

Vol. 3

THE NIKKEI SHOKUTAKU: STORIES, RECIPES AND MEMORIES OF "JAPANESE" FOOD

NIKKEI MONOGATARI

日系物語



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My first glimpse of anything Asian on TV was the dancing mushrooms in Disney's Fantasia. What was society telling me about being Asian? I was not even represented as a person—I was food.

--Miki Dare

POEMS, REFLECTIONS AND STORIES BY

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Nikkei Monogatari

Issue 3

Special Issue: The Nikkei Shokutaku: Stories,
Recipes and Memories of “Japanese” Food

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ご飯 = ライス = Rice ?

Gohan (rice) = raisu (rice) = rice ?



“

My mother also made chawan mushi, a savoury custard that required the special cups with lids to be taken out of a storage box in the attic labelled “JAPANESE DISHES.”

--Sachiko Okuda

“

This parcel was magical. We couldn't believe how much stuff obāchan managed to pack inside like Tetris blocks - my mom always said it would be impossible to get it all back in.

--Lisa Nakamura Durrell



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BEHIND THE SCENES

By Mimi Okabe, Catherine Sachi Kikuchi and Alex Okuda Rayfuse

Between January and February 2023, Japanese for Nikkei (JFN) had the opportunity to collaborate with the National Association of Japanese Canadians's (NAJC) Young Leaders Committee (YLC). Together, we organized something called a Language Club, where we facilitated four virtual sessions for intermediate speakers of Japanese to come and share their stories, memories and experiences with “Japanese” food culture. During these sessions, we quickly learned that food is not just a source of nourishment, but a powerful source of connecting individuals with their cultural roots, and shaping individual and collective identities.

“The Nikkei Shokutaku: Stories, Recipes and Memories of ‘Japanese’ Food” is a culmination of JFN’s collaborative efforts with YLC, and offers a rich collection of art, poetry, reflections and stories that celebrate the diversity of “Japanese” food culture from the perspectives of a global Japanese diaspora. The Nikkei *shokutaku* (which transliterates to “dining table”) is like a smörgåsbord of personal histories and experiences, and this volume is a testament to the varied ways in which “Japanese” food culture has been passed on, reimaged, and made new across different regions, communities and generations.

This special Issue begins with “Matsutake - Notes on Belonging,” a story by Sarah Eiko Ariza-Verreault, who explores themes of belonging, using mushrooms as a metaphor to explore ideas of connection and rootlessness. From Xauni de Figueiroa’s vibrant and playful take on addressing the question of food and identity in her painting, “Ichigo-go,” to Mariko Sumi’s illustration of various dishes that showcase her connection with her heritage culture in “Connecting to my Japanese Heritage by Food,” many of the contributors of this Issue also focus on specific food items to tell their story. Noah Kawaguchi’s free verse poem, “You Are What You Eat,” invites us to reflect on how food choices shape identities and experiences, using the California roll as a metaphor to address questions of cultural identity and diversity. In “Making Rice,” Hanako Teranishi explores the intricate and often overlooked process of making rice. While it may seem simple, for Teranishi, rice-making is a meaningful labor of love. On the topic of rice, our very own Ken Yoshida encourages us to embrace the cultural, political and geographical nuances of what constitutes “Japanese” cuisine in “ご飯 = ライス = Rice? Gohan (rice) = raisu (rice) = rice?”

And, in “Onigiri,” Larissa Wakatsuki and Fausto Kadomoto Inomata reminisce about the importance of preserving recipes and cultural traditions, providing a step-by-step visual guide to making *obāchan*’s rice ball.

Our relationship with “Japanese” food culture can also teach us important life lessons. Sonya William’s “Itadakimasu” reminds us how food can bridge divides and build understanding. Small actions such as planting seeds can inspire dialogue and healing. Miki Dare’s “Add Water Instant Asian” shows how food is a site of resilience and resistance against discrimination and marginalization through her vivid painting and reflection.

The theme of family is also highlighted in this Issue. Megan Kiyoko Wray’s poem, “[u][mami],” explores the connection between food and family, especially how flavors and scents transport us to memories of our mothers. Lisa Nakamura Durrell’s story of her *obāchan* in “Obāchan’s Parcel of Love” celebrates the powerful role that food has in forming strong family bonds. Speaking of parcels, Lillian Hanako Rowlett shares a personal story about her co-founding of Kokoro Care Packages, a subscription service that provides “hand-crafted care packages filled with artisanal Japanese food in “Finding Heart in Japanese Food.” And, in “Festive Special,” Sachiko Okuda offers an insightful look into the diversity of New Year’s Day traditions and the importance of respecting cultural and familial customs.

For this Issue, we also commissioned Japanese Canadian artist, Emmie Tsumura, to design the cover. Our warmest gratitude to Tsumura, whose design not only demonstrates a playful and whimsical take on the zine’s theme, but carefully pays tribute to our contributors by showcasing ingredients and food items featured in their works. Emmie’s works have been displayed at the Powell Street Festival and, most recently, at the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival. To learn more about Emmie and her work, please see her full bio at the end of the zine.

May this Issue nourish your soul!

Matsutake - Notes on Belonging

By Sarah Eiko Ariza-Verreault

“Is that what I think it is?” My grandma asked the man at the grocery store counter. We were at Seaborn, a Chinese-owned grocery store that carries many Japanese delicacies tucked away behind the bubble tea shops near Midland and Finch in Scarborough. We came here for *kazunoko kombu*, herring roe on kelp, which is very difficult to find anywhere else. Grandma served them marinated in vinegar. They were my favourite because of how they crunched. But *kazunoko* wasn’t what grandma was surprised to find.

The man at the counter nodded knowingly. He didn’t speak English as well as my grandma. He removed a large, brown mushroom from the plastic bag. The smell of fresh earth filled the room over the hum of the freezers. My grandma was already removing her credit card from her purse. She added some mushrooms to her pile of groceries on the counter and didn’t even look at the screen to see her total.

“We need to stop by Ets’s place,” Grandma said to my mom in the car, peering through her Coach sunglasses at the road ahead. “I want to give her one of these.” Ets, or Etsuka, was my grandma’s friend who lived close to her near Don Mills and Finch. They were both interned at Lemon Creek as children.

