



**"Enhance the flavor of plain food to improve the poor nutritional state of the Japanese people."
A passionate ambition of a scientist who dedicated
his research to the modernization of Japan was behind the discovery of umami.**

Docudrama Commemorating the Centennial of the Discovery of Umami

AMBITION

(志) — The Story of Kikunae Ikeda, Chemist —



Director : Sho Igarashi
Cast : Norimasa Fuke as Kikunae Ikeda
Planning : Umami Centennial Committee



“Mr. Ikeda displays a most learned interest in a great variety of topics. He is certainly a very perceptive and fine man.” — Soseki Natsume.



Prof. Ostwald took Kikunae to a German opera performance.



Kikunae and Soseki Natsume shared their aspirations.



Returning to Japan, Kikunae taught at Tokyo Imperial University and contributed to the foundation of modern chemistry in Japan.



Kikunae tasted the similar savoriness, umami, that he had tasted in German cuisine, in konbu stock in a tofu hotpot.



Kikunae continued to study around-the-clock to unravel the secret of the elusive taste, umami.



Kikunae's fateful meeting with Saburotsuke Suzuki gave birth to AJI-NO-MOTO®.

AMBITION (志) — Story —

In 1899, Kikunae Ikeda finally realized his dream to study in Germany. He immersed himself in studying leading edge chemistry with the renowned Prof. Wilhelm Ostwald who would go on to win the Nobel Prize. During his stay in Germany, Kikunae was astounded by the German Empire, which was then rising as the world's superpower. The innovative lab equipment as well as the magnificent German music and art, and the excellent physique and diet of the German people overwhelmed him. “Why is the build of the Japanese so small and frail in comparison to the Germans?” He became truly concerned about the future of Japan and resolved to use chemistry to improve the health of his fellow countrymen.

On his trip back from Germany, Kikunae met Soseki Natsume in London. They talked passionately about the future of Japan. Kikunae told Soseki, “If the Japanese are to match the great powers of the world, we must eat better and improve our physique, thereby creating a more bountiful society.” Kikunae's passionate ambition inspired and opened a bright new path for Soseki whose study of literature seemed stalled at the time.

After returning to Japan, Kikunae taught at his alma mater, Tokyo Imperial University. Simultaneously, taking a tip from Dr. Hiizu Miyake's theory that “good taste promotes digestion,” he absorbed himself in studying soup stock made of dried konbu kelp. “By improving the flavor of plain food with savoriness, umami, one can encourage digestion and thus improve the nutritional state.” He thought he could contribute to improving the physique of the Japanese by creating a new seasoning based on taste substance (umami) in konbu. Finally, he made a breakthrough discovery that the umami came from ions of glutamic acid.

In 1908, Kikunae obtained a patent for “the manufacture of a seasoning comprised primarily of monosodium glutamate.” The following year, he and Saburotsuke Suzuki commercialized the discovery in the form of the umami seasoning AJI-NO-MOTO®.

One hundred years after Kikunae's discovery, umami is now recognized internationally as “umami taste.” Recent studies are discovering new qualities of umami. Umami has tremendous potential for improving human health and wellbeing in the years to come.

Doctor Kikunae Ikeda

- 1864 : Born in Kyoto on September 8th. Most of his early life until age 17 spent in Kyoto.
- 1882 : Entered the Tokyo University Preparatory School.
- 1889 : Graduate from the Chemistry School of the Science Department of Tokyo Imperial University.
- 1899 : Spent 2 years of government-financed foreign study at the University Of Leipzig in Germany in order to study physical chemistry.
- 1901 : Appointed as a professor in the Chemistry School of the Science Department of Tokyo Imperial University.
- 1908 : Discovered that glutamate is the responsible for the umami taste in konbu (kelp). On July 25th, patented the process for manufacturing a seasoning which used monosodium glutamate as the main component.
- 1909 : Began sales of AJI-NO-MOTO®, the world's first umami seasoning.
- 1925 : Passed away on May 2nd.

