

Japanese Food



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Objectives

To understand four parts of the Japanese food culture, namely, the eating etiquette, food quality, cooking methods and the taste by the experience of Japanese food in the trip and thereby to make comparisons between it and the Chinese cuisine.

Taste



Sashimi is thinly sliced, raw seafood. Many different kinds of fresh fish and seafood are served raw in the Japanese cuisine. Sashimi, while similar to sushi, is distinct for its absence of vinigered rice. The sashimi pieces are dipped into a dish of soya sauce before being eaten. The daikon and shiso can also be dipped in soya sauce and eaten; both have a fresh, minty taste. Depending on the kind of sashimi, wasabi or ground ginger may accompany the dish and be added to the sashimi as a condiment. Some of the most popular kinds of sashimi are

- Maguro: Tuna
- Toro: Fatty Tuna
- Ebi: Prawn
- Saba: Mackerel
- Ika: Squid
- Tako: Octopus

A. Sushi and Udon



Since Japan is surrounded by ocean, seafood has always been widely consumed as well as rice. Originally, raw fish was fermented in salt to preserve it and eaten with seasoned rice. In Japanese cuisine, sushi indicates dishes that use sushi rice, which is seasoned with a sweet vinegar mixture. Although you can make sushi without using any fish/rawfish, many kinds of fish are used in sushi dishes, such as Japanese eel, tuna, salmon, mackerel, etc. Therefore, the first glance given by sushi was extremely fresh! Udon (饅頭 (うどん) ³) is a type of thick

wheat-flour noodle popular in Japanese cuisine. Udon is usually served hot as noodle soup in a mildly flavored broth, in its simplest form as *kake udon*, served in *kakejiru* made of dashi, soy sauce, and mirin.

In China, similar thick wheat flour noodles are called cū miàn (粗麵).

This original udon was 2 to 3 cm in diameter, a flat pancake-shaped "noodle" added to miso-based soup.

B. Shabu Shabu, Nasu dengaku and Tempura



Shabu Shabu is recommended to someone who delights in a chafing dish. "Hot spot" always comprise plenty of foods which can be chosen in Hong Kong. In contrast, Japanese Shabu Shabu is properly fresher than that in Hong Kong as it contains only beef and vegetables.



"Nasu dengaku" is one typical dish in which the Japanese eggplant is cut in half and baked under a layer of miso paste. However, differ from the Chinese eggplant, Japanese eggplants are more juicy and sweet. We're surprised by the rich feel.

Tempura is a very popular Japanese food, and is one of the best known food outside Japan.

Vegetables are being fried deeply and become crispy. When it comes to the taste, since Tempura can be dipped with source or sea salt, it taste a little bit salty.

Eating Etiquette

A. Introduction

The display of proper manners is by all accounts the mark of an educated and civilized person. Each country and each culture has its own set of what it considers to be good manners to which should be adhered and conformed. When it comes to observing manners, people around the world vary from strictness to leniency, perhaps no other peoples in the world take manners as seriously as the Japanese do.

In our trip to Japan, we were given the precious opportunity to taste the very best of the Japanese cuisine. What is more important and significant is the fact that we were simultaneously able to witness how strictly the Japanese observe table manners. This experience was a pleasant and an eye-opening one. It has therefore been decided that the ways and the aspects that our Japanese counterparts adhere to table manners are to be explained in great details. Illustrations are supplemented in addition to the description. This part covers the traditional Japanese graces, use of chopsticks and the decent ways to enjoy some of the Japanese delicacies.

B. Table Manners

i) Graces

When it comes to politeness, The Japanese will usually be placed somewhere near the top of the list, if not at the top. They say a phrase before each meal to show their appreciation for the cooks and the hosts. Another phrase is uttered after each meal as an indication that they have enjoyed the meal and that they are grateful for the food items they have just had.

Before meal, people in Japan say 'Itadaki-masu' (I gratefully receive) whereas after meal, people say 'gochisosama-deshita' (Thank you for the meal). Failure to do so not only implies you did not enjoy the meal, it is also an insult for the host. Hence, the two phrases are always heard across Japan.

Do not leave the table immediately after meal. We are expected to move all our dishes back to the same position as they were at the start of the meal. This includes replacing the lids on dishes and pots and putting your chopsticks on the chopstick stand or back into their paper slip.



Don't forget to restore the pot lid to its original position!



Let's say 'Itadaki-masu' to native Japanese.

ii) Use of Chopsticks

It has never been easy to learn to use chopsticks. However, the skills to manipulate chopsticks are vital in Japan as they are the most widely-used utensil there. Diners are supposed to hold the upper chopstick with the index finger, the middle finger, and the thumb and put the other chopstick between the bottom of the thumb and the tip of the ring finger. Never hold your pair of chopsticks with five fingers as this is deemed impolite.