Now, we were on a mission. We weren’t done grocery shopping and still needed to go to Metro before it closed and we didn’t think we’d be making this detour to Ets’ house. We also didn’t want to visit Ets too late in case she was sleeping. Grandma handed me her phone. “Call Ets for me,” she demanded. It didn’t take long for me to find her since grandma’s Samsung Galaxy III was set to the accessibility mode with an extremely large font and buttons. The call went to voicemail. “Call her again,” Grandma said robotically.

I was getting anxious. Why was this so important to her? Was it normal for Ets to not pick up her phone? I would always get nervous when grandma didn’t answer when I called.

“She’s practically deaf,” Grandma said, waving her small, leather-gloved hand dismissively. “Keep calling, she’s bound to pick up.”

“Mom, I think she’s gone to sleep,” my mom chided her.

“There’s no way,” Grandma shot back. “I know what she’s doing. There’s a Jay’s game on right now. She has her T.V. turned up too loud to hear the phone.” She rolled her eyes behind her sunglasses.

When we finally got to her house, grandma leapt from the car. Her heart was pounding so hard from adrenaline that the artery that blocked circulation to her left leg was not bothering her. She marched up the steps to the front door. I struggled to keep up with her.

“Ets! Open up!” Grandma pounded on the door and rang the doorbell like an annoying twelve-year-old boy. “Ets!? Ets!?” She yelled.

“Grandma, I really think she’s sleeping or something, or maybe she isn’t home,” I said, glancing around the street, growing embarrassed. The sun had already set and the streetlights were on. The lights inside the house were dim.

“Oh, there’s no way,” Grandma said stubbornly. “She’s just going deaf!” Grandma jumped off the porch and made her way to the window at the side of the house. She started banging on the glass. “Ets! I’m at the door!”

“We are trespassing...” I said as I followed my grandma around the backyard as she banged on every window and shouted Ets’s name. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I had never seen my grandma have so much energy and be so determined. She grasped the sill of a window that was slightly open and used her tiptoes to peer inside.

“I can hear her T.V. The game is on!” She said, more to herself than to me. “Ets!” She called once more.

“Grandma, I don’t think she’s coming out,” I told her. “We can keep the mushroom in the fridge and call her in the morning. Let’s go back to mom in the car.” We were outside for such a long time, I was glad it was a warm Fall night; any snow that fell all month long had melted almost instantly.

As we made our way around the house, we began to hear voices. It was Ets and my mom talking on the porch! Ets heard noises coming from outside and came out to see what was going on. She found my mom idling in the driveway.

“I have something for you!” Grandma said to her friend after we all greeted each other and laughed at our misadventure. She took out a mushroom from her plastic bag.

“Oh my!” Ets exclaimed, her small hands flew to her mouth. “Is that a matsutake mushroom? My mother used to forage for those when we lived in B.C.!” It began to dawn on me that this mushroom was a big deal.

Matsutake mushrooms sprout near pine trees on the forest floor in East and Southeast Asia, certain parts of Europe, and along the Pacific Coast of North America. They are notoriously difficult to find because they require specific conditions to grow, and you might have to fight off some squirrels to get some. A roundworm that attacked Pine Trees in Japan greatly affected its harvest since the 20th century.

“Eiko, I don’t cook as well as you,” Ets said, defeated. “I shouldn’t take this, I’m scared it will go to waste with me.” Grandma shoved the bag with the mushroom back at her.

“My mother used to slice and serve them with rice,” Grandma responded matter-of-factly. She made it sound so easy, but cooking came naturally to her. She rarely made Japanese food, yet she never lost her touch. I often wonder if I will ever be able to cook as well as her.

I, like a mushroom, sometimes feel rootless. Being part of a displaced community feels like I’m found only in the wild, under very specific conditions. Sometimes, I want to hide my culture like a mushroom under layers of foliage. But even hidden and without roots, the mushroom remains strong and precious. This mushroom that grows in Japan also grows in B.C., where my great-grandmother immigrated, and it followed my grandmother to Toronto, where she could share it with family and reminisce with her old friend.

There are so many things I will never know about my family beyond a history book or documentary. Without passing down memories, I can’t give colour to the black-and-white photos in our albums. Matsutake gohan tasted like a memory my grandma couldn’t bring herself to say out loud; it was the flavour of joy in a childhood that faced so much hardship, an indulgence when she only knew scarcity. That night, I ate a dish my great-grandma had once prepared, and I knew the one place I belonged was at the dinner table between my mom and grandma.

Add Water Instant Asian

By Miki Dare



To what extent is the creation and consumption of “Japanese” food important to you, and how does it shape your sense of identity and belonging to your cultural heritage(s)?

My sense of identity and how people react to my Japanese Canadian heritage are flavoured by the larger society that I live in. Asian representation in mainstream media, let alone Japanese Canadian representation, gets a one-star rating at best. My first glimpse of anything Asian on TV was the dancing mushrooms in Disney’s *Fantasia*. What was society telling me about being Asian? I was not even represented as a person—I was food. Something consumable. Something little and funny. The limited imagery and information we have in our society about Asians is highly detrimental; it negatively impacts how Asian children feed their sense of self and keeps others from seeing us as humans—let alone as equals.

My mother is Japanese Canadian and my father is Irish and Scottish Canadian. Some people can “tell” I have Asian heritage, but others might ask about what my race is because they just can’t put their finger on what I am. Just by me saying “Japanese”—it’s like adding water to instant ramen noodles—stereotypes can quickly fill people’s minds, spill out of their mouths, and impact their actions.

Sometimes, this “discovery” leads to descriptions of me as “exotic” and comments and questions about being Japanese—that is, well, questionable.

“Ohhh. Like a geisha! Or a samurai warrior!”

“Did your mom walk behind your dad? I heard Japanese women walk behind their men.”

People have made comments that I can’t even write here.

Why is this happening?

