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THEME FOR **NOVEMBER:**
JAPAN'S FOOD CULTURE

Japan's unique food culture owes much to ingredients, methods of preparation and serving that are particular to individual towns or regions. In this issue, we highlight a few examples of distinctive local foods and cultural practices, while also introducing more general characteristic elements of *washoku*, the “traditional dietary culture of the Japanese.”

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ON THE COVER
Japan's Food Culture
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EDITORS' NOTE
Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

PRIME MINISTER ABE ATTENDS THE 74TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY/JAPAN-U.S. SUMMIT MEETING

Mr. Abe Shinzo, Prime Minister of Japan, visited New York from September 23 to September 26, 2019, for the seventh year in succession to attend the 74th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly.

In his address to the General Debate of the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Abe mentioned the international events that Japan is hosting this year and next year, including the G20 Summit, TICAD7, the Kyoto Congress (the 14th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice) and the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, etc., and stated the importance of the contributions of Japan in the fields of education and women, regional situations including the North Korea and Middle East situations, and using multilateral frameworks to address inequalities.

Also On September 25, the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting was held between Prime Minister Abe, and the Honorable Donald J. Trump, President of the United States of America.

The leaders reaffirmed the recognition that the Japan-U.S. Alliance is stronger than ever before as it marks their fifth Summit Meeting this year alone, including the visit to Japan by President Trump and Mrs. Trump as the first State Guests in the era of Reiwa in this May, this year alone, and shared the view on continuing to further strengthen the unwavering Japan-U.S. Alliance.

Regarding the Japan-U.S. trade negotiations, the two leaders confirmed that the both sides reached final agree-



Photograph of the address at the General Debate

ment on the Japan-United States Trade Agreement and the Japan-United States Digital Trade Agreement, and is issued the Joint Statement.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Abe explained to President Trump that investment by Japanese companies in the United States has been contributing to the expansion of U.S. employment, including the facts that since the inauguration of the Trump Administration, investment of a cumulative total of 25.7 billion dollars in the U.S. has been announced, that over 50,000 jobs have been created, and that Japan has become the largest investor in the U.S. In response, President Trump expressed his great appreciation.

Moreover, the leaders exchanged views on the situation on North Korea, including issues of concern such as the abductions, nuclear, and missiles issues, and confirmed that Japan and the United States, as well as Japan, the United States, and the Republic of Korea would continue to closely cooperate on these issues.

The leaders shared the view that Japan and the United States would continue to cooperate toward easing tensions and stabilizing the situation in the Middle East.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Abe said that the previous day he had called on President Rouhani to ensure that Iran exercised self-restraint to ease the situation and to ensure that Iran exercised its influence constructively. Prime Minister Abe also said that he intended to work closely with the United States to bring about peace and stability in the Middle East.



Photograph of the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting



JAPAN'S FOOD CULTURE

“*Washoku* is a social practice based on a set of skills, knowledge, practice and traditions related to the production, processing, preparation and consumption of food. It is associated with an essential spirit of respect for nature that is closely related to the sustainable use of natural resources. ... The practice favors the consumption of various natural, locally sourced ingredients such as rice, fish, vegetables and edible wild plants.” So reads UNESCO’s inscription (2013) of “*Washoku*” on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In this issue of *Highlighting Japan*, we introduce some of the local ingredients, dishes and cultural practices that form the basis of *washoku*, traditional Japanese food.

Mukasa Chieko



Local Produce the Building Blocks of *Washoku*

Although Japan is a long, narrow, small country that extends north and south, each region of the country has a wide variety of foods using local ingredients. We interviewed Mukasa Chieko, who has covered local foods for many years as a food journalist and has interviewed numerous producers and cooks, about the features and appeal of traditional Japanese food.

What are the main features of traditional Japanese food?

