

How savory pancakes became an enduring symbol of Japanese hope and happiness

Okonomiyaki – a savory pancake popularized in the devastating aftermath of the Hiroshima atomic bomb – has become a culinary representative of joy and is today one of the popular food cultures in Japan. The powerful story of Okonomiyaki is one that Otafuku Sauce, the producer of the country's original pancake condiment and best-selling sauce, wants to spread globally.



"We consider Okonomiyaki to be a dietary culture which contributes to society, and we label our mission to spread this dish to the world the 'Okono-mission'"

Naoyoshi Sasaki, President,
Otafuku Sauce Co., Ltd.

In 1922, a young entrepreneur named Seiichi Sasaki began selling Japanese sake and soy sauce at a small store in the Yokogawa district of Hiroshima City.

Having built a modest success with his local shop, Sasaki began to experiment with brewing vinegar in 1938. He started developing his own koji (a kind of rice malt), that would be used for a special new vinegar. His initial expectations were modest: the taste, he hoped, would simply bring a smile to people's faces. This was the genesis of one of modern-day Japan's favorite and best-selling sauces, Otafuku Okonomi Sauce.

"Not long after that the atomic bomb hit Hiroshima and the city was destroyed and burnt to the ground," recalls Naoyoshi Sasaki, grandson of the Otafuku brand founder and now company president.

It was in the process of rebuilding the city, however, that one particular dish was popularized: Okonomiyaki – a simple savory pancake that contained,

due to the difficulty of that time, a variety of ingredients of whatever was fresh, available and safe to eat such as cabbage and green onions.

"Interestingly enough, the first sauce used to accompany Okonomiyaki was Worcestershire sauce," says Mr. Sasaki. "One of the features of that sauce is its thinness, which would cause it to dribble down the food, and this frustrated the owners of Okonomiyaki restaurants."

And so, the company spotted a gap in the market and set out to come up with a new recipe that would solve local restaurant owners' sauce-based problem.

"We began researching and developing sauces which go well with Okonomiyaki, and in 1952, we finally developed our original: Otafuku Okonomi Sauce. The thickness and viscosity was developed in response to the lack of consistency of Worcestershire sauce, which was a challenge for the owners to cook with."

Okonomiyaki – the cheap and delicious dish – had revitalized the people of Hiroshima recovering from the aftermath of World War Two. Now they had been given the perfect sauce to pair with their favorite meal, and so it was exceptionally well received by chefs and the local population alike.

Today, the ethos of Otafuku Sauce – which makes and sells a range of sauces, vinegars and Okonomiyaki ingredient sets – remains identical to when it started out: to bring joy to people. It is a mission, says Mr. Sasaki, that is perfectly symbolized by the brand's logo.

"The concept of our emblem is to spread joy and happiness to the world. My grandfather founded the company and he adopted this traditional image, a Japanese goddess, for what it symbolized. At the time of our company's foundation, women were generally in charge of cooking. I believe that my grandfather

What is "Hiroshima-style Okonomiyaki"?

INGREDIENTS

- Dried Fish Powder
- Tempura Crips
- Batter
- Noodles
- Otafuku Okonomi Sauce

- Bean Sprouts
- Egg
- Green Onions
- Cabbage
- Dried Seaweed
- Pork

Can you predict what will be the next food trend after ramen?

The culinary world is seeing the rise of a new favorite from Japan called Okonomiyaki. The dish, first eaten to ward off hunger after WWII, is now a symbolic food of Hiroshima and its reconstruction.

Okonomiyaki is a savory street-style pancake that is renowned for its delicious flavor and high nutritional content. You can add any ingredient you like to the dish that literally translates to "whatever you like, grilled."

The one ingredient that should not be skipped is Otafuku Okonomi Sauce, Japan's top-selling condiment. Otafuku Okonomi Sauce became popular after WWII when Okonomiyaki became a staple food in Hiroshima. The sauce is mild and sweet with about 50 selected ingredients, and the unmistakable flavor of dates distinguishes this sauce from any other Japanese condiment.

<https://www.otafukusauce.com/e/>

thought about his wife as a goddess and the logo symbolizes his respect to women."

The story of Okonomiyaki, which is little known outside Japan, is indeed one that carries a message of hope, happiness and simple pleasures in life that the modern Otafuku brand now wants to help spread beyond the shores of the island.

"We consider Okonomiyaki to be a dietary culture which contributes to society, and we label our mission to spread this dish to the world the 'Okono-mission',"

says the president. "To fulfill the 'Okono-mission', we must develop our brand and raise international awareness. We have begun to do that by incorporating English in our brand logo last year. So, to spread Okonomiyaki and our products globally, our strategy is to make foreigners that come to Japan try the dish with our delicious sauce. Because once you've tried it, you will remember it forever!"

