

cooking

by Joanna Rotté THE BASICS WITH LIMA OHSAWA

Before coming to Japan I had heard a rumor that the macrobiotic centers in this land are anathema to the young and hip but havens for the elderly and decrepit. However when I visited Nihon C.I.: Japan Center Ignoramous, also known as *Intermac* (International Macrobiotics), I was greeted by an assembly of colorfully dressed folks, of varying hair lengths, aged twenty to thirty. The schedule of their activities for a regular month encompassed lectures on Chinese astrology, facial diagnosis, curing disease, use and application of cosmetics, food studies, and analysis of case failures to cure disease through macrobiotics; a wedding party, and the monthly birthday party at which whole grain pastries, bread, salad, apples and juices (but no alcoholic beverages) were served. The students were ardently engaged in tasks related to formulating the center's educational and social activities, and publishing the monthly, *La Revue du Principe Unique*. I saw some results of their work in representative issues, which included excerpts from the writings of Georges Ohsawa, articles on martial arts, travel experiences outside Japan, the international macrobiotic summer camp, and new or renewed recipes—often by Lima Ohsawa, the widow of Georges Ohsawa and the most respected teacher of macrobiotic cooking in Japan.

Lima Ohsawa is seventy-nine. She has traveled, studied, lectured, cooked, and sampled foods throughout the world. On my visit to Nihon C.I., she told me that in America she had observed a tendency among macrobiotic students to swing between extremes, especially in eating. Her solution for that problem is brown rice (cooked with barley for the very yang) alternated with barley and oatmeal. The evening staple, she suggested, should be *soba* (buckwheat) or *udon* (wholewheat) noodles. For former meat eaters, laden with sodium from the salt contained in meat, the use of salt in cooking should be minimal. If marijuana is still being used, more salt is necessary in cooking. If a yang headache results from too much salt, take vegetables, salad, and fruit. Final-

ly, to offset the American hobby of over-eating, engage in physical exercise, chew well, and keep a strict macrobiotic diet for five years. This last suggestion was delivered to me almost with nonchalance, a statement of fact, as if five years is but a speck in the dust of time. Yet, considering the extent of many years of wrecking one's health, perhaps five years' discipline is a small price to pay to salvage one's self.

What first impressed me about Lima Ohsawa's cooking class was the spaciousness of the kitchen. It was equipped with a huge mirror overhanging the work table, so that the demonstration could be viewed from anywhere in the room. Also, the students, pert in white aprons, all showed expertise with a knife (which I supposed was a beneficial side effect of being Japanese).

The classes occur once a week for several months, enabling Mrs. Ohsawa to directly observe the changing mind-body condition of each student as she transforms her food and cooking. Mrs. Ohsawa noted, "After three months, they all become prettier." Once prepared, the food is shared by her and the students as they discuss the yin/

yang of it.

There are two class levels, beginning and advanced. A student enrolls in one of the beginner courses for three to four months, attending either the morning class taught by Ukitsu San, a former Lima Ohsawa student, or the evening class taught by Mrs. Ohsawa. The advanced class teaches the preparation of dishes for parties, festivals and feasts. Also, once a month, the students learn how to make miso, natto, amasake, and tofu; alternatively, Lima Ohsawa offers insights into the styles of traditional Japanese, Buddhist-temple or French cooking. But, whatever the occasion she always stresses the principle of selecting food proper to the environment and cooking it as naturally as possible according to the principle of yin and yang. She considers brown rice the most suitable protein source and a valuable tool for discharging poisons from the body that were accumulated when eating meat. Ingredients are always shaken, not stirred, and wooden chopsticks are used to dish out the food. The beginner class, of course, studies basics. The following recipes came from one of these classes which I attended on a particularly happy day:



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VEGETABLES SAUTÉED WITH MISO

2 onions, minced
3-1/2 ounces burdock, sliced
4 ounces lotus root, minced
1 carrot, minced
1 tablespoon ginger root, grated
1/2 teaspoon dried orange peel, grated
1 cup barley-soybean miso (mugi miso)
sesame oil
water

Sauté vegetables in the order given, in a skillet (stainless or cast iron) or wok, over a medium to low flame. Soften miso in a bowl or suribachi with small amount of stock or water to make it easier to blend. Place miso on top of vegetables. After the first bubbles appear, just at the boiling point, add the ginger, then the orange peel for aroma. Cover with a lid and simmer for about one hour. Cool slightly and purée in a suribachi to form a spread. Makes about one cup. This recipe is a famous, macrobiotic dish. It was especially contrived by Lima Ohsawa to entice Americans to partake of the pleasurable energy of miso. Also, her feeling was that Americans are too fond of sesame butter and other oily spreads. She offered this dish as an alternative spread. Of course, any vegetable combination may be used as long as a balance between roots and greens is kept in mind.

