

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



THE JAPANESE TABLE

Japanese Feasts for Special Occasions

Food Fit for the Divine

by Ayako Ehara

As Food Forum concludes its series on the special foods of Japan, this final installment explores the significant foods presented at jinja (Shinto shrines) and Buddhist temples, which underpin religious beliefs.

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Japanese Feasts for Special Occasions

Food Fit for the Divine



From left: Twice daily, Jingu priests offer *shinsen* to the *kami* at Ise Jingu; Kanname-sai at Ise Jingu.

Japanese religious beliefs are characterized by a duality of Shinto and Buddhist traditions. Until the recent past, the typical home in Japan had two altars—a Shinto *kamidana* and a Buddhist *butsudan*—and today, many still do. Daily prayers are accompanied by placing water and cooked rice on both the *kamidana* and *butsudan*. This feature introduces the food and offerings at *jinja* and temples, which have supported people's religious beliefs.

Shinsen Offerings

Japanese have long believed that everything of nature—mountains, trees, animals—is endowed with a divine spirit, or *kami*, and that all life is sustained by such deities. People presented special foods as offerings, called *shinsen*, to certain deities, and after such rituals were performed, it was believed that by sharing and consuming these offerings, divine protection would be granted.

The rituals and ceremonies calling upon safety from natural disasters, or to ask for an abundant harvest or fish catch, are called *matsuri*, which always begin with *shinsen* offerings to the *kami*. In early times, prepared foods were usually presented, which is still the case at some *jinja*; but since

the Meiji era (1868-1912), it has become more common to offer raw and dried foods.

At Japan's sacred Ise Jingu, twice-daily offerings in the form of meals have been made to the *kami* in the morning and evening for some 1,500 years. Over one thousand *matsuri* are held at this *jinja* each year, but the most significant of these is the Kanname-sai annual harvest ritual in autumn. The Kanname-sai *shinsen* comprise some thirty small dishes whose basic elements include steamed rice, water and salt, accompanied by sake and foods that represent the sea, rivers, mountains and fields. Among these are *noshi awabi* dried abalone strips, considered an essential offering at Ise Jingu since ancient times.

Quite elaborate *shinsen* are prepared for Kyoto's Aoi-Matsuri ritual (once known as Kamo-sai; *aoi*



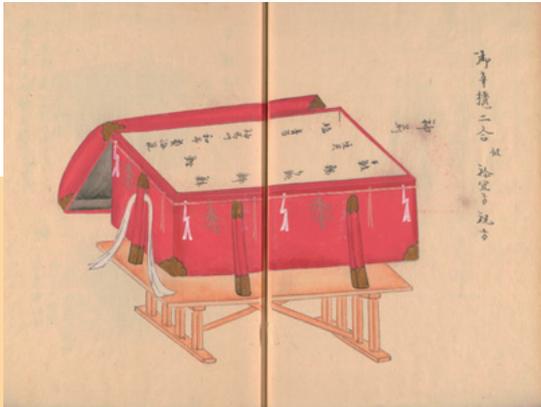
Aoi-Matsuri

refers to a species of wild ginger), an early summer tradition that takes place at both Kamigamo and Shimogamo Jinja. At Kamigamo, *shinsen* offered within the *honden* main sanctuary include steamed rice, *mochi* rice cakes, carp, fowl and salted sea bream, accompanied by chopsticks. Outside the *honden* doors, further offerings involve over thirty different small dishes, each piled high with foods such as steamed rice, salt, sake, fish and fowl (see cover photo). In a garden facing the *honden*, deities originating from other regions are presented with *shinsen* of dried salmon, dried squid, wakame seaweed, *aonori* seaweed and salt, all in a vermilion lacquer box (p. 3 top right photo).

Shinsen throughout Japan vary by season and locale, featuring distinctive ingredients and prepared dishes. Though they have evolved through the centuries, they represent the essential elements that define Japan's food culture.

Shojin-ryori Temple Food

Vegetarian temple cuisine, called *shojin-ryori*, existed in Japan during the eighth century, and was further developed here by priests who had traveled to China in the late twelfth century to study Zen Buddhism.



Shinsen in photo at right can be seen in the Aoi-Matsuri record book, written in 1870. Courtesy of National Diet Library Digital Collections



Aoi-Matsuri shinsen in vermilion lacquer box placed in a garden in front of the Kamigamo Jinja honden.