Because Japan is a mountainous country surrounded by the sea on all sides, there are a variety of foods using ingredients obtained from the sea and mountains throughout the country. This is a significant feature of traditional Japanese food called *washoku*. Each region has its own unique

cooking and food preservation methods that enable ingredients to last for a long time. People have long eaten dishes made with seafood, even in regions located far from the sea. Because different ingredients can be obtained in different seasons, some foods can be eaten only in a particular season and others are cooked only for special days like New Year's Day. Fermented seasonings, such as soy sauce and miso, which form the basis of *washoku*, have different flavors in different regions. In addition, *washoku* is also characterized by making foods with umami (one of the five basic tastes) by using *dashi* stock made by soaking shavings of *katsuobushi* (dried, fermented, smoked skipjack tuna), *kombu* kelp or small dried fish in hot water. I think that Japan is one of the countries with the greatest variety of ingredients, tastes and dishes in the world.

What interests you about the traditional local dishes nationwide?

What is appealing about the original local foods in each region is not only their flavors, but also the stories behind their origins. Local dishes are born and changed during people's lives. Take *imoni*, which is traditionally eaten in Yamagata Prefecture. It is said that *imoni* originated in the Edo period (1603-1867) from boatmen on the Mogami River, which flows through the prefecture, who

stewed and cooked sticks of dried codfish and *satoimo* (taro), a specialty of Yamagata, in pots on the riverbanks. Since Western food culture prevailed in the Meiji period (1868-1912), beef and pork, which had previously not been commonly eaten in Japan, were added to the ingredients of *imoni*. In addition, in fall people came to enjoy an *imoni* party called *Imoni-kai*, at which family and friends ate *imoni* on a riverbank together. This is how the food culture of *imoni* has been passed down to this day.

Fermented foods to which a range of ideas for food preservation are applied are also an aspect of the appeal of local dishes. *Nare-zushi*, which is made by pickling fish in salt and rice and fermenting it in lactic acid, is a typical example of fermented food. *Funa-zushi* made with *funa* (crucian carp) from Lake Biwa is a fermented fish specialty of Shiga Prefecture, while *heshiko* pickled mackerel is a specialty of some areas including Fukui Prefecture. Shingu City, Wakayama Prefecture, has *nare-zushi* made with Pacific saury as its local specialty, and many customers from both Japan and overseas visit stores here selling “thirty-year-old” fermented fish, which is soft like yogurt. *Nare-zushi* has an abundance of lactic acid bacteria that build up people’s immunity, and it is also very good for the health.

Has anyone made a particular impression on you in connection with food?

There are many people who work hard to protect traditional Japanese food cultures in many parts of the country. Tokushige Ayako, aged 91, who lives in Miyakonojo City, Miyazaki Prefecture, is one of them. She cultivates chemical-free *ume* (Japanese apricots, commonly known as plums) and makes and sells foods using *ume* such as *umeboshi* (pickled plums). *Umeboshi* is a traditional Japanese food. After salting *ume*, people dry them in the sun and pickle them further to make *umeboshi*. It is common for people to eat *umeboshi* as a

side dish of rice. *Umeboshi* also has such a great disinfection effect that it has long been useful as a folk drug. Sickly in childhood, Tokushige ate *umeboshi* when she was in poor shape. Wishing to share *umeboshi*, which supported her health, with as many people as possible, Tokushige founded her own business about thirty-five years ago. In those days, there were few companies both producing raw materials and selling their products or, what’s more, managed by women. Tokushige faced numerous difficulties. However, the story went around that her *umeboshi* tasted great and were also good for the health, and she received orders from all around the country. Even today, as she passes her skills down to her grandchild, her successor, she still works hard making *umeboshi*.

What advice would you give foreign tourists when it comes to enjoying *washoku*?