That's how we hold chopsticks

Also worth noticing are the bad manners associated with chopsticks which we should avoid. First, we cannot wave chopsticks above food dishes. Second, we should not suck chopsticks or stick chopsticks vertically into a bowl of rice (Chopsticks are poked through rice only at funerals). Passing food from your chopsticks to somebody else's chopsticks should also be avoided (During funerals, the bones of the cremated person are passed along from person to person in the exact same way). After the meal, chopsticks are supposed to be laid down with the tips pointing left.

iii) The decent ways to enjoy Japanese delicacies

a) Sushi

It could be held by chopsticks or bare hand(s). Soya sauce and wasabi are the best complement to sushi. If one needs either or all of them, one should pay attention to the following etiquette. Pour some soya sauce into the small dish provided. It is considered bad manners to waste soya sauce, so try not to pour more sauce than you will use. You do not need to add wasabi into the soya sauce, because the sushi pieces may already contain it, or may be eaten plain. However, if you choose to add wasabi, use only a small amount so as not to offend the sushi chef. If you do not like wasabi, you can request that none is added into your sushi.



The perfect match-sushi and soya sauce!

In general, you are supposed to eat a sushi piece in one bite. Attempts to separate a piece into two generally end in the destruction of the beautifully prepared sushi.

b) Ramen and Udon

We can use chopsticks to lead the noodles to our mouth. You may wish to copy the slurping sound of people around you if you are dining in a noodle shop. In Japan, slurping noodles is by no means a bad manner as many people think, it is considered evidence of enjoying the meal there.

As for noodle soups, be careful not to splash the noodles back into the liquid. If a spoon is provided, use it to drink the soup, otherwise, lift the bowl to your mouth as if it were a cup.



Udon



Ramen

c) Rice

We should hold the rice bowl in one hand and the chopsticks in the other. Lift the bowl towards our mouth while eating. Do not pour soya sauce over plain, cooked rice. If there is sauce (e.g., Japanese curry) on the rice, spoons will be provided so that we can enjoy the rice with the sauce. It is considered good manner to empty our bowl to the last grain of rice.



Hold the bowl in one hand and the chopsticks in the other.

d) Soup

We usually drink the soup out of the bowl as if it were a cup, and fish out the solid food pieces with chopsticks. Do not forget to stir your bowl of soup before drinking as thorough blending guarantees good taste.



Miso soup-mouthwatering!

Food & Dishes

A. Noodles



One of the examples: Udon

Noodles often take the place of rice in a meal. They are featured in many soup dishes, or served chilled with a sauce for dipping.

Udon noodles are native Japanese noodles made of wheat flour. Udon are thicker than soba and can also be served either hot or cold and with various toppings.

B. Bread



Bread is not native to Japan and is not considered traditional Japanese food, but since its introduction in the 16th century it has become common.

C. Deep-fried dishes & Sushi



They are deep-fried vegetables or seafood in a light, distinctive batter. Tempura can be seafood, vegetables, mushrooms and other pieces of food coated with tempura batter and deep fried. Tempura was introduced to Japan by the Portuguese in the 16th century, but has become one of Japan's most famous dishes internationally.

Sushi can be defined as a dish which contains sushi rice, cooked rice that is prepared with sushi vinegar. There are various kinds of sushi dishes.

D. Sashimi, Pickled or salted foods



Sashimi is raw, thinly sliced foods served with a dipping sauce and simple garnishes; usually fish or shellfish served with soy sauce and wasabi. These foods are usually served in tiny portions, as a side dish to be eaten with white rice, to accompany sake or as a topping for rice porridges.

Tsukemono are pickled vegetables, hundreds of varieties and served with most rice-based meals.

E. Sukiyaki & Shabu-Shabu



A nabe dish prepared with thinly sliced meat, vegetables, mushrooms, tofu and shirataki (konyaku noodles). The pieces of food are dipped into a raw egg before eaten.

Shabu-shabu is Japanese style meat fondue. Thinly sliced meat, along with vegetables, mushrooms and tofu is dipped into a hot soup and then into ponzu vinegar or a sesame sauce before being eaten.

F. Miso Soup



A bowl of miso soup often accompanies breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is made by dissolving miso paste in hot water and adding additional ingredients such as wakame seaweed and small pieces of tofu.

Cooking Methods

The cultures of the Japanese cuisine are similar to the Chinese. Most of the Japanese cuisine is **simmered**, vinegared, grilled, **steamed**, **deep-fried**, salted or served with hot pot, like Chinese food.

Simmered food:

They are cooked in hot liquids kept at or just barely below the boiling point of water. Simmering ensures gentler treatment than boiling to prevent food from toughening or breaking up.

Vinegared food:

The food is treated with vinegar to make it sour. Plums are one of the vinegared food. Sometimes they are put on the rice.