Among them was the Zen master Dogen (1200-1253), who was active in spreading the practice of *zazen* seated meditation as well as disseminating the fundamentals of *shojin-ryori*. *Shojin* means to pursue training in Buddhist teachings; *shojin* cuisine emphasizes the use of ingredients in their entirety, wasting nothing and—in accordance with the Buddhist injunction against the taking of life—uses no meat, only vegetables.

Dogen regarded the preparation and consumption of meals as a form of religious training, and for those priests in charge, he wrote down specific rules and standards for both. In 1244, Dogen founded the Eiheiiji temple in present-day Fukui Prefecture, where his teachings are still passed on today. I had an opportunity to partake of a special *shojin* meal that is offered only to invited guests of Eiheiiji.



Shojin-ryori special guest menu at Eiheiiji

The meal was served on two *zen* tray tables (p. 3 bottom photo).

The first tray held steamed white rice and miso soup. Placed above the soup was a vinegared dish, a local specialty made with the stems of *yatsugashira*, a type of taro. Above the rice was a simmered dish that included *yuba* soy milk skin, *shiitake* mushroom, deep-fried tofu and other ingredients. In the center of the tray was *goma-dofu* (tofu of ground sesame paste and *kuzu* starch), a dish in which Eiheiiji places great importance. The second tray held *sumashijiru* (clear soup) containing *nama-fu* (wheat gluten) and *tororo kombu* (shaved dried kombu softened in vinegar). To the right of the soup was a vegetable dish of eggplant and *shishito* miniature sweet green peppers. At the upper left was a *shira-ae* dish of vegetables dressed with a mixture of mashed tofu and sesame. Placed

upon a sheet of white *shiki-gami* paper was an auspicious treat of braided, deep-fried kombu.

In *shojin* cuisine, soybean products such as tofu and *yuba*, along with *fu*, are important sources

of protein. Sesame contains oil, calcium, iron and protein, and has been an essential ingredient in *shojin* cuisine long before the development of modern nutritional science.

Each year, on the anniversary of the death of Dogen, a two-tray meal is served in red-lacquered dishes on red-lacquered *zen* tray tables and offered at his memorial sanctuary. I was told that the dishes of this offering meal resemble those in my guest menu, with some variations. This kind of *shojin* fare is served not only in temples, but also at home and in restaurants that specialize in *shojin-ryori*. The spirit of these dishes—founded in gratitude for all life, wasting nothing—continues to be embodied throughout the heart of Japanese cuisine. ●

cover

Aoi-Matsuri *shinsen* offerings comprise many small dishes, placed outside *honden* doors of Kamigamo Jinja.

Author's profile

Ayako Ehara was born in 1943 in Shimane Prefecture, and graduated from Ochanomizu University. She holds a Ph.D. in Education and taught for many years at Tokyo Kasei Gakuin University, where she is currently professor emerita. A specialist in food culture, the history of food education and cookery science, Dr. Ehara is the author and editor of many publications, including *Katei Ryori no Kindai* ("Modern home cooking"; 2012); *Oishii Edo Gohan* ("Delicious Edo-period meals"; co-author, 2011); and *Nihon Shokumatsushi* ("History of Japanese foods"; co-author, 2009).



CLOSE-UP JAPAN

Traditions and trends
in Japanese food culture



Miso soup with tofu and
wakame seaweed



Miso soup with carrot, daikon, *shimeji* mushrooms,
sato-imo taro and *abura-age* deep-fried tofu

Miso Soup

Miso soup is an ever-popular mainstay in Japanese cuisine. Although it is basically made of only miso and dashi stock, this versatile soup assumes many variations that reflect longstanding personal and family tastes.

Miso is a fermented paste whose ingredients are soybeans, salt and one of the following types of *koji* (fermentation starter): rice *koji*, barley *koji*, or soybean *koji*. The type and amount of *koji* used determine the character of the miso. There are also several varieties of dashi stock, such as *katsuobushi* dried bonito flakes,



Misodama

Miso soup variations
reflect personal
and family tastes

kombu and small dried anchovies or sardines. Pre-packaged, powdered dashi is commonly available, but some types of miso contain dashi, so the soup can be made simply by dissolving the paste in boiling water.

Miso soup is commonly prepared with one to two added ingredients, which may include preferred combinations of tofu, *wakame* seaweed, daikon, various mushrooms or *asari* clams—topped with chopped Japanese long onion or scallion. At home, heartier soups with multiple ingredients often accompany rice, making for a satisfying and nutritional meal. Miso soup recipe books offer inspiration for home cooks.

