
Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens
of Tokyo and Beyond

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Published in Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond the United States by Ten Speed Press, an imprint Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

www.crownpublishing.com

www.tenspeed.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ono, Tadashi, 1962- author.

Japanese soul cooking : ramen, tonkatsu, tempura, and more from the streets and
kitchens of tokyo and beyond / Tadashi Ono and Harris Salat.

pages cm

Includes index.

1. Cooking, Japanese. I. Salat, Harris, author. II. Title.

TX724.5.J3O564 2013

641.5952--dc23

2013020776

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-60774-352-1

eBook ISBN: 978-1-60774-353-8

v3.1

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For my wonderful wife, Manami, and daughters, Sueh and Kiku—you're my inspiration.
—Tadashi

For Momoyo and our adorable little Gen, already an adventurous nosher just like his folks.
—Harris

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We'd like to thank our editor Melissa Moore, art director Toni Tajima, and the rest of the Ten Speed Press gang; our agent Angela Miller; our pal, travel buddy, and mad photo genius Todd Coleman; the good folks at the Japan National Tourism Organization, the Tokyo Visitors and Convention Bureau, and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government for their phenomenal support and assistance; the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force for inviting us to eat curry on a warship; the captain Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond and crew of the JMSDF Notojima; our ever-gracious JMSDF liaison Lt. Commander Takashi Nobukuni; curry (and every other kind of Japanese cooking) *shisho* Nobuko Torimitsu and her friends; Tokyo food blogger Heimin Kaneko and his friends;

the journalist Keiko Tsuyama; Chef Kazuyuki Takekawa of Daiki ramen; the owners and staff of all the Tokyo restaurants we visited, chowed down at, and photographed; our stellar researcher, Tomoko Mori; *Saveur* editor Jim Oseland, and Hilary Merzbacher, Sarah Green, Judy Haubert, Nidhi Chaudhry, and Helen Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond Yin in the *Saveur* kitchen who helped make our Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond food shoot possible; and our amazing recipe testers around the world—you rock!

INTRODUCTION

Let's start with a groundbreaking moment back in 1872, when Emperor Meiji of Japan did something no other ruler of that country had done for a thousand years, namely, bite into a juicy hunk of meat in public. That simple act stunned his subjects—and forever changed the course of Japanese culture. It gave birth to a new kind of cooking in Japan, a new kind of hearty, rib-sticking *comfort* food cooking that's beloved there to this day. It's a world apart from traditional Japanese standards like miso soup, grilled fish, and pickled vegetables, and it's the amazing—and surprising—cooking that we celebrate in this book.

But how could a singular chomp shake up an entire country?

Nineteen years earlier, in 1853, American warships had suddenly appeared in the Japanese port of Yokohama. Until then, the country's leaders had sealed off Japan from the rest of the world for more than two hundred years, during which time Japanese couldn't leave on pain of death. But while Japan faced inward those two centuries, America and European nations exploded into the most powerful economic and military powers on earth. So when Yankee warships showed up, and then demanded Japan open their doors to trade—or else—the Japanese had little choice but to accept.

Soon more Westerners planted themselves in Japan. Their arrival triggered a profound upheaval in the country that led to the formation of a modern state under the emperor, who was determined to launch an industrial revolution and build a modern military just like in the West.

Foreigners arriving in Japan brought with them strange and new ingredients, dishes, and eating habits—many of these centered on consuming meat. Up to then, meat eating in Japan was taboo, actually banned by Buddhist edict for a millennium. During their period of isolation, Japanese relied primarily on fish, vegetables, tofu, and traditional seasonings like dashi, miso, and soy sauce. But the emperor and his minions Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond credited meat and dairy eating for the strapping physiques of the Westerners, who towered over Japanese at Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond the time. So they urged Japanese to Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond consume meat and other Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond Western foods. The emperor's very public meat encounter followed, and soon after that, in 1873, an official banquet was thrown in Japan for a visiting Italian royal, where, for the first time, this formal meal was prepared entirely of French cuisine.

These seminal events got the Western cuisine ball rolling, and before long, eating Western-style cuisine became a powerful symbol of modernity in Japan.

In the late nineteenth century, Western-style restaurants began to appear in Japan, like *Seiyoken* ("Western House"), which opened its doors in Tokyo in 1872. At the same time, the Japanese military began adopting Western-style foods. From these beginnings, ordinary Japanese began to learn of this new style of eating. Chefs, food companies, and cooks began to adapt these dishes to Japanese tastes, mixing and matching both Western and local ingredients, such as butter and soy sauce. Within a few decades, the mass media, especially women's magazines and radio shows, began featuring this cooking. What started as restaurant fare, like tonkatsu, or military chow, like curry, began to filter into homes across Japan. By the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese and Korean dishes like ebi chili, bulgogi, and chahan, also adapted to Japanese tastes, joined Western cooking in this culinary march. And in the years after World War II, Americans occupying Japanese Soul Cooking: Ramen, Tonkatsu, Tempura, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond Japan added their own unique food influences, including Japanese-style (*wafu*) pasta.

The embrace of foreign food evolved in Japan into a parallel cuisine, comfort food cooking that became as beloved as traditional Japanese fare. This modern style of eating picked up steam as Japan became increasingly urbanized, and we consider even stalwart dishes like soba, udon, and tempura to be a part of it.

What fascinates us, as you'll read in the pages that follow, are how so many of the dishes we describe began life as restaurant cooking, but then were quickly embraced by home cooks. And even today, these dishes are enjoyed both at neighborhood eateries and at the dining table. And that's key. Because, as you'll see in the pages that follow, these dishes are as delicious and amazing as they are simple and easy to whip up.

Japanese Soul Cooking Ramen Tonkatsu Tempura And More From The Streets And Kitchens Of Tokyo And Beyond

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