

The Japan Society of New York Holds Food Culture Forum

Shoyu evolves from object of cultural exchange to staple of fusion cuisine

From December 2-4, 1999, The Japan Society of New York hosted a forum on Japanese food culture entitled *A Taste of Health: Exploring Japanese Food Culture*. The Japan Society Auditorium, with a capacity for 250 people, was the venue for the forum. The auditorium came alive as crowds of New Yorkers with an interest in Japanese food attended. The following is a brief account of the main events and speeches presented at the forum.

Opening speech by William Clark Jr., President of the Japan Society



Reception guests enjoy *shoyu*-flavored appetizers.

Conference Agenda

A Taste of Health: Exploring Japanese Food Culture

December 2, 3 & 4, 1999

Thursday, December 2

Evening Lecture

"Flavor & Its Origins: The Story of Soy Sauce"
Yuzaburo Mogi, President & CEO, Kikkoman Corporation
Ronald Yates, Professor of Journalism and Head of the Department of Journalism at the University of Illinois, former Foreign and National Correspondent, Chicago Tribune
Barry Wine, Food Consultant, former Chef and Proprietor, Quilted Giraffe

Friday, December 3

"Fusion Sushi & Beyond: A Hands-On Workshop"
Michiko Yamamoto, Chef and Proprietor, Murakami Kaishindo Restaurant

Saturday, December 4

"Journeys into Japanese Culinary Arts & Nutrition: A One-Day Symposium with Tasting Workshops"

—Morning Session—

Seasonings and Their Role in Japanese Food Culture
Isao Kumakura, Professor of Japanese History and Curator, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan
with Martin Collcutt, Director, East Asian Studies Program, Princeton University

Food Patterns East & West

Sidney Mintz, Professor Emeritus, Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University

Panel Discussion: Soy and Health: Benefits of the Traditional Japanese Diet

Elizabeth Ando, Food Consultant and Journalist
Marion Nestle, Professor and Chair, Department of Nutrition and Food Studies, New York University
Michiko Yamamoto

Questions & Answers with the Audience

—Afternoon Session—

Tasting Workshops:
Shoyu and Beyond: Japanese Seasonings
Michiko Yamamoto

Sencha: Japanese Green Leaf Tea

Koraku Ogawa, Grandmaster of the Ogawa Tea School, Kyoto, Japan

Isao Kumakura and Martin Collcutt

Miso: Fermented Soybean Paste
Elizabeth Ando

Deepening Japan-U.S. friendship

The theme of the first day of the forum was the internationalization of *shoyu* (soy sauce) and Japanese food. Proceedings got under way under the chairmanship of Japan Society President William Clark, Jr., followed by remarks from Kikkoman President and CEO Yuzaburo Mogi. Mr. Mogi gave the following speech on behalf of the forum sponsor, the Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture.

"To mark the 80th anniversary of its founding, Kikkoman in October 1999 established the Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture, which seeks to study various aspects of *shoyu* and other fermented seasonings, engage in cultural and social activities, and gather and distribute information. Given its diversity of peoples and cuisines, New York is a natural location for an event marking the opening of the Institute. As a former student of Columbia University, I am delighted to have the opportunity to sponsor this event in New York, which I regard as my second home."

"For several decades, Kikkoman has encouraged the spread of *shoyu* as an emissary of Japanese food culture throughout the world. Such has been the success of this effort that we now find the word 'teriyaki' in Webster's English dictionary. Kikkoman currently exports *shoyu* to over one hundred countries, and *shoyu* is even used in traditional French cooking. Judging from its current status as a regular ingredient in everyday cooking, both in the United States and Japan, we can perhaps conclude that *shoyu* has moved beyond the status of an exotic object of cultural exchange to become a staple ingredient of fusion cuisine. It is my fondest hope that this fusion of food cultures will continue to grow, contributing to the deepening friendship between Japan and the United States."



