Champuru

Champuru is a way of cooking that combines tofu and seasonal vegetables. Tofu is an excellent source of vegetable protein, but it lacks vitamins and dietary fiber. This can be compensated for through a combination with vegetables, making champuru an nutritionally rational dish. Here we introduce goya champuru. Goya contains a lot of vitamin C, so it is often eaten in Okinawa as it is effective against heat exhaustion.

Main dishes: Chikina (pickled vegetable) champuru, mamina champuru, goya champuru, rakkyo champuru

Irichi

Irichi is cuisine that uses dried foods, root vegetables, and other low moisture ingredients simmered and stir-fried with stock. The ingredients along with stock and seasoning are thoroughly simmered in, giving the dish a distinctive rich taste. Here we introduce chidekuni irichi. Chidekuni (island carrot) is a soft-fleshed root vegetable often used in stir-fries, simmered dishes, and soups. It is rich in carotene and has long been used as a source of nourishment in Okinawan cooking.

Main dishes: kubu irichi, kanpyo irichi, blood irichi, ukara irichi, sunshi irichi

Awamori

Awamori is a special kind of Okinawan shochu made with rice and black koji mold. There is a theory that the name comes from a method of measuring alcohol content by allowing the liquor to bubble (“awa” = foam, “mori” = to fill).

Due to the similarity of its flavor and aroma to a Thai Liquor called Laolong, awamori is popularly believed to have been transmitted from Thailand in the 15th Century, but in recent years several other routes have come to light, including one connecting Fujian province in China. During the Ryukyu dynasty, awamori was an indispensable precious item for diplomacy, used for entertaining Chinese envoys and presenting to the Edo Shogunate.

In addition to being enjoyed as a liquor, awamori is also used as a seasoning to produce unique flavors, such as those characteristic of rafute, a distinctive Okinawan pork dish.

Main dishes: kusunabanbushi, goya nbushi, shibui nbushi, nabera nbushi

Kusu (vintage awamori)

When allowed to sit for 3 years or more after brewing, an awamori is known as “kusu” (vintage liquor). The quality of awamori improves through long aging and maturation, and is imbued with a deeper, more delicious flavor.

In the prewar days, it is said there was a kusu in Shuri from the Chinese Kangxi period (1662-1722 by the Western calendar), and so the legend goes that there is a bottle of awamori that is more than 300 years old. And it is inferred at the same time that the custom of cherishing and preserving awamori started during that era.

The Traditional Maturation Method, “Shitsugi”

Sho Jun, the fourth son of King Sho Tai, last monarch of Ryukyu, who was also a well known hobbyist, wrote essays concerning kusu that remain to this day. Among them is an indispensable introduction to the brewing of kusu, which lays out a method of preparing multiple earthenware jars to preserve the liquor in chronological order known as “shitsugi.”

One begins by putting good liquor in the first jar as a parent liquor, and preparing a second and third jar separately. The parent liquor (from the first jar), called “ahya,” which has been reduced by pumping and natural evaporation, will supplement the next oldest second jar. In this way, by transferring from the second jar to the third and so on, one can store liquor for hundreds of years without losing its flavor.

Main dishes: nsunabanbushi, goya nbushi, shibui nbushi, nabera nbushi

Putturu tasha

A crunchy, fluffy dish of melted starch: nmukuji putturu

Dishes stir-fried in oil: somin tashiya, nabera tashiya

Images provided by: Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau, Matsumoto Cooking School, Junko Ashitomi
A crunchy, fluffy dish of melted starch: *nmukuji putturu*

**Gusuku Era**

- 13 14
- 1420 (Shō Shishō 15)
- 1404 (Bunei 9)
- 1729 (Shō Kei 17)
- 1713 (Shō Kei 1)
- 1697 (Shō Tei 29)
- 1562 (Shō Gen 7)
- 1478 (Shō Shin 2)

**11th - 15th Centuries**

- It is said that Zenkan, a Japanese Buddhist monk, visited the Ryukyus and erected Gokurakuji Temple (introduction of Buddhism). *Kissako* (Zen term literally meaning “have a cup of tea”) was introduced. There is no Buddhism-influenced ban on eating meat.
- Markets are established in Shuri and Naha. Women conduct business at the markets, selling vegetables, salted fish guts, and salt.
- Envoys (investiture envoys) sent by the Chinese emperor visit the Ryukyus and perform investiture rituals, recognizing Bunei as king of the Ryukyus.
- Since then, the Ryukyus also conduct trade with China under Li Qi (Chinese emperor).
- Chinese investiture mission arrives in the Ryukyus. The investiture envoys confirm Shō's status as King of the Ryukyus (final investiture mission).
- Offerings during the Obon festival change from the fruits of the adan (pandanus palm, or screw pine) and fruits of trees to pineapples, bananas, etc.
- "Matsuri no Toki Zenbu Nikki (Banquet Menu During Festivities)" is compiled. This is a book containing a record of the menu of dishes and ingredients of offerings provided at a yusai (funeral of the previous king) as well as the ingredients of dishes offered to the investiture envoys.

**16th Century**

- The shipwrecked Koreans including Kim Bi-ui drift to Yonaguni Island. As there were no iron pots, porcelain, pottery, and spoons on Yonaguni Island, cooking was done using earthen pots. In the Sakishima Islands, people raised cattle, chickens, and pigs, but pigs could not be seen there.

**17th Century**

- The Ryukyuan royal government issues a ban on the slaughtering of cattle and horses. Common people are forbidden to slaughter cattle and horses.
- Markets are established in Shuri and Naha. Women conduct business at the markets, selling vegetables, salted fish guts, and salt.
- "Bukubuku tea" starts to be consumed around the Naha area.
- "Kusakura" is published during this year. It is a book containing a record of the menu of dishes and ingredients of offerings provided at a yusai (funeral of the previous king) as well as the ingredients of dishes offered to the investiture envoys.

**18th Century**

- "Bukubuku tea" starts to be consumed around the Naha area.
- Markets are established in Shuri and Naha. Women conduct business at the markets, selling vegetables, salted fish guts, and salt.
- "Bukubuku tea" starts to be consumed around the Naha area.

**19th Century**

- "Kusakura" is published during this year. It is a book containing a record of the menu of dishes and ingredients of offerings provided at a yusai (funeral of the previous king) as well as the ingredients of dishes offered to the investiture envoys.
- The Kume Island government collapses. Shō Inamoto, a regent assisting the king and handling state affairs. He encourages young people to study the Law of the Shō period and appoints them as officials. He also builds hospitals and nursing institutions, introducing modern medicine to the Ryukyus.

**History of Ryukyu/Okinawan Food Culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period/Era</th>
<th>Major Events</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15th - 16th Centuries</td>
<td>Food culture and culinary practices are already well established, with staples such as rice, fish, and vegetables.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17th Century</td>
<td>The introduction of Buddhism and the establishment of markets in Shuri and Naha contribute to the development of a diverse culinary culture.</td>
</tr>
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