It’s because people who don’t have connections with someone Japanese Canadian rely on ideas that mainstream media have fed them. People can easily picture in their minds a geisha, a ninja, samurai—having never met one in real life. We consume images of the “funny” Asian man who is the butt of jokes for being short, wearing glasses, being nerdy, having an accent, etc. We consume images of the sexualized Asian woman who is small, quiet, and submissive eye candy—and often needs to be saved by a White man. Our mental and media landscapes are littered with psychic fast-food stereotypes, and this easily drowns and smothers out the complex diversity and reality of what it means to be Japanese Canadian.

Not seeing Japanese Canadians as people makes it easier for discrimination and injustices to happen. The Canadian government interned my great-grandparents, grandparents, and my mother and her brothers during World War II. The power of seeing all Japanese Canadians as the “enemy” allowed for this to happen. My mother’s only “crime” was being born Japanese.

Just as fast food is unhealthy for people to digest, so are stereotypes. Our society is all about instant gratification and getting things fast and easy. But understanding a culture and truly seeing an individual within the context of their heritage requires taking time to build relationships and learn about a community. It’s breaking bread with people and making meaningful connections. I encourage my children to be aware and not consume or be consumed by superficial two-dimensional depictions of Asians—or any group deemed “different” by society.

My relatives and elders before me faced serious injustices that had lifetime ramifications. Intergenerational trauma and societal garbage are still marinating within me and all around me. But I pick up that mental junk food garbage thrown at me and refashion it into something beautiful, and wear it with pride. I am so proud to be Japanese Canadian. Despite the toxic biases and beliefs that have impacted generations of my family and myself, I hold my head high, and my beauty is my inner strength; I am a geisha girl stereotype survivor.

Ichigo-go

By Xauni de Figueiroa



Finding Heart in Japanese Food

By Lillian Hanako Rowlatt

Nothing brings people together like food. So often our fondest memories are intertwined with food and the people who gathered around the table to share a meal together.

Being half-Japanese, I have always felt a strong connection to my eastern heritage and western upbringing. Even as a child, I was fascinated by Japan's culture and traditions. Growing up, my mom would cook a mix of foods, some to appease my and my brother's western palettes, while also introducing us to the foods from her home. The Japanese foods we ate ranged from simple meals of miso soup, rice, fish and vegetables to ordering *osechi ryōri* every year for New Year's. As I grew up, my love for Japanese food increased for both the comfort it brought me and the memories it created.

My intrigue with Japan led me to spend two years teaching English on the JET Program in Kashiwazaki, Niigata - a small town located on the western side of Honshu. A land of snow and agriculture, Niigata is best known for its high-quality rice and deliciously smooth sake. Although miles away from the bustling city of my mother's hometown of Osaka, this small community opened their hearts to me and many of my fondest moments come from locals inviting me into their homes to enjoy a meal with their families. We also made special trips to uncover some of the regional specialities (one of which was my first and only experience trying raw horse sashimi!).

After returning from Japan, I spent almost a decade in finance - a career that took me from Toronto to New York. But my affinity and love towards Japan never faded. I ended up working on the Japanese equities desk in New York and spent time traveling between Japan and the US. I created bonds and friendships that have lasted until this day.

As time passed, I felt a pull to do something more meaningful and close to my heart. To share something special that people around me could truly enjoy. I had noticed more and more people connecting to Japan: people like me who want to remain close to their heritage, those who had traveled there and fallen in love with the country, or those finding inspiration through some aspect of the culture. A common theme always popped up - how much people love Japanese food! From fresh seasonal ingredients to meals that seamlessly balance each of the five tastes, everyone had a favorite food memory from Japan that made them feel even more connected to the country and its people. Yet so many people were also lamenting about how hard it was to find authentic Japanese food outside of Japan. A problem I also felt.

Five years ago, I took the leap to solve this problem. I co-founded Kokoro Care Packages, a company that offers authentic, small-batch products made locally in Japan and delivers them to people around the world. *Kokoro*, which means “heart” in Japanese, has a meaning that goes beyond this definition. It represents “spirit, “soul,” and “emotion,” and is the foundation of Kokoro Care Packages. Each of our products is selected with *kokoro* in mind, as we connect people to the food, the people and the traditions of Japan, all while supporting local farmers, producers and their communities.

Japan has a way of capturing people’s hearts, and I will forever be grateful for the gift Japanese food has given me. As I watch my mother age, I see how eating authentic foods from her home creates beautiful moments of nostalgia. Every time I eat Japanese food, I remind myself to store away these precious memories in hopes that they will bring me the same sense of joy in the future. I hope you will do the same.

Discover your favorite small-batch products from Japan at www.kokorocares.com and @kokorocares

You Are What You Eat

By Noah Kawaguchi

You are what you eat.
I am a California roll,
a California roll from

Ohio, in California, rolling
up to Nijiya Market, wandering
down the rolling aisles, wondering

if, in California, people
eat enough right-side-in
rolls to avoid becoming

uramaki, rolled inside out,
and carefully designed to
suit the palate of America;

I'm California rolling
up to Nijiya Market,
musing on the prospect

of them becoming a
rainbow shop at two
o'clock, amusing

my avocado- and cucumber-
filled brain, shimmying
past the seafood like the

imitation crab I am, wrapping
myself in blankets of seaweed
and sushi rice, pulling down

my clammy ginger hat
until it covers up my eyes,
soaking in a bath of

wasabi-filled soy sauce
until I fall apart and
my chopsticks fail me;

it's so easy to
remember, uramaki,
rolled inside out,

just like the California
rolls I used to get
every time——

You are what you eat.

[u][mami]

By Megan Kiyoko Wray

ooh, mommy
the spicy-sour-sweet
umami marinade
spritzes the air
wafting up wandering nostrils
lifting tendrils to sway a
soft, languid waltz
cilia silently singing along
muscle memory: sensory serenade
flooding fascia with fragrance
from far, far away

my foremothers find magnitude in
morsels
i find bloodline in clippings
pasted on postcards
passed on in bursting
bamboo boxes, white edges
yellowing, like me
as time urges them through

how maternity moves on
muted in food network naps
love notes drip dribbled
in specked savory stains
a slice, sliver, sluice
my mom
my mom's mom
me
find ceremony in simmering pots
of stock, carcasses born to
broth from bones unknown to
ancestors so familiar to us
familial to us
this is my motherland
my mother's taste
my mother's tongue

Obāchan's Parcel of Love

By Lisa Nakamura Durrell



Dedicated to my loving grandma (*obāchan*) who passed away at the age of 97. I am so happy she was able to meet her 12th grandchild, my daughter Kira, in 2019 before the pandemic.

