

Trivia from the Food Cultures of the World

Part 1: Trying One Hundred Tofu Delicacies at the Magazine

Today, tofu is considered a popular Japanese health food by most of the world. However, though there are many theories on the origins of tofu, the most accepted is that the modern recipe was developed in China during the Early Han Period (206BC–circa 8AD). Tofu seems to have been introduced to Japan by Zen monks during the Kamakura Period (1192–1333). The first written reference to tofu is found in the record of offerings to Kasuga Shrine in Nara. Approximately five hundred years later the *Tofu Hyakuchin*, or One Hundred Tofu Delicacies, was published in Osaka in 1782.

Although we are fascinated by the abundance and variety of foods in this modern age, we seem to be limited in our uses for tofu to the most common dishes such as plain, boiled tofu; tofu as an ingredient in *miso* soup or *oden* (a soup with a light broth containing a wide variety of ingredients); chilled tofu; and the spicy tofu and minced pork dish, *mabodofu*, imported from China. The *Tofu Hyakuchin* (One Hundred Tofu Delicacies), published during the Edo Period (1603–1868) and detailing one hundred different dishes made from tofu, however, clearly indicates that tofu certainly contributed to the diet of the people of that time, even if only in some small measure. So that we can all reach a clear understanding of the diet of our nation, Japan, I hope to clearly explain the wisdom and methods of our ancestors.

The Cookbook that Conquered Edo and Osaka

Just as its title indicates, the *Tofu Hyakuchin* introduced recipes for one hundred dishes made from tofu. The book was written by Seikyodojin Kahitsujun and published in Osaka's Koraibashi by Zenshichiro Fujiwara of Shunseido. This book was highly regarded by the people of



Second version of the *Tofu Hyakuchin* (from the Ajinomoto Foundation for Dietary Culture)

the time for offering entertaining ways of preparing the tofu to which they had become so accustomed.

The author of *Tofu Hyakuchin* was an educated and cultured person, not a cook, who wrote the book, using a penname, simply to fulfill a personal interest. In the book, he divides the dishes into six grades: ORDINARY, STANDARD, CONNOISSEUR, INTERESTING, UNUSUAL, and EXQUISITE. He included both Japanese and Chinese literary works and poems to show readers the intellectual aspect of cooking. This new publication with its original structure was so well received that a second volume was published the following year, and a third and final volume was published during the Meiji Period (1868–1912). Since the introduction of *Tofu Hyakuchin*, a variety of cookbooks following the same basic principles were later published in both Edo and Osaka. These books offered one hundred recipes for *daikon* radish, sweet potatoes, sea bream, eel, eggs, and so on.

ORDINARY

The Secret is in the Ingredients

In the Kanto region (Tokyo and surrounding area), this dish is called *ganmodoki*. Although the modern method of preparation calls for all of the ingredients to be mixed with the tofu and then deep fried, this dish was traditionally prepared by stuffing tofu with various seasoned ingredients and then deep frying. As the flavors of the vegetables and the soft, leathery crust that forms on the tofu with deep frying combine, the traditional flavor is quite delicious. As with popular modern dishes, the fact that this dish could be simply and quickly prepared is what



made it so common. The ORDINARY section of the *Tofu Hyakuchin* introduced dishes that could

easily and regularly be prepared for everyday family meals. Twenty-six of these recipes, however, included the special secrets of chefs.



Background: Activity around the Nihonbashi District of Edo (Edo Meisho Zue)

STANDARD

Simple flavors

This dish is prepared by skewering blocks of tofu, flavoring the blocks with soy sauce, and then lightly roasting the tofu. Next, a paste made from kudzu (arrowroot) starch is applied to one side of the tofu block, coarsely ground wheat bran is applied, and the tofu roasted again until it turns brown. The roasted wheat bran smells very good and adds an interesting flavor. The STANDARD section of the *Tofu Hyakuchin* contained only ten different recipes.



CONNOISSEUR

White Miso

The *Tofu Hyakuchin* introduced twenty-six recipes of the connoisseur grade. Recipes designated as CONNOISSEUR

were somewhat superior compared to those from the ORDINARY section, not only in flavor, but also in presentation. Though it is rather difficult to find the differences from one recipe to the next, the names were certainly well thought out. Some of these names are translated as Common Tofu, Cloud Tofu, Pink



Tofu Hyakuchin

Tofu Hyakuchin (from the Ajinomoto Foundation for Dietary Culture)

Tofu, and Minced Tofu.

As all of these dishes were prepared with white *miso*, they probably were not very popular in the Kanto region, where red or dark *miso* has been the traditional standard. In the Kanto region of the Edo Period, white *miso* was a very special product only used in restaurants. Therefore, the only traditional dishes from that part of Japan that utilize white *miso* are a few broiled fish dishes.

INTERESTING

A Sense of Modern Desserts

When using the word “interesting” in regard to cooking, we probably think “strange”. The *Tofu Hyakuchin* introduced nineteen recipes in this section,

which described interesting dishes as being quite different dishes that would catch people by surprise.



One of the dishes introduced was more like a dessert than what is normally considered a dish served at mealtime. This dish was prepared using firm tofu and agar (a gelatinous substance made from seaweed). The tofu was either cut into preferred shapes or broken up, placed in a wooden box with melted agar, and finally chilled in a refrigerator. Although the original text calls for firm tofu, the dish is most delicious when a softer tofu is used and a dark syrup made from vinegar and soy sauce is poured over the chilled tofu. It seems that many restaurants served this dish as a dessert for a very long time.

UNUSUAL

Tofu Steak

It seems that the recipes included in this section of the *Tofu Hyakuchin* offer a balance between flavor and appearance. In many cases, this balance is achieved by the oil used. The dishes in this section are described as being more delicious than those in the INTERESTING section, though presentation of dishes in the INTERESTING section is more unusual. The recipes in this section were guaranteed to offer both excellent flavor and attractive presentation.



It is said that the best three recipes in the *Tofu Hyakuchin* are all recipes for fried tofu. Prepared in the same manner as a beef steak, tofu steaks were eaten similar to the way Westerners eat at a barbecue; eating while cooking.

Recipe

1. Cut tofu into bite-sized pieces and remove as much of the liquid as possible.
2. Fry the pieces of tofu in a frying pan with a little more oil than is probably normally used. Turn the tofu as necessary until it is slightly browned on two sides. Do not over cook.
3. Dip the tofu in a sauce prepared from finely grated *daikon* radish and soy sauce and eat.

EXQUISITE

Going to the Extreme

The seven recipes listed in this section were true works of art in the world of tofu cuisine. These dishes were described as being exquisitely seasoned and preserving the true flavor of tofu; dishes for the true tofu connoisseur. After preparing dishes



from the INTERESTING and UNUSUAL sections of the *Tofu Hyakuchin*, preparation of the dishes in the EXQUISITE section was sure to make people understand and appreciate the delicate flavor of tofu. In terms of modern recipes, these dishes must be comparable to the simple cold tofu and boiled tofu so popular today.

One method for preparing boiled tofu calls for boiling the tofu in a broth made from kudzu. The key to boiled tofu is not to overcook it. The tofu is placed in the boiling broth and left until it begins to float. Tofu boiled in kudzu broth has a very refined flavor.

Tofu was an important source of nutrition for all classes of people.

Looking back at the history of Japan, we know that rice was not available on a constant or even regular basis to either the farmers or the townspeople of the Edo Period. At the end of the Edo Period, the domains of all clans fell into grave financial difficulties, so that even the ruling-class samurai had to be frugal. It was at this time that tofu became a common dish on the tables of many lords.

In order to repair balance the finances of his clan, one lord is said to have restricted himself to wearing clothes made of cotton and eating only a half-block of tofu with their rice for five years. Inspired by their leader’s restraint, his subordinates followed his example and the clan was able to make a full financial recovery. According to records, another family is said to have maintained a very strict diet of tofu only, with vegetables added one day per month. Despite such efforts at economy by some people at this time, it is also true that records reveal that the craftsmen of Edo were eating meals of at least four different dishes, and the *Hyakuchin* books were very widely received in Edo at this time.

References

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- Cooking Photographs by Shohei Matsufuji

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Part 2: Drinking Tea from Saucers in the 17th Century!

Serving tea in a cup with a saucer beneath it is common sense these days. However, when tea was first introduced in England, the tea was served in a cup, but transferred from the cup to a saucer for cooling and drinking. The thought of English ladies and gentlemen drinking their tea from a saucer is certainly humorous. The origins of this method of drinking tea lie in a saucer known as a porringer.



Painting portraying the traditional custom of pouring tea from the cup to the saucer for drinking (photo contributed by Orion Press)

Tableware Used Before the Tea Cup

Records from Nagasaki Prefecture's Hirado Trading Company show that in 1659, 50,000 cups were exported to the Yemen port of Mocca (Mocha). Many of these cups are thought to have made their way to Europe. As the cups of that time had no handle or accompanying saucer, it seems clear that the customs associated with drinking tea were passed along from China. This is about the time that cups without handles were first imported into England, and drinking tea in this manner became popular with the nobility. However, they felt that drinking directly from a cup was vulgar, and began ordering saucers from the Dutch East India Company.



A silver porringer (from the Satogaeri Kappu Shiryō-kan)

From that time on cups and saucers were used together, with tea being served in the cup but poured into the saucer for drinking.

Supporting this revision in custom is the traditional flat saucer, or porringer, used by the nobility before the import of porcelain tea cups. Held with both hands, the porringer was used for drinking herbal tea or tonics. Very few porringers have survived to modern times as most were made of silver, and many were exchanged for money and then melted down for more practical use during the frequent wars that erupted throughout Europe. For the nobility of the time, so used to drinking from the porringer, the introduction of the tea cup shaped like a sake cup was probably quite a shock. It must have been like the Japanese, used to eating with chopsticks, adjusting to the use of Western knives and forks.