Shops specializing in miso soup serve regional variations or unique miso blends; soup may be ordered alone or accompanied by a bowl of rice and pickles. Miso soup can also be purchased at supermarkets and convenience stores, which sell a dizzying array of instant, just-add-hot-water soups in packets or ready-to-eat cups. Pre-prepared mixes are available in single servings with countless options in terms of ingredients, types of miso and dashi stocks.

Recently, homemade, individualized *misodama* “miso balls” are trending. These are prepared by blending together one’s preferred miso, dashi and other ingredients. This custom miso mix is divided into single portions, formed into balls, and refrigerated or frozen. To serve a distinctive alternative to store-bought instant products, hot water is poured over the *misodama* in a soup bowl then mixed. *Misodama* are perfect for a quick breakfast, and easy to carry to the office for lunch. ◆



JAPANESE STYLE

Perspectives on
Japanese cuisine

Japanese Strawberries

Strawberries were first introduced to Japan in the 1830s by the Dutch. By the 1990s, strawberry consumption had become widespread, and today nearly 300 varieties of Japanese strawberries have been developed, characterized by their uniform size and sweet flesh. Tochigi Prefecture, dubbed the “Strawberry Kingdom,” is one of Japan’s largest producers, best-known for its Tochtotome

strawberry, created in 1996. Another famous strawberry is the juicy Amaou from Fukuoka Prefecture, developed in 2005.

A small but lucrative luxury market offers rare varieties, including enormous berries as large as 80 grams (3 oz.), and Japan’s unique white strawberries. Most strawberries are grown in greenhouses, with peak season falling from December to May.



Strawberry-picking in a greenhouse

Many greenhouses allow people to enjoy strawberry-picking, so they can savor the berries fresh off the vine. They are also enjoyed in sweets such as *ichigo daifuku*, a surprising *wagashi* Japanese confectionery with a modern twist. In its center is a whole strawberry, surrounded by sweet *azuki* red bean paste, covered by soft *mochi*. ◆



Tochtotome strawberries



Ichigo daifuku

TASTY TRAVEL



Chiba

Chiba *Futomaki-zushi*

Futomaki-zushi, literally “thick sushi roll,” is a specialty in the Boso region of Chiba Prefecture. Also called *matsuri-zushi*, it is served at celebratory feasts and on special occasions. Seemingly an ordinary sushi roll, when *futomaki-zushi* is sliced, intricate, delightful imagery is revealed: flowers, animals and lucky symbols appear like magic. Such complex designs are made by combining multiple thin sushi rolls and oblong strips of vegetables and omelet as fillings. Elaborate motifs can expand the diameter of a *futomaki* to as much as 5-10 cm, or 2-4 inches. Using the region’s local seafood and farm produce, new *futomaki* designs and techniques continue to evolve. ◆



Futomaki-zushi wrapped in nori and omelet (top right)



WHITEFISH AND PEA SHOOTS IN EGG-DROP DASHI

Mitsuba Japanese wild parsley is used in authentic Japanese dishes for its refreshing fragrance and delicate texture. As *mitsuba* is not readily available outside Japan, this recipe substitutes aromatic lemon zest, with pea shoots for texture.



◆ Pea shoots

Serves 2-3

204 kcal Protein 17.0 g Fat 10.5 g
(per serving)

- 150 g / 5.3 oz. whitefish fillet, deboned and skin removed*
- 50-60 g / 2 oz. pea shoots
- 500 ml / 2 C dashi stock
- 1 T + 2 t Kikkoman Light Color Soy Sauce**
- 1 T + 1 t Kikkoman Manjo Mirin
- 3 eggs, beaten
- Lemon or citrus zest, wax- and preservative-free

- 1 Sprinkle salt lightly on both sides of the fillet and place in refrigerator for 20 minutes.
- 2 Rinse the fillet gently with water and pat dry with a paper towel. Cut into slices 7-8 mm / 0.3 in. thick.
- 3 Cut the pea shoots in half.
- 4 In a non-stick frying pan, mix dashi stock, soy sauce and mirin and bring to a boil; turn to medium heat and add the fish. When the fish is nearly cooked, scatter the pea shoots over the entire pan.
- 5 Bring to a second boil, pour in the beaten eggs to cover entirely. When the liquid along the rim of the pan begins to run clear and eggs are slightly set, turn off heat, cover and allow to sit for about two minutes, until eggs are set.
- 6 Serve in soup bowls, topped with grated lemon zest.

* Alternatively, use sea bream, flounder or cod.

** May substitute 2 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce and 3/5 t salt.

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

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto



MISO-MARINATED GRILLED PORK



◆ Pork chop

Serves 4

284 kcal Protein 19.9 g Fat 19.3 g
(per serving)

- 4 pork loin or tenderloin chops, 2 cm / 0.8 in. thick*

Miso marinade

- 300 g / 1 C miso
- 1 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 4 T Kikkoman Manjo Mirin
- 3 T granulated sugar
- 1 knob ginger, cut into julienned strips
- 2 sheets of cheesecloth or gauze**
- 1 carrot
- 1 stalk celery
- 4 okra pods

1 Mix the ingredients for the miso marinade well, and divide the mixture into thirds.

2 With a knife, make a few small slits around the edges of each pork chop to prevent the meat from curling up during grilling.

3 In a lidded container spread out one third of the marinade evenly. Lay a sheet of cheesecloth over the marinade, and on this, place the pork chops.

4 Place the second sheet of cheesecloth on the meat, and cover evenly with another third of the marinade (*see photo*). Secure the lid and allow to chill in refrigerator for 8 to 10 hours. The remaining third of the marinade should be refrigerated for later use to marinate the vegetables in Step 7.



5 A few hours before grilling the chops, prepare the vegetables for marinating. Cut the carrot and celery into sticks, 1 cm / 0.4 in. wide and 4 cm / 1.5 in. long. Boil the carrot cubes to desired texture and drain; set all aside.

6 Sprinkle and rub okra with 1/2 t salt. Parboil and drain, remove stems; set aside.

7 Marinate the vegetables by gently mixing them with the last of the marinade; cover and place in the refrigerator for about two hours. When time, remove the vegetables, rinse off marinade with water and pat dry with a paper towel; set aside until ready to serve.

8 Remove meat from the marinade and grill. Serve with the vegetables on the side.

* Beef or chicken are equally delicious alternatives.

** Cheesecloth prevents miso from sticking to the meat. If any miso remains on the meat, it will char during grilling.



Online Renewal of the Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum



Visuals from the Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum
www.kikkoman.com/en/shokuiiku/soysaucemuseum/index_en.html

The Kikkoman global website has launched a new upgraded version of its online Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum.

Throughout its 350-year-long history, Kikkoman Soy Sauce has played an essential role in Japanese food culture. Today, Kikkoman Soy Sauce is distributed to over one hundred countries around the world. Recognized as an all-purpose seasoning, Kikkoman Soy Sauce is used not only in Japanese cuisine; it has become fundamental to a diverse range of international cuisines and complements various ingredients worldwide.

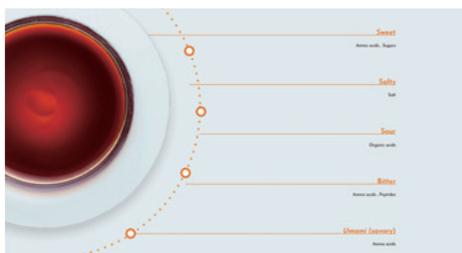
Through the online Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum, our company hopes to enhance global audience awareness of our soy sauce by introducing its history and characteristics. The Museum targets not only those familiar with Kikkoman Soy Sauce, but those who may be acquainting themselves

with it for the first time. The online Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum website may be accessed in English, simplified and traditional Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese.

The new Museum website builds on its previous version, and now features more compelling, eye-catching graphics and visuals that convey a more comprehensive perspective on the traditional notion of "museum" to attract and stimulate visitor curiosity. Kikkoman's online Museum includes five sections, or "Exhibitions": the first is titled "History of Kikkoman Soy Sauce," which explains the origins of soy sauce and offers an overview of brewing methods and global expansion, illustrated through historical visuals that include a gallery of vintage Kikkoman Soy Sauce labels; the second is "Making Soy Sauce," which delves

into the traditional Japanese brewing method *honjozo* through photos and videos. The third exhibition, "Features of Kikkoman Soy Sauce," describes the unique characteristics of *honjozo*-brewed Kikkoman Soy Sauce; the fourth exhibition, "Seasoning Effects," suggests different ways of using Kikkoman Soy Sauce while preparing ingredients, during cooking, and as the finishing touch to enhance a dish and create new levels of flavor. Finally, the Museum site features the exhibition, "What's the Difference?" Here, attractive and easy to understand visuals compare naturally brewed Kikkoman Soy Sauce with other soy sauces produced using different raw materials and production methods.

Kikkoman continues to promote the international exchange of food culture by sharing new ways of incorporating soy sauce into cuisines enjoyed around the world. Our aim is to create exciting new flavor experiences while sharing information about Japanese food culture. ●



Check out the updated Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum

