

240717 CG Matsunaga's remarks at JETRO event
at Gorge Brown College Centre of Hospitality and
Culinary Arts on 17 July 2024

Mr David Begg, Vice President, Global
Partnership, George Brown College,
Mr Tony Garcia, Director, Academic Operations,
the College's Centre of Hospitality and Culinary
Arts,
Mr Saito Takeshi, Executive Director, JETRO
Toronto,
Mr Yako Joji, Vice President, Gonbei USA Inc.,
Mr Jun Mattison, Assistant Manager, the Rice
Factory, New York,
All guests and audiences,
Good morning.

Mr Begg and Mr Garcia, it is my honour to say a
few words at this school of excellence in
hospitality management and culinary arts which
is set in Toronto, a capital of diversity, home to
the largest and most vibrant hospitality industry
in Canada.

We recall with pleasure our history of collaboration with the Centre in the past including lectures and demonstrations on Japanese cuisine. Today's workshop is yet another collaboration with the Centre. We would like to continue our excellent partnership with the Centre in future.

Today, Mr Yako and Mr Mattison will demonstrate how to prepare and cook Japanese rice, and how to shape onigiri with savory fillings.

What is onigiri? Onigiri is a historical portable food that Japan is proud of. Simply put, onigiri or omusubi is a common Japanese food made from white rice which is formed into triangular or round shapes with fillings inside, or on the top. It is often wrapped with nori, a dried edible seaweed.

Onigiri has a long history. The oldest food which may be called a prototype of onigiri appeared about 2000 years ago in Japan. In the early Nara period, that is in the early 8th century, one of the

Fudokis (風土記) , ancient reports on provincial culture, geography and oral tradition presented to Empress Genmei (元明天皇), referred to “nigiri-ii” (握飯). Later on, the word “nigiri-ii” turned to a mellower and more commonly used expression of onigiri. In the Heian period roughly from the 9th century to the 12th century, rice was made into small rectangular shapes known as tonjiki(屯食). These are the origins of onigiri.

Onigiri is a fast food and a slow food at the same time. It is a fast food because it is easy to prepare, quick to be served and extremely convenient to carry wherever you go. It is a slow food because It is typically made of healthy Japanese ingredients rooted in the country’s tradition. The possible choices of fillings are unlimited. Onigiri has always been popular in Japan.

In recent years, onigiri has become popular outside Japan, too. In particular, Onigiri Gonbei’s outlets in New York, New Jersey and Paris have rung the bell. I understand they sell as many as 2000 to 3000 pieces each day. They use various

traditional Japanese fillings. At the same time, they actively adopt localized fillings adjusting themselves to the local tastes.

The presence of high-quality Japanese rice has become increasingly prominent in recent years. Rice Factory in New York imports Japanese rice as brown rice and polish them after an order is placed. This preserves the flavour and moisture of the rice like new rice. And of course, Japanese rice tastes good cold too.

To conclude, I hope you immerse yourself into the marvelous world of onigiri and join the fast-growing group of fans of Japan's most fascinating fast-slow-versatile-transportable-and-tasty casual food. Enjoy the workshop.

Thank you.