

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



THE JAPANESE TABLE

Japanese Tea

Its Growing Global Appeal

by Mitsuru Shirai

For our 2019 feature, we explore the fascinating world of Japanese tea. This first installment looks at the history of tea and where it is grown, as well as the distinctive qualities that make Japan's tea so unique.

4

SPECIAL REPORT:
Japanese Cuisine Around the World
Tetsuro Hama

6

MORE ABOUT JAPANESE COOKING:
Potato and Tuna Salad with Infused *Sencha*
Tea Leaves
Simmered Bamboo Shoot and Chicken Meatballs

8

KIKKOMAN TODAY:
Kikkoman Teaching Kitchen Opens at
The Culinary Institute of America

Japanese Tea

Its Growing Global Appeal



From left: The delicate work of hand-picking Japanese tea leaves; traditional hand-rolling of tea leaves takes time and concentration.

Nichijo sahanji—“Just daily rice and tea”—is a Japanese expression that captures the notion of the routine, the ordinary. Whatever else may occur in daily life, drinking green tea and eating rice are two constants, and this saying is a measure of how important a pleasant and healthy cup of tea is to Japanese.

The unique characteristic of Japanese tea is that the heating method used in its production is steaming. Green tea in China is processed by pan-roasting, but only Japanese tea is steamed, a process that brings out the umami and mellow flavor of the leaves. The main component of the umami of Japanese tea is theanine, a kind of amino acid that has calming and relaxing effects. The tea itself is greenish yellow, with a distinctive aroma.

Tea in History

Tea is said to have been originally grown in the region bordering China, Laos and Myanmar. Tea-drinking became established as part of Chinese culture in the eighth century, which happened to be a time when many aspects of that culture were being introduced to Japan—and tea was one of them. The standard tea in those days was prepared

by fermentation, and it was distributed in a block form known as *dancha*. The fermented aroma of this tea did not have much appeal in Japan, and eventually the practice of tea-drinking here died out.

About four hundred years later, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a method was devised in China of making tea from tea leaves that had been steamed, dried and then milled into a very fine powder, so that it could be dissolved with hot water. When this new tea, known as *matcha*, was introduced to Japan, it was widely accepted. Its color was a beautiful bright green, while its preparation method preserved the fresh umami and aroma of the leaves. The Japanese found these qualities particularly pleasing, and *matcha* quickly spread throughout the country. In China, the drinking of *matcha* made from steamed leaves gradually disappeared during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and pan-roasted leaf teas became the predominant product in that country, whereas in Japan the production of steamed green tea continued to evolve independently.

It was in the eighteenth century that Japanese green tea as we know it today was developed. This tea

was made by hand-rolling steamed leaves into needle-like shapes, and drying them in order to be infused. Further green tea variations arose, including *gyokuro*, made from the same carefully selected leaves as those used for *matcha*; and *hojicha*, which has a light and refreshing flavor. The act of drinking infused types of Japanese teas became such an ordinary, yet vital, part of daily life that they fostered expressions like *nichijo sahanji*.

Varieties and Cultivation

Today, Japan produces some 80,000 tons of tea, of which roughly 80 percent is *sencha*; about 10 percent comprises *matcha* and other powdered teas, while the remainder is made up

Japan's Principle Tea-Growing Regions, 2017





Types of Japanese tea, clockwise from top left: *fukamushi sencha*, *gyokuro*, *matcha*, *genmaicha*, *hojicha*. To make tea, suggested hot water temperature ranges are: *fukamushi sencha*, 70-80 °C; *gyokuro*, 55-60 °C; *matcha*, 95 °C; *genmaicha* and *hojicha*, 95-100 °C

of other tea varieties. The most commonly consumed tea in Japan is *sencha*, of which there are various types: *fukamushi* or deep-steamed *sencha*, whose leaves are steamed the longest for one to two minutes, rendering its color a deep green when served; *futsu*, steamed for about thirty seconds, a gentle, transparent and golden-colored tea; and the umami-rich *gyokuro* tea, steamed for fifteen to thirty seconds. Further processing of *sencha* results in teas such as *hojicha*, which possesses a refreshing roasted flavor, and *genmaicha*, which contains roasted rice grains.

