

Reading and Talking

“Dashi” drink from Coca Cola

“Umami” is a Japanese word that is now also English. Sweet salty, bitter, sour, and umami are the five basic tastes. Umami was found in 1908 (Meiji 41) by Dr. Kikunae Ikeda at Tokyo Imperial University. He was studying “kombu dashi,” which is a stock that is used in Japanese cooking. Recently, dashi stock is also a healthy no-caffeine, no-sugar, low-calorie, low-salt drink. In October, Coca Cola Japan started to sell “Nomeru Wadashi” (Japanese dashi stock that you can drink). It has a mild, umami flavor. One 185g pack has two calories and is 148 yen.

(104 words)

What do you think of “Nomeru Wadashi”?

↳ I think it’s great. / I think it’s OK. / I think it’s strange. (→ How come you think so? / Do you think it’s going to be popular? / Did you know about it before you read this story? / Do you want to try it?)

Do you drink caffeine-free tea or coffee?

↳ Yes, I do. (--Do you like “mugicha” barley tea? / Have you ever drunk “tanpopo” dandelion coffee? / Do you buy organic food?)

↳ No, I don’t. (--Have you ever drunk “gobou” burdock tea? / Do you know someone who drinks rooibos tea? / Do you know “kuromamecha” black soybean tea?)

Do you like cooking?

↳ Yes, I do. / Kind of. (--How often do you cook? / Do you remember the first dish that you ever made? / Who is your favorite TV cooking personality?)

↳ No, I don’t. (--How come you don’t like cooking? / Is there anything that you can cook? / Do you know how to cook rice?)

(11 December, 2020)

More Information

“Dashi” drink from Coca Cola

Japanese words sometimes make their way into English. Typhoon, tsunami, sake, origami, karaoke, manga, anime, and emoji are some of them. Another English loan word from Japanese is “umami.” Umami is a basic taste that your tongue recognizes, along with sweet salty, bitter, and sour. (Spicy is not a taste because it’s not produced by taste buds on the tongue. Spiciness is actually a pain sensation!) Umami was discovered as the fifth taste in 1908 (Meiji 41) by Dr. Kikunae Ikeda, a chemist at Tokyo Imperial University, when he was studying “kombu dashi”, a stock that is made from dried kelp seaweed.

Recently, dashi stock has become a healthy caffeine-free, sugar-free, low-calorie, low-sodium drink. In October, Coca Cola Japan climbed on this bandwagon with “Nomeru Wadashi” (Japanese dashi stock that you can drink). It has a mild flavor and umami aftertaste, and it can be drunk hot in winter, cold in summer, or at room temperature.

Nomeru Wadashi, which was developed with the Kikkoman company, is part of Coca-Cola’s new “Go:Good” soup line. One 185g container has two calories and costs ¥148.

(190 words)

(11 December, 2020)

Reading and Talking

A “gachapon” for pearls??

Uwakai Pearl (宇和海真珠株式会社) puts Uwajima akoya pearls in “gachapon” capsule-toy dispensers! For two 500-yen coins, you get a capsule with a pearl accessory. There are necklaces, rings, bracelets, and earrings. Every capsule has an accessory. Also, one capsule in 25 has two accessories, and one in 50 has three that are worth 20,000 yen! There are now 30 dispensers, one each in Hokkaido, Miyagi, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Osaka, Kochi, and Kagawa, two in Nagano, Gifu, and Tokushima, four in Ehime, six in Tokyo, and seven in Aichi.

(92 words)

Do you want to try a pearl gachapon dispenser?

↳Yes, I do. / Kind of. (--What do you think about the price? / Do you want to get all of the accessories? / Have you ever collected gachapon toys?)

↳No, I don't. (--How come you don't want to try one? / Do you have some pearl earrings? / Have you ever bought something from a gachapon dispenser?)

Have you ever won a prize in a “chuusenkaï” prize draw?

↳Yes, I have. (--When and what did you win? / Were you surprised to win? / Have you ever bought “takarakuji” lottery tickets?)

↳No, I haven't. (--When did you join a prize draw? / Have you ever turned a “garagara chusenki” old-fashioned raffle drum?)

Are you wearing a ring or bracelet today?

↳Yes, I am. (--Have you bought a ring or bracelet recently? / Do you have any pearl jewelry? / Which do you like better, diamonds or pearls?)

↳No, I'm not. (--Do you ever wear a ring? / Do you ever wear earrings? / Do you ever wear a necklace?)

(11 December, 2020)

More Information

A “gachapon” for pearls??

Japan became famous for pearls after Kokichi Mikimoto found a way to make cultured pearls in Mie Prefecture in 1893 (Meiji 26). Today, Mie is the third-largest pearl producing prefecture, after Nagasaki (#2) and Ehime (#1).

Uwakai Pearl (宇和海真珠株式会社) is a company in Ehime Prefecture. This year, it came up with a novel way to promote its Uwajima akoya pearls. Pearl accessories were put in a “gachapon” capsule-toy dispenser. If you put in two 500-yen coins, out comes a capsule with a pearl accessory inside. There are necklaces, rings, bracelets, and earrings, both clip-on and for pierced ears. Each item comes with a one-year warranty and a certificate of authenticity. Every capsule has an accessory. In addition, one capsule in 25 has two accessories, and one in 50 has three that are worth ¥20,000 in total.

The first Uwakai Pearl gachapon dispensers appeared in Chikuma, a city in Nagano Prefecture. They were a sold-out sensation, and now there are 30 dispensers around Japan, one each in Hokkaido, Miyagi, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Osaka, Kochi, and Kagawa, two in Nagano, Gifu, and Tokushima, four in Ehime, six in Tokyo, and seven in Aichi.

(195 words)

(11 December, 2020)