SLICED RADISH TOFU

1 large daikon, sliced
daikon greens, chopped
3 pieces deep fried tofu, cut in bite-size squares
tamari
1 cup water
sesame oil

Press out excess moisture in tofu and deep fry at 375° until golden brown. Sauté the daikon greens in a deep skillet or pot over medium flame. Add the daikon and continue sautéing. Add water, deep fried tofu, and tamari to taste. Boil until vegetables are tender. Makes three to four servings. Daikon is a fine source of yin. For yin, Lima Ohsawa considers boiled vegetables preferable to tofu, especially raw tofu. Since daikon cuts through fat, she recommends that, when we eat fried dishes like tempura, we grate an amount of raw daikon equal to however much oil was used, then add a dash of tamari and serve it as a condiment.

RICE CAKE VEGETABLE SOUP

3 leeks, sliced
6 albi potatoes, sliced
1 carrot, sliced
1 quart kombu stock
1 package dried wheat gluten (fu)
1 teaspoon salt
tamari
1 teaspoon dried orange peel
mochi cakes, one piece per person
(mochi is pounded sweet brown rice formed into patties or cakes)

Soak the dried wheat gluten in the kombu stock. Cover with a wet towel. Sauté the white part of the leek in a soup pot over a medium flame. Add albi potatoes, then carrots, continuing to sauté after each addition. Add wheat gluten and kombu stock (without the kombu). Add green part of leeks. Season with salt and tamari. Add dried orange peel for aroma. Cook until vegetables are tender, add mochi cakes during the last three to five minutes. Serves six. This is a traditional New Year's dish, fortifying and delicious due to the strength and sweetness of the pounded rice cakes.

KOMBU ROLL

2 burdock roots, sliced in 5 inch strips
2 carrots, sliced in 5 inch strips
3 pieces kombu, 2 inch by 5 inch rectangles
1 package kampio (dried vegetable ground and formed into narrow strips—available in Oriental stores)
sea salt

Cut burdock and carrot into six 5-inch strips that will equal the length of the kombu. Rinse kampio, rub with salt. Boil the burdock and kombu together in a pot over medium heat until soft. (Be careful not to overcook kombu or it will fall apart.) Boil the carrot and kampio together until soft. Place two strips of burdock and carrot inside each kombu strip. Tie the roll with kampio at the middle and both ends. Cut the roll (with a wet knife) into three equal sections. Makes nine pieces.

Lima Ohsawa considers cooking the essential life study, for men (especially macrobiotic leaders) as well as women. She has a repertoire of menus spanning forty years of self-instruction. Labeling herself "born with a silver spoon," she revealed that her aristocratic taste had to be brought

down to earth. As Georges Ohsawa was the taste-tester, the training was severe.

Her cooking satori came during the period before World War II when she and Georges moved into a mountainous area of Japan. Mrs. Ohsawa had bought many packages of millet, a very yang strain grown in Korea. In the countryside she eventually found a mill and ground the millet into flour. June, the rainy season, was followed by the heat of summer. The millet soured. She didn't know what to do.

Finally, she unearthed a sweet variety of pumpkin, the core of which had turned bitter from exposure to a lot of sunshine. Planning to combine these elements changed by nature—the yang millet which had turned yin (sour) and the yin pumpkin which had turned yang (bitter)—she at first boiled them together. It was unsuccessful; she realized that “things boiled don't mix.”

Trying again, she cut the raw pumpkin, mixed it with the millet flour and added sliced apple. Her immediate intuition was to bake the mixture, but guests arrived and she forgot it. Much later, she thrust the whole thing into the oven, baked it quickly and served it. Then she waited. From the next room, Georges Ohsawa called her name. When she came in, he smiled and said, “Try this.”

At first there was no taste, then, slowly, it began to taste sweet, and then sweeter, until there remained a marvelous sweetness. Ohsawa asked, “How did you make this?” She explained her yin/yang theory. It was the first time she had successfully and truly combined yin and yang. After that, Lima Ohsawa completely changed all her methods of cooking.

Since that time she has provided cooking classes for thousands, always searching for variety, never limiting herself. To her, intangible food is as essential as material food. She advises macrobiotic students to reflect upon the old proverbs, read, study, and, above all, keep a loving mind when listening to others. Do whatever work you like and do it well, she says. Just as you choose sound food to create a healthy body, choose sound thinking to create a vigorous mind. Her prescription for happiness is right eating, right thinking, and right doing.

(The Nihon Center where Joanna studied is located at 11-5 Oyama cho, Shibuya ku, Tokyo 151, Japan.)

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