The cultivation of tea for *sencha* typically involves two distinct processes. One is to grow bushes in the sun until the tea is harvested, while the other involves shading bushes from the sun when new leaves begin to appear, as is the case with those

leaves destined for *gyokuro* and *matcha*. Ever-growing in global popularity, powdered *matcha* is made by grinding the dried leaves in a mill. About 5 percent of *matcha* produced is consumed by practitioners of the *chanoyu* tea ceremony, but the vast majority is used as an ingredient in sweets and beverages, including ice cream and *matcha* lattes.

The production of *sencha* is particularly well-established in Shizuoka Prefecture, in the central part of Japan's main island of Honshu, and on the island of Kyushu in the western part of the country. Although Kyoto is known for its *matcha*, strong domestic and global demand has given rise to increased production of *matcha* in Shizuoka and Kyushu. Shizuoka, Japan's leading tea-producing prefecture, accounted for about 40 percent of the country's total harvest in 2017. The prefecture will hold its seventh World O-CHA (Tea) Festival 2019 in May and November to introduce tea-related culture, research and products, while sharing the appeal and culture of Japanese tea.

Japanese tea was first introduced to Europe in 1609, but after opening to Western trade in 1858, Japan's tea exports

increased globally. In particular, considerably high volumes of tea were exported to the United States. In nineteenth-century America, it was customary to add sugar when drinking green tea, while in Japan the flavor and aroma of the tea have always been enjoyed as they are. For the health benefits of tea, drinking Japanese green tea "straight" is recommended. ●

cover

A lush green tea plantation in Shizuoka Prefecture, set against the imposing backdrop of Mt. Fuji

Author's profile

Mitsuru Shirai was born in 1957. After graduating from Osaka Prefecture University, he served in the Shizuoka prefectural government and has long been involved in the promotion of tea in his roles as general manager of planning in the World Green Tea Association; manager of Shizuoka Prefecture Tea and Agricultural Production Division; director of Shizuoka Prefecture Department of Economy and Industry; and vice-director of Fujinokuni Cha no Miyako Museum (Tea Museum, Shizuoka). He is a qualified Japanese tea instructor, a Chinese tea artist and Chinese tea sommelier. His authored works include *Yabukita no subete* ("All about Yabukita cultivar of tea"; 2007); *No no fukei* ("Agricultural essays"; 2010-2017); and *Ryokucha tsushin* ("World green tea bulletin"; 2007).



Fukamushi (left) and *futsu sencha*



Japanese Cuisine Around the World

Food Forum's annual Special Report recognizes chefs, restaurateurs and entrepreneurs who have been promoting Japanese food culture throughout the world. This year we feature Tetsuro Hama, who runs both a Japanese restaurant and a cooking school in London.



Tetsuro Hama

Born 1948. Relocated to the UK in 1973. Founded Japanese Grill Room Hama in 1973, YAKINIKU HAMA in 1976 and So Restaurant in 2006. Established the Sozai Cooking School in 2012, private chef service eho chef in 2017 and bespoke Japanese chef service ikisho in 2018. Currently chairman of the Japanese Culinary Academy UK and board member of the Japan Society. In 2015, he received the Minister's Award for Overseas Promotion of Japanese Food from the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.



