Random Thoughts 108

# Coffee

This evening on the NHK program *Ariyoshi no Okane Hakken* the program looked at the reasons behind the recent boom in new coffee shops opening up. Being a coffee lover myself, I decided to watch the program and was amused to see how recent coffee shop startups have tried to establish a presence through the creation of original coffee blends and presentations. I say “amused” because for me, the coffee I like best is the one I brew myself! I have found a type of roasted bean I particularly like, a full roast blend using 100% Arabica beans, that produce a nice, espresso-like flavor. As a result, I rarely go to coffee shops anymore.

My own first introduction to a coffee shop was when I first visited Japan. When I was growing in America famous brands such as Starbucks and Tully’s had not yet been created and perhaps because I grew up in a small rural area, there were no shops dedicated just to serving coffee. We would go to a diner to get a cup of coffee and it was **nothing really to speak of**[[1]](#footnote-1). It was generally brewed in large pots and the longer it sat after being brewed, the more acidic it became. My first impression of the coffee in the coffee shops of those early years here in Japan was that it was really strong and bitter; as we would say, “thick as mud”. Those coffee shops were not designed to be the type of epicurean experience which seems to be the goal of all these new startups, but a place you would go to spend hours alone reading or with a friend for conversation. In other words, the price of a cup of coffee was like an admission ticket to enter and stay as long as you like. It was remarkably like the very first shop that opened in Japan about which I’ll say more later.

Looking back just on that more than half century I have been here it is interesting to see how coffee culture has changed just in that time. It has made me curious to know more about its history. From what I learned on the internet, coffee was introduced to Japan in 16th and 17th centuries by Dutch traders. The Dutch called coffee *koffie* and the Japanese word was a phonetic katakana representation; later the kanji 珈琲 were selected. In the 1860s coffee was introduced to the countryside in the form of infused sugar balls called *koohiito*.

The first actual coffee house was called Kahiichakan and established by Nishimura Tsurukichi in 1888. He opened it with the idea of doing something for the younger generation. Here is an excellent link that tells you more about that first shop.[[2]](#footnote-2) Although that shop only lasted 5 years, in its short time it greatly influenced coffee culture in Japan. That article really gives a good description of how coffee’s popularity grew in Japan from that time.

I always start my day with a freshly brewed cup of coffee! How about you?

1. 大したことない [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://en.goodcoffee.me/column/guest-columnist/history-of-coffee-in-japan/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)