

Greetings from the President's Office

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Craving for Traditional Japanese Food while Overseas

Study-abroad for a year is compulsory at AIU and our students travel to a partner university in their second or third year of their college life. The University as a whole has its hands full with preparation during this period. Under our basic policy of “one student to one university,” all students go through a personal and individual study abroad adventure. The process is a new experience; each student encounters mixed feelings of anxiety, frustration, hope, and excitement. I am delighted to learn that every student who spent a year abroad experienced self-growth and returns to AIU full of self-confidence and a sense of achievement. Their experience is definitely an enormous turning point.

Along with the psychological changes and developments that result from studying abroad, a shift in one's perception on their home country often occur. Prior to studying overseas, students rarely realize their feeling toward their home country, and only after living outside of Japan are Japanese students able to look at Japan objectively, and come to appreciate its history and culture, as well as discover various issues that were once overlooked, which can all build a deeper sense of patriotism and concern for Japan.

A good example of being able to reevaluate and appreciate Japan is the longing for Japanese food, which deepens gratitude for it; especially for me, I craved rice, sushi, miso soup, *tsukemono* (vegetable pickles) and Japanese noodles such as *udon* and *soba*. From 1973 to 1977, I studied at the graduate school of Indiana University, and thereafter held a teaching position at Washington State University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, equating to a total of 14 years in the U.S. This was almost a half century ago, and there were no grocery stores selling Japanese ingredients in the small city of Bloomington at that time. There were even no Japanese restaurants in the capital, Indianapolis, too. We, Japanese graduate students living in the dorms, used to get together and share Japanese food that was shipped from our parents, which took more than one month by ship to arrive, and sit in a circle to eat them. In a dormitory at Indiana University, it was a student named Toba, who is now a professor at the School of Commerce, Waseda University, and Visiting Professor at AIU, who opened his door for us. He was such a diligent and hardworking student, he won the first prize in a U.S. research-writing contest, and despite his busy schedule, he used to prepare late-evening snacks for us on the weekends. Thus, we called his room the “Toba-Tei.” (“Tei” means a host in Japanese.) Among the many dishes that we shared, I vividly remember the daintiness of our

kamage udon, it was actually featureless and an unremarkable one; simply boiled in a small electric pot and sprinkled with merely soy sauce. If this was made in Japan, most likely no one would tempt to eat it. However, it was in the barren dormitory, past 11 pm, and we delightfully shared a cup of *kamage udon*. These memories suddenly come to mind when I reminisce of my time in the U.S. Taking this opportunity, I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Toba.

Another memory regarding Japanese food is my attempt to cook soft sweet bean jelly, also known as *mizu-yokan*, which encountered a great deal difficulty. My children were born in the U.S. and we used to spend the New Year holiday there and prepare New Year dishes with ingredients sent from Japan. One of those special dishes was *mizu-yokan*. It was my responsibility to cook it from agar and strained bean paste, and to cook a well-formed and firm *yokan*, all ingredients must be mixed with the appropriate portions, which I did not have any idea about. I picked up a small amount of agar and pasted soybeans on a trial basis and mixed them in my own style, resulting in a split object, agar in the upper part and soybean paste in the lower. Even after several tries, my attempts ended up as an unbalanced mixture, and I was left with several failed objects. After becoming irritated, I put all the objects into a saucepan and heated it up, and poured it into a mold. Once it cooled, a perfectly hard *mizu-yokan* was finally formed.

Today, most people do not even think to cook dishes like the *kamage udon* or *mizu-yokan*, especially in this age of instant foods. This is how my study life was like in the U.S., and based on these experiences more than 40 years ago when people faced various inconveniences in daily life, my desire for Japanese food was firmly established.



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