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From Ethnic to Mainstream

In November 2018, I visited Tsuruoka in Yamagata Prefecture, in the northwest of Japan's main island of Honshu, for the first time. Four years previously, Tsuruoka had been designated as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy—the only city in Japan to be so named. In 2013, "Washoku: Traditional Dietary Cultures of the Japanese" was registered by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. The term "cultural heritage" seems to suggest traditional foods, but Japanese cuisine has long evolved through its broad and enthusiastic inclusion of other cultures. The original roots of sushi, for instance, can be found in fermented foods from other parts of Asia, but the prototype of what we think of as sushi today goes back to Edomae sushi, made in the city that is now Tokyo during the Edo period (1603-1867). Cuisines are constantly merging and undergoing organic change. Looking at recent trends, we see many cases where talented chefs around the world are working

with Japanese ingredients and preparation methods, and many of those ingredients—miso, yuzu, wasabi, wakame—are turning up on European tables.

Early Days

Japanese Grill Room Hama opened in 1973 in the Bayswater district of London. At that time, there were only four or five other Japanese restaurants in the city. It was uncommon then for Japanese to work overseas, and the notion of starting up a business in another country without preparation or training was considered reckless. I went ahead anyway, because I resisted submitting to the old stereotype that I had to start out washing dishes in other people's restaurants. I opened a Japanese restaurant in my early twenties without much money, few connections and little know-how about the food business. The menu was composed mainly of casual *domburi* dishes (meat and vegetables on a bowl of rice), yakitori and the like—food that



Japanese Grill Room Hama (1973)



Tuna filleting event at So Restaurant (2011)

So Restaurant's diverse menu includes spider roll sushi, *tonkatsu* deep-fried pork and Japanese beef *tataki*.



Japanese students and company employees based in the UK could easily afford. Since that time, the number of Japanese restaurants in London has doubled about every five years, and by the late 1980s, there were about one hundred. As that number increased, so did Japanese restaurants run by non-Japanese, and in the 1990s, restaurant chains with names like Wagamama, Yo! Sushi, Itsu and Wasabi were proliferating under non-Japanese management.

Some frown on Japanese food restaurant chains that are not run by Japanese, but I myself believe they should be recognized as having contributed to the advancement of Japanese food. These days, there is almost no one in London who does not know what sushi is, and many are really fond of it. It may



A sushi-making class at Sozai Cooking School (2017)

not be sushi as eaten in Japan, but it instigates the desire to eat authentic sushi, and appreciation for restaurants serving “real” sushi has grown considerably. Indeed, prominent dishes from Japanese cuisine such as sushi, tempura and ramen are at the top of the list of foods that the British want to eat. Forty-plus years ago, Japanese food was just one among many ethnic cuisines; today it is definitely part of mainstream dining.

So Restaurant

After starting my restaurant in 1973, in 1976 I opened a second place called YAKINIKU HAMA. I later pulled out of the Japanese restaurant business in 1983 to concentrate on a car dealership I had started in the UK in 1979, and did not return until several years after 2000, when I sold the dealership. When I found out that the chef who helped me start my restaurant in the early seventies was returning to London, I opened So Restaurant near Piccadilly Circus in 2006. This chef was in fact a specialist in French cuisine and had gone back to Japan to run a French restaurant there. With the boom in Japanese cuisine, Japanese restaurants had to develop specialties to set themselves apart, and at first, the So Restaurant trademark was Japanese food with a bit of French style. However, our customers had high expectations regarding Japanese cuisine, so now we serve contemporary Japanese food with European influences.

Japanese Cooking School

Following this, I started Sozai Cooking School, the first cooking school specializing in Japanese cuisine in the UK. Its purpose is not so much to train professional chefs, as to respond to people's interest in making their own sushi, ramen and other Japanese dishes. We offer classes that anyone can attend. Among the 60 percent to 70 percent of women attending the school are a few men striving to master the tricks of making rolled sushi, and couples having fun learning to make ramen. Most of our instructors are Japanese home cooking experts, but they also occasionally include the head chef of a famous Japanese restaurant. Sozai has invited chefs from UNESCO Creative City Tsuruoka for events, and we're also preparing to launch a course this year for professional chefs. I now serve as chairman of the Japanese Culinary Academy UK, and recently moved into fields completely new to me: a private chef service called eho chef that connects diners with chefs, and a bespoke Japanese chef service called ikisho.

Thinking back, ever since I started up a Japanese restaurant all by myself—deliberately doing something no one else was doing—I realize I've always been fascinated by uncharted worlds. As I embarked on my first visit to Tsuruoka, I felt the same rush of excitement that welled up in me four decades ago, when I was young and ready for anything. ◆



POTATO AND TUNA SALAD WITH INFUSED SENCHA TEA LEAVES

Shincha first flush *sencha* tea leaves may be eaten after being infused for tea. Flavorful *sencha* leaves are being recognized for their health benefits, and there is a growing trend of including them in various dishes. The umami of *hanakatsuo* and soy sauce reduces the slight bitterness of the leaves. The *hanakatsuo*, soy sauce and *sencha* mixture is delicious as an accompaniment to a bowl of warm rice.



花かつお

◆ Hanakatsuo

Appetizer serves 3

351 kcal Protein 12.0 g Fat 14.3 g
(per serving)

- Potatoes, 400 g / 1 lb.
- *Shincha* first flush Japanese *sencha* tea leaves, 4 t / 8 g
- 2 t cold water
- 200 ml / 6-7 oz. hot water
- 3 T shaved *hanakatsuo* dried bonito flakes
- 1 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 can of solid tuna, preferably packed in oil, total 140-160 g / 5-6 oz.
- Yuzu peel, thinly shredded; alternatively, grated lemon or orange zest
- 3 T extra virgin oil
- 1/2 t lemon juice
- Salt
- Black pepper
- 1-2 lettuce leaves or curly lettuce
- Slice of red bell pepper, finely diced for garnish (optional)

1 Boil the potatoes with skin on and cook until tender. Peel off the skin and cut the potatoes into quarters, then cut these into pieces each about 5-7 mm / ¼ in. thick. Set aside.

2 Place *sencha* leaves in a teapot and sprinkle 2 t of cold water over them to moisten; allow to sit for a minute. Pour 200 ml hot water into a measuring cup to let it cool down a little. Pour it over the leaves and let it sit for about 30 seconds, then pour out the tea.*

3 Place the infused tea leaves into a tea strainer and press them with a spoon to drain out excess water.

4 Mix 2 T tea leaves with the *hanakatsuo* and soy sauce. Set aside.

5 Drain the tuna, break apart into lumps and place in a bowl.

6 Add the potatoes, the tea leaf mixture and the yuzu peel to the tuna and mix lightly with the extra virgin olive oil. Add the lemon juice and season with salt and black pepper; adjust taste as needed.

7 Lay out the lettuce leaves on a serving platter. Spoon out the potato and tuna salad onto the lettuce, and garnish with the diced red bell pepper, if desired.

* The poured tea is not used in the recipe, but please enjoy while it is still warm.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto

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



SIMMERED BAMBOO SHOOT AND CHICKEN MEATBALLS

Wakatake-ni, literally, “simmered wakame and young bamboo shoot,” is a classic Japanese dish typically served in the spring, when the first tender bamboo shoots make their appearance. This recipe becomes an ideal vegetarian dish if a vegetable-based dashi stock of kombu and dried shiitake mushrooms is used.



◆ Boiled bamboo shoot

Serves 4

195 kcal Protein 13.2 g Fat 7.0 g (per serving)

- Dried cut wakame, 8 g / 0.3 oz.; use 120 g / 4 oz. after rehydration
- 1-2 boiled bamboo shoots,* packed or canned; 300 g / 11 oz.

