**Momofuku Ando, 96, Dies; Invented Instant Ramen**

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Momofuku Ando, who -- to the delight of dormitory students and other kitchen-resistant customers worldwide -- invented those small packets of preflavored dried noodles that require just a three-minute boil, died Friday at a hospital in Osaka, Japan. Mr. Ando, the founder of the Nissin Food Products Company, was 96.

The cause was heart failure, said Larry Lampel, the company's senior resources manager at its American headquarters in Gardena, Calif.

Starting with the chicken-broth noodles in cellophane bags that Mr. Ando first concocted in a shack behind his house in Ikeda, Japan, 49 years ago, Nissin now produces 16 flavors of what it calls Top Ramen and Cup Noodles. Besides six varieties of chicken, they include beef, shrimp, vegetable and spicy chili.

The company sold 46.3 billion packs and cups around the world last year, earning $131 million in profits.

In 1958, Mr. Ando -- virtually penniless after a credit association he served as chairman went bankrupt -- began experimenting with ways to prepare flavored noodles by simply adding hot water.

The idea stemmed from an experience a decade earlier, when Japan was still ravaged by postwar poverty. In ''The Story of the Invention of Instant Ramen,'' an autobiography published in 2002, Mr. Ando told of walking through the rubble-strewn streets of Osaka.

''I happened to pass this area and saw a line 20, 30 meters long in front of a dimly lit stall from which clouds of steam were steadily rising,'' he wrote. ''People dressed in shabby clothes shivered in the cold while waiting for their turn. The person who was with me said they were lined up for a bowl of ramen.''

''I realized that people were willing to wait patiently just for a bowl of ramen,'' he said.

Ordinary unflavored noodles were not the solution; Mr. Ando insisted that his noodles be tasty, inexpensive and easy to prepare. The problem was flavoring them without making them mushy. Using a secondhand noodle-making machine and a large wok, Mr. Ando sprinkled soup on the noodles with a watering can, then kneaded and loosened them by hand after letting them partly dry. ''This allowed the noodles to soak up the soup on the outer layer,'' he wrote. ''I then dried the noodles so they would keep longer and could be easily prepared with boiling water.''

Born on March 5, 1910, in Taiwan while it was under Japanese occupation, Mr. Ando was a son of Taiwanese parents who had moved there from Osaka; he became a Japanese citizen after World War II. When he was 23, he returned to Japan and, while a student at Ritsumeikan University, ran several clothing companies. In 1948, he started a company that produced salt; it changed its name to Nissin 10 years later. He is survived by his wife, Masako, two sons and a daughter.

Chicken was the prime ingredient in Nissin's global success. ''By using chicken soup, instant ramen managed to circumvent religious taboos when it was introduced in different countries,'' Mr. Ando wrote. ''Hindus may not eat beef and Muslims may not eat pork, but there is not a single culture, religion or country that forbids the eating of chicken.''

Nissin opened its first overseas operation, in California, in 1970. Besides Japan, it has plants in Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Singapore, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Hungary and Germany as well as in Lancaster, Pa.

In July 2005, the company vacuum-packed portions of instant noodles so that a Japanese astronaut, Soichi Noguchi, could have them on the space shuttle Discovery. Mr. Ando said at the time, ''I've realized my dream that noodles can go into space.''

Photo: Momofuku Ando in 2005. (Photo by Kyodo News, via Associated Press)

**Correction:** January 27, 2007, Saturday An obituary on Jan. 9 about Momofuku Ando, the founder of the Nissin Food Products Company and the inventor of instant ramen, misstated his national origin. He was born in Taiwan during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan to Taiwanese -- not Japanese -- parents; he became a Japanese citizen after World War II.