



TRANSCRIPCIÓN ORIGINAL DE STUDIO OCHENTA

HOW NO TO TRAVEL - EPISODE 6 - JAPANESE CURRY

KIONA:

Hi, this is Kiona

LUIS:

And this is Luis

KIONA:

And we are the hosts of HNTT podcast Season 3

LUIS:

Fasten your seatbelt and take your seat at the table

KIONA:

In this season we're traveling around the world from our dinner table to see how cultural exchange contributed to some of the world's most famous foods

LUIS:

THIS WEEK: JAPANESE CURRY.

Sfx music / food music

—

[00:01:43.550] - KIONA

So that was delicious.

I do want to say though, I like my Japanese curry spicy.

[00:01:59.690] - LUIS

Oh yeah. This one is definitely on the milder side, right?

[00:02:02.720] - KIONA

Yeah, for sure. But yeah, so I know that I've always eaten Japanese curry, but also I'm Asian. When was the first time you've had Japanese curry?

[00:02:16.360] - LUIS

The first time I had it, I was a teenager. I can't remember exactly what year, but I had this Japanese friend, her name was Yukiko, and she's Mexican, but her parents are Japanese. I remember that once we went to her place, me and a few friends, and we had Japanese curry there, and it was just the most delicious thing. I had never had anything like it, and it was exactly this that we're having right now, and yeah, I remember I wanted to make it myself again, but I couldn't find the ingredients. All I could find was something called Indian curry or curry powder, Indian style. I actually bought it and tried to make something with it, and then I noticed that it tasted nothing like what I had tried there. And so I was a bit frustrated, right? Because where can I ever get this again? It felt like this unique moment in my life, and at that moment, of course, I was a teenager, I didn't know any better. Right. But I thought I was never going to have it again because it was just such a one time thing, you know?

[00:03:25.510] - KIONA

It was like the experience of a lifetime.

[00:03:27.650] - LUIS

Exactly. Yeah.

[00:03:28.850] - KIONA

That's so funny. I guess I've always grown up with Japanese curry. I'm originally from Hawaii, and Hawaii is packed with Japanese people.

And I never called a Japanese curry, actually, it was always referred to as beef stew.

And so I would always say like, mom, can you cook beef stew? And she would cook it and it was Japanese curry.

So you can imagine my surprise when I came to the United States and I was like, ordered beef stew and not Japanese curry came out.

[00:04:03.180] - LUIS

Like something completely different.

[00:04:05.630] - KIONA

Yeah, I mean, it wasn't thick, it was like liquidy, and it was like large chunks of beef, mostly beef, less vegetables, and definitely no rice inside.

[00:04:17.570] - KIONA

And I was highly disappointed. And I guess for us, Japanese curry was always like something that you get after the beach. It is served in little trucks all over the island, and it's definitely served in a Styrofoam cup.

[00:04:35.030] - KIONA

If it's not in Styrofoam, it's not real.

[00:04:37.670] - LUIS

Almost like a snack. Very portable sort of snack.

[00:04:41.330] - KIONA

Exactly. And always eating hot. And then you always have the option to put hot sauce on it or Sriracha or chili pepper sauce. And also, curry itself comes in different spicy packages. You can get mild, you can get extra spicy.

[00:04:59.040] - LUIS

And you like the extra spicy.

[00:05:00.720] - KIONA

Always. Yeah, and it always came in cubes. So I never knew curry was like, if you want to make curry yourself. By the way, Japanese curry is like, one out of the three things I know how to make at my house, but it always came in cubes. And I didn't even know curry was actually a powder.

[00:05:21.320] - LUIS

Yeah, curry originally was a powder, but the Japanese curry that we know today is made in, like, this paste. Right, these cubes.

[00:05:28.610] - KIONA

Exactly. So when I saw curry and powder, I mean, my stepmom is Palestinian, and when she asked if I wanted to chicken curry, I saw her pull out this huge basket of powder and I was like, what is that? And it was curry, which is so different from what I'm used to. So it just kind of made me interested. Like, there's so many different kinds of curry, and what the heck, Japanese curry is so different from all the other curries that I've ever had, and I was just wondering if you could tell me more about it.