It was like Christmas morning when *obāchan's* parcel arrived.

I can still smell the scent of the humid, salty air packed between the layers of packaged foods when we opened the industrial-sized cardboard box. I always loved to imagine the box journeying across the Pacific Ocean, from *obāchan's* house in Nakano, Tokyo to our condominium in Calgary, Alberta.

This parcel was magical. We couldn't believe how much stuff *obāchan* managed to pack inside like Tetris blocks - my mom always said it would be impossible to get it all back in. Everything from dried *kombu*, *hijiki*, instant noodles to heavy liquids like *tonkatsu* sauce, Calpico and *kakigōri* syrup during the summers. For my sister and I, there would always be an assortment of *dagashi* snacks and Sanrio character goods. Curated by *obāchan*, each item thoughtfully put in. On the inside of the box flaps would be *obāchan's* handwritten letter.

We would lay everything out on the table like merchandising our pretend grocery store. It was a time without internet, so decoding the packages featuring current marketing campaigns or limited editions was the closest thing to getting a peek inside Japan in the moment. My sister and I looked at the items for hours, talking about what to eat first and what we would save for later because it would be *mottainai* [a waste] to enjoy it all at once.

Growing up in the 80s in the prairies, Japanese food was still hard to come by. There's a family story about how my parents first landed in Regina, Saskatchewan, but quickly relocated to Calgary because there was one Korean-Japanese grocery store. That's how important food is to my family.

So when *obāchan's* parcel arrived a few times a year, it meant the world to us. The packaged foods not only became our bridge to my mother's homeland, but symbolized having *obāchan's* love in our cupboards.

Arigatō, obāchan.

Festive Special

By Sachiko Okuda

When I was growing up in Montreal, New Year's Day had near-sacred status in our household. The same could not be said for New Year's Eve, which my family regarded merely as prep time. But New Year's Day, according to my mother, was the one chance for us to set the tone for the entire year ahead, and she wanted us to be ready to seize the moment.

The New Year's preparations spearheaded by my mother were heavily inspired by our Japanese heritage. All bills had to be paid, the outfits we were to wear had to be clean and ironed, and the house had to sparkle. It was in accomplishing this last task that my mother's determination really shone. In our house, dirt and grime from the old year would have no place in the new one. On December 31, my father would run the Hoover until it began to emit smoke, my mother washed the bed linens and hung them to dry on the clotheslines in the basement, and my sisters and I scoured the rubber welcome mat, the front vestibule, and all the boot trays. Afterwards we girls shampooed our long hair in the laundry tub and washed our combs and brushes. My mother said that if we were really to do things right, we would also wash the broom and scald the mop head, but usually we skipped these final steps. There was still plenty of kitchen work left to do.

My mother marshalled my sisters and me to slice cucumbers for the shrimp-and-wilted-cucumber salad, peel carrots, grate daikon, chop green onions, open and drain the cans of bamboo shoots, water chestnuts and lotus root, and measure out the sugar, vinegar and soy sauce for the various marinades and glazes. We went to bed long before she did, and when we awoke the next morning, everything was in place for cooking the special New Year's meal. We ate this meal at lunchtime, because we were expected to eat our "big" meal at my grandparents' house in the evening.

I cannot recall the precise array of dishes my mother served at lunch, but I do remember that it was on New Year's Day that I tasted fish roe on kelp for the first time; I was not a fan. My mother also made chawan mushi, a savoury custard that required the special cups with lids to be taken out of a storage box in the attic labelled "JAPANESE DISHES." I loved chawan mushi, but I do not recall eating it at any other time of the year, not even on birthdays. I think the fuss and bother of getting out the precious chawan mushi cups and washing them was reserved for New Year's.

For dessert we ate small squares of fruit cake left over from Christmas and fresh mandarin oranges from Japan. I say “fresh” with some hesitation because, judging from the dried-up condition of those mandarins, it must have taken them ages to cross the Pacific Ocean and make their way across Canada to our home in Montreal. They were just awful to eat, with a layer of pith easily twice as thick as what you would find on a Sunkist orange from California. The membrane that encased each segment was so leathery and tough that we were compelled to strip it off before popping what was left of the fruit into our mouths. And yet, just like the proverbial child who receives a Christmas orange in the toe of her stocking, my sisters and I looked forward to the annual shipment of Japanese mandarins. Perhaps it was their smell that we appreciated the most; it freshened the air that was laden with the scent of burnt soy sauce.

After my mother died, my sister, an exceptional home cook, kept up the family New Year’s meal. And her husband, who had grown up in Japan, introduced us to a new tradition: each of us would write on a sheet of paper something from the old year that we wished to forget, seal it up in an envelope, and then throw the envelopes into the fireplace. I am not sure this was an authentic Japanese tradition, but it was surprisingly liberating and cleansing to see the paper catch fire and go up in flames.

