

Traditional Japanese Health Food—Natto

日本の伝統的健康食—納豆

Speaking of Natto with Harold McGee

フードコラムニスト・ハロルド・マギー氏に聞く納豆体験

Japanese Restaurant News (hereafter JRN): One comes across many varieties of fermented foods in Japan, due to the climate. Fermentation improves preservation and increases both nutritional value and “umami,” the Japanese word for delicious flavor. Is there a basis, other than nutritional value, to indicate that eating fermented foods is good for one’s health?

Harold McGee (hereafter H): Fermented foods are products invented by human beings in a number of countries around the world starting from about the year 3000 BC. Some everyday examples include *miso*, *natto* fermented soybeans, *kimchee*, sauerkraut, sausages and diverse alcoholic drinks like sake and wine, among the many food products that can be mentioned. It is clear that as the result of fermentation, complex food compounds are created that exert a beneficial effect on the body. Because of fermentation, microorganisms such as bacteria, as well as molds, and the substances produced by microorganisms help the body maintain its balance.

JRN: Compared to the general American type of daily diet, the Japanese diet usually incorporates more fermented foods. How should a food lifestyle that involves eating many soybean products such as *miso*,

natto and *tofu* be evaluated? Are there any points that Americans should learn from?

H: In comparison with the American food lifestyle, I think that the traditional food lifestyle that average Japanese people follow is much healthier. One thing that should be learned from that is that during a single meal many varieties of nutritional elements are integrated. For instance, different types of seafood and seaweed, varieties of soybean products, vegetables, supplemented by *miso*, *natto* and similar fermented food products contain much calcium, protein and vitamins which provide a balanced food lifestyle, no? Compared to that, the American type of food lifestyle is a little lopsided because of all the carbohydrates and fat that it is comprised of. However, now soybeans are attracting much attention in America, and although I do not want to overestimate their commercial success, their popularity is rising due to their outstanding nutritional value. Interest has been sparked in regards to *natto*, the fermented food product version of those soybeans, so that surely there will be an increase in the future of the number of people who grow to like it. Concerning that, one would like to recommend to Americans that the rich Japanese assortment of nutritional elements that are well-balanced in a food regimen be adopted as a habit, you know.

JRN: I have heard that you have known about *natto* for a long time. How was it that you started eating *natto* in the first place? And what was the first impression that you had (in regards to *natto*)?

H: I first ate *natto* about 25 years ago when I went out to eat at a Japanese restaurant in San Jose. I saw something on the menu that I hadn’t seen before, the words “*natto*,” and out of curiosity I ordered it. The waitress said, “You probably won’t like it, I warn you,” but being told that just made me more curious (laughs). It was a new experience, but I liked both the aroma and the taste. After that, whenever

Japanese Restaurant News (以下、JRN) : 日本はその気候から発酵食品が多く見受けられます。食品を発酵させることによって保存性が良くなり、栄養価も増します。さらに「旨味」が増すのも事実です。発酵食品を食べることが体に良いという根拠は栄養価以外にありますか？

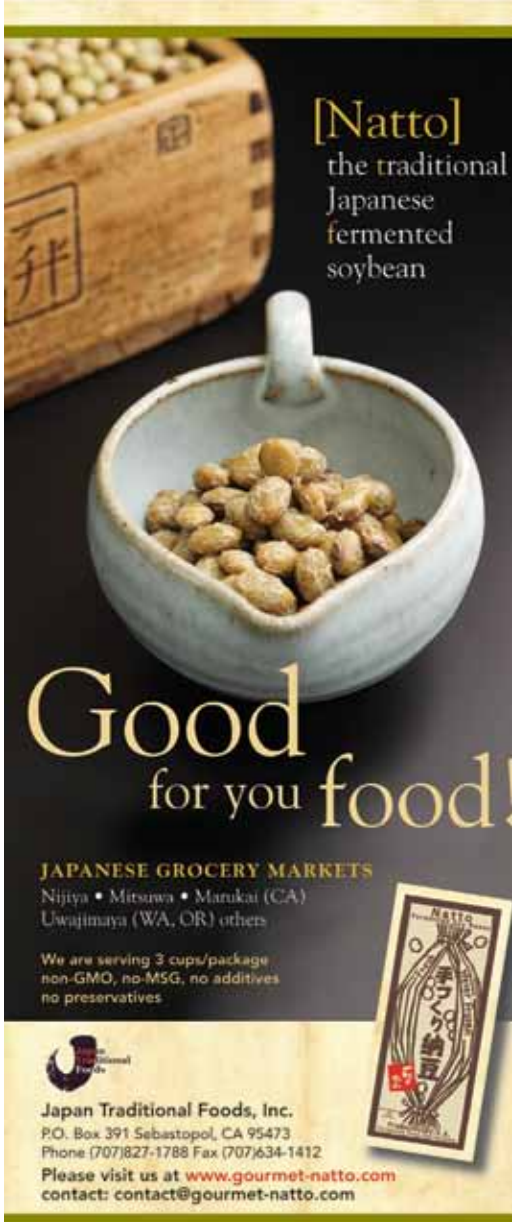
Harold McGee (以下、H): 発酵食品は、BC3000頃の時代から世界各国で発明された人類の産物です。身近なところでは、味噌、納豆、キムチ、サワークラウト、ソーセージ、酒やワイン酒といったアルコール類など、たくさんの食品が上げられます。発酵することによって生まれる複合体が体に良い影響を与えることは分かっています。発酵により発生するバクテリア等の菌、カビなどが体のバランスを整えます。