[00:06:08.390] - LUIS

I wanted to start by asking this. Do you know what place claims curry as their national dish?

KIONA:

India?

LUIS:

One would think. Right. I would also immediately assume India. And actually, that's what I thought before actually researching. But in fact, Japan is a place that claims curry as its national dish.

[00:06:42.910] - KIONA

I would never have guessed.

[00:06:45.210] - LUIS

Yeah, and Japan is actually not the only place to do that.

[00:06:48.890] - KIONA

Where else?

[00:06:49.820] - LUIS

The UK is another country that claims curry as maybe not the national dish, but definitely a national dish.

[00:06:57.080] - KIONA

Wow. So everyone else is claiming what I thought was an Indian invention.

Well, my Indian refs definitely have told me, like, there is no such thing as Indian curry because curry means something else. I kind of forgot.

[00:07:29.690] - LUIS

exactly. Don't get me wrong. Curry definitely exists in India, but it doesn't really refer to a dish, like you wouldn't order an Indian curry, as you said. Right. Curry is rather like just a form of describing a certain mix of spices.

[00:07:51.210] - KIONA

Oh, so it doesn't...like it can change.

[00:07:54.200] - LUIS

Exactly. Yeah, you would have different spices like turmeric, cumin, coriander, cardamom, garlic, ginger. There's so many garam, masala, and all of these different spices. And of course, they vary by region and they vary by dish as well. So you wouldn't prepare the same dishes with the exact same blend of mixes.

FACTBOX

KIONA:

Did you know that curry is one of those food that arguably tastes better the next day?

It turns out that there's actual scientific evidence to back this up, especially in foods such as soup and thick stews that have many ingredients, for example garlic, onion peppers and other condiments, not only reacts with proteins and starches and food while cooking but continue to do so while refrigerated. So the more time the ingredients get to blend together in the meal, the more flavor they release and the tastier it can get.

Just make sure to reheat your food in a skillet or pot over low heat or in a low temperature oven.

And even though it's the easiest option, avoid the microwave. It can dull down the flavors, and then what's the point of waiting the whole day, right?

[00:08:22.110] - KIONA

Okay, so if the word curry just means, like, a mix of spices, it doesn't necessarily mean a dish. How did curry end up being associated with just one dish?

[00:08:34.590] - LUIS

So, before we get into that, curry itself comes from the word gari. In Tamil, which is a word that basically means spice or relish kadi, and also something to a company with rice. Right. So the rice is already a fixture of it since the beginning.

[00:09:13.580] - KIONA

Okay.

[00:09:20.110] - LUIS

So how does this thing that doesn't really exist in India, the way we commonly think of it, arrive at other places in the world?

[00:09:46.080] - KIONA

Right. But like, specifically a dish that they're referring to.

[00:09:49.400] - LUIS

So it all has to do, of course, with colonization, so, when the British controlled India ruled over India, they brought all of these or many of these ingredients and also techniques to England. And of course, the South Asian population in England started to grow as well. A lot of people were leaving India and moving to the UK. And so this is when a very uniquely British phenomenon started, the end of the 18 hundreds and the beginning of the 19 hundreds, which is the curry house.

[00:10:57.390] - KIONA

Wait, there's a house is just for curry?

[00:11:00.610] - LUIS

kind of, yeah. So curry house, it can even be somewhat of a pejorative word. The word curry house can be used somewhat as in a dismissive way. The only thing they sell here is curry, that sort of thing.

But it is a common sort of shop or restaurant or basically a small place to have a quick lunch and all of these places are usually owned by Indian or by South Asian families, and they serve curry.

[00:11:55.810] - KIONA

So you're saying that these curry houses just popped up everywhere, all over Britain?

[00:12:01.460] - LUIS

curry houses had a sort of a working class origin. Right. So there were a lot of people who left India or Bangladesh, and their jobs were sailors. They usually were sailors or merchants, and they set up shop in the UK. And then it became particularly popular in the Victorian era. And this was in part because of Queen Victoria's bond with an Indian servant. So she actually, you know, developed a taste for Indian curry as well.

it's kind of shocking how many things we like globally because Queen Victoria liked them.

and we talked about it as well in our vanilla episode because Queen Victoria also really fancied vanilla, and that's also an important reason why it's such a well known flavor.