I recommend that they stay at highly acclaimed local farm tourist homes. These tourist homes serve traditional Japanese breakfasts. Breakfast consists of rice, pickles, miso soup and a side dish, a group of foods that form the basis of *washoku*. Because the water and climate vary from region to region, the fragrance and flavor of the rice differ. Vegetables for pickles, such as eggplant, cucumber and turnip, are also cultivated nationwide. Various native varieties exist, however, meaning that the pickles taste different in different regions. An increasing number of farm restaurants using fresh local ingredients operate in many parts of the country. In Tokyo as well, there are *izakaya* Japanese-style bars and *soba* noodle restaurants using traditional vegetables called “Edo Tokyo Vegetables,” such as Senju Negi green onion and Terashima Nasu eggplant. I hope that tourists from other countries will enjoy the taste of traditional Japanese food at such restaurants. ▮

Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU

The Rice That Nurtures Storks

In Toyooka City, Hyogo Prefecture, the return to wet-paddy cultivation of rice and other environment-friendly farming initiatives has not only revived the local stork population but also produced a brand of rice with outstanding stickiness and sweetness.

SATO KUMIKO

The stork is a migratory bird that breeds in southeastern Siberia and flies south in the winter. It could once be seen in many parts of the country in the winter. Some clusters of storks occasionally stay in a Japanese wintering location, and the Tajima region including Toyooka City in northern Hyogo Prefecture used to be a typical habitat. But the Japanese inhabitable environment for storks worsened in the twentieth century, and in 1971 wild storks became extinct in Tajima, which was their last domestic habitat.

Subsequently, with the aim of bringing storks back into the wild, Toyooka City bred storks provided to the prefecture by Khabarovsk in the former Soviet Union, the sister city of Hyogo Prefecture, and succeeded in breeding them for the first time in 1989. The city began releasing storks into the wild in 2005, and more than 150 field populations exist as of 2019.

The attempt to bring storks back into the wild, which was considered very difficult, was successful in large part due to the constant cooperation of the rice farmers in Tajima. The causes of the storks becoming extinct were a major change in the environment of the rice paddies, a feeding ground, as well as indiscriminate hunting and the cutting down of large numbers of nesting pine trees. In the past, there were many wet rice paddies in Japan, whose soil was always wet. After World War II, however, dry rice paddies became predominant because they made it easier to introduce agricultural machinery and led to a better harvest. However, because dry rice paddies have dry ground except during the rice cultivation season, aquatic creatures such as the frogs and small fishes that storks feed on cannot inhabit them. In addition, the growing use of agricultural chemicals and chemical fertilizers, even in the rice cultivation season, caused almost all the aquatic creatures to disappear.

To create an inhabitable environment for storks, five volunteer farmers launched a farming method that nurtures storks in Toyooka City in 2003. This farming method is characterized by not using agricultural chemicals or by reducing them as much as possible to create an environment that is easy for

A flying stork





Local farmers and children planting rice

aquatic creatures to inhabit, and by putting water into rice paddies even in winter after rice cultivation is over.

Ohara Hiroyuki, Chairman of Tajima Agricultural Cooperative (JA Tajima) Committee for Producing Stork Natural Rice, says, “Most farmers had only experienced the cultivation of rice in dry rice paddies. It was truly starting from scratch to create an inhabitable rice paddy environment for storks and realize tasty rice at the same time.”


But as the farmers went ahead with the farming method that nurtures storks, more aquatic creatures appeared in the rice paddies, and the growth environment for storks returned. JA Tajima named the rice cultivated in this way “Stork Natural Rice” and began selling it. Currently, about 300 farmers in the city cultivate this rice, producing more than 1,500 tons annually.

Stork Natural Rice is so tasty, with outstanding stickiness and sweetness, that it is not only purchased by consumers nationwide but is also exported overseas. JA Tajima invites consumers to events, such as a field trip to rice paddies and a rice-reaping experience program, in an effort to deepen the exchanges between consumers and producers.

“Traditionally, people in Tajima eat a local dish

called *barazushi*, which is a mixture of ingredients, such as fish and vegetables, scattered on sushi rice, meaning that they consume a lot of rice. Stork Natural Rice takes so much time and effort to produce in terms of water management and weeding that its price is relatively high. But we do not want to make the rice special. We hope that it will be rice that local people will enjoy eating every day,” says Ohara. In response to this producer’s wish, Toyooka City uses Stork Natural Rice for lunches at elementary schools in the city.

