

# 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 shoyu

#### 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, co-authors 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



Lecture and slide show by Naomi Duguid and Jeffrey Alford



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

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



Mochi pounding demonstration



Shoyu (soy sauce) tasting workshop

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numerous questions were posed by the audience.

This presentation was followed by a reception featuring sushi. Because rice and *shoyu* go hand-in-hand 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,

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 *osechi-ryori*, 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.