[00:13:14.070] - KIONA

So Queen Victoria is the original influencer.

[00:13:17.150] - LUIS

Exactly. And you know, isn't she also why women traditionally wear white as a wedding dress?

[00:13:25.080] - KIONA

I have no idea.

[00:13:26.610] - LUIS

But regardless, Queen Victoria is responsible for many very specific elements of our everyday lives and our taste. And this includes curry. In promoting curry in the UK, queen Victoria was basically promoting her imperial agenda. So you know how India was often referred to as the crown jewel of the British Empire?

[00:14:21.680] - KIONA

I have a question, though. So whenever I go to Indian places and they measure the spice, my favorite food truck in Austin literally has a thermometer, and the top says brown people spicy. And the bottom says white people spicy. And so in general, like, Indian dishes are pretty spicy, which I love. And I know you love spicy as well. But how the heck did these British people eat spicy food? I know that they didn't like it.

[00:15:02.910] - LUIS

they didn't. And I think that illustration that you gave us of brown people spicy and white people's spicy is so on point because this is actually the moment where curry starts to become, well, a dish, for one. Right. As opposed to a very vague and abstract form of referring to very specific blends of spices in India. And this is also the point where curry in the UK. lost almost all of its spice. So this is interesting because going back to the curry houses, they were owned and operated by South Asian people, but they generally catered to white British people. Right. And so this was the sort of place where you went to for something that something a little bit spicy, but not too much. So, like, just enough for it to be fun, but not too much for it to be of course. Well, too much, too spicy.

[00:16:20.860] - KIONA

Okay. So I get how it traveled to England and it became a dish at that point. Right?

but how the heck did it get to Japan?

[00:16:33.840] - LUIS

This is a really interesting story because in fact, it arrived in Japan, at least the popular Japanese curry that we know today, this stew with vegetables and meat arrived in Japan specifically by way of the British Navy.

[00:19:34.740] - KIONA

So Japanese curry is basically British curry, which is different from Indian curry. But is Indian curry eaten in Japan?[00:19:48.690] -

[00:16:58.590] - LUIS

So, well, there are actually two legends: legend has it that curry was introduced to Japan by way of a shipwrecked British sailor picked up by a fishing boat. Right. And so this guy apparently was picked up and then he brought it to Japan. And it's a nice little story or an analogy to talk about how it arrived in Japan.

[00:17:40.470] - KIONA

Yes. I mean, I definitely don't imagine him being like, okay, of all the things I'm going to save on the shipwrecked boat, I'm going to take my curry with me.

[00:17:47.840] - LUIS

Yeah, exactly. There's only room in the lifeboat for me and the curry.

~~**[00:18:42.840] - LUIS**~~

So by outright not serving any form of English food, they managed to keep it sort of standardized. And so the Japanese Imperial Navy did the same thing, basically. So they learned it from the British Navy, and then the Japanese Navy adopted the exact same thing, and they did it for the same reason. So they didn't serve any particular regional Japanese food so as not to offend or go against the tastes of people from other regions. They adopted curry as basically their Navy dish.

And even today, to this day, the Japanese Navy still keeps a tradition of curry Friday, because curry itself is also a very easy meal to make en masse for hundreds of soldiers or something like that, because you only need, like, a lot of paste and a lot of rice.

[00:20:23.850] - KIONA

Yeah, it's so true. This is actually the reason why I know how to make it, is because it's cheap. I just have to buy vegetables and rice, and I have my curry blocks and it lasts me for like a week. So in grad school, I was eating a lot of Japanese curry because I only have to cook at one time.

[00:20:42.020] - LUIS

Yeah, exactly. So eventually it was thanks to these army mess halls that curry found its footing and it's easily scalable for large groups. And that is also why it not only was incorporated into troop diets, but also popular in school cafeterias as well. So that's how it jumped from being a purely Navy dish or that was only eaten in the Navy, to being more widespread.

[00:21:15.660] - KIONA

You know, I wish my school cafeteria would have served us.

[00:21:18.860] - LUIS

All right, that sounds like the best school lunch possible.