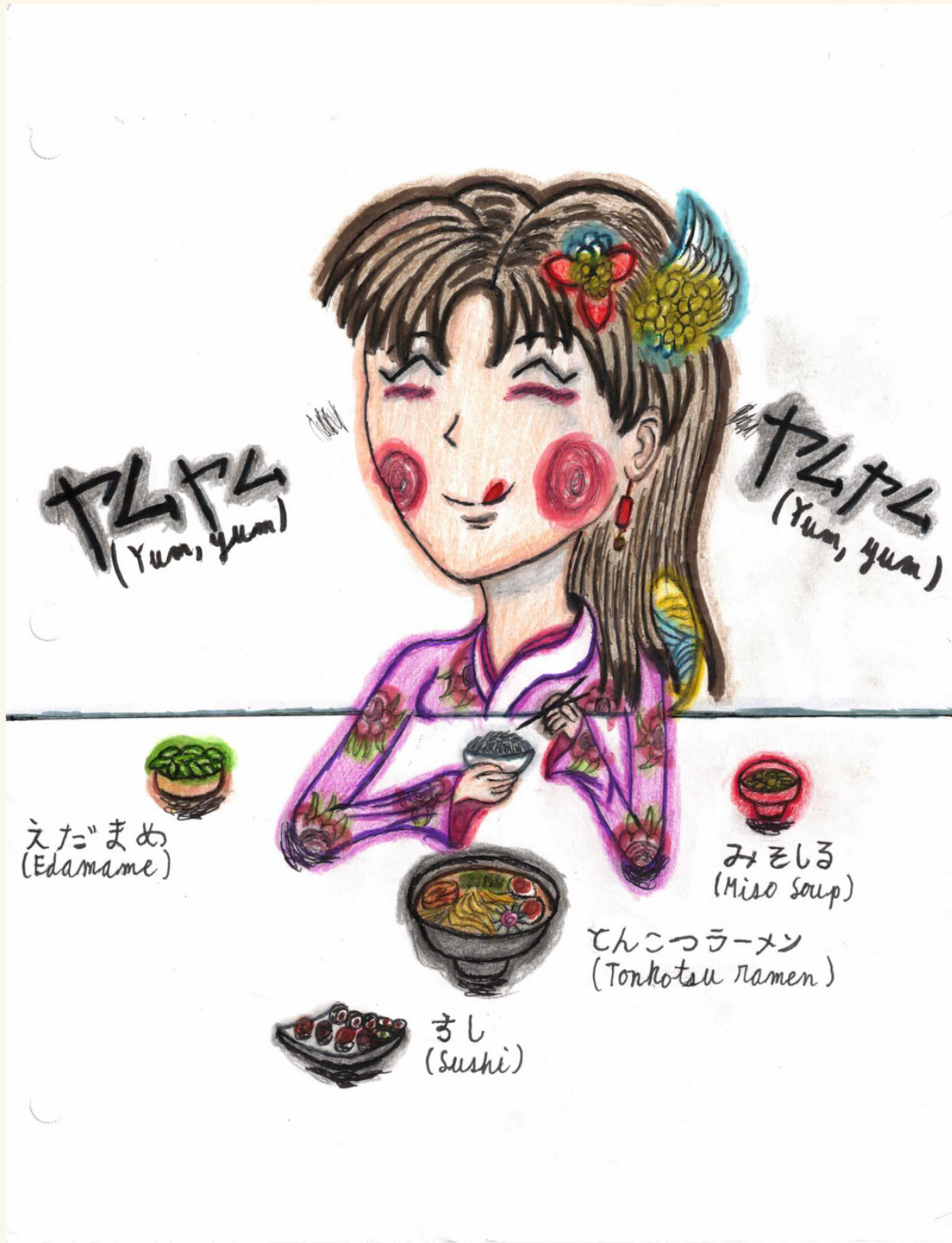
Of course, for many people, New Year’s Day is just January 1, the day after New Year’s Eve. I came to this sobering conclusion the time my husband and our family spent the holidays at his brother’s house. He and his wife hosted a family New Year’s Eve party and at midnight, the children were invited to bang pots and pans. New Year’s Day itself was ultra-low key; the children went tobogganing at the hill across the road and rounded out the afternoon playing video games in the basement. Three o’clock came and went, four o’clock arrived and still no sign of dinner preparations. Finally, towards five o’clock my sister-in-law pulled out a handful of delivery menus from a kitchen drawer. Did we want pizza, Chinese, or Swiss Chalet? My brother-in-law wondered aloud whether the “Festive Special”—chicken with cranberry sauce instead of barbecue sauce, and a foil-wrapped Lindt chocolate ball for dessert—was still available. It was not.

I thought back to all the effort my mother put into New Year’s Day and for a moment, the prospect of rotisserie chicken served in a black plastic takeout container on the most auspicious day of the year seemed unbearable. Any other day might have been all right, just not New Year’s. Then I recalled the dried-up mandarin oranges of my childhood and how totally incomprehensible their appeal would be to my in-laws. To each their own.

“I’ll take the quarter chicken dinner, leg,” I said.

Connecting to my Japanese Heritage by Food

By Mariko Sumi



Making Rice

By Hanako Teranishi

My family has an “Aroma Simply Stainless Rice Cooker.” It is my father’s rice cooker and there is no sentimental story that comes with it. It is not the first one he bought, nor is it passed down from his parents, it was just because he wanted a better one. One that would last longer and “make better rice.” Japanese short grain rice is always on our table. Whether it's accompanying lasagna, mac n’ cheese, steak, pizza, burgers, turkey, or takeout. Regardless of if there are also potatoes, mashed, scalloped, boiled, or fried on the side, there is always rice sitting nearby. Without rice, the meal cannot be a meal, and so my father makes a fresh pot every day. I use the word “makes” because he doesn’t cook the rice, our rice cooker “cooks” the rice.

Perfectly prepares 2-6 or 2-15 cups of any variety of cooked rice. 100% food-grade 304 stainless steel cooking pot for clean eating and optimal durability. Simple, one-touch operation with automatic Keep Warm mode. The rice cooker, seemingly, does everything, it makes rice seem like an afterthought, an unimportant side not worth the love we sprinkle into our other cooking. It is just so simple; it is so easy to take for granted.

Eventually, my father passed the torch onto me. First, he showed me how to wash rice. I took note of how his fingers danced through the water and how the grains of rice accepted his invitation as they twirled together in time. I watched how effortlessly he drained the dirty water without wasting one grain. They danced until the water ran clear, signalling their dance was over and the rice was ready to be cooked. As the next step, he told me the water-to-rice ratio:

“For every cup of rice, you cook its one cup of water. But add a little bit more.” I asked him how much more and he shrugged, “You’ll just know.” As if it was pre-programmed into me, as if when it was my turn, it would come naturally as if I had been made to do this. The final step is to wait. Before you cook the rice, you have to let it sit for thirty minutes and another thirty minutes exactly after. Cooking rice takes time and cannot be an afterthought to the meal. The meal is a secondary component that has to be scheduled around the preparation and cook time of the rice. While rice may be the side dish it cannot be treated as such, it must be prepared with just as much care and deliberation as a main course.