President Yuzaburo Mogi



Prof. Ronald Yates



Mr. Barry Wine



President Mogi discusses *shoyu* with Prof. Yates.

Shoyu goes well with meat

Following the screening of a video in English that described the history of *shoyu* and how it is made, University of Illinois Professor Ronald Yates, author of *The Kikkoman Chronicles* (McGraw-Hill), and Mr. Mogi engaged in a discussion which took the form of an interview, wherein Professor Yates posed questions about Kikkoman, its expansion into the U.S., the internationalization of *shoyu* and about Mr. Mogi himself.

In response to questions from Professor Yates, whose background is in journalism, Mr. Mogi explained that the company was founded in the early seventeenth century by a woman from the Mogi family, who began to make *shoyu* after moving to Noda. Mr. Mogi also presented figures showing that the Japanese consume an average ten liters of *shoyu* annually per capita—on a par with their consumption of sake—and indicative of the close relationship between *shoyu* and Japanese food.

When asked what had persuaded him that *shoyu* would come to be accepted in the U.S., Mr. Mogi explained: *shoyu* goes well with meat. He described witnessing the positive response to a *shoyu* demonstration he had held at a supermarket while he was a postgraduate student at Columbia. This led to the introduction of "teriyaki," while the popularity of *shoyu* as a barbecue sauce also stimulated a rise in the consumption of *shoyu* in the U.S.

Professor Yates pointed out that Kikkoman was founded by a woman, a circumstance unusual even in modern Japan, let alone at that time. Mr. Mogi noted that Denis Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, completed in 1765, mentions that *shoyu* goes well with meat. These and other humorous anecdotes elicited much laughter from the assembled audience. Mr. Mogi rounded off the discussion with the following observation: "Everyone has to eat. Because of this, food culture is the ideal vehicle for cultural exchange. And *shoyu* is central to Japanese food culture."

Rising interest in Japanese food

The interview was followed by a speech from Food Consultant Barry Wine. Mr. Wine, who has a background in law and has run a fusion restaurant, summarized recent trends in Japanese food and international cuisine. Wide-ranging and full of useful suggestions, Mr. Wine's speech offered the following

thoughts on Japanese food and culture.

"The influence of Japan can be seen everywhere, from fashion and interior design to the chopsticks and sake found in our dining rooms. Teahouses grace the top floors of Manhattan residences. We see Japanese gardens everywhere. We can even buy Japanese lunch boxes. Japanese charcoal was a popular Christmas gift this past winter. We're pressed to work longer now than any generation before us, to work faster to keep pace with the Internet, and our lives have become hectic, filled with the urgent demands of contemporary life. So it's no surprise that we seek to bring calm and simplicity into our everyday lives. This is why we're drawn to things Japanese. Japanese cuisine is popular because it gives us a chance to experience this relaxed, lucid culture."

"To understand Asian food culture, we need to learn more about Japan. But the geographical distance between our two nations, the current strength of the yen, and language barriers all make traveling to Japan somewhat difficult right now. We need to encourage Japanese teachers to come visit and teach. We need them to encourage our chefs to travel to Japan. The Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture has an important role to play in this process by providing opportunities for American chefs to learn more about Japanese food culture."

Mr. Wine was then joined by Professor Yates and Mr. Mogi, and the three fielded various questions from the audience. Among the topics raised in this lively question and answer session: Do Japanese and American *shoyu* taste different? Why are fermented foodstuffs healthy?

Following the symposium, the audience moved to the reception hall, where they enjoyed informal conversation and a selection of Japanese food. The many New Yorkers present took the opportunity to sample a range of fusion dishes made using *shoyu*, including boiled green soybeans in the pod, Japanese style omelet, meat dumplings and deep-fried shrimp.

The three-day Food Culture Forum helped deepen the participants' understanding of the elements of Japanese food culture, with *shoyu* as a central element. The Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture plans to continue its study of *shoyu* and other fermented foods, items that represent the core of Japanese food culture, as well as the study of other food cultures around the world.