restaurant instead.



A 92-yuan sushi set at Yokohamako in Dalian



Wasabi in Dalian serves simply superb tuna.

Food stalls with grilled oysters are specialty of Dalian. Five oysters are 10 yuan. Sea urchins can be grilled in the shell, costing 10 yuan apiece, and also can be eaten raw. They would cost about 30 yuan if served at a Japanese restaurant.

The Dalian Development Area is home to no less than 400 Japanese companies. With this built-in market, there are many authentic sushi restaurants run by Japanese in the city.

The Inland Area is Open for Future Development - Dandong and Shenyang, China-

Dandong is in an outlying area, so the forest of skyscrapers surprised me. Apparently, their trade with North Korea has been prosperous. Many Korean restaurants are at the foot of the Sino-Korean Friendship Bridge that spans the Yalu River. Of those, the most luxurious is Liuliang Restaurant, where one black sedan after another delivers guests who are welcomed by several lovely women wearing chima jeogori. I asked if I could see their menu at the reception counter, located at the back of a large hotel-like lobby. The menu had tuna "at the going price" and



The North-Korean Liuliang Restaurant in Dandong required an advance reservation for at least a party of four, leaving this reporter out in the cold.

sushi rolls. Tuna was the only variety offered for *nigiri-zushi*. As I was curious what kind of tuna it was and what the price was, I asked to be escorted to a table. They said that a reservation was required, and that it must be for a party of at least 4. This was the first time I had come across such a gorgeous restaurant in China, and yet I had no choice but to walk away.

On my way out, I took a photo of an attractive woman in chima jeogori at the front. This action brought a



The seafood section, with live fish tanks beside the Liuliang Restaurant lobby. Here, you choose your fish before being seated, and the cooked fish is delivered to your table.

female manager who dashed out to shout furiously at me in Chinese. Although I couldn't understand a word she said, I gathered that she was yelling at me not to take any pictures.

After returning to Japan, I learned that there is another Liuliang Restaurant in Beijing. That one is run by North Korea to earn foreign currency. The one in Dandong is probably under the same management. Because of the issue of defectors from North Korea, taking photos of the employees was something that could not be allowed. Later I learned that Pyongyang, capital of North Korea, used to be called Ryugyong (Liuliang in Chinese).

Dandong has about 5 Japanese restaurants. Of these, only Sentaro is run by a Japanese national. Its actual owner, though, is a Chinese national named Wang Qian. His wife who helps him with the restaurant is Japanese. Wang was born in Dandong, and studied in Japan for 10 years, during which he met his wife. He and his wife returned to Dandong and opened a Japanese restaurant. Their menu

prices were reasonable, for example, 88 yuan for one set of sushi. Ingredients were all frozen and used after thawing. Wang told me that the raw fish caught locally is not safe enough. There was a poster in the restaurant that read "Sushi, all you can eat for 80 yuan,"



An in-store poster at Sentaro, a Japanese restaurant in Dandong, has Korean writing as well.

which had already been discontinued. "No matter how low the sushi prices are set, there are no Japanese living in Dandong. Chinese order sushi together with other dishes, not just sushi alone," said Wang.

It was my first visit to Shenyang, formerly Mukden, in 18 years. The changes the city had gone through were simply amazing. A subway was to be completed shortly, and construction work was underway in front of Shenyang Station. A major shopping complex called Wanda Plaza had opened 6 months earlier (the end of 2009) on Taiyuan Street near the station. The complex has some 10 restaurants on each of the first to fourth floors alone, and nearly 60 restaurants in all. I felt this would provide a good cross section of what Shenyang



Happy Gimhap in Shenyang specializes in Korean rice rolls called *gimbap*.

people like to eat.

In the complex, the two pizza shops were enjoying quite a bit of popularity, and the Korean barbecue restaurant had many customers as well. The Happy Gimhap is a shop that specializes in the Korean rice rolls called *gimbap*, which look similar to *makizushi*, and it was packed with customers. They proudly display how *gimbap* is prepared to anyone passing by, so there was a crowd of spectators. This restaurant has 7 locations in Dalian, one in Shenzhen, and two in Shenyang.

There were two *kaiten-zushi* (conveyor belt sushi) restaurants, both of which were almost empty. A Japanese restaurant named Fujisan was right in front of Happy Gimhap, yet it was empty. It didn't have a sushi counter, as the sushi made in the kitchen was brought to the table. One serving of 10 *nigiri-zushi* was 50 yuan. The Chinese manager, who had been in



Sushi at Ajisen in Shenyang

Dalian once, said in fluent Japanese, "Compared to Dalian, people in Shenyang don't know much about Japanese cuisine, let alone sushi." Ajisen, on the first floor facing the main street, was the chain's 389th shop in China. Ajisen in New York started by serving

ramen, later adding sushi to the menu. Those in China will focus their efforts on sushi. There was a big poster of sushi saying "There is nothing more valuable than good health." One serving of 10 *nigiri-zushi* was being offered for 48 yuan, and a bowl of ramen noodles for only 19 yuan. At those prices, it's easy to understand how Chinese people can resist eating sushi.

Although sushi is popular in coastal areas where fresh fish is readily available, it may take some time for sushi to penetrate inland.



Chinese-owned Itamae Sushi has several shops in Japan.

And yet, what will happen if people in inland areas start eating sushi? There will be a scramble for fish between Japan and China. This, in fact, has already begun. The Chinese owned Itamae Sushi, which has several tens of shops in Hong Kong and Macau, has opened 5 restaurants in Tokyo alone. This is quite a shocking turnaround for followers of the sushi industry. For three consecutive years, Itamae Sushi has been hitting remarkably high prices for Pacific bluefin tuna caught off Oma, in Aomori Prefecture, at the year's first auction. For the past two years (2010 and 2011), however, Kyubey restaurant in Ginza offered to share the tuna fifty-fifty to save the face of Japanese restaurants. At the first auction of 2012, Tsukiji Kiyomura Sushi-Zanmai caused a stir with their winning bid of 56.49 million yen (\$736,000) for a Pacific bluefin tuna.

It seems likely that these astronomic bids will go beyond just tuna, with the Chinese increasingly bidding on other fish in the near future.