The first time I washed rice, nothing came naturally. My fingers did not gracefully dance, and, instead, they clawed and thrashed through the icy water, they froze and cramped becoming numb as the grains begrudgingly stuck between my fingers. They gasped for air as my blood froze. And after several rinses and many lost grains, the water was still cloudy. My reflection was obstructed by a beige blight. I didn't "just know" the extra water measurements so I guessed, and it always felt wrong. My hands and heart were sore and heavy as after hours of labour my rice came out sodden. Too sticky, too mushy, not enough, not right.

The machine can never do it wrong. The machine has been pre-programmed with one setting: cooking the rice to perfection every time. The person beside the machine is the one responsible for the rice, and by common belief, they should be pre-programmed, too, but they are not. They are not a machine.

While my rice was not perfect, nor anywhere near being "good enough," my father still ate it and smiled. He thanked me and asked me to make it again another day. Every time, no matter how "wrong" my rice was, he would thank me and ask me to make it again.

I realized that making rice is a labour of love. While you might think of rice as just a "simple food," a low-effort side dish that you don't have to watch over. It absolutely is not. You could rinse it once, but the water would be cloudy and the machine wouldn't know, it would still cook the rice. But you would know and in your heart that wouldn't be right because the memory of your father teaching you blossoms from his memory of his mother teaching him and so on. It is a silent tradition of love passed through generations and shared with every branch of our family. In our history of pain and sorrow, we have always been too busy to be angry, to be sad, to grieve, to communicate, but we have always found the time to wait for rice. Our dedication to a chosen labour is love. We wait for rice so we can show the people we love our hearts. An offering of our love and intimacy we keep so close to our chests. While the words "I love you" get lost in our throats, the rice that passes over our tongues speaks in place of our silence.

Onigiri

By Larissa Wakatsuki and Fausto Kadomoto Inomata



Itadakimasu

By Sonya William

When we moved from Tokyo to Cortes Island, British Columbia, our new house had a circular raised garden bed that was bordered with rocks. We obligingly called it the “rock garden;” it was filled with mint and lemon balm.

Filling buckets with warm water, I would mix mint and lemon balm leaves with small amounts of sugar to make tea. Usually, the water would come from our outdoor hose, which pulled from a creek running behind the house; my mom would boil it to make sure we didn't catch beaver fever. One time, I used water from the pond, which rendered the tea for visiting fairies only, not for human consumption.

When I was sick, my mom would make *ochazuke*, which is rice steeped in tea with a bit of garnish on top. When my stomach hurt, she would make plain rice with *umeboshi*. We only ate brown rice because white rice is the exact same as brown rice except with all the vitamins and nutrients removed. The secret to a long life is chewing brown rice thoroughly.

On Cortes Island, it's expected that you grow a fair amount of the food you eat. In the spring, the first treat of the year was always strawberries. Cortes Island is Klahoose First Nation territory; perhaps it was from someone in Klahoose that I first heard the story about a trickster fox who replaced a wild strawberry with the engorged head of his penis and was titillated by a young woman who frustratedly pulled at it to eat. Every year, only I knew the way that the strawberry harvest had this added adult sheen.

Of course, it was my mom who decided to plant *shiso* (perilla leaves), so deceptively like the stinging nettle which daunted every path. In the rock garden, the *shiso* plants, with their tall stems and generous diamond-shaped leaves, easily blended in with the mint and lemon balm.

Shiso doesn't go into tea. Instead, it gets wrapped around a raw piece of tuna, or patted into a slender sandwich of *umeboshi*. If you've never had *shiso* and *umeboshi* together, I highly recommend it as it has a particular and appealing flavour.

Perhaps we were the first people ever on Cortes Island to have *shiso* and *umeboshi* together, because of the gusts of fate that carry people into strange places. I don't believe in ownership over delicious things. I hope someone is harvesting young *shiso* leaves from the rock garden today and filling them with little piles of *natto*.

There is something deliriously confusing about the growing of food on land that was stolen, to nurture a plant from Japan alongside the mint leaves used by a child to play-act a western fairy tale. In the end, the complexities probably don't matter so much. As long as you remember to chew well, you can spend those extra years planting new seeds.

ご飯 = ライス = Rice?

*Gohan (rice) = raisu (rice) = rice?

By Ken Yoshida

During my first visit to Toronto in the final year of my undergrad studies, my friends and I were wandering about in Koreatown and I could not contain my excitement when we came across a Korean grocery store selling fresh *taiyaki* (たい焼き). I was also filled with joy when I saw that the same store was selling wrapped *onigiri* (おにぎり) like in Japan's *konbini* (コンビニ). My friends, whom I've known since kindergarten, saw a new side of me that day because I had only eaten those items during family trips to Japan, and no stores in our hometown of Ottawa sold such foods. The excitement I expressed perplexed my long-time friends because they thought I regularly ate Japanese food at home. However, I viewed the food I ate at home as "Japanese".

My exposure to Japanese food was through my father, who was from around Nagoya, Japan. Despite being from a region with known regional food specialities, which I will get to later, the food we ate at home was not Japanese. This was reflected in our consumption of what is considered a fundamental aspect of Japanese cuisine: rice. Instead of preparing 100% Japanese short-grain rice, the rice we ate at home was a mix of Japanese rice with Thai sticky rice (ข้าวเหนียว - *khao neow*). The ratio my father usually prepared was $\frac{3}{4}$ Japanese rice and $\frac{1}{4}$ Thai sticky rice or even $\frac{2}{3}$ Japanese with $\frac{1}{3}$ Thai. For those unfamiliar with Thai sticky rice, it is a long-grain rice like Thai jasmine rice. But when cooked, it is much stickier to the point that you can eat it balled up with your hand and it won't crumble apart if you dip it in a sauce or soup. The cooked result of our rice mix would be a rice that is stickier and "drier" in texture than regular Japanese rice because of the smaller amount of water used to cook the mix. My father would even use Thai sticky rice instead of *mochigome* (もち米) to make *mochi* (もち) at home, resulting in a texturally denser *mochi* with a firmer stretchiness.

