

OKONOMIYAKI

お好み焼き



(Michael Nguyen)

Introduction

Okonomiyaki, the Japanese savory pancake, is a dish with a long history dating back hundreds of years. Within those hundreds of years, it didn't always exist as the cabbage-filled sauce-topped pancake consumed for lunch and dinner that many know today. It began as a simple dessert that was consumed at Buddhist ceremonies and in modern day has become a communal food. For foreigners, the food is a complete mystery, even having to be adapted to suit their palettes, but the dish itself truly means "As-You-Like-It" as there are many variations and different encounters as listed below.

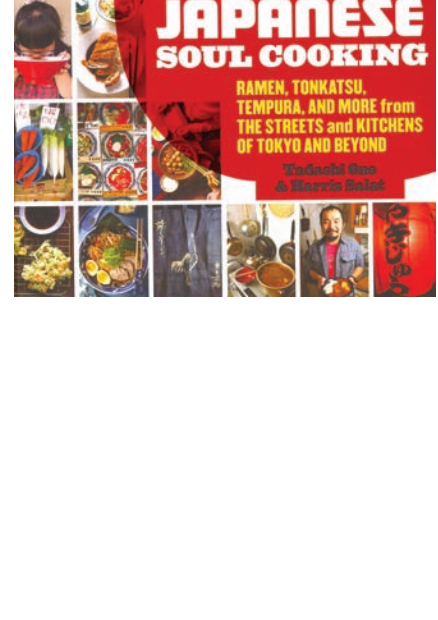


(dannychoo / flickr)

Making

Japanese Soul Cooking (Tadashi Ono & Harris Salat)

"Forget buttermilk, sliced bananas, and maple syrup, because in Japan the pancakes are a whole different flapjack--savory, hearty, and oh so good, griddled with everything from cabbage, pork, and ramen noodles to fried eggs and "dancing" dried, saved bonito."

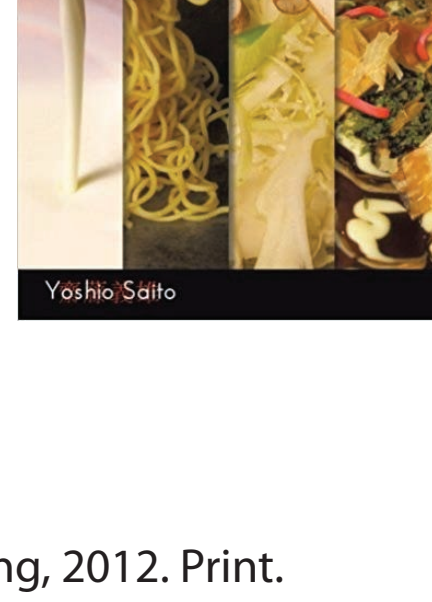


Ono and Salat share their expertise in okonomiyaki, with Ono immigrating from Japan to America to become a chef at a young age and Salat having trained in Japanese restaurant kitchens, through their delightful "oh so good" descriptions of okonomiyaki. In addition to a short history of the dish that only dates back to World War II, the two of them note that the most important aspect of okonomiyaki is that there should be a great variety in the toppings which add "flavor and visual" appeal along with the sauce and mayonnaise. The "Okonomiyaki" chapter provides interested cooks with two variations, although there are hundreds in existence. The two most popular ones are the Osaka-style which is a simple batter mixed with cabbage and pork while the Hiroshima-style recipe adds layers of yakisoba noodles and bean sprouts within the pancake. The recipes offer no western substitutes for those that want to ensure an authentic "Japanese soul cooking" experience.

Ono, Tadashi, and Harris Salat. "Okonomiyaki." Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and beyond. London: Jacqui Small, 2014. 128-35. Print.

Okonomiyaki: Japanese Comfort Food (Yoshio Saito)

Much of Saito's cooking experience comes from his mother and sister, having spent much of his childhood in the kitchen, which fits the description of Japanese comfort food. Saito went on to then immigrate to the United States and talked on several cooking shows, even making a catering company before creating this cookbook.



Saito's "Okonomiyaki: Japanese Comfort Food" goes over several variations that no other cookbook goes into. Some variations are well-known like the Osaka-style and Hiroshima-style which are covered in Ono and Salat's "Japanese Soul Cooking," and the cookbook goes into great depth with the "eleven commandments" of cooking okonomiyaki for complete beginners. For recipes with a less authentic experience but adapted for vegetarians or even busy people, Saito has chosen to provide sections for them to let people of all kinds of background try okonomiyaki on their own terms.

Saito, Yoshio. Okonomiyaki: Japanese Comfort Food. Indiana: Trafford Publishing, 2012. Print.



(bdu / flickr)

Marketing

Origin of Okonomiyaki (Boteju)

Boteju's brief but detailed account of Okonomiyaki matches that of Lapointe's article for The Japan Times early on. They both similarly begin with funoyaki back in the Edo Period, but then Boteju's version diverges with the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, which then caused sukesoyaki, the precursor to okonomiyaki, to become a staple food. Boteju largely focuses on the "sauce" that tops these dishes with miso on funoyaki, bean jam with sukesoyaki, and later the soy-based sauce in yoshokuyaki. Due to the great variations on the recipe over time, it became known as okonomiyaki due to the addition of many different fillers and toppings.

Although the piece talks about the origins of okonomiyaki, as an advertising piece for Boteju's well-regarded chain, it leads the reader into the development of the sauce topping as they claim they are the originator of adding mayonnaise and mustard. The website is available in both Japanese and English and their restaurants are located all across Asia, so they seem to be targeting tourists that are interested in trying something unique by providing their expertise on the dish.

"Origin of Okonomiyaki." Boteju, <http://www.boteju.com/boteju/boteju/kigen.html>. Accessed 28 February 2017.



(Michael Nguyen)

Eating/Memorializing

As you like it, and you will (Rick Lapointe / The Japan Times)

Lapointe, an American living in Japan, reflects on his childhood experience with okonomiyaki and details its history as far back as the 1600s in an article he wrote for The Japan Times. He succeeds in his account by noting specific versions of the dish, like funoyaki during the Edo Period which was a sweet pancake served with a pepper-flavored miso, and monjayaki, a looser batter mixed with vegetables and meat, during the Meiji Period. He educates his readers by precisely telling them how to order at a restaurant and the variety of ingredients available in hopes that they can one day try it out for themselves as he once did. He also provides an alternative to eating at a Japanese restaurant, which is to have the reader make it themselves by providing a recipe.

Lapointe, Rick. "As you like it, and you will." The Japan Times, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2002/07/28/food/as-you-like-it-and-you-will/>. Accessed 01 March 2017.

In search of okonomiyaki, the addictive Japanese pancake (Jason Margolis / WLRN)

Margolis enlists Merry White, an expert on Japanese culture from Boston University, in order to prepare this informational piece on okonomiyaki for NPR-affiliated station, WLRN. He begins by writing about his first encounter with the dish many years ago and the ingredients that make it up, and then he interviews White to get additional context on the dish itself. White claims that due to food shortages post-World War II and a surplus in cabbage, the Japanese people created the dish as a tasty way to survive as anything can be thrown into it. Today, it has become well known in both Hiroshima and Osaka, spreading across Japan and even to a few rare locations in the United States. Both Margolis and White detail that they became addicts to the dish many years back despite the unseemly appearance to Americans and that locations in the United States had to adapt the dish so that it would suit their palette, and the two hope that more people will be willing to try it when they have the chance, despite WLRN being based in Miami.

Margolis, Jason. "In search of okonomiyaki, the addictive Japanese pancake." WLRN, <http://wlrn.org/post/search-okonomiyaki-addictive-japanese-pancake>. 27 May 2016. Web. Accessed 27 February 2017.

Pretty Good Number One: An American Family Eats Tokyo (Matthew Amster-Burton)

"I wanted to go out for okonomiyaki because it would present the trip's final bout of cultural disorientation, and okonomiyaki did not disappoint."



Amster-Burton, a Seattle food writer, is quick to describe his journey as disorienting when opening his chapter on okonomiyaki. Yet, unlike the American soldiers described in Cwiertka's "Modern Japanese cuisine" who refused to eat okonomiyaki due to the appearance, he remained intrigued as he is forced to clumsily cook his own okonomiyaki on his own grill with little guidance from a Japanese person who could hardly speak Japanese. Despite what he listed off as a strange concoction of ingredients and an odd appearance, he and his daughter, Iris, enjoyed the taste and the experience, as nothing else could really match it for as little as \$15. For someone who has never eaten okonomiyaki, he manages to bridge the gap for those who are interested in trying out the dish.

Amster-Burton, Matthew. "Okonomiyaki." Pretty Good Number One: An American Family Eats Tokyo. N.p.: CreateSpace Independent Platform, 2015. 173-175. Print.



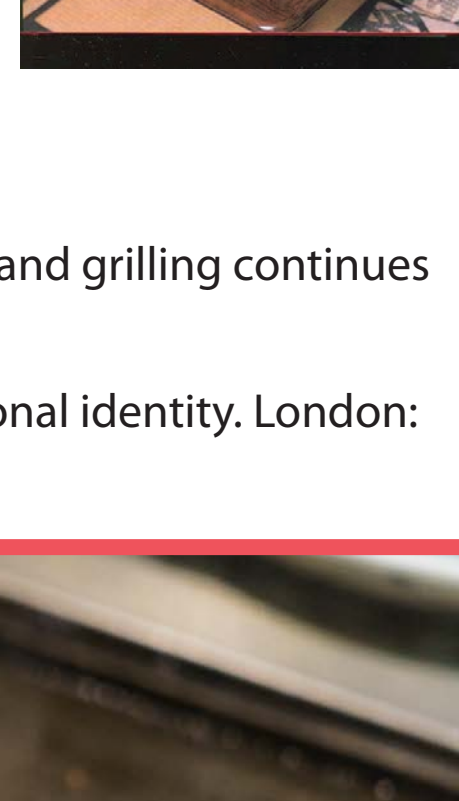
(Julie Makinen / Los Angeles Times)

Advocating for Change

Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power, and National Identity (Katarzyna Joana Cwiertka)

"Okonomiyaki was a meagre fare that did not agree with the taste of the American soldiers."

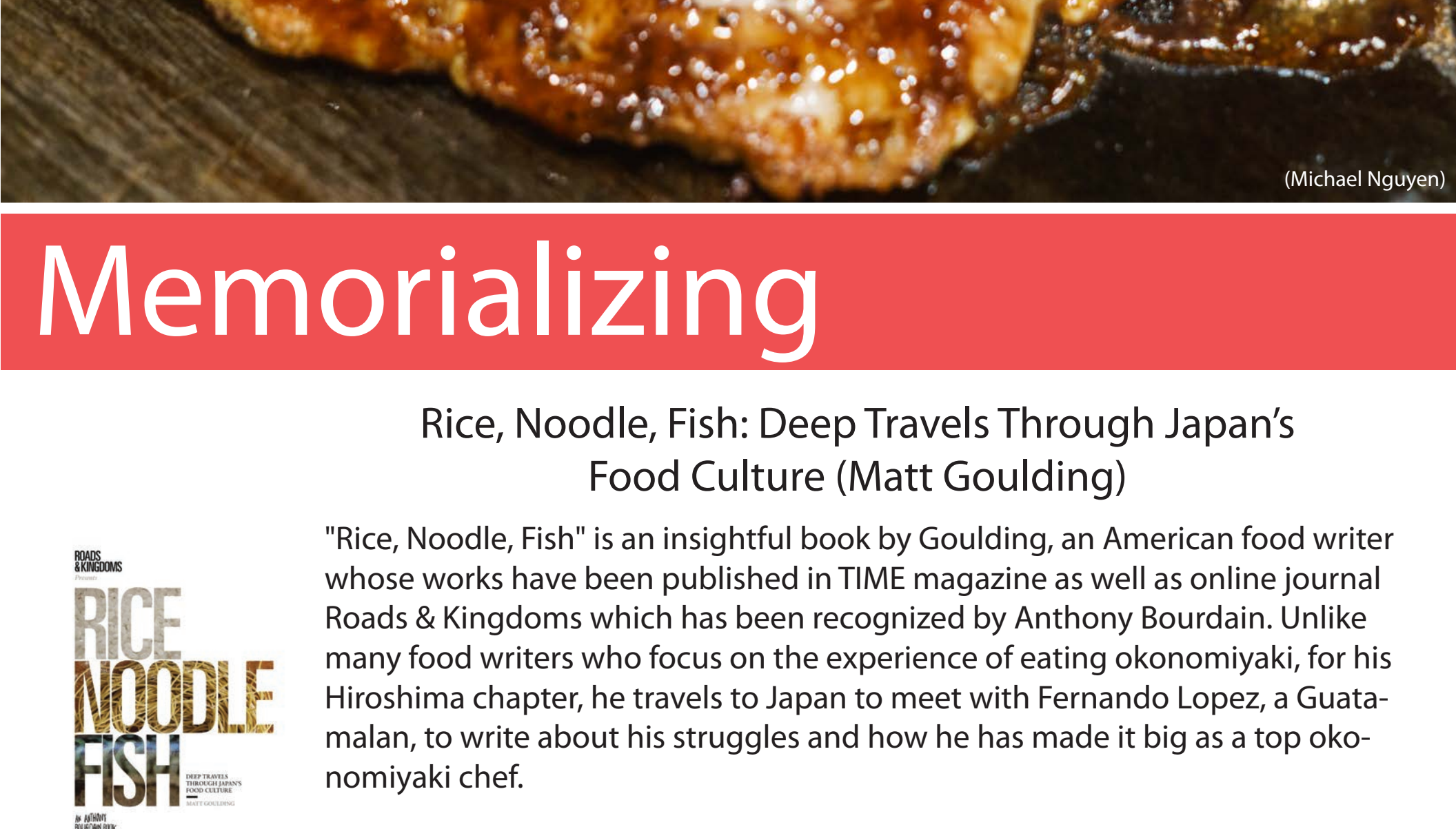
It is uncommon to find a work that describes the experience that foreigners had with okonomiyaki dating back to just after World War II, yet Cwiertka, an professor of Modern Japanese Studies at Leiden University, manages to uncover one such experience.