Grilled food:

In Japan, a yakitori cart or shop with charcoal-fired grills and flavorful marinated grilled meat on a stick can be found on many streets. Meat and vegetables are grilled directly at high temperatures.



Steamed food: The food is cooked by using steam. Steaming is considered a healthy cooking technique and capable of cooking almost all kinds of food. One of the famous Japanese steamed food is Chawan (egg custard).



Deep-fried food: It is submerged in hot oil or fat. Tempura is a popular Japanese dish of deep fried battered meats, seafood, or vegetables. A light batter is made of cold water and flour (usually wheat or rice). Eggs, baking soda or baking powder, starch, oil, and/or spices may also be added. The batter is often kept cold by adding ice, or by placing the bowl inside a larger bowl with ice in it.



Salted food: The food is prepared by salting which is the preservation of food with dry salt. It is related to pickling (preparing food with brine, i.e. salty water). It is one of the oldest methods of preserving food.



Shabu-shabu:

Shabu-shabu in Japan and the hot pot in China look very much alike also. It is a Japanese variant of hot pot. The dish is related to sukiyaki in style, where both use thinly sliced meat and vegetables, and usually served with dipping sauces. Shabu-shabu is usually served with tofu and vegetables, including hakusai, chrysanthemum leaves, nori (edible seaweed), onions, carrots, shiitake mushrooms and enokitake mushrooms. In some places, Udon, Mochi and/or harusame noodles may also be served.



Apart from those similar to Chinese cuisine, the Japanese also like to eat sashimi which is raw.

Sashimi is a Japanese delicacy primarily consisting of very fresh raw seafood, sliced into thin pieces about 2.5cm (1") wide by 4cm (1.5") long by 0.5cm (0.2") thick, but dimensions vary depending on the type of item and chef, and served with only a dipping sauce (soy sauce with wasabi paste or other condiments such as grated fresh ginger, or ponzu), depending on the fish, and simple garnishes such as shiso and shredded daikon radish.



Sushi :

Sushi is another famous Japanese food. There are several methods to make sushi. Combined with hand-formed clumps of rice, it is called nigirizushi. Sushi served rolled inside or around nori (dried and pressed layer sheets of seaweed or algae) is makizushi. Toppings stuffed into a small pouch of fried tofu is inarizushi. Toppings served scattered over a bowl of sushi rice is called chirashi-zushi .



Comparison with the Chinese cuisine

Taste:

Chinese food tends to be heavier, which means it is always seasoned with more spices, more grease and Japanese food tends to be lighter and milder.

Japanese food is based on the 'Miso' ingredient (pressed soya beans) and its sauces are less complicated and are easy to digest. A lot of Japanese food has a fish base and seaweed is used frequently. The sashimi is the raw fish, which tastes light and you cannot find in Chinese food.

Generally the taste is simpler and more natural as opposed to Chinese cuisine.

Eating Etiquette:

Their dishes are very different, but they are usually served in the same style. Different size bowls are for different things and plates are for others. They both use chopsticks for food.

Foods & Dishes:

Japanese food is very light and occasionally raw. It is also very healthy. Chinese food uses a lot of grease sometimes. Actually, both nationalities have lots of rice. Japanese food mostly has fish, beef, chicken and pork though pork is not really popular.

They both incorporate the option of soy and teriyaki as well.

In addition, the Japanese common food incorporates foreign food, such as bread

Cooking Method:

Chinese use wok to fry stuff that gives them the ability to turn the food constantly so makes the food be cooked well both inside and outside.

Japanese use flat pan or teppan (grill table) to cook food with high temperature that makes the food burn and crispy outside but raw and juicy inside.

Conclusion

Japan is a country which places paramount significance and value on table manner and etiquette. During our nine-day exchange programme, we learnt a lot about the food culture and table manner to which Japanese people adhere. Failure to observe these manners is no doubt undesirable. If we are to foster a better Sino-Japanese understanding and relations, the above, albeit seemingly insignificant, can indeed give the Japanese an impression that we Chinese are accommodating. We will then be in a better position to achieve our goal.

Reflection

During our nine-day Japan trip, we deeply experienced the differences between the Chinese food and the Japanese food. Despite originating from China, the Japanese culture has developed into the one with its partially unique characteristics, which can be easily seen by observing the food culture. For example, the Japanese food is always made cool but the Chinese food is served hot. Such differences make us feel not accustomed to the food. The Japanese food, however, still remains its some Chinese characters, such as Ramen, rice, which arouses our interests so much. Seeing these differences and similarities, we decided to use the food culture as our topic. The outcome is finally satisfactory because through the report, our knowledge about the two food cultures is enormously enriched. Now, whenever the Japanese food is mentioned, we can tell more in different aspects, such as cooking methods, etiquette before enjoying it.

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