As the farmers proceeded with the farming method that nurtures storks, ecosystems full of biodiversity returned to Tajima. In this region, farmers using the standard cultivation method also began working on environment-friendly cultivation. In addition, by collaborating with the stockbreeders of Tajima beef, a local specialty, the local rice farmers provide them with the rice straw that remains after harvesting Stork Natural Rice and are given manure from the cattle in exchange. As this shows, an agricultural cycle is being created throughout the Tajima region.

Producers and consumers are joining hands through rice cultivation that nurtures storks and will make continued efforts to pass down a rich food culture to the next generation. 



A field trip to rice paddies organized by JA Tajima



Kanazawa's Kitchen and its 300-Year History

Omicho Market in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture, which is proud of its history of more than 300 years, is a lively covered market lined with local seafood and vegetable stores that bustle with local customers and tourists all year round.

SASAKI TAKASHI

If you take a ride on the Hokuriku Shinkansen from Tokyo, you can get to Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture, a city in the Hokuriku region on the coast of the Sea of Japan, in about two and a half hours. Kanazawa is a castle town that was built by the Kaga Clan in the Edo period (1603-1867), and there are still traditional streets and houses and culture in the city. Among other things, Omicho Market, which is located near Kanazawa Castle and is lined with about 180 stores including retail stores and restaurants dealing in fresh fish and vegetables, is popular with the local citizens, and is referred to by the nickname “Omicho.” The covered

market is a 15-minute walk from JR Kanazawa Station, and it attracts around 20,000 visitors a day on weekdays and 30,000 visitors a day on weekends.

“Two rivers—the Saigawa River and the Asano River—flow through Kanazawa City, and markets used to be held everywhere along the rivers. The Kaga Clan brought them together in the current location near Kanazawa Castle in 1721, which is said to be the origin of the Omicho market,” says Eguchi Hiroyasu, Managing Director of the Omicho Market Promotion Association.

Omicho flourished in the Edo period as a purveyor to the Kaga Clan. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), the market came to be lined with a wide variety of stores, including wholesalers, brokers and retailers, and developed as the “Citizens’ Kitchen.” A wholesale market subsequently opened in a different location, and Omicho became a market that mainly offered retail stores and food and drink stores selling fresh fish, fresh vegetables and fruit and dressed meat.

Because the market building had aged, a

All Photos: Courtesy of Omicho Market Promotion Association



Fresh fish and vegetables on sale at Omicho Market

redevelopment project commenced in 2007. Omicho Market Building, a five-story commercial facility, was completed in the corner of the market in 2009. After this new building was completed, the market became lined with stores selling fresh fish and fresh vegetables and fruit again, and the salespeople can be heard shouting, “Low Prices!” and “Fresh produce!” in lively, cheerful voices in the traditional manner.


“At Omicho, seasonal food products are offered each season, such as seafood from the Sea of Japan and farm products called “Kaga Vegetables.” This enables people to experience the cycle of the four seasons in close proximity,” says Eguchi.

Abundant seafood from the Sea of Japan, such as yellowtail, squid, crabs and shrimps, can be found at Omicho. The crabs, in particular, are known for their delicious flavor. The Crab Festival is held every November, when the market comes alive with visitors. In addition, the colorful Kaga Vegetables sold at the market are cultivated mainly in Kanazawa and are resplendent with the sense of the seasons that has been passed down since the Edo period. Typical examples of these vegetables are bamboo shoots in spring, Kaga Futokyuri (thick cucumbers) and Heta Murasaki Nasu (purple eggplants) from summer to fall and Gensuke Daikon (giant white radishes) and Kanazawa Ippon Futonegi (large spring onions) in winter. These seasonal foodstuffs have been arranged on beautiful traditional dishes since the Kaga Clan era, such as Kutani ware and gold-sprinkled

Kanazawa lacquer ware, as Kanazawa’s traditional dishes. They are known as “Kaga Cuisine.”

“The most notable feature of Omicho is face-to-face sales. The items are purchased each day and displayed in a store. When selling the products, the salespeople talk to the customers about what food items taste good each day and how to cook them,” says Eguchi.

When the Hokuriku Shinkansen commenced operation in 2015, it brought significant changes to the market. The number of tourists from Japan and overseas visiting Kanazawa City hit seven million, and visitors to Omicho also increased to around 1.6 times the previous number. The “Citizens’ Kitchen” also came to play a role as a tourist site. The Promotion Association gathered store managers and local regular customers, had repeated exchanges of opinions and distributed a market map in both Japanese and English explaining how to enjoy walking around and shopping at Omicho so that both local customers and tourists could enjoy shopping and sightseeing.

“Because the local people use Omicho on a daily basis, tourists can also feel at ease shopping there. Many people who live in suburban areas and usually shop at a nearby shopping center always come to Omicho to go shopping on the days of festivals and celebrations. We want to continue to cherish the unique longstanding appeal of Omicho,” says Eguchi. 



The renovated five-story Omicho Market Building

Preparing *dashi* from shaved *katsuobushi*



Dashi

The Foundation of Traditional Japanese Food

Umami-rich *dashi* stock brings out the flavor of *washoku*, traditional Japanese food.

SAWAJI OSAMU

The human tongue can identify five basic tastes—sweetness, sourness, saltiness, bitterness and umami. Of these, umami was discovered and named by Dr. Ikeda Kikunae at the Tokyo Imperial University in 1908. But people had long possessed the empirical knowledge that umami made food tastier, and meat, fish and vegetables that include components of umami, such as glutamic acid and inosinic acid, have traditionally been used to create *bouillon* broth in Western food, *gao tang* stock in Chinese food and *dashi* stock in *washoku* (traditional Japanese food).

“Dashi can be said to constitute the foundation of Japanese food,” says Takatsu Katsuyuki, President of Ninben. “It can improve the flavor of a dish’s ingredients, with dashi derived from *katsuobushi* having among other things a rich aroma.” Ninben was founded in Nihonbashi, Tokyo in 1699, and is one of Japan’s representative longevity companies. Since its establishment, the company has engaged mainly in the manufacture and retail of *katsuobushi*.

Katsuobushi is dried, fermented and smoked *katsuo* (skipjack tuna). *Dashi* can be derived from it in the form of *kezuribushi*, which are flakes shaved

All Photos: Courtesy of Ninben



Katsuobushi is pulled across a *kezuriki* (shaver) to create the *kezuribushi* used to make *dashi* stock

from the *katsuobushi* block. The thickness of the *kezuribushi* flakes used in dashi depends on what is being made.

Katsuo are abundant in Japanese coastal waters and have long been a source of protein for Japanese people. It was in the Edo period (1603-1867) that *katsuobushi* began to be used widely as an ingredient for dashi. In the early Edo period, the manufacturing method of boiling, smoking and drying *katsuo* to make *katsuobushi* was established, and it remains largely unchanged today. In the late Edo period, a

Takatsu Katsuyuki, President of Ninben,
at the Nihonbashi Dashi Bar

method of increasing umami by repeatedly drying and applying mold to the surface of the katsuobushi was developed.

Besides katsuobushi, in the Edo period *kombu* kelp gathered in Hokkaido was carried to Osaka, a commercial city often called the “Nation’s Kitchen,” by the Kitamae-bune ships traveling the Sea of Japan, leading to its spread as another ingredient for dashi. However, katsuobushi and kombu were so expensive that ordinary people began to use another ingredient to make dashi, *niboshi*, which are dried small fish such as sardines.

Soon other seasonings such as miso and soy sauce began to be mass-produced in the suburbs of cities like Edo (now Tokyo) and Japanese food culture developed rapidly. Typical Japanese dishes such as *soba* noodles and tempura came to be eaten widely.

“It is considered that a combination of seasonings, such as miso, soy sauce and dashi, led to the creation of today’s familiar *soba* and tempura sauces,” says Takatsu. “Dashi made from a combination of katsuobushi and kombu also came to be used in cooking. Umami can be greatly strengthened by the synergistic effects produced by two types of dashi.”

