

Kikkoman's quarterly intercultural forum for the exchange of ideas on food



THE JAPANESE TABLE

Washoku: A Medium of Expression

by Isao Kumakura

This third installment in our series on washoku explores the distinctive ways in which Japanese cuisine is used as a medium of expression.

4

CLOSE-UP JAPAN:
Sozai Pan

—

5

JAPANESE STYLE:
Japanese Chopsticks

TASTY TRAVEL:
Murakami Salted Salmon

—

6

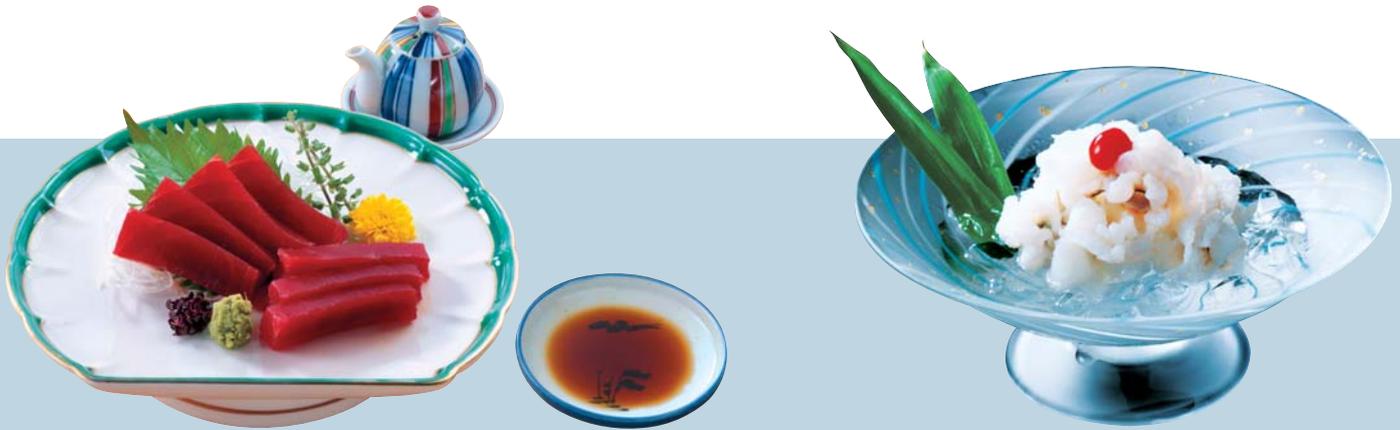
MORE ABOUT JAPANESE COOKING:
Mimosa Rice Bowl
Salmon and Vegetable *Agebitashi*

—

8

KIKKOMAN TODAY:
Kikkoman Commemorates 200 Years of
Nagareyama *Shiromirin*

Washoku: A Medium of Expression



Delighting Both Eye and Palate

Washoku, as is often said, delights the eye as much as the palate. Certainly traditional Japanese cuisine is known for the way in which its attractive presentation seems to double the satisfaction of taste. In many cases, the beauty of *washoku* is expressed through some sign or symbol of the natural landscape; for example, in spring, when the cherry blossom is the typical motif, dishes may be sprinkled with thin slices of daikon cut into the shapes of cherry blossom petals. In autumn, an array of roasted *matsutake* mushrooms may be decorated with a sprig of red maple leaf or spray of *susuki* grass, so that the dish is imbued with a sense of the seasonal landscape.

Skill in the use of traditional kitchen knives, together with attention to presentation in the serving of food both play a major role in the appeal of the dishes served. There is a wide array

of knives in Japan, each with a distinct purpose. For example, one type of knife is made expressly for preparation of *hamo*, pike conger, which is similar in appearance to eel and often served in summer. *Hamo* have a great many small bones that are difficult to remove, but utilizing this special knife, *hamo* may be cut at intervals of about two millimeters, leaving just about one millimeter of skin intact. The blade is large and extremely sharp, and is capable of slicing through the flesh and bones of *hamo* by virtue of its own weight. After this careful preparation, a fillet of *hamo* dipped in boiling water emerges like a delicate white blossom, a cooking method that results in a moist fillet whose umami can be enjoyed to the fullest.

Understated Harmonies

Japanese cuisine revolves around the skills of beautiful presentation. Take a serving of tuna sashimi: the attractive contrast of red tuna slices arranged on a mound of white, thinly cut daikon strands may appear simple, but is in fact quite difficult to accomplish. With a garnish of green *shiso* (perilla) leaf and yellow chrysanthemum, accompanied by a saucer of deep reddish brown soy sauce—a color

referred to as black in Japan—this dish features five colors: red, white, green, yellow and black.

Traditionally, Japanese cuisine emphasizes the ideal of food that is a combination of all five tastes and five contrasting colors.

Tableware and serving utensils are themselves important elements of Japanese cuisine. The vessel upon which the food is served is considered the “dress” of the dish. Teiichi Yuki (1901–1997), the brilliant chef and founder of the famous restaurant Kitcho, was known for his outstanding achievements in modern Japanese cuisine. Yuki planned his meals by beginning, not with the food, but with the dishes upon which it would be served. Starting in the *kura* storehouse where his collection of tableware was kept, he would choose items suitable to the season, also keeping in mind the personalities of those who would be at the table. Only after carefully selecting the tableware—considering not only the harmony, but also the interesting contrasts to be evoked in the shift from one dish to another throughout the meal—would he then begin to consider what foods would be suitable to serve, thus emphasizing the equal importance of the vessels to the cuisine itself.

The variety of tableware available



A special knife cuts *hamo* bones with precision.

From left: Sliced tuna sashimi on grated daikon, garnished with *shiso* and chrysanthemum, accompanied by soy sauce; *hamo-no-otoshi* with a dollop of *ume* pickled plum paste; *yuzu-gama* shrimp and *shimeji* mushrooms in a *yuzu* citron rind; *somen* noodles served in fresh-cut bamboo.



is diverse not only materially—plain wood, lacquerware, earthenware, porcelain, metal, bamboo, glass, and so on—but in shape. Dishes or plates may be round, square, rectangular, leaf-shaped, floral-shaped, fan-shaped or have handles; they vary not only in size and depth but in design. The colors and motifs of the dishes may carry symbolic meaning. For example, use of a *koyomite* ceramic dish with a *koyomi* pattern—a stylized motif representing a traditional calendar—for food served at the end of the year evokes the rapid passage of time, making the meal all the more memorable. The chopsticks provided with particular

serving dishes are also of various kinds, their use dictated by specific rules. As for the various types of tableware, their often delicate materials mandate that they be handled with considerable care.

Subtle Dining Ambience

The deeper enjoyment of *washoku* comes not only from attention to the tableware, but to the decor and arrangement of the dining room. Restaurants in the West often feature paintings or other artwork, but few are likely to change such decorations in accordance with the seasons. The traditional room in which a Japanese meal is served will have a *tokonoma*, an alcove built into the room that provides a space expressly for display. The back wall of the alcove is for a hanging scroll, whose picture or calligraphy will express some sense of the season, or a message. The host carefully selects the scroll to complement the season or connect with the sentiments of those at the table, thus expressing a hospitable spirit. For this reason, the hanging scroll is often changed. The choice of flowers as well as the vase in which they are arranged reflects the consideration of a host toward the guests. These preparations are an essential part of Japanese cuisine.

Good conversation is prized in

Japan, but even more highly valued is the kind of communication that cannot be expressed in words. The role of the guest is to perceive the intentions of the host in the selection of food and tableware, as well as in the room's decor, and to respond to it. Efforts provided by the host are not simply one-way actions: in Japan, hospitality—*omotenashi*—is considered to be complete when those efforts are understood and gratefully recognized by the guest, creating a rapport of mutual appreciation. ◆



Traditional *tokonoma* alcove with hanging scroll and flowers

cover

In a dish redolent of the autumn season, roasted *matsutake* mushrooms are accompanied by grilled ginkgo nuts, served on aromatic pine needles. The red maple leaf adds a dash of autumn color.

Author's profile

Isao Kumakura was born in Tokyo in 1943. He taught at Tsukuba University from 1978 to 1992; from 1992, he was professor at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, where he was then named professor emeritus in 2004. He was director of Hayashibara Museum of Art, Okayama from 2004 to 2012. Since 2010, he has served as president of Shizuoka University of Art and Culture. Dr. Kumakura is the author of many publications on Japanese food culture and Japanese tea culture; his most recent work is *Bunka to shite no Manaa* ("Manners as Japanese culture").



CLOSE-UP JAPAN

Traditions and trends
in Japanese food culture



Sozai Pan

Clockwise from bottom left: sausage *pan*, curry *pan*, baguette with tuna, teriyaki chicken *pan*, tuna-mayonnaise *pan*, corn *pan*, baguette with potato, gobo *pan*

European-based bakeries are prominent in the Japanese market, and much sought-after for their authentic baguettes and croissants. But Japan has its own distinctive homegrown baked goods, including the immensely popular *sozai pan*, a range of unique breads that involve the creative amalgamation of side dish (*sozai*) and bread (*pan*).

It wasn't until the late 19th century, when the country opened itself to Western culture, that bread was introduced into the Japanese diet. The Japanese lost no time in developing bread-based variants that reflected their own tastes, including

Sozai pan are
always tempting,
often surprising

sozai pan, which began to be marketed after the 1920s. *Sozai pan* comprises two elements: a very soft-textured bread-base, characteristic of Japanese breads, plus the addition of fillings or toppings that would typically be eaten separately. These added ingredients range from Japanese to Western and even Chinese foods and seasonings.

Curry *pan*, for example, reflects the immense popularity of curry and rice: it is a concoction of deep-fried bread with curry filling. The majority of Japan's bakeries offer curry *pan*, some of which are exclusive variations on the basic recipe. Some shops might produce only a limited amount of these special curry *pan*, which are

quick to sell out. Other *sozai pan* include corn-mayonnaise breads, topped with a mix of sweet corn and mayonnaise; then there is a more hearty bread stuffed with a savory sausage.

Other Japanese-derived *sozai pan* varieties include teriyaki chicken *pan*, garnished with Japanese long onion and sesame seeds; *pan* topped with mayonnaise-wasabi seasoned tuna; and *gobo pan*, which features burdock root, *shimeji* mushrooms and sesame mixed with mayonnaise. Recently, more and more bakers are creating *sozai pan* with a firmer bread base, such as baguettes stuffed with potato, bacon and cheese. Bakeries are constantly developing new types of *sozai pan*, often using seasonal ingredients that are sold only for a limited time. The hybrid nature of *sozai pan* was originally founded on a tasty mix of Japanese and Western elements, but today's *sozai pan*—always tempting, often surprising—reflect an innovative, more purely Japanese sensibility. ●



Curry *pan*



JAPANESE STYLE

Perspectives on
Japanese cuisine

Japanese Chopsticks

Chopsticks are used extensively throughout Eastern and Southeast Asian countries, but while other cultures might also use spoons, Japan relies solely on chopsticks when eating *washoku*, Japanese cuisine.

There are many varieties of Japanese chopsticks, most of which are made of wood or bamboo—rarely metal. Chopsticks are often tapered at the ends to pick up small pieces of food easily. There are chopsticks used

especially to place cooked foods into serving dishes, or to add finishing touches to a meal: these are finely made and considered indispensable in *washoku* preparation. Some chopsticks are tapered at both ends, for serving two different kinds of food; these prevent the mingling of dissimilar flavors on the tips of the chopsticks. Most Japanese people have their own chopsticks for use at home, while new or single-use chopsticks are reserved for guests; disposable chopsticks are provided in most restaurants. A proper place setting will usually include a chopstick rest, called *hashi-oki*, which appear in various motifs and styles to complement the decor. The rests make chopsticks easier to pick up and set aside neatly, while preventing their tips from touching the table. ●



Special chopsticks add finishing touches to a dish.



A variety of Japanese chopsticks, together with an assortment of chopstick rests

TASTY TRAVEL



Murakami, Niigata



Salted salmon hung to dry



Grilled salted salmon fillets

Murakami Salted Salmon

The city of Murakami in Niigata Prefecture is best known for its traditional salted salmon. Between October and December, salmon return from the sea to spawn in a nearby river; this is the best season for making salted salmon, as the flesh is fatty yet firm. Male salmon are caught, cleaned and scrubbed with coarse crystal sea salt, then preserved in the salt for several days to a week. They are then soaked in pure water to remove the salt before being hung and air-dried in a shady place, where they are exposed to cold winter winds for about a month. The salmon ferments naturally in this climate to produce umami, the source of its characteristic flavor. The best way to enjoy salted salmon is very simple—just grill and serve. ●



MIMOSA RICE BOWL



◆ Japanese spinach

Makes 4 small bowls

490 kcal Protein 22.1 g Fat 8.4 g (per bowl)

Namasu

- 150 g / 5 oz. daikon, julienned or shredded
- 30 g / 1 oz. carrot, julienned or shredded
- 1/2 t salt
- 2 t granulated sugar
- 1 T grain vinegar

Seasoned spinach

- 85 g / 3 oz. Japanese or baby spinach*
- 1/2 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1/2 t sesame oil
- 2 fresh salmon fillets, each 90 g / 3 oz.
- Salt
- Vegetable oil

Scrambled eggs

- 4 eggs
- 1 T sake
- 1/6 t salt
- 1 t Kikkoman Light Color Soy Sauce
- 2 t granulated sugar

Tomato soy sauce

- 1 T honey
- 2 T tomato paste
- 2 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 2 T sake
- 2 T Kikkoman Manjō Mirin
- 1 thumb-sized knob of ginger, 12 g / .4 oz., peeled and grated
- 4 C hot cooked rice
- Roasted *nori* seaweed, cut into strips
- White sesame seeds

Russian Mimosa salad involves several layers of different ingredients. In this recipe, the salad is transformed into a colorful full-meal *donburi*-style dish. The elements of this *donburi* can be tasted in different combinations for maximum enjoyment of their flavors.

- 1 Mix all *namasu* ingredients together and set aside for 30 minutes; divide into 4 portions, then set aside.
- 2 For the seasoned spinach, parboil the spinach with a pinch of salt. Drain and squeeze out moisture, then cut into 2 cm / 1 in. pieces. Mix with soy sauce and sesame oil. Divide into 4 portions, then set aside.
- 3 Remove salmon skin, sprinkle a little salt on both sides of the fish and set aside for 1 hour.
- 4 Mix together the ingredients for scrambled eggs. Heat non-stick frying pan over medium heat for 1-2 minutes, add the egg mixture and slowly stir with a spatula continuously until the egg begins to set, then reduce heat. Continue to stir vigorously until the eggs are fairly well-done; divide into 4 portions and set aside.
- 5 Pat salmon with paper towel. Cut each fillet diagonally into 8 slices. Heat a little vegetable oil in a frying pan, and sauté both sides of the salmon.
- 6 Add the combined ingredients for the tomato soy sauce to the salmon in the pan. Bring the sauce to a boil, remove from heat and set aside.
- 7 To serve, each bowl is prepared individually as follows: Place half a single serving of cooked rice into the bowl, then cover with *nori*. Add the other half of the rice serving over the *nori*. Continue to layer in this order: drizzle a spoonful of tomato soy sauce over the rice, leaving a little aside for garnish. Cover this with one portion of eggs, one portion of seasoned spinach, and finally four pieces of the grilled salmon. Lightly drizzle a little tomato soy sauce over the salmon. Top with *namasu* and sprinkle with sesame seeds to serve.

* Even the stems of Japanese spinach are eaten because they are particularly tender.



SALMON AND VEGETABLE AGEBITASHI

Agebitashi is a dish whose ingredients, which include vegetables and fish, are deep-fried and then soaked in a marinade of mainly dashi, vinegar, sugar and soy sauce.



◆ Lotus root

Serves 5

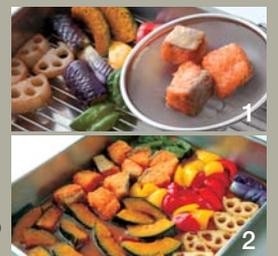
300 kcal Protein 11.4 g Fat 17.2 g
(per person)

- 200 g / 7 oz. fresh salmon
- Salt

Marinade

- 360 ml / 1 1/2 C dashi stock
- 120 ml / 1/2 C grain vinegar
- 4 T granulated sugar
- 3 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 t salt
- 2 Japanese dried red chili peppers
- 150 g / 5 oz. eggplant
- 150 g / 5 oz. lotus root
- 200 g / 7 oz. *kabocha* Japanese pumpkin
- 200 g / 7 oz. sweet peppers in a mix of different colors if desired
- Vegetable oil for deep-frying
- Wheat flour