[00:21:23.690] - KIONA

I know. I got served like, corn and cardboard pizza.

[00:21:27.650] - LUIS

Yeah. Oh, gosh, I do not miss those cardboard pizzas.

[00:21:33.120] - KIONA

Yeah. Okay, so tell me, how did Indian curry get to Japan?

[00:21:39.560] - LUIS

Yes, that brings me to the second legend and my favorite version of this origin story for Japanese curry: There was one very, very interesting story of a man who single-handedly is responsible for bringing, quote, authentic Indian curry to Japan.

[00:22:01.960] - KIONA

Okay, I'm excited to hear it. Sounds interesting.

[00:22:04.710] - LUIS

Yes, and I just love this so much because you rarely get stories that are provable of, like, a single person bringing a single thing and starting a phenomenon. But this is one of those so this is amazing.

[00:22:17.580] - KIONA

Oh shoot... Why do we not know this man already?

[00:22:19.620] - LUIS

I know. Yes. his name is Rash Behari Bose. He was Bengali and he was born in 1886, So after finishing high school, bose applied for a job in the army, but then he was rejected because the British who were ruling over India at the time viewed Bengalis as not the ideal masculine man that they needed in their army.

So this naturally made him resent the British military and the United Kingdom in general. And so he started developing anticolonial ideas. Particularly considering that he was living in a time of a lot of colonial conflict. Right, the partitions of the different countries that we know today and regions that we

know today in South Asia, basically, he was in a time where there was this fervent anticolonial movement developing.

[00:23:46.950] - KIONA

So he, with all reasons possible, rejected the UK. And became anticolonial

[00:23:59.550] - LUIS

And then, in 1912, he became involved in an attempted assassination of a viceroy.

[00:24:11.250] - KIONA

What happened after that?

[00:24:15.010] - LUIS

so now he was actually being persecuted by British authorities. Right. And so as colonial authorities started to close in on him, he decided to flee to Japan in 1915.

it would make sense I would flee, too. But why Japan?

[00:25:11.190] - LUIS

The reason he chose Japan was that he first made his way to the city of Kobe under a pseudonym, P. S. ThaKor, and he pretended to be a relative of the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore from India. Right. And Rash Bihari Bose had read that Rabindranath Tagore was planning a trip to Japan, and so he decided, now or never, I'm going to Japan now. And so he created this fake persona, and he decided to flee to Japan.

And then from Kobe, he eventually set out for Tokyo, and then he met a number of Indians who also shared anticolonial ideas. And eventually he actually met with Sun Yatsen, the great Chinese nationalist, who was also an exile in Japan at the time.

[00:26:19.190] - KIONA

Okay, so a whole bunch of revolutionaries exactly. Met each other.

[00:26:22.620] - LUIS

Exactly. They were all hanging out there in Tokyo. He eventually made the acquaintance of a number of Japanese Pan Asianist. So, again, part of this whole political movement that was establishing there. And he notably met a Japanese politician by the name of Mitsuru Toyama.

this guy is important. We'll get to him in just a moment. But initially, Bose was living his life as this other person. PS. Thakhor, he was in Tokyo, but then his cover was blown when an armed shipment to his compatriots in India that was arranged from Shanghai with the help of Sun Yatsen, the Chinese Nationalist. this arms shipment, was intercepted in Singapore.

[00:27:17.450] - KIONA

Okay, so let me get this straight. Bose was under this fake name, and under this fake name, he was sending arms to India to help the revolution, I guess you would say. but in the process, they got found out.

[00:27:40.560] - LUIS

The shipman's paper trail exposed his true identity. Right. And then the British Embassy in Tokyo, which was acting under the terms of an Anglo Japanese alliance that they had, decided to sue for his extradition.

[00:28:39.300] - KIONA

This man is actually fascinating. Like, from going to almost assassinating a politician to escaping under a fake identity, to sending arms back to India to them being found out. Did they capture him?