In and after the Edo period, dashi became the basis of Japanese food culture. In recent years, dashi has attracted renewed attention amid the spread of Japanese dishes to foreign countries and the



inscription of washoku on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

As a part of its *shokuiku* (food and nutrition education) activities, Ninben teaches washoku and dashi culture using katsuobushi in educational institutions and at events across the country. Today, premixed liquid and powdered dashi derived from katsuobushi and kombu are often used in Japanese home cooking. In the past, however, home cooks shaved their own block of katsuobushi using a *kezuriki* (shaver) to make dashi. In Ninben Shokuiku classes, participants learn how to shave katsuobushi using a *kezuriki* and make dashi, and often express surprise at the rich aroma of katsuobushi and the quality of the dashi produced from it, Takatsu says.

Goods including katsuobushi are sold at the Ninben Nihonbashi Honten, which opened at COREDO Muromachi in 2010, and shaving of katsuobushi is demonstrated at the store. The Nihonbashi Dashi Bar at the Honten also sells foods such as Dashi Soup using dashi made from katsuobushi, and *katsubushimeshi*, rice topped with freshly shaved katsuobushi. At lunchtime, many neighborhood office workers and shoppers visit the store.

“We never expected that dashi freshly made from katsuobushi would become so popular,” says Takatsu. “We will prepare even more places where people can come to know the charms of dashi and enjoy tasting it.”



Children learn how to make *dashi* stock at a Ninben Shokuiku class



A Festive Feast for Family and Friends

In Karatsu City, Saga Prefecture, a festival is held in early November during which many people maintain an age-old family tradition of laying out a lavish feast.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

In Karatsu City, Saga Prefecture, Karatsu Kunchi takes place on November 2-4 every year, attracting 500,000 visitors from Japan and overseas.

Karatsu Kunchi is the annual autumn festival of the Karatsu Shrine that commenced in the seventeenth century. The word “*kunchi*” in kanji means a day to “be grateful for the harvest and make offerings to the deity.” Fourteen magnificent floats more than 7 meters in height and weighing 2 to 3 tons in the shape of things such as *shishi* (lions), *ryu* (dragons) and *tai* (sea bream) parade through



Fourteen floats each with their own “story” and decorated using traditional methods and materials are a feature of the Karatsu Kunchi festival

Photos: Courtesy of Karatsu Tourism Association (top); Courtesy of Saga Prefectural Tourism Federation (bottom)

the city, pulled by a multitude of people. In 2016, Karatsu Kunchi was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as “Yama, Hoko, Yatai, float festivals in Japan” together with thirty-two other festive events.

In Karatsu City, the custom of serving a *kunchi* meal prepared on

large dishes during the festival has been passed down from generation to generation in many families. People invite those who have continuously helped them, such as their business partners, relatives, friends and acquaintances, and entertain their guests with the meal.

At a *kunchi* meal, simmered

Pharmacists Yoshitomi Hiroshi and Yayoi lay out a *kunchi* feast for some 200 people every year
Photo: Umezawa Akira



ara (a large grouper) is one of the representative dishes, but the dishes are not necessarily clearly defined and vary from family to family.

“In my family, we prepare the meal for about 200 people every year, and preparations begin more than a month before the festival,” says Yoshitomi Hiroshi, who runs a pharmacy in the city.

The Yoshitomi family prepares ten to twelve different dishes, including *kuri okowa* (glutinous rice steamed with sweet chestnuts), *chimaki* (glutinous rice and other ingredients wrapped and steamed in bamboo leaves), *zaru tofu* (unwashed tofu prepared and served on a bamboo basket), and *shirohanamame no satoni* (candied white kidney beans).

Hiroshi’s wife, Yayoi, says, “In late September, we get the plates and utensils that we use for the *kunchi* meal from a warehouse in order to wash them. We also purchase and prepare the ingredients for the meal, such as the sweet chestnuts to be used for

kuri okowa, during the month of September. If we didn’t make the arrangements early, we wouldn’t be able to get the necessary ingredients ready.”

