

The Japanese Connection: A Japanese immigrant and the origin of *Chamoy*.

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Abstract

Teikichi Iwadare was born in Japan in 1902 and emigrated to Mexico in 1923 with his wife Chimako.

He settled in Central Mexico, after years of seeking fortune from town to town. Teikichi opened a grocery store and was one of the most successful Japanese immigrants before World War II. He also became a *yobi yose*, (a Japanese immigrant who received and helped new immigrants until they were capable of maintaining themselves). His store was even called the *Iwadare University*.

When Japan entered World War II, the American government pressured the Mexican authorities to make a census of all Japanese immigrants and tagged those who could potentially collaborate with Japan. Teikichi had acquired sulfur mines in 1937 and exported this mineral to Japan. That's why he was signaled as a possible collaborator, his goods were confiscated and he and his family were sent to a special "camp" in Mexico City. After the war he decided to stay there and began to grow vegetables and flowers in a nearby ranch.

In 1950 he opened a company: *Proteína Soya*, and introduced soy products into the Mexican market. He also began to produce a Japanese staple food: Ume boshi (pickled prunes) made with apricots, which he called *Chamoy*, probably derived from the Chinese word *suan mei* –sour plum or the Vietnamese *xí muôi* –preserved prune. The salty and acid flavor was very popular among Mexican children and teens. He also produced a candy called *Brinquitos* made of powdered dry chilies, sugar, ascorbic acid and natural flavors. The *Brinquitos* were widely used to condiment fresh fruit. The company went bankrupt in the late 70's and *Chamoy* was no longer produced (the new owner, a former employee, changed the name of *Brinquitos* into *Miguelito*), however people kept calling *Chamoy* a sauce made of powdered dry chilies, sugar, vinegar, ascorbic acid and sometimes tamarind paste (this sauce probably originated when *Chamoys* were smashed and mixed with *Brinquitos*).

Nowadays *Chamoy* sauce is widely used as a condiment for snacks, fresh fruit and even beverages. It is also popular in Latino communities in the United States and is produced by big companies, but few people know its origin and the source of the name.

The purpose of this paper is to show how a staple Japanese food brought by a Japanese entrepreneur to Mexico became -incidentally- a staple food in contemporary Mexican cuisine.