The use of Thai sticky rice in our family's rice consumption can be explained by my mother being northern Thai and my father having an appreciation for northern Thai food and other foreign foods. We regularly buy Cantonese foods like lap cheong sausage, eat Vietnamese pickled onions (*hanh dam*) instead of *tsukemono* (漬物), and even make *kimchi* (キムチ) from Japanese blog sites. Having this variety of primarily Asian foods at home meant that my White Anglophone and Francophone friends would assume that I ate Japanese food at home since my family was the only Japanese family and even Asian family in the French immersion program at elementary, middle, and high schools. However, because my father would regularly take us to Japan to visit family, I noticed that the food I ate at home and brought to school lunches in Canada was "Japanese" and was different from the food I ate with extended family at their homes and at restaurants in Japan.

The regional food specialities of Nagoya is what Japanese food looks like to me because of my repeated exposure to that food when visiting family in Japan. Some well-known specialities include *hitsumabushi* (ひつまぶし), which is grilled eel on rice that is eaten in three different ways (as is, with condiments like *wasabi* - わさび, and by pouring *dashi* - 出汁 or tea like in *ochazuke* - お茶漬け). Another is *miso-katsu* (味噌カツ), which uses a dark red miso-based sauce instead of a Worcestershire-based sauce used on *tonkatsu* (豚かつ). Last, but not least is *ankake supa* (あんかけスパ), which is a pasta dish that uses a gloopy red sauce and is topped with various ingredients. These regional foods look very similar to their counterparts across the country. *Hitsumabushi* differentiates from *unajū* (うな重) primarily by the way it is eaten, *miso-katsu* distinguishes from *tonkatsu* by the type of sauce being used, and *ankake supa* diverges from *wafū pasuta* (和風パスタ) by its interpretation of preparing spaghetti noodles. These foods indicate a local flavour preference that differs from the rest of the country, but all of them cannot be singled out by a commonly used ingredient, cooking method, serving style, etc. However, they can all be identified by where it originated from, which in this case is Nagoya.

Geography is the common factor I would also define Japanese food by because it captures a large number of factors that can be taken together. Some factors are those I mentioned earlier in how the listed Nagoya foods differed from their counterparts. Defining Japanese food by its geography takes into account the evolution of flavour and presentation preferences in the country. This is most clearly seen in the foods I listed, where grilled eel is a dish that is considered to be traditionally Japanese from the Edo period because of its use of fish that is eaten with rice and served in a bowl with a wooden spoon or chopsticks. Followed by *katsu* that is thought to be a contemporary Japanese dish from the Meiji period (1868-1912) because of its successful combination of Western cuisine with traditional Japanese cuisine (eaten with rice and served in a Japanese plating set-up with chopsticks). While *ankake supa* represents modern Japanese food from the post-war period because it does not use traditional ingredients like fish or rice, and is served on a singular plate with a steel fork and spoon. Each period's food has had time to refine itself, with grilled eel being the most refined because it is the oldest of the three. It will be interesting to see how *ankake supa* will be more refined, as well as see which new foods in Japan become a commonplace meal either at homes or in restaurants.

Circling back to the question in the title of this reflection, ご飯 = ライス = Rice?, I would answer it as “Yes”. But only in the context that it comes from a specified location like Japan or Nagoya, and not other factors like the type of ingredients used. Whatever type of Japanese food I come across in Japan the next time I am there to visit family, I won't forget to say *itadakimasu* (いただきます - I humbly accept the food), *umai* (うまい - delicious), and *gochisōsama deshita* (ごちそうさまでした - thank you for the meal)!



Contributor Bios

Sarah Eiko Ariza-Verreault (She/Her) is a mixed-race Japanese (Yonsei) and French Canadian emerging writer and creative from Tkaronto, Treaty 13 territory. She graduated with an MA in English Literature from the University of Toronto. She is currently working on a genre-bending thriller novel which will explore the traumas of living in and growing into a hypersexualized body as a young Japanese woman in a postcolonial context. In her free time, she enjoys singing in the shower.

Miki Dare is a Japanese Canadian artist who explores issues of identity, personal history, and social realities through mixed media. Dare is pronounced “DAH-RAY” and means “who” in Japanese. Her work delves into “Who am I?”—from our connections to the past to the constraints and conveniences of today’s world.

Xauni de Figueiroa is Gosei with Japanese roots from both Canada and Brazil. She is inspired by her cultural heritage, the environment, and creatively facing life’s challenges. Examples of her work include sewing and modelling a dress of plastic bags, creating ceramic figures based on Japanese folklore, and painting with flavours of fantastic reality. “Ichigo-go” is her most recent work featured in the Kartion Art Gallery’s Women and Art Exhibition.

Lillian Hanako Rowlett is a half-Japanese Canadian currently living in Toronto with her Japanese mom. She holds a Bachelors of Honors degree from Queen’s University in mathematics with a subject of specialization in economics. She is a CFA® charter holder, and after spending almost a decade in finance, she now connects people to Japanese food, culture and traditions through her company, Kokoro Care Packages. She was also an ALT on the JET Program from 2003-2005 in Kashiwazaki-shi, Niigata-ken. Reach out and connect with her at lillian@kokorocares.com

Noah Kawaguchi (He/Him/His) is a musician and writer, originally from Ohio and currently based in San Francisco, USA. He graduated from Oberlin Conservatory with a major in Jazz Studies and a minor in East Asian Studies and is now a graduate student in Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. He plays the *shakuhachi* and often creates from his perspective as a mixed Shin-Nisei Japanese American from the Midwest. See noahkawaguchi.com for up-to-date information.

Megan Kiyoko Wray (She/Her) is a queer, mixed-race Japanese Canadian Yonsei poet, writer, and creative human based on Treaty 1 Territory. Her work explores concepts of identity, place, and belonging with particular interest in intergenerational emotion, memory, and understanding. Megan regularly uses food and art to (re)connect with her cultural roots, and with the world around her. As of fall 2023, she will be co-facilitating *Mata Ashita: An Intergenerational Writing Circle for Japanese Canadians*.

