

A cartoon review of ...

The history of Nishiyama Seimen and Sapporo ramen

The history of Sapporo ramen began at a street vendor's stall towards the end of 1947. Business was brisk at all the stalls as people came in search of food, and the standard soup at the time was *tonkotsu* broth made from pork bones and flavored with *shoyu* (soy sauce).

Among those ramen vendors was the popular *Darumaken* stall run by Nishiyama Senji, an accomplished noodle maker who trained in Chinese cuisine before the war. As *Darumaken* began supplying other shops with noodles, work increased and Nishiyama Takayuki, a dependable assistant, was brought in to help.

Thanks to Takayuki's hard work, *Darumaken's* noodle making section expanded and in 1953 that side of the business was passed on to him by Senji prompting the establishment of *Nishiyama Seimenjo* (currently Nishiyama Seimen).



Meanwhile, at the *Ajino Sanpei* ramen shop, Omiya Morito first introduced miso ramen to the menu around 1954. The new miso-flavored ramen topped with plenty of vegetables soon became extremely popular.

The noodles for this miso ramen, which even now continue to be the type used for Sapporo ramen (a firm, crinkly noodle containing eggs, manufactured using a high water-content maturing technique) were developed by Takayuki.

The standard Sapporo ramen made around this time was a *tonkotsu* and vegetable-based soup, slowly stewed to produce a rich broth. The noodles contained raw eggs and were yellow in color, and the high water-content maturing technique produced a firm chewy texture. These medium-thick noodles went perfectly with the soup.

The image of "Sapporo the ramen town" became established as a result of an article by Hanamori Yasuji published in the magazine *Kurashi-no-Techo* (the lifestyle handbook) over which he presided. Hanamori lauded the miso ramen he ate at *Ajino Sanpei*, prompting the shop to be subsequently inundated with tourists.

When the other shops saw the success of *Ajino Sanpei*, they decided to put miso ramen on their menus, and approached Takayuki, asking him to sell them the noodles or teach them how to make the soup. As a result, the popularity of miso ramen quickly spread throughout Sapporo.

The forerunner to Ramen Alley was the Koraku Ramen Shop Street, which existed from 1951 to '69. The street comprised 7 shops, included Nishida Yasuji's *Horan* and Matsuda Kanshichi's *Ryuko*, and did a roaring trade. The row of shops was demolished and replaced by the Original Ramen Alley in 1971, and a separate New Ramen Alley was established in 1976. Both places continue to be popular spots for tourists visiting Sapporo.



From around 1970, Sapporo ramen became a popular souvenir for tourists. Around 1983 it also became available as one of the Post Office's gift packs, and as the ramen was sent as midsummer and New Year gifts, Nishiyama Seimen noodles were soon known throughout the whole of Japan.

Enter the 1990s, and Japan's local specialty ramen boom had reached Sapporo, prompting the varieties of ramen to suddenly increase. Further developments saw shop owners selling their own original flavors in the era of personalized ramen, and the range of types and varieties of noodles supplied to shops by Nishiyama Seimen became wider.

Now, ramen has become as popular as sushi as a Japanese dish overseas. Nishiyama Seimen currently exports noodles to over a dozen countries, helping to spread the Sapporo ramen food culture around the world.

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