JRN: 一般的にアメリカの食生活に比べますと、日本の食生活には多くの発酵食品が含まれています。納豆や味噌、豆腐など大豆をたくさん食べるような食生活についてどう思われますか？アメリカ人が見習うべき点はありますか？

H: アメリカの食生活に比べると、全般的に日本人の伝統的な食生活の方がとても健康的だと思います。1回の食事で多くの種類の栄養素を摂り入れている点は見習うべきです。例えば魚類や海藻類、豆類、野菜に味噌、納豆などの発酵食品が加わり、カルシウム、プロテイン、ビタミンが多く含まれたバランスの取れた食生活ですね。それに比べ、アメリカ的な食生活は炭水化物、脂肪分が多く、少し偏っています。しかし今、アメリカでも大豆はとても注目されていますし、商業的な過剰評価はしたくないのですが、栄養的に優れているという理由で人気上昇しています。その大豆の発酵食品である納豆へ興味を持ち、好きになる人がこの先増えるかもしれませんね。そして日本の種類豊富な栄養素をバランスよく摂取する習慣をアメリカ人に勧めたいですね。

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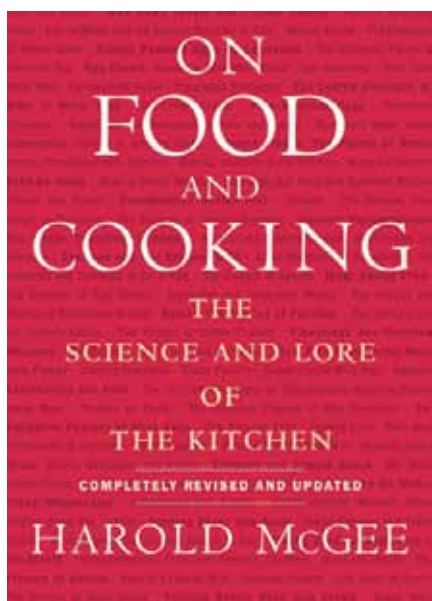
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Japan Traditional Foods, Inc.
P.O. Box 391 Sebastopol, CA 95473
Phone (707)827-1788 Fax (707)634-1412
Please visit us at www.gourmet-natto.com
contact: contact@gourmet-natto.com

JRN: 先生は納豆を随分前から知っているとお聞きしましたが、最初に納豆を食べたのは、どういっきっかけでしたか？また（納豆に対して）どういった感想を持ちましたか？

H: 初めて納豆を食べたのは25年ほど前で、サンノゼの和食レストランに行った時です。メニューの中に今まで見かけたことのない「*natto*」という文字を見て好奇心で注文したところ、ウェイトレスから「多分好きじゃないと思いますよ」と言われ、なお更興味を持ちました（笑）。新しい体験でしたが、匂いも味も好きでした。それからたまたまメニューで見かけた時には注文するようになりました。

JRN: 昨年より Japan Traditional Foods はカリフォルニアで納豆を作り始め、最近オーガニックの大豆を使用した「Megumi NATTO™」を発売しました。McGee さんはその納豆をお食べになったそうですが、どのように召し上がりましたか？そして現地生産の味はいかがで



jacket highres

I saw it on a menu, I ordered it.

JRN: Japan Traditional Foods starting making *natto* in California last year. And recently, they have begun selling “Megumi NATTO™” that is made from organic soybeans. It seems that you have tried that *natto*, in what way did you eat it? And how do you like the taste of the locally produced *natto*?

H: The other day I was offered a sample, and I ate it with white rice after seasoning it with a small amount of soy sauce, *shoga* ginger and chopped onions. I felt that it was the most delicious *natto* of any that have ever eaten up to now. It had a delicate aroma and bite on the palate, with a rich flavor and that aroma was similar to coffee. With a unique stickiness, it stuck to my mustache (laughs), but I even enjoyed that.

JRN: Are organic soybeans something that you are a stickler about? And do you have any advice as to how Americans should eat *natto* to get the most enjoyment out of it?