Meatballs

- 200 g / 7 oz. ground chicken
- About 1 T finely chopped bottom slices of bamboo shoot**
- 3 T finely chopped onion
- 2 t granulated sugar
- 1/4 t salt
- 1/2 egg
- 1 T water
- 1 t potato starch or cornstarch

Simmering liquid

- 500 ml / 2 C dashi stock
- 1 T granulated sugar
- 3 T Kikkoman Light Color Soy Sauce
- 2 T Kikkoman Manjo Mirin
- 2 T sake

- 10 *kinome*, *sansho* Japanese mountain pepper sprouts

1 In a bowl, soak the dried cut wakame in water for 3-5 minutes or according to package instructions.***

2 If whole, cut the bamboo shoots in half horizontally. Cut the bamboo tips lengthwise into 6-8 equal pieces. Then slice the bottom half of the shoots horizontally into 1 cm- / 0.4 in.-thick slices, then cut into quarters or sixths. Parboil all of the sliced bamboo shoots and drain.*** Finely chop one of the bottom pieces, to add when making the meatballs.

3 Thoroughly mix together all the ingredients for the meatballs.

4 Bring the simmering liquid ingredients to a boil in a pot, then reduce to medium heat. Form meatballs using two spoons, and drop into the boiling liquid. Use all the ground meat mixture. Skim the surface occasionally to remove fat. Gather the meatballs together in one place in the pot. Add the bamboo shoots and continue to simmer together for 7 minutes over medium heat.

5 Finally add the wakame to the pot and heat briefly.

6 Place the meatballs, bamboo shoots and wakame in a serving bowl. Pour some simmering liquid over the ingredients and garnish with the *kinome*.

* The white powdery substance inside the bamboo shoots is oxalic acid and is edible.

** Use the slightly harder bottom slices of the bamboo shoot for this, to lend a crisp texture to the meatballs.

*** If dried wakame is not pre-cut, cut into 2 cm / 0.7 in. lengths after rehydrating.

**** Parboiling packaged or canned pre-boiled bamboo shoots removes smell and prepares them to soak in the flavor of simmering liquid more readily.



Kikkoman Teaching Kitchen Opens at The Culinary Institute of America



Kikkoman Sales USA, Inc. President and CEO Masanao Shimada, speaking at the Kikkoman Teaching Kitchen. The Culinary Institute of America President Dr. Tim Ryan (right).

It is one of Kikkoman’s missions to spread the joys of food and connect global food cultures. As part of the effort to set an example as a good corporate citizen, Kikkoman has engaged in many different activities that have made an impact on global society and local communities over the years.

One such example is its over 20-year partnership with The Culinary Institute of America (CIA). In honor of their collaboration and continuing commitment to culinary education, CIA has established the Kikkoman Teaching Kitchen at the college’s



Hyde Park, New York campus. Culinary students will be given hands-on learning opportunities in a wide range of Asian cuisines with constant donations of Kikkoman’s full line of authentic Asian sauces.

“It is with great privilege we join The Culinary Institute of America in fostering culinary education that allows students to explore Asian flavor,” said Kikkoman Sales USA, Inc. President and CEO, Masanao Shimada. “Kikkoman is grateful for the opportunity to help influence the next generation of industry leaders.”

Kikkoman’s relationship with the CIA began in 1997 when the college opened its first branch location in St. Helena, California. The partnership now includes a variety of initiatives, from serving as a member of the Japanese Studies Leadership Council to engaging in the digital collaboration “Asian for a New Generation” online learning module. In addition to product donations and a leadership

gift commitment, Kikkoman was an inaugural sponsor of The Culinary Institute of America’s Worlds of Flavor® International Conference & Festival. The company proudly continues its support of the conference to bring influential chefs together in search of the latest culinary trends to this day.

Although the Kikkoman Teaching Kitchen will focus on Asian cuisines, Kikkoman’s seasonings are used to enhance flavors around the world. Ever since Kikkoman began actively marketing its products globally, it has strived to make soy sauce a part of different food cultures, not just an exotic foreign element. In this way, Kikkoman Soy Sauce has been welcomed and loved in over 100 countries around the world.

Never veering from its commitment to quality, Kikkoman relishes the continuous challenge of finding new ways to contribute to the fusion of soy sauce and Japanese cuisine with local food cultures to fill the world with the joys of food. ◆