Lisa Nakamura Durrell is a Nisei-Vietnamese Canadian living in beautiful British Columbia with her husband Greg and daughter Kira. Born in Calgary, she relocated to Vancouver to work for the 2010 Olympic & Paralympic Committee. Over a decade later, she is still in Vancouver because of the abundance of Japanese food and culture. Favourite meals are tempura soba and gyoza & ramen. She is also an on-camera talent, hosting a culinary series for Travel Alberta and a cooking show on Gusto TV's "One World Kitchen." Follow her eating adventures and Japanese-inspired parenting on Instagram at @lisadurrell

Sachiko Okuda (She/Her) is a Nikkei Sansei. When she was growing up in Montreal in the 1960s, apart from home there were only three places where she could eat Japanese food: at her grandparents' house, at the Montreal Buddhist bazaar, and at Expo 67. Sachiko is grateful to the Yonsei-led Mata Ashita intergenerational writing circle for inspiring her to reflect upon and (finally!) write about her Nikkei heritage.

Mariko Sumi (She/Her) is a mixed-race Japanese (Nisei) and French Canadian from Ottawa (ON). She got her true passion in illustration, while growing up with tons of picture books, comics, mangas, Disney movies, Studio Ghibli movies and anime. As an independent illustrator, she was involved in many local newspapers and arts contests, which she won most of them during her school years. For example, she was the finalist of Best Caricature of the Year for the Express Étudiant (a local newspapers of Ottawa French schools) in 2009. Also, most of her artwork has been published in the student-run science journal, The Catalyst, from 2011 until 2018. Finally, the artistic achievement, of which she is most proud, is the virtual exhibition of her manga- influenced illustrations on the Youtube Channel of Manga Montréal school, for the two past years: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOxUFVteKQdzXG_Nm8BR09g. Follow on Instagram: @andromedashun119

Hanako Teranishi (They/Them) is a queer Yonsei mixed Japanese Canadian/Nikkei living on Treaty 1 Territory, Winnipeg, Manitoba. They are also in a BA English Literature program and looking to pursue an MA in English Literature as well, with a focus on Asian North American writing. They are interested in learning and writing about racial and queer identities alongside anti-capitalist and queer theory. Hanako's engagement with writing seeks to create pockets of belonging, intimacy, and love by filling in the gaps they see within academia and literature.

Larissa Wakatsuki (They/Them) and Fausto Kadomoto Inomata (He/Him)

Larissa and Fausto are Japanese diaspora, living as settlers on the stolen territories of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwx̱wú7mesh* (Squamish), *səlilwətał* (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, currently known as Vancouver. They are married, and learning to reconnect to their culture in a way that holds space for mistakes, imperfection and joy.

Sonya William (She/Her) was born in Kamagaya, Chiba. Her mother is Japanese and her father comes from the region then known as Yugoslavia; her last name comes from the imagination of a border official somewhere along the way. She grew up on Klahoose First Nation territory in BC, and now works in marketing in the city we call Toronto, ON.

Ken Yoshida previously contributed to Nikkei Monogatari's inaugural Issue. His involvement with Japanese for Nikkei (JFN) expanded to be a course instructor for beginner's Japanese. Since his father is from around Nagoya, he enjoys eating a regional food speciality known as *hitsuabushi* (ひつまぶし), but also enjoys common Japanese snacks like *taiyaki* (たい焼き). A Japanese recipe he enjoys cooking and sharing is *nikujaga* (肉じゃが).

COVER ART

Emmie Tsumura is a multidisciplinary experimental artist and designer based in Toronto. Her work lives where politics meets the everyday, and she uses justice-oriented design strategies to build more accessible, inclusive, and joyful communities. She incorporates absurdity, chaos, and humour into her work, and is known for having a whimsical and engaging personal style. She primarily works in illustration, collage, and multimedia installation. She holds a masters in design from York University, and her current area of research explores multispecies collaborations, Japanese folk tales, and creative play as resistance.



ABOUT THE EDITORS

Mimi Okabe was born in Miyagi, Japan and raised in Ontario, Canada. She is currently an assistant teaching professor and Director of the Asian Studies Program at the University at Buffalo, SUNY, where she researches and teaches on topics related to Japanese popular culture. The co-founding of JFN has sparked new research interests in heritage language pedagogy, through which Mimi advocates anti-racist pedagogical practices in Japanese language classrooms.

Sachi Kikuchi grew up in a bilingual and bicultural household in Canada. After completing her MA in Theoretical Linguistics and a TESL certificate, she moved to Sendai, Miyagi. Four years later, Sachi returned to Canada, where she founded Kokoro Communications, which provides Japanese teaching and koseki translation services. She then co-founded Japanese for Nikkei with her childhood friend, Mimi.

Alex Okuda-Rayfuse and the YLC Team

The National Association of Japanese Canadians' (NAJC) Young Leaders Committee (YLC) is comprised of Japanese Canadians ages 19-35 from across Canada who are active leaders in their respective communities. The committee is responsible for:

- acting as the national voice of young people in Japanese Canadian communities;
- engaging and connecting young people in Japanese Canadian communities across Canada; and
- proposing recommendations to the NAJC National Executive Board on programming, events, and annual budget.

The committee oversees a network for young Japanese Canadians, the Japanese Canadian Young Leaders (JCYL). For information, visit:
<https://linktr.ee/NAJCYLC>

For more information about the YLC, visit: <https://najc.ca/committees/young-leaders-committee/>



つづく

To be continued...

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I don't believe in ownership over delicious things. I hope someone is harvesting young shiso leaves from the rock garden today and filling them with little piles of natto.

--Sonya William

“

Matsutake gohan tasted like a memory my grandma couldn't bring herself to say out loud; it was the flavour of joy in a childhood that faced so much hardship, an indulgence when she only knew scarcity.

--Sarah Eiko Ariza-Verreault

NIKKEI MONOGATARI

日系物語