- 1 Sprinkle a little salt on both sides of the salmon and set aside for 1 hour. Pat the salmon with paper towel, then cut it into bite-size pieces and set aside.
- 2 After mixing the marinade ingredients together, pour into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Remove from heat and pour the liquid into a marinating tray.
- 3 Follow instructions for cutting up all vegetables, and set each aside separately. Cut eggplant lengthwise, then slit cross-hatched patterns 7 mm / .3 in. wide, 5 mm / 1/4 in. deep on the skin; cut into pieces 2 cm / 1 in. long.
- 4 Peel the lotus root, and slice in rounds or half circles 1 cm / 1/2 in. thick. Scoop out the *kabocha* seeds. Cut in half lengthwise and then into smaller 1 cm- / 1/2 in.-thick wedges. Cut the peppers lengthwise, remove seeds and cut into bite-sizes.
- 5 Heat vegetable oil in a fryer to about 160-170 °C / 320-338 °F and deep-fry each group of vegetables separately to desired doneness. Drain excess oil and place all together in the marinade for over 30 minutes.
- 6 Lightly dust the salmon with wheat flour. In the same fryer, heat the vegetable oil to about 160-170 °C / 320-338 °F and deep-fry the salmon until lightly browned. Drain excess oil (photo 1) and then transfer the fried salmon to the marinating tray to soak for over 30 minutes (photo 2).
- 7 Using a perforated spoon, dish out the salmon and vegetables into individual bowls to serve.



Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation

1 C (U.S. cup) = approx. 240 ml; 1 T = 15 ml; 1 t = 5 ml



Kikkoman Commemorates 200 Years of Nagareyama *Shiromirin*

Washoku, Japanese cuisine, has been the subject of national and global interest since it was registered on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2013, wherein it is described as “*washoku* traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese.” One of *washoku*'s essential seasonings is mirin, which is produced from glutinous rice, rice *koji* (fermentation starter) and *shochu* (distilled spirit) or alcohol. Mirin is a traditional fermented seasoning, as are soy sauce and miso, and it supports the complex flavors that are fundamental to *washoku*. Mirin has a long history. Since the late 16th century, when sweetened foods were less common and thus highly valued, mirin's sweet, refined flavor had been considered sophisticated, and enjoyed as a kind of sake drink.

In 1814, Monjiro Horikiri, second-generation master at the Sagamiya sake brewery in the Nagareyama area of Chiba Prefecture, was striving to compete against mirin being brought into Kanto (the region surrounding Edo, today's Tokyo) from the Kansai area; that is, mainly Kyoto and Osaka.



From left: Chicken teriyaki rice bowl: the teriyaki sauce includes soy sauce and mirin; *Nikujaga* simmered potatoes and meat is seasoned with soy sauce and mirin; Kikkoman Manjo Honmirin

Horikiri was determined to develop a type of mirin unlike any other, and eventually succeeded in brewing *shiromirin* which, in contrast to the darkish, cloudy mirin of the times, was light-colored and beautifully clear. *Shiromirin* took Edo by storm and spread throughout Japan, until it became renowned as a Kanto specialty. This was the forerunner of today's mirin, known as Kikkoman Manjo Honmirin.

As Japanese food culture continued to develop, mirin came to be used more as a seasoning in restaurants. From around the early 19th century, the *koikuchi shoyu* rich-flavored soy sauce of Kanto increased in popularity, and it was combined with mirin to develop the

so-called classic *Edo-mae* taste— flavors characteristic of Edo. Popular examples of *Edo-mae* taste include *unagi no kabayaki*, grilled eel teriyaki basted with soy sauce and mirin, and soba buckwheat noodles, whose accompanying dipping sauce includes soy sauce and mirin.

The merits of mirin lie not only in its natural sweetness, which is derived from rice; mirin gives food an attractive glaze and gloss, while its alcohol content prevents food from becoming overly soft while cooking. Mirin also allows foods to absorb flavors, and eliminates raw or unpleasant odors from ingredients. Because of these effects, mirin can be introduced as a seasoning into a variety of cooking contexts to create sophisticated and flavorful meals.

The year 2014 is the 200th anniversary of the development of *shiromirin*. To commemorate this special year, Kikkoman is running campaigns and events to promote the benefits of mirin, including teaming with high school students to create recipes using mirin, and hosting cooking seminars that focus on mirin. Kikkoman will continue to produce its Manjo Honmirin with high quality ingredients and traditional brewing technology in its efforts to help deliver great taste to every home. ◆



Commemorating 200 years: the “Nagareyama *Shiromirin*” exhibition at the Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture