

## Theater of Taste

TS05 - Kunio Tokuoka, Japanese biodiversity  
Fri 22 Oct 2004 7pm

Today we would like to introduce to you two Japanese food, "Gomadofu" and "Yuba".

In Italy, some of you may have heard the name of foodstuffs "Tofu (soybean curd)" and "Goma (sesame seeds)." Those of you who know them may imagine that "Gomadofu" is a bean curd that made from mix of sesame seeds. However, the answer is No. Actually, Gomadofu is totally different from Tofu and the recipe is different too.

Before talking about Gomadofu, we need some explanations on Tofu that may cause for misunderstanding. Tofu is made from the raw materials such as soybeans and bittern (Nigari). On the other hand, Gomadofu is made from mix of sesame seeds, kudzu, and water and neither soybeans nor bittern are used. This is the different point.

There is a record that Zen Buddhists brought Gomadofu from China as well as Buddhism and the history of Gomadofu in Japan is surprisingly old. Later, it was used for one of the vegetarian dishes derived from the Kamakura period and became one of popular foods as a Kyoryori (Local dishes in Kyoto) during the Edo period. The taste was arranged to more Japanese-like with the times and it is still taken over as a traditional Japanese food. It is now often used for the Buddhist ceremony as a vegetarian dish that plays an important role.

The natural flavor and rich taste of sesame seeds are the features of modern Gomadofu and it feels very smooth on the tongue. You feel the rich flavor of sesame seeds and enjoy its special texture in your mouth. Also, Gomadofu is rich in nutrients and contains a lot of proteins, calcium, iron, and vitamin E. With this high level of nutrition value, we can recommend this as a healthy food with confidence.

Next food is Yuba (soy milk skin). Yuba is made from soybeans. The recipe is very similar to the process of making "Tofu," a representative food that is made from soybeans. Here is the recipe for making Yuba:

1. Soak soybeans in water for a night.
2. With pouring water, mash and boil it.
3. Filtrate the boiled beans through a cloth (the extract is called "Tonyu (soy milk)")
4. Pour Tonyu in a pan and heat it up. Then, Yuba (a thin skin) is produced on the surface.

When you put "Nigari (bittern)" in the soymilk, it coagulates and becomes Tofu. If you heat it

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up before putting Nigari, however, Yuba is produced. The one scooped up right away is called “Nama Yuba” and the one dried up is called “Kanso Yuba.” Especially when you eat “Nama Yuba” right after scooped up, it is called “Kumiage Yuba” and is considered as the most precious way of eating. As stated above, there are many ways of enjoying Yuba such as eating just as it is or as dried-up.

The history of Yuba goes back a long way and it is considered that it was imported with Tofu from China by Zen Buddhists. There is an explanation that Yuba has a history of over two thousand years. Buddhist monks lived around Kyoto contributed to the popularization of Yuba in Japan. Since Yuba was made from soybeans, it was much appreciated by the vegetarian Buddhist monks. Later, Yuba became popular for the vegetarian dishes or tea-ceremony dishes. With its abundant fat and protein, Kusunoki Masashige used it as a provision in Chihaya Castle where his army barricaded-in in 1332. The Chinese character of Yuba was changed in modern times and was called “Yuba” in olden days. Originally in China, it was called “To-Fu-Be (a skin of Tofu)” and the Chinese characters such as “granny,” “grandma,” or “old woman” were used because the color and texture of Yuba looked like wrinkled skin of old woman. Especially “Kyo Yuba” has been well known since olden days.

Now, I would like to talk about the reason why I chose these foods for you. It is palpable that the recent trend of culinary field in the world tends to “Super Innovation.” I think it is very important to improve and adapt to the times. However, it is not always true if only we change something. So, I feel a little question on the orientation of the culinary “Super Innovation.” For this reason, I would like to give my whole mind to the review of our traditional techniques. For example, Miso (soybean paste), Tofu, or Yuba are made from soybeans, which have been used in Asia since long time ago, and each food has further variations. Besides, sesame seeds can be used as oil, spice, sauce, or sometimes can be served as a food looks like Tofu.

With a certain technique, a material turns to so many kinds of foods. When I think of it, I feel that every piece of the Japanese food history that has been maintained while many foods were weeded out can be considered as “Healthy Innovation.” What should be added in the extension of the tradition? Firstly reviewing the culinary history of my home country, I took my first step toward the creation.

The important thing is “To review the roots.” That is, to know about the materials and I think it is to get a sense of the producer of the materials. Those producers who cultivate beautiful and healthy food materials support our cooking. In present-day Japan, the circumstance for genuine agriculture is not that easy. I believe that it is the first step for the development of cooking and is a responsibility of the chef to loudly speak for the producers’ enthusiasm through the foods.

My grandfather said, “With your ingenuity, everything in nature can be a food.”

When I think it out again and again with enthusiasm, I think I can give an effect on the cooking and it gets through to the other people’s mind.

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In summary, my culinary philosophy is “Living Together.” Food nurtures many things. It is not only for supplying energy to the body but also is a media that promotes the relationship between the people. To share the time sitting around a table with friends, colleagues, or master and pupils who seek the way of cooking is just to cultivate the relationship between the people. Also, I think we should develop the relationship between the producers, restaurants, and even the consumers as well. I think that “Living Together” stands for the mutual development beyond the generations. I think that either scientific solution or creation of a new field is one of elements for “Living Together” but is not the central thing.

Of course, a new recipe, combination, and different way of decoration are important but I keenly feel that essential is a food, which is for “Living Together.”

It is nice for the producers, chefs, service, and customers to communicate through a food. If you feel that the communication can be the vigor for the future for everybody involved with this food, there is no chef who can hardly ask for more.

Why these foods have been taken over for a long time? I think it is because it has been necessary for “Living Together.” What would you think about it?

Today, I come here to introduce to all of you what we have developed in Japan. However, now I am in Italy, not in Japan. Therefore, it is a little regrettable because I cannot convey everything from Japan to you. However, I made my best efforts to make you feel, taste, and know about Japan as much as possible. I would be glad if you understand it even if only slightly.

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