[00:28:53.930] - LUIS

Okay, so that's the next part of the story. So at this point so, at this point remember that Japanese politician I mentioned, Mitsuru Toyama? So. He actually introduced Rash Bahari Bose to the Soma family. And the Soma family were the owners of a well-known bakery called Nakamura. So this family allowed Rash Bahari Bose to hide out at their bakery for several months while everyone was looking out for him. They allowed him to stay there and to take refuge and shelter and to avoid getting caught by Japanese or British imperial authorities.

[00:29:40.650] - KIONA

They really must have liked him to let him hide out. I mean, they could have probably gone into some serious trouble.

[00:29:46.230] - LUIS

and also, the Soma family's eldest daughter, Toshiko, originally acted as Rash Behari Bose's interpreter, and eventually the two got married in 1918, thanks to this marriage, Bose was able to legally live in Japan without fear of persecution.

[00:31:02.420] - KIONA

Wow. I'm also fascinated by this family. I mean, they must have been really open minded. I imagine interracial marriages at the time were probably not that common, Okay, so where does the curry come in?

[00:32:16.080] - LUIS

Yeah, I'm glad you asked,-I swear this will eventually arrive at curry. And in fact, that's the point of the next part. So, sadly, Toshiko, Bose's wife, died from pneumonia just a couple of years after Bose got his citizenship. So two years later, Rash Behari Bose decided to partner with his father in law to set up a small restaurant on top of the Nakamura Bakery. And in this bakery, he started selling Indian style curry and rice.

[00:32:57.390] - KIONA

So this is where the authentic Indian curry came from.

Because it was legit cooked by an Indian person.

[00:33:06.140] - LUIS

which is really interesting because the selection of ingredients and the form of preparation of the dish was personally supervised by Rash Behari Bose. Right. His idea was that he wanted all Asians, to experience he wanted all Asians to experience India's food and culture. Right. And Bose and this is really interesting bosc wanted to prove that the curry the Japanese were used to was a colonial invention, and this was part of his anticolonial struggle. He was trying to win back curry from the British.

FACTBOX:

KIONA

Did you know that curry is actually a key part of yet another national dish?

Okay, so we've talked about how curry is now a staple of both british and japanese cuisine, but there's another very popular food that incorporates this ingredient: the german curry wurst.

And this story also starts with a faithful exchange. Shortly after the World War II, in 1949, a german woman by the name of Herta opened a fast food kiosk in her hometown.

It was a time of food shortages as the country was of course still recovering from the war, so her food was quick and simple. One day she stumbled upon a British soldier with whom she decided to trade. She gave him spirits and he gave her two ingredients: ketchup and curry powder.

After a few tries, she created the meal we all know today: sausage and fries with a slightly spicy ketchup and it eventually became a classic Berlin street food.

[00:34:35.260] - KIONA

This man tried everything possible to destroy everything colonial and was like, no, all the way up until food, where he's still pushing back.

[00:34:47.340] - LUIS

we love Japanese curry, and we love it. It's an important part of our lives, and it's such a recognizable taste. And yet this man had very understandable reasons to not like it because it reminded him of that colonialism and of that Basically, extraction of certain traditions and this development of something different, of something that you associate with India, but isn't really Indian.

[00:35:23.060] - KIONA

Right. So I just want to be clear to all our listeners out there that we love Japanese curry. We do not love colonialism.

[00:35:29.870] - LUIS

Yeah, exactly. We're pro Japanese curry anticolonialism.

[00:35:33.710] - KIONA

Yeah, exactly. it's so interesting that colonialism brought curry to Japan, but anticolonialism brought Indian curry to Japan.

[00:36:30.650] - LUIS

And actually, you can still get authentic Indian curry at the Nakamura Cafe.

[00:36:39.020] - KIONA

I was just about to ask that..is it still open?

[00:36:41.610] - LUIS

It is. Yeah. It still exists, and it's actually become quite a prosperous business. And they actually also sell curry paste in different flavors, including, like, the traditional Japanese curry. But their best selling one is Rash Bahari Bose's personal Indian curry recipe.

[00:36:59.690] - KIONA

I love that. I've never been to Tokyo, but that is definitely going to be my first stop.

[00:37:03.660] - LUIS

Yeah. Now I'm interested in trying it, too. It's like, I actually also want to go to Japan to try Rash Behari Bose's Indian curry.