Food Forum Event 2000 Rice & Rituals: Essential Foods and Festival Fare in East Asia

Hosted by the Japan Society of New York on November 28 and December 2 of last year, the second Food Forum revolved around the theme of Rice and Rituals. Not only is rice the grain of central importance in Japan and other parts of East Asia, it also plays a special role in the region's rituals and cultures. This stimulating forum explored the significance of rice in the various cultures of East Asia, while highlighting the many forms in which it is prepared for consumption.

Japan Society

The Japan Society is a non-profit, non-political American organization which was founded in 1907. The Society promotes understanding and enlightened relations between the United States and Japan.



Conference Agenda **Rice & Rituals: Essential Foods and Festival Fare in East Asia** November 28 & December 2, 2000 Sponsored by the Japan Society Co-sponsored by the Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture

Tuesday, November 28

The Way of Rice: Sushi & Beyond

Welcoming Address: Michael Soburn, President, Japan Society Greetings: Yuzaburo Mogi, President & CEO, Kikkoman Corporation Lecture & Slide Show: The Way of Rice: Sushi & Beyond Naomi Duguid & Jeffrey Alford, Journalists/Photographers Reception: Tasting Workshop featuring a variety of sushi, Japanese dishes and

Saturday, December 2

Rice in Asia: The Grain that Shapes Culture

Morning Session

- Greetings: John Wheeler, Vice President, Japan Society Panel Discussion 1: A Scene with Rice
- Naomi Duguid & Jeffrey Alford, Journalists/Photographers
- Panel Discussion 2: Rice Culture of Japan
- Toshinao Yoneyama, Dean, Otemae University, Kyoto, Japan Panel Discussion 3: Rice in Chinese Culture
- Chee Beng Tan, Chairman, Dept. of Anthropology, Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Panel Discussion 4: Rice Culture and Cuisine in Vietnam Nicole Routhier, Chef/Award-Winning Cookbook Author

Afternoon Session

- Panel Discussion 1: Sacred Offerings in Japan Charlotte Anderson, Anthropologist; Gorazd Vilhar,
- Art Historian/Photographer Panel Discussion 2: Faith in Inari (god of harvests) at Fushimi Inari Shrine Karen Smyers, Professor of Religion, Wesleyan University
- Panel Discussion 3: Rice on the Japanese Table
- Elizabeth Andoh, Journalist/Food Culture Specialist
- Panel Discussion 4: White, Green, Yellow, Red—Rice Used in Rituals of Chinese-Vietnamese Nir Avieli, Anthropologist, Hebrew University
- Reception: Mochi (rice cake) pounding demonstration



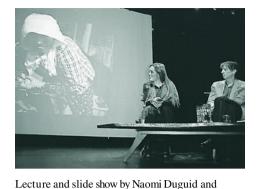
Yuzaburo Mogi, President & CEO, Kikkoman Corporation

Rice—Symbol of Japanese Food

The first day began with an evening session on the theme of The Way of Rice: Sushi & Beyond, which focused on sushi and the many other forms in which rice is prepared.

Following an introduction by Japan Society President Michael Soburn, Kikkoman President and CEO Yuzaburo Mogi gave an opening address in which he explained that the Japanese terms for breakfast, lunch and dinner all contain the word gohan, or cooked rice, and that it is customary to leave not even a single grain of rice in one's bowl by meal's end. In other words, explained Mr. Mogi, rice is the symbol of Japanese food and a central element of Japanese culture. He also spoke of the close link between rice and Japanese shoyu.

Jeffrey Alford and his wife Naomi Duguid, coauthors of Seductions of Rice and a number of other books, gave a presentation introducing Japanese food culture and rice cultivation techniques around the world. Their lecture was illustrated with a series of beautiful slides. The pair shared several fascinating anecdotes with the audience and discussed a wide range of foods made from rice, including narezushi, considered the forerunner of modern sushi; *inarizushi*, with its ties to Inari (god of harvests); mochi (rice cakes); and traditional Japanese confectionery. Their presentation was met with strong interest, and





Panel discussion held during the December 2 afternoon session (L to R): Charlotte Anderson, Gorazd Vilhar, Karen Smyers, Nir Avieli and Elizabeth Andoh.



At the reception

Jeffrey Alford

Mochi pounding demonstration

numerous questions were posed by the audience.

This presentation was followed by a reception featuring sushi. Because rice and shoyu go hand-inhand in Japanese cuisine, guests were offered the opportunity to taste a variety of different shoyu as they savored a selection of both traditional and "fusion" sushi.

Close Ties to Asian Culture

Under the theme of Rice in Asia: The Grain that Shapes Cultures, the second day's symposium focused on the role of rice not just as food, but as an essential element in the region's festivals and rituals. The day began with a slide presentation entitled Landscapes with Rice, and continued with panel discussions throughout the morning and afternoon sessions.

Drawn from several disciplines, including cultural anthropology, religious studies and food culture, the panelists provided stimulating presentations and discussions on the role of rice in rituals and customs in Japan, China, Vietnam and other Asian countries. Examples ranged from the Japanese custom of making offerings of rice to the gods, to the Japanese belief in Inari, and to the use of rice in rituals in China and Vietnam, thus providing a clear overall picture of the important role played by rice in shaping Asian cultures.

Toshinao Yoneyama, dean of Otemae University,

Panel discussion held during the December 2 morning session (L to R): Jeffrey Alford, Naomi Duguid, Toshinao Yoneyama, Nicole Routhier and Chee Beng Tan.

Food Culture Forum







Shoyu (soy sauce) tasting workshop

2000 Gregory Cherin (p. 25)

presented a lecture entitled The Culture of Rice. which focused on the close ties between rice and the Japanese way of life. Not only is rice a staple food in Japan and an essential ingredient in drink and food such as sake and *senbei* (rice crackers), the straw and ashes that remain after the harvest of the grain are recycled for use in everyday implements and in buildings.

The audience was also treated to tales of some of the unique rituals that persist throughout Japan, including rain ceremonies, which play such a vital role in rice cultivation. Japanese food expert Elizabeth Andoh then presented a special lecture on osechirvori, traditional Japanese dishes served at New Year, before the audience was treated to a selection of osechi-ryori dishes.

Day two of the forum ended with a meal of Vietnamese food and sushi, prepared to remind guests of the delights of Asian rice. Guests also enjoyed a demonstration of the Japanese New Year's ritual of mochi-tsuki, or rice-cake pounding.

The fruitful two-day forum proved an unqualified success. As part of its research into the fusion of Japanese and international food and other aspects of international food cultures, the Kikkoman Institute for International Food Culture is committed to continuing its support of such events.