We love to hear people say "Washoku is great!"

Charms of Washoku, Traditional Japanese Cuisine

On November 9, 2013, Kikkoman hosted a forum at Marunouchi Hall, on the 7th floor of the Marunouchi Building in front of Tokyo Station, and invited four young, active chefs from Kyoto and Tokyo. In the forum they shared their views on the beauties of *washoku* (Japanese cuisine), including its relationship with the four seasons, the basics of washoku, and differences between Japanese food culture and other food cultures.

Panelists

Takuji Takahashi
Third-generation owner and chef at Kinobu, in Kyoto.

Born in 1968. After graduating from university, he trained in Tokyo Kitcho in Tokyo. His culinary style of adopting new theory and methods has been widely praised. He is also a certified senior sommelier and well versed in wine. Kinobu is a *ryotei* (prestigious and well-established traditional Japanese restaurant) located in a traditional Gion Festival neighborhood.

Hisato Nakahigashi
Fourth-generation owner and chef at Miyamaso, in Kyoto.

Born in 1969. After graduating from high school, he studied hotel management and service in France. After returning to Japan, he trained at Tsuruko in Kanazawa. He offers a new style of *tsumikusa* cuisine with a preparation based on freshly-harvested wild plants and seasonal vegetables. Miyamaso is a *ryotei* nestled in the rustic natural setting of Hanase, Kyoto.

Yoshihiro Takahashi
Fifteenth-generation chef at Hyotei, in Kyoto.

Born in 1974. After graduating from university, he trained in Kanazawa. He then returned to Kyoto to work under his father, Eiichi, the 14th-generation owner and chef at Hyotei. He carries on the practice of traditional Japanese cuisine based on multi-course *kaiseki* dinners. Hyotei has a 400-year history, and is located near Nanzenji Temple in Kyoto.

Naoyuki Yanagihara
Successor at Kinsaryu Culinary Discipline and vice-president of Yanagihara School of Traditional Japanese Cuisine.

Born in 1979. After graduating from university, he worked for a food manufacturer. Thereafter, he experienced working in the galley of a Dutch sailing vessel as the only Asian crewmember. Currently, alongside his father, Kazunari, he teaches the study of Japanese cuisine and *cha-kaiseki* (meals served in formal tea ceremonies) at their cooking school in Akasaka, Tokyo.

Moderator

Hitoshi Kakizawa
Food business consultant

Born in 1967. Trained at Tsuruya in Osaka. After working as executive chef at the Japanese Embassy in Washington, DC, he succeeded his father as the 2nd-generation chef and owner of a Japanese restaurant in Toranomon, in Tokyo. He also served as the general manager at MURASAKI, a restaurant operated by Kikkoman at the Japan Industry Pavilion during Expo 2010 Shanghai China.

The First Experience of Preparing a Japanese Dish

H. KAKIZAWA: What was the first washoku meal you prepared?

Y. TAKAHASHI: Twenty-some years ago, when I was a university student living away from home, I made *nikujaga* (Japanese meat and potato stew) for myself. It was the first washoku I had ever made. I did it in my own way, just seeing for myself how I could make it taste good.

T. TAKAHASHI: My first attempt at washoku was when I graduated from university. I was 22 years old, and had never cooked anything in my life. At the Japanese restaurant where I was training, I prepared a meal for the kitchen staff. Unfortunately, I don't remember what I prepared.

H. NAKAHIGASHI: The first time for me was tempura I made for my father when I was an elementary school student. Before seeing the tempura, he said that it smelled good. However, the minute he saw it on the plate, he said he couldn't eat it. The tempura was not crispy at all.

N. YANAGIHARA: I made *tai chazuke* when I was an elementary school boy. Grinding sesame was my chore in the family when I was small. My mother sliced fresh sea bream, and I ground up sesame and added soy sauce to it. Then I dipped the sea bream slices in the sauce and placed them on a bowl of rice. I poured hot *dashi* (Japanese cooking stock) I made myself over it, and then ate it. That was the first washoku I ever made.

Charms of Washoku

H. KAKIZAWA: What do you think is the appeal of washoku?

T. TAKAHASHI: The sound of my mother chopping ingredients on the cutting board and the smell of dashi stock coming from kitchen—for me, washoku is associated with these memories from my childhood. It was the taste, flavor and smell of washoku that held us all together in the family. In the culinary world in Japan, it is often said that the secret of the art is handed down from the father to only one of the children in the family. I think part of the mystique of washoku is that the taste and flavor of the family can be passed down from generation to generation.

Y. TAKAHASHI: We feel the season with each dish, and this feature appeals to me. Washoku conveys a

How to Make *Nikujaga* (Meat and Potato Stew), an All-Time Favorite

Yoshihiro Takahashi —Nikujaga—

Peel, cut and soak potatoes in water. Chop carrots into large chunks. Cut onions into wedges. Saute the beef, potatoes and carrots, and then add water until they are covered. But don't forget to add sake. After it starts to boil, remove the scum from the top. Add onions and cook some more. Then add *shirataki* noodles (made from konjac) that have been immersed in water. Season to taste with sugar, soy sauce and mirin (sweet cooking sake). Nikujaga is a low-calorie, healthy dish, in which the flavor of the ingredients is brought out with just a small amount of seasoning.

message in every season. For instance, in May we enjoy *chimaki* (*mochi* rice cake wrapped in bamboo leaves and steamed) and *kashiwa-mochi* (mochi made of powdered non-glutinous rice, stuffed with sweet bean paste, steamed and wrapped in *daimyo* oak leaves). This is an ancient tradition, and still alive today. It means that we are linked to people from times past through the foods of each season. I think this is one appeal of washoku.

T. TAKAHASHI: Well, I also think of it in association with the four seasons. This custom may be found only in Kyoto, but on June 30th (halfway through the year) of each year, Japanese sweets called *minazuki*, which is another way of saying June, are delivered to us from a confectioner in the neighborhood. On the following day of July 1st, we deliver *hamo-zushi* (pressed conger pike sushi) to them in return. It's wonderful that this practice of season-based exchange is being done in such a natural way.

N. YANAGIHARA: Washoku dishes can be prepared by using ingredients that are all produced in Japan, with seasonings that are unique to Japanese cuisine. They must be the most familiar foods to us. But today we have a wide variety of cuisines to choose from around the world. The foods that make us appreciate our identity as we eat them—that is what I see as the appeal of washoku.

H. NAKAHIGASHI: I also think it's the feeling of the season. Occasionally, I go overseas for work. In those occasions, I notice that the cuisines of other countries do not evoke a sense of the seasons. They just express seasonality by the type of food on the plates. In contrast, for example, in my restaurant, the season is expressed through all aspects of the arrangement, including the tableware, hanging scrolls and flowers, so that you can perceive the season with all five senses. This is how washoku is enjoyed, and it is also a great appeal of washoku as I see it. Choosing suitable tableware and hanging scrolls is not easy. When you find that mulling over these details is fun, rather than troublesome, your life will become much more enjoyable.

Washoku as Seen from Abroad

H. KAKIZAWA: Mr. Nakahigashi mentioned overseas cuisine. How is washoku evaluated in other countries?

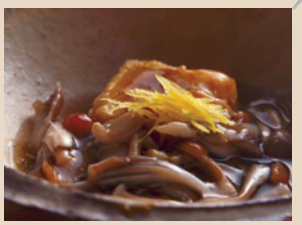
T. TAKAHASHI: Food cultures in other countries are based on fat and sugar, while the base of washoku is dashi, in other words, umami. Recent trends in overseas cuisine, however, are moving toward extracting the umami of ingredients first and thereafter achieving balance as a whole. Their dishes have become lighter, with as little fat as possible. Another point I have noticed is that the quality of fish has improved remarkably over the last decade. I believe these changes must be due to the influence of washoku. Chefs in other countries have gained a deeper understanding that the proper handling of fish after they are caught is key to making delicious cuisine. I think that the trend is changing in the direction of limiting the use of salt, fat and spices so that umami can be drawn out from the ingredients.

N. YANAGIHARA: In 2012, I participated in the Sushi Master Contest in Israel as jury president. To my surprise, the capital city of Tel Aviv has more than 300 restaurants that offer sushi. It was the 3rd biennial competition, and was the first time an Israeli chef won first prize. He was only 26 years old. He said he learned how to make sushi by watching movies on YouTube, and he did make really beautiful sushi. I discovered that overseas chefs have a higher level of interest in washoku than they did before. I keenly felt that young people who have a passion for washoku, and who are eager to know more about authentic washoku, are increasing in numbers throughout the world.

H. NAKAHIGASHI: I have visited Hong Kong often recently, and Japanese cuisine there is regarded as the highest class of cuisine. It is hugely expensive. For instance, grilled *kinki* or broadbanded thornyhead (*Sebastolobus macrochir*) costs 30,000 yen. At an upscale *izakaya* (casual Japanese pub-style restaurant), I saw this dish being ordered by one customer after

another. This is an example of where I feel that washoku is a little misunderstood. In the near future, I hope that the Japanese cuisine we have been making will be truly understood there. Not long ago, I also visited Barcelona. The seafood is very fresh there. They didn't eat seafood raw before, but now even shellfish such as shrimp is consumed raw. Some restaurants have a live fish tank. I think this is one influence of Japanese cuisine. Another interesting thing is the high evaluation of fermented condiments used in washoku. This is taken for granted among Japanese chefs, but chefs there were amazed to learn that by marinating meat in miso or *mirin* (sweet cooking sake), they could make it taste delicious with quickly increased umami, without the aging process they normally use.

Y. TAKAHASHI: I also visit other countries often. These visits made me realize that Japanese cuisine is water based, while French is a fat-based cuisine (using a lot of fat) and Chinese is fire-based cuisine (relying heavily on fire). The background to this feature of Japanese cuisine is that the water in Japan is soft water, which is rare elsewhere in the world, and it allows us to make excellent dashi. For this reason, there are many in other countries who have a kind of longing for Japanese cuisine, washoku.



A Simple and Convenient Dish with Seasonal Ingredients

Hisato Nakahigashi —*Kinoko-no-Ankake-Dofu*
(Tofu with mushrooms in starchy sauce)—

A typical autumn food is mushrooms. Tear the mushrooms by hand, not with a knife, as the fibers run lengthwise. Drain tofu lightly and deep-fry it without batter. Deep frying brings the umami out from tofu. As we want to taste the distinct flavor of the mushrooms, we should use as little dashi as possible. For instance, if I happen to have *maitake* mushrooms with good aroma, I'll think how it should be cooked to retain that aroma. This is the secret to washoku. Mirin and soy sauce are all we need. Turn the heat off and add starch mixed with water, and then turn the heat on again. Add chicken tenderloin to finish the *ankake* sauce. Pour ample amounts of sauce over the deep-fried tofu and sprinkle shredded peel of yuzu citrus over the top.

How Each Season is Felt

H. KAKIZAWA: Usually, a calendar tells us the season. In your case, what tells you the season?

H. NAKAHIGASHI: For me, each of the four seasons is a theme for expressing our hospitality to customers. Even if you go into the mountains every day, there are no two days when things in the mountains are exactly the same. So, naturally our mindset regarding the dishes we serve to customers changes day by day. What I perceive by seeing, touching and smelling things in the mountains is the true calendar for me. What inspires me is not necessarily ingredients. They can be flowers or other things. Seeing them makes me feel something. The time when a thing is most beautiful is when it is in season.

N. YANAGIHARA: My calendar is the fish market at Tsukiji. For instance, when it gets cold, I see more red-colored fish in the market. And then there are the five season-related celebrations, and particular seasonal dishes being served. It is a shame that these customs are being neglected recently. I think we should cherish the traditions of events more than we currently do. If those who are parents respect and maintain our customs, they will be passed down to their children and future generations. A lifestyle that is sensitive to the gradual transition from one season to another is a significant part of Japanese culture.

Y. TAKAHASHI: The seasons for foods have some variation in time, although the length depends on the type of food. The season of a food begins with *hashiri* (firstling) when the food begins to appear on the market. It then reaches *sakari* (peak) when, in the case of fish, for instance, it is tasty with plenty of fat. The last and remnant period is called *nagori*, when the fish has less fat and flavor. Each food has these three stages of a season. By paying attention to these changes, we feel the passing of time and the four seasons. One example is a pot dish called *hamo-matsu* in Kyoto cuisine. *Hamo* (conger pike) is at its peak in July, when it is delicious with plenty of fat. However, hamo-matsu is a dish served in October, when *matsutake* mushrooms are at their peak. Matsutake at its peak is combined with hamo in its remnant period. This combination allows us to feel and embrace the passing of time. Having such an experience over a meal is also a unique attraction of washoku, I think.

H. KAKIZAWA: What do you suggest that those who are not professional chefs do to feel the seasons through washoku?

T. TAKAHASHI: I suggest that they check out the foods in supermarkets or department stores. If you find a food that you didn't see the week before, it is probably the *hashiri* period of the food. When the space for that food has grown to the largest point, the food is at its *sakari* and tastes the best. Japan has a great variety of fish and vegetables, with 300 varieties of fish and maybe 170 kinds of vegetables. Simply by using them in different combinations, you can significantly broaden the repertoire of washoku dishes that you can prepare.

N. YANAGIHARA: *Deaimono* is a Japanese culinary term that describes the ideal pairings of ingredients. Seasonal foods often make superb combinations.

Bamboo shoots and young leaves from Japanese pepper plants, or bamboo shoots and wakame (seaweed), are typical combinations in spring. Finding good combinations is a pleasure in making washoku, and a way to savor the seasons.

Y. TAKAHASHI: In November, for instance, matsutake mushrooms are already out of season. It is off-crop season for most vegetables, and there are often no particular vegetables that we would like to use. Yet, if I have to choose one, it might be small turnips. At my restaurant, we use them in combination with conger from the Seto Inland Sea. When we serve the dish of steamed conger on small stewed turnips, we advise the customer that it's best to eat the conger and turnip together in each bite. The light, gentle flavor of turnip and the fat of conger make an excellent pairing.

How to Make the Best Rice

H. KAKIZAWA: Plain white rice is essential in washoku. Tell us why.

N. YANAGIHARA: At my cooking school, the first lesson for every student is how to cook rice with a *hagama* (a traditional rice cooking pot with a broad brim). They are expected to learn how to cook rice using gas flames, without depending on electricity, and to know the proper timing for heat control. The primary dish in washoku is rice. Tasty rice enhances the accompanying dishes. The present style of washoku was established roughly 200 years ago, so it's not that old. Most of the dishes that are eaten today, such as *nikujaga* and curry, go well with rice. More than anything else, delicious rice warms our heart. That is what white rice means, at least in my mind.

Y. TAKAHASHI: I also cook rice in many different ways, such as using *bunka-gama* (a modern pot with a rim that rises above the lid) or an earthenware pot. Japanese culture has long been based on rice cultivation. In our minds, rice is something sacred, and its white color relates to the gods. It is deeply rooted in our history. The way to cook rice differs when you are using a bunka-gama or earthenware pot. It is important to know how to cook rice with different pots. I think it would be great if you could build your sense of how to cook delicious rice with each kind of pot, by repeating the same process many times.

N. YANAGIHARA: Many would have heard "Don't lift the lid even if infants cry (for food)." This is only the last part of the rice cooking rules. "*A small flame in the beginning, and a vigorous flame in the middle. When bubbling, remove wood from the fire. Finally throw a handful of straw in the fire, and don't lift the lid even if infants cry (for food).*" These rules give heat control instructions chronologically. After the pot is placed on the hearth and the firewood is added, the fire will grow gradually. In the middle of cooking, the fire will burn at its maximum. Thereafter, a boiling sound will be heard, when the surface of the contents will be simmering. When it comes to this state, remove most of the wood, so that the rest of the cooking will be done by the residual heat in the hearth. This is the part of the process where we use low heat. Finally add a handful of straw to the hearth, so that the straw will burn with the residual heat. This is the part where we use a high flame for ten seconds. After that comes the last part, "Don't lift the lid even if infants cry." This applies to the final 10-minute process of letting the rice steam in the pot, and is very important. If the lid is lifted during this process, the temperature will rapidly drop, resulting in rice covered with moisture. This last part of the instructions was misinterpreted as it was passed down through the generations, and many now think this rule is applicable to the entire process of cooking rice.

Basics of Washoku Preparation

H. KAKIZAWA: Cooking rice is the most basic of all basics in washoku cooking. What other things are basics?

T. TAKAHASHI: Even if you have salty grilled fish, the saltiness can be softened by putting a larger-than-usual bite of rice into your mouth. Rice helps you adjust the taste of other dishes to your liking. This is one attractive feature of rice. White rice has a natural sweetness. Chewing it converts the starch to glucose. I think it is important to appreciate the natural sweetness of rice.

Y. TAKAHASHI: Another basic is how to make dashi. Dashi will be different for each of the four panelists here. When I conduct a cooking seminar, I often advise the participants to find and make dashi of their own, one that best suits their family. There is no rule for dashi ingredients. The basic combination is *kombu* kelp with *katsuobushi* (dried skipjack tuna) shavings. But, even then, it doesn't have to be skipjack tuna shavings. My restaurant uses dried yellowfin tuna shavings. *Iriko* (dried baby sardines) make good dashi, too. You can also mix two or three different varieties of dried fish shavings. Washoku preparation will become more enjoyable if you have your own original dashi recipe.

N. YANAGIHARA: Washoku is, in a sense, a culture of fermented seasonings. Most overseas cuisines use fat and spices to flavor dishes. Think of the seasonings you use at home. Soy sauce, mirin, miso and sake—all are

The Art of Cooking Rice, a Washoku Essential

Naoyuki Yanagihara —How to Cook Rice—

One of the first rules is not to wash the rice, but to polish it. Once you have rinsed it with water, drain it off immediately. If rice is kept in that water, the water will absorb the smell of bran. Thereafter, immerse the polished rice in clean water for cooking. When cooking rice in a pot over a gas flame, you may lift the lid for a moment in the middle, contrary to what many people think. Set the pot over high heat. When the rice has started boiling and bubbling up, reduce the flame to medium heat. After a while, the pot will quiet down. If you lift the lid to confirm, you can see the surface of the rice simmering. After confirming, turn down the gas to low heat and gently replace the lid on top. Then listen to see if a dry sound is coming from inside the pot. A crackling sound is the cue. Turn the gas to high heat and turn it off after just 10 seconds. Finally let it stand to steam for 10 minutes. During this steaming process, never lift the lid. When the rice is done, use a rice paddle to turn the bottom portion up over the top portion. This evens out the moisture distribution, and makes the rice tastier.

produced by fermentation with the action of microorganisms. As a basic for washoku cooking, you need to have these fermented seasonings in your kitchen. These seasonings allow us, the chefs, to create magic. All magic tricks rely on some never-revealed secret. Learning how to use these seasonings is a basic foundation of washoku.

H. KAKIZAWA: How are Japanese seasonings viewed around the world?

Y. TAKAHASHI: Soy sauce, mirin, miso and sake. Overseas cultures do not have these seasonings. Some overseas chefs told me that chefs in Japanese cuisine are fortunate to have them.

T. TAKAHASHI: To put it simply, soy sauce makes any dish tasty. If you try to replicate the soy sauce taste yourself, it takes a tremendous amount of work and time. I know because I have tried. To get an aroma that smells like soy sauce, I grilled various kinds of vegetables. Then to get umami like that from soy sauce, I simmered down turnips, carrots, daikon radish, green onions, vanilla beans, and burned fish bones. In this way, I finally got a sauce similar to soy sauce, but to reach this point it took me about 10 hours. Despite all that effort, it still didn't taste as good as commercially available soy sauce. Overseas chefs do something similar to this all the time to make sauce. They saute meat and then vegetables. Thereafter, they put the cooked ingredients in water to simmer them down and brown them. In contrast, soy sauce is readily available in Japan. So, washoku preparation is actually easy.

N. YANAGIHARA: Even though washoku preparation may be easy, you need to have some minimum knowledge. For example, there are preparatory techniques using water, such as *shimofuri* (pouring hot water over fish and then immediately immersing it in cold water) and parboiling. In addition to these basic techniques, you need to learn how to use seasonings. Overseas, it is much more complicated, as they need to combine spices from among hundreds of varieties. In that sense, washoku is easier.

Y. TAKAHASHI: I've always thought that the procedure of making dashi itself is instant. Of course, I don't mean granulated instant dashi. The process prior to that takes time. The production of katsuobushi (dried skipjack tuna) consumes a considerable amount of time. Kombu kelp is not ready to be used immediately after harvest. It has to be dried and aged for one or two years before it is delivered to us. Seasonings also take time to produce. Before these products come into our hands, they undergo elaborate processes. By combining these products, though, washoku can be prepared rather easily. This is what I feel washoku cuisine is. There are many ways to make dashi. With the combination of kombu kelp and katsuobushi shavings, for example, one way is to put the kombu in the water first and then add katsuobushi shavings afterwards. Another way is to soak both kombu and katsuobushi in a pot of water overnight, and heat the pot the following morning. Then, strain it after it has come to a boil. Dishes will taste differently depending on how the dashi was made, and on what ingredients are used. Finding a dashi you like will lead to easy and enjoyable cooking.

H. NAKAHIGASHI: It is so convenient that Japan has seasonings and condiments readily available for sweet, hot, salty and other tastes. These condiments make washoku preparation easy. Another important point is the dashi. You don't have to force yourself to make dashi every morning. Depending on your lifestyle, you can make it when you have time, and store it for later. As Japan abounds with delicious ingredients, you can make wonderful dishes by simply combining some of these ingredients and adding seasonings according to your liking. Then you will realize how easy washoku really is.

T. TAKAHASHI: A basic easy seasoning in washoku is the use of equal parts of soy sauce and mirin. This is the starting point. Add mirin or sugar if you want to make it sweeter, and add more soy sauce or salt if you want it taste saltier. This was what the senior chefs told me when I began working in a kitchen. If it needs some refinement in taste, add sake. From this starting point, you can develop and create flavors of your own for dishes you serve your family.

Delicious Miso Soup That Can Be Made At Home

Takuji Takahashi —Miso Soup with Long Green Onions and Sakura Shrimp—

Let me share the dashi making method we have been using in my family. Mix kombu kelp and katsuobushi shavings together in hot water. The ideal heat level for this process should have the katsuobushi slowly turning in the pot. Allow all of the umami to dissolve into the water and then strain. Skim the scum off the top and add sake, which works to neutralize the fish smell of the katsuobushi and the sea smell of the kombu. Dissolve miso in the dashi. Cut up the green onions. (Always wash long green onions with water before cutting so that their freshness can be restored.) When the miso soup is about to boil, add an ample amount of green onions. Roast the sakura shrimp in a skillet until their flavor comes out. Pour the miso soup into a bowl and top it with the shrimp and shaved yuzu peel.

Secrets to Make Good Miso Soup

H. KAKIZAWA: Please tell us your secrets about how to make good miso soup, a vital companion dish in washoku.

T. TAKAHASHI: Speed is the key. As we have small children, we prepare all dishes in an hour. We have the established preparation flow, such as the polishing and cooking of rice, and the making of dashi stock. We start preparing at 5 p.m. and eat at 6 p.m. At my house, we don't use a paper towel to strain dashi. Water with both kombu kelp and katsuobushi shavings is boiled to draw out all elements of umami. This dashi can be used for other dishes besides miso soup. While we are preparing dinner, our children sometimes ask us to help them with their homework. This style of home cooking allows us to do it.

H. KAKIZAWA: You often say that "making dashi" and "extracting dashi" are different.

T. TAKAHASHI: Professionally, we say "to extract dashi." We extract only the good part of kombu in water by maintaining the water temperature at 60℃ to 70℃ for one hour, and we remove the kombu. Then, katsuobushi shavings are thrown in just before the kombu dashi starts boiling. As the extract from katsuobushi comes out instantly, the shavings are removed right away. In professional terms we call the extraction of the desired flavors by removing the ingredients from the dashi broth with the right timing "Extracting Dashi" or "Dashi o Hiku" in Japanese. On the other hand, the cooking method commonly used to make dashi by most Japanese home cooks is called "Dashi o Toru" in Japanese.

H. KAKIZAWA: Please describe your idea of good miso soup.

H. NAKAHIGASHI: We use dashi made from *iriko* (dried baby sardines) in my family. Katsuobushi has a smoky flavor, which I think interferes with the flavor of miso. We pinch off the heads of the iriko, and soak the iriko in water overnight. The next morning, the water is boiled and we skim the scum off the top. Then we make the miso soup. Iriko has the sweetness of umami, rather than that of sugar. I recommend it for a morning miso soup because it goes down smoothly.

Y. TAKAHASHI: I use a different miso for each season. As we need energy in Kyoto's cold winter, I use a light-colored *shiromiso*, which is rather thick. In summer, it gets extremely hot in Kyoto, so we use dark-colored *akamiso*. In other seasons such as spring and early autumn, we use *awasemiso*, a mixture of shiromiso and akamiso. Starting with the reddish-brown akamiso in summer, we add whitish shiromiso little by little, with gradually increasing portions of shiromiso over the days. Finally, we know winter has arrived when the shiromiso alone tastes good. We feel warm and relaxed when we have shiromiso soup in cold weather. In summer, when we sweat a lot and need salt, akamiso soup fits perfectly.

N. YANAGIHARA: I prefer stronger flavored miso, like Sendai miso. Sendai miso and Shinshu miso have flavor that tastes just like they were freshly made. The best essence of miso soup is its flavor. Dissolve some miso into dashi, add some leafy vegetables, and enjoy it. The longer it cooks, the better it tastes. I sometimes mix Sendai miso and Shinshu miso together. Even for miso soup alone, there are many ways to enjoy it.

How to Bring Washoku into Your Life

H. KAKIZAWA: We want more people to enjoy washoku at home. What should we keep in mind in trying to accomplish this?

T. TAKAHASHI: People color-coordinate their clothes, bags, shoes and other items. Yet, when it comes to washoku preparation, they are not so particular. I believe that meal preparation should have at least the same attention as fashion. "Today, I'd like to combine this ingredient and that." One way to bring washoku closer to our daily life is to regard it as being similar to our daily choice of fashion. Considering plates and bowls as kinds of accessories, we use them to arrange a table to suit our preferences. Thinking about creating our own original food culture is the secret to making washoku as professionals do. Colors are important as an

art of color combination. The three primary colors of red, green and yellow look beautiful in washoku. In the background, white and black, or white and brown, may be used. Winter vegetables are mainly root crops, so we use a combination of white and brown. Autumn is a season of colored leaves, so it looks nice to have red as the main color, with brown added to symbolize the color of trees, placing yellow on top. Summer colors are greenish, and pastel colors are for spring. These seasonal colors can be skillfully incorporated into dishes to increase our enjoyment.

H. NAKAHIGASHI: The preparation of washoku can be regarded as a hobby. You cannot keep doing it unless it is fun. What bothers me most in cooking is when a certain something is not there when I need it. I will have to buy it or make it. Then it becomes too much of a bother, and I just want to give up. So, for instance, after *niban-dashi* (the second dashi after the first is extracted) is made, I bottle it and store it in my refrigerator. Several types of miso, such as *shiromiso*, *akamiso* and *inakamiso* (barley miso), as well as some other seasonings, can be stored. If these items are kept in stock, you can enjoy making your own washoku while changing menus daily.

Y. TAKAHASHI: Finding something you like may be a secret to bringing washoku into your life. It can be an ingredient or a cooking utensil. A grater, a knife, anything is fine. If you have a favorite cooking item, you will take good care of it and use it carefully. I am this type of person myself, and I use my pan until it is too banged up to use any more. An iron skillet, not Teflon-coated, makes good food. Just one utensil can dramatically change cooking procedures. Once you have developed that kind of cooking sense, washoku will become a part of your life.

N. YANAGIHARA: I agree that enjoyment is the most important element. When we are preparing a meal, we always expect to hear the dishes were delicious. A simple word, "*oishii*" (delicious) will reward all our efforts. Also, a person who prepares food must enjoy doing so in the first place. Enjoy the colors and utensils. It is important that you feel excited when preparing dishes. Homemakers, in particular, handle everything by themselves, as a chef does. They are the general producers of a table. They go grocery shopping, plan the menu, prepare the dishes, and then eat and wash the dishes. If you find pleasure in each process, you may feel washoku coming closer to you.

Your Favorite Cooking Utensil

H. KAKIZAWA: You prepare a variety of dishes every day. Do you have any particular utensil you like?

T. TAKAHASHI: It's a pot with a handle my grandfather used to use. The wood handle has been replaced, and the pot itself has been worn thin. It even had a hole, which I had repaired at a sheet-metal shop. When I use it, once in a while, it reminds me of the time when he was alive and well. If a dish we used to have in those days is cooked in this pot, the dish tastes better. For instance, my grandfather used to cook the head of conger pike in soy sauce and sake. When I cook that dish in the same pot, memories of those days come rushing back to me.

H. NAKAHIGASHI: There are no old pots in my kitchen, as I just throw them away when they get old. However, I love my ceramic knife, though it's nothing new. It is a big help, as I often use vegetables with strong harshness or bitterness in my cooking. This knife imposes no stress on the ingredients and causes no chemical changes to the taste. If I cannot find it, I will look all over for it. No other knives can serve as a substitute. This shows how much I value this knife as my cooking partner.

Y. TAKAHASHI: A sifter for sprinkling salt, which I usually use at my restaurant, is my favorite item. The salt used at my restaurant is rich in minerals, and is moist. It is not easy to sprinkle it on ingredients as it clumps together, so this sifter comes in handy. If the mesh is too fine, the salt will not sift through. The mesh should be coarse enough for the salt to pass through. I had my own original salt sifter made, and I love using it. Also, I can tell the humidity just by using it.

N. YANAGIHARA: My favorite item is non-colored, non-starched, white cotton cloth. It is simply a universal tool. It can be used for straining dashi, wiping cutting boards, and straining grated daikon radish. It can also be made into a bag for straining red beans. We buy a bolt of cotton fabric and cut it to the desired length for use. This is one of the cooking items that I hope will return to Japanese households.

H. KAKIZAWA: Thank you very much for your comments.

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Two hours went by in a flash as our four professional chefs shared their passion for washoku. There simply wasn't enough time to hear all of what they had to say. However, we did hear about many wonderful aspects of washoku from various perspectives, the relationship of washoku and the seasons, ways to bring washoku closer to our lives, the influence of washoku on cuisine in other countries, and more.