Although Amster-Burton describes his experience with okonomiyaki as mysterious, even saying "okonomiyaki is to American pancakes what Japanese wrestling is to American wrestling," he remains open-minded enough to try okonomiyaki despite the appearance and even enjoyed the taste. These American soldiers which occupied Japan post-World War II did not enjoy okonomiyaki, which was noted to be made with the surplus of wheat that the Americans were brought in and was the Japanese food for survival due to rice shortages. Rather, the Americans enjoyed the luxury of beef, a rarity in Japan. Restaurant owner, Fujioka, decided to instead fry beef on the griddle in front of the customers which proved to be popular with Americans and would be imported into the United States.

Okonomiyaki to this day remains a cheap dish, yet the idea of Japanese beef and grilling continues to be a sought-after luxury for a Japanese experience.

Cwiertka, Katarzyna Joanna. Modern Japanese cuisine: food, power and national identity. London: Reaktion , 2014. 186-189. Print.

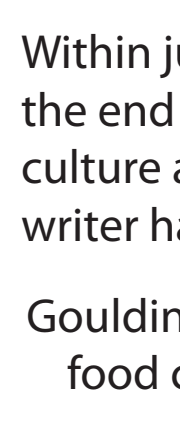


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Memorializing

Rice, Noodle, Fish: Deep Travels Through Japan's Food Culture (Matt Goulding)

"Rice, Noodle, Fish" is an insightful book by Goulding, an American food writer whose works have been published in TIME magazine as well as online journal Roads & Kingdoms which has been recognized by Anthony Bourdain. Unlike many food writers who focus on the experience of eating okonomiyaki, for his Hiroshima chapter, he travels to Japan to meet with Fernando Lopez, a Guatemalan, to write about his struggles and how he has made it big as a top okonomiyaki chef.



Fernando states that it has not always been easy since he is a foreigner and there are hundreds of other okonomiyaki shops. Lopez started off as a mere apprentice that learned the importance of various ingredients and how the season can affect their water content and subsequently, the taste. With hard work, his master was ready to let him go after a few months and create his own restaurant, even helping Lopez design his location. Through perseverance and the help of Lopez's Japanese wife which gave the illusion of authenticity, they built a small loyal customer base that grew to love the Latino flair that he gave his okonomiyaki which grew into a sustainable business. Despite the success to this day, every owner still has their own struggle. Lopez suffers from tendonitis. Other students who learned alongside Lopez have passed away unexpectedly.

Within just a single chapter, Goulding manages to describe the beginnings of an Okonomiyaki chef, the end of one, and their passion for the art. For those who are curious about the Japanese food culture and apprenticeship, especially with regards to okonomiyaki, this is a must have, as no other writer has put into great detail what it's like to be an okonomiyaki chef.

Goulding, Matt, and Nathan Thornburgh. "Hiroshima." Rice, noodle, fish: deep travels through Japan's food culture. Richmond, Vic.: Hardie Grant (Australia), 2016. 187-215. Print.