Tea Drinking Among the Commoners Following the Industrial Revolution

Tea had become a rage among the nobility, and was even used to treat gout. Word of both the popularity of

tea, as well as its ability to relieve or prevent gout spread among even the commoners of the time. However, as tea was very expensive, it was an extravagant treatment. Over a period of three hundred years—from the mid-17th century to the mid-20th century—the tea-drinking phenomenon spread from the nobility to the upper class, middle class, and finally to the lower classes. During this time, the manners of the nobility were also adopted by all classes of society. The Industrial Revolution was underway and during the reign of Queen Victoria, England prospered as “the factory of the world”, until even the lower classes were able to enjoy tea. Thus, England's tea culture was established.

Stalls serving drinks and light meals early in the morning began appearing on the streets of London at this time. These stalls were frequented by laborers on their way to work. The most popular item was, in true English fashion, hot milk tea. However, as the customers were usually in a hurry, the traditional custom of pouring the tea into the saucer for drinking was rather inconvenient, and this custom seems to have died out. Though it is quite rare to see someone drinking their tea from the



A chocolate cup from the mid Edo Era (from the Satogaeri Kappu Shiryō-kan)

saucer today, it is said that the famous British author of the 1940s, George Orwell, drank his tea from the saucer at the BBC cafeteria. Clearly customs and manners acquire various forms over a lengthy period of time. Just as time marches on, these changes are quite natural in any society

References

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Research assistance gratefully received from the cup museum, *Satogaeri Kappu Shiryō-kan* (Ichikawa City, Chiba Prefecture)

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Part 3: The Birth and Evolution of the Croissant

Although the croissant is today considered a famous French bread, it was actually born in Austria. The recipe made its way to France, a prominent agricultural nation. Over the centuries, the recipe evolved into the rich croissant now so popular around the world. There are many stories, colored by the times, providing the backdrop for the birth and evolution of the modern croissant.

Eating the Crescent Symbol of the Ottoman Empire

In 1526, the Ottoman Empire made its first expedition to Vienna where it attacked the Hapsburg Empire (now Austria). Later, the Ottomans expanded their empire by invading surrounding countries one by one. In 1683, they had completely surrounded Vienna but the exhaustion of more than one hundred-fifty years of warfare made them vulnerable. The Hapsburg Empire prevailed, thanks to the ferocity of the Viennese defense and the support of her allies.

In the midst of this war, the Ottoman army initiated a strategy for digging underground passages to the castle and was working on these tunnels at night. A baker working in a basement during the early hours of the morning heard the tunneling and notified the Viennese army, preventing an underground invasion. It is said that prevention of this underground invasion, as well as the arrival of allied forces at about the same time

led to the Hapsburg victory. In celebration, the baker baked bread in the shape of the crescent moon. There are two theories behind the crescent-shaped bread. One is that it represents the sickles used to dig their tunnel. Another is that it was based on the crescent-moon symbol of the Ottoman Empire. Still a third theory suggests that the French word croissant refers to the growth of the waxing moon from the three-quarter stage to the full moon. This theory also seems valid.

“Let them eat cake!”

The croissant has become a bread associated thoroughly with France. It is said that the recipe was brought to France by none other than the famous Marie Antoinette, originally of Austria. When she married the crown prince of France (later King Louis XVI), she took her baker who introduced the recipe for the original croissants to France. Originally, croissants were made from a dough similar to that used to make sweet rolls, not the flaky Danish-style dough used to day.

Today, the shape of croissants is not limited to the crescent. The shape may vary depending upon the oils and fats used. For example, a straighter shape is achieved with the use of fresh butter and margarine; a diamond shape is achieved with the use of butter only; and the standard crescent shape is achieved with the use of margarine only.

Executed during the French Revolution, Marie Antoinette is unfortunately most often remembered for saying, “Let them eat cake!” at a time when the people of France were starving to death, though modern

historians tend to believe that she never made such a statement. However, had she actually said this, the item referred to as “cake” in the English translation most certainly meant croissants. Today, bread known as French bread is a hard type of bread such as the baguette or bâtard. In contrast to these, bread made with a mixture of butter or milk produces a soft type of bread such as



Marie Antoinette (photo contributed by Orion Press)

the croissant or brioche. At the time of the French Revolution, these soft types of bread were considered desserts, like pastry.

Today, croissants are generally considered snacks for children or a special weekend or holiday breakfast for adults in France. Weekday breakfast frequently consists of cereal or a warmed baguette with butter and jam. The common beverage is café au lait drunk from a large bowl. Lunch consists of a sandwich eaten in a park or school lounge and a bottle of mineral water. A common French dinner is often a salad appetizer, main dish, and cheese. The traditional French diet is still alive and well in modern France, with meals changing very little with the seasons, and a preservation of their national love of bread.

References

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 - *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*
- Croissant photo provided by The Yamazaki Baking Co., Ltd.



The popular crescent-shaped croissant with its marvelous aroma