H: For myself, I have no objections to just eating it with soy sauce alone and rice. But since Americans have their own individual tastes and eating habits, I think that offering them various styles of preparation is best. I am one who is a stickler for the producer, the distribution route and the food quality, so I choose an organic product that is of a little higher caliber. In terms of nutrition, there is not much difference, but as expected one can appreciate the deliciousness of the crop that is hand-selected from the raw material and put under cultivation.

JRN: In the near future, do you think Americans will be eating more kinds of traditional Japanese food? Do you have any advice as to how Americans can be persuaded to eat more *natto*?

H: About thirty years ago most Americans felt a resistance to “ethnic foods.” But presently there has been an increase in the number of those who like Japanese food, and in turn they are passing along that to their children. In that way, interest (in Japanese food) is spreading. Already, things like tofu and miso are used in average American households, so in that way I must believe that the time will come in the future that *natto* will come to be accepted. For that purpose, first, unless it is known about, nothing will begin at all. For instance, how about setting up booths at farmer’s markets? Or demonstrations at supermarkets? How about contests to see who can stretch that stickiness out the longest? (Laughs) It would probably also be promising to target children, you know. I look forward to seeing what happens.

したか？

H: 先日サンプルを頂いた時には、少量の醤油に生姜と葱を加えて白米といっしょに食べました。今まで食べた、どの納豆よりも美味しいと感じました。繊細な香りと食感、味も風味に豊かで、コーヒーに似た香りがしました。独特のネバネバは、僕のヒゲにひっかかったりしましたが（笑）、それでも楽しめました。

JRN: 先生はオーガニック大豆にこだわりはありますか？また、アメリカ人に好まれるような納豆の食べ方のアドバイスはありますか？

H: 私はご飯と一緒に醤油だけで食べても、何の抵抗も無かったです。でも色々な味覚、食習慣を持つアメリカ人がいるわけですから、様々な調理法を提供すると良いと思います。私は生産者やルート、食品質にこだわる方ですので、少々高くてもオーガニック製品を選びます。栄養学的にはそれほど変わりはありませんが、原料から人の手によって選別され、育てられた作物はやはり美味しいと感じます。

JRN: 近い将来、アメリカ人はもっと伝統的な日本食を食べるようになると思いますか？アメリカ人にもっと納豆を食べて頂くアイデアなどはありますか？

H: 30年ほど前、アメリカ人の多くは「エスニックフード」に抵抗を感じました。ですが、現在では日本食好きな人が増え、彼らがまた子供に伝えて、というように（日本食への）興味はもっと広がっていくでしょう。もう既に、豆腐や味噌などがアメリカの一般家庭でも用いられているように、納豆も将来的には受け入れられる時が来るのではないのでしょうか。そのためにはまず、知ってもらわなければ何も始まりません。例えばファーマーズマーケットにブースを出すとか、スーパーでデモをするとか。ネバネバをどこまで長く伸



Kyoritsu Shuppan

ばせるかを競い合うコンテストなんてどうでしょう？（笑）子供達をターゲットにするのも面白いかもしれませんね。期待しています。

Harold McGee writes about the science of food and cooking. In 1984, he published “On Food and Cooking.” Twenty years later, the revised and enlarged edition of “On Food and Cooking” was named the best food reference book of 2004 by the James Beard Foundation and the International Association of Cooking Professionals. In 2005, Bon Appétit magazine named McGee Food Writer of the Year. In 2008, Time magazine included him on its annual list of the world’s most influential people.

McGee has written articles and reviews for many publications, appeared on Public Television’s “Diary of a Foodie,” on the National Geographic Channel, and CNN, and on National Public Radio. He writes a monthly column, “The Curious Cook,” for The New York Times.



Natto Spring Roll

Filling:

- * 1cup Natto
- * 50g Bean sprout
- * 1 Cucumber
- * Shiso Leaf
- * 1/2 package thin brown rice noodles
- * Cilantro to taste

Dipping sauce

- * Fish sauce to taste
- * Squeezed lemon juice to taste
- * Honey to taste



Preparation

1. Fully immerse a sheet of a rice paper into the warm water for about 10 - 12 seconds, just until soft (don't let it become too soft; it will continue to soften as you work). Lay it on the cutting board.
- *You will have a bowl that is larger than diameter of rice papers so that you can completely immerse the skins in water to soak and soften them. Rolls big enough to hold. Soak one paper at a time, or they will stick to each other.
2. Soak the brown rice noodles in hot water to soften for about 20 minutes. Drain thoroughly. (How to prepare the noodle depends on the products, see the back of the package and follow the directions.)
3. Wash the vegetables and cut cucumber into thin slices.
4. Blanch bean sprouts quickly.
5. On a rice paper, lay shiso and a small amount of noodles, vegetables and Natto. Fold both sides of the paper over the filling, and then roll it up.
6. Combine all the dipping sauce ingredients in a small bowl and sprinkle chopped cilantro.