In Karatsu, each town district also begins practicing the *ohayashi*, which is played with traditional Japanese instruments such as the *fue* (flute), *kane* (bell) and *taiko* (drum) at the time of the festival every night from October 1. The preparations made by people become increasingly frantic as the Karatsu Kunchi festival approaches. Around the eve of the festival on November 2, the final stage of the *kunchi* meal preparations begins, and a large number of dishes will be on the tables at noon on November 3.

When the festival begins, many people enjoy a *kunchi* meal by visiting the houses of their acquaintances around the city. It is also part of the fun of *kunchi* to have reunions with old friends and be introduced to new family members of relatives.

It costs a lot of money to prepare

such lavish dishes and drinks. It is said that in the olden days, people in the city spent the equivalent of three months’ salary on preparing the *kunchi* meal.

“Even now, it costs a lot of money. People in Karatsu begin saving money in reserve deposits after *Kunchi* ends every year in preparation for the next year’s *Kunchi*,” says Hiroshi. “We still look forward to holding *Kunchi* every year. Many people, including our relatives who live far away and the schoolmates of our children, show up whenever we have *Kunchi*. It is our greatest pleasure to see our guests sitting around our lovingly prepared dishes and having fun. We hope to pass down this wonderful tradition, which is unique to Karatsu, indefinitely.”



Left, huge simmered *ara* grouper are a traditional centerpiece of the *kunchi* meal. Right, the large feasts prepared vary from family to family but showcase local specialties

Photos: Courtesy of Saga Prefectural Tourism Federation

Gyoza City



Diners tuck in at the gyoza restaurant Kirasse

Utsunomiya in Tochigi Prefecture is leveraging its love of gyoza dumplings to pull in the crowds.

SASAKI TAKASHI

Gyoza, a Chinese dish, became popular fare in Japanese homes and restaurants after World War II. In China, gyoza—dumplings made of minced meat, vegetables and other ingredients wrapped in dough—are usually cooked by boiling. Japanese gyoza have thinner wrappers than Chinese gyoza and are typically eaten fried.

There are many gyoza specialty restaurants in cities across Japan. Yet Utsunomiya City in Tochigi Prefecture—home to some 300 restaurants serving gyoza—has had such success with its publicity campaign promoting gyoza that most people consider the city to be synonymous with the dumplings.

All Photos: Courtesy of Utsunomiya Gyozaikai

A nationwide household expenses survey conducted annually by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications triggered gyoza's leap into the spotlight as a popular food in Utsunomiya. In 1987, when gyoza was added to the list of survey items for the first time, the survey revealed that more gyoza dumplings were purchased per household in Utsunomiya every year than in any other city in Japan. Utsunomiya has held on to the top or second spot every year since.

“Gyoza has been a popular food with local people for a long time,” says Suzuki Akihiro, Director of Utsunomiya Gyozaikai. “Gyoza have traditionally been offered at festivals and celebratory events, and it was common for hungry children to drop in at gyoza restaurants on their way home from school. However, we didn't know that eating gyoza in this way was a custom peculiar to Utsunomiya.”

Officials at the Utsunomiya City Hall, who noticed

the early survey results, thought about establishing gyoza as a *meibutsu* (local specialty) of Utsunomiya and asked each local gyoza restaurant to cooperate. In 1993, Utsunomiya Gyozakai was formed with the support of thirty-eight restaurants. The City and Gyozakai held events featuring gyoza and drew up a map introducing gyoza restaurants. These came to be covered often in TV programs, newspapers and magazines, earning the city nationwide publicity for its “Utsunomiya Gyoza.”

Utsunomiya Gyozakai works closely with member stores to conduct a range of promotion activities based on the policy of “competition for taste and collaboration for advertising.”

“We acquired trademark registration in the name of Utsunomiya Gyoza, but we don’t create common menus or recipes. The gyoza restaurants in Utsunomiya all have different flavors, and many people enjoy eating at different restaurants in the city to enjoy these different flavors,” says Suzuki.

The gyoza restaurant Kirasse, which is managed by Gyozakai in the center of Utsunomiya City, has a corner for the daily gyoza specials served at member stores as well as five permanent stores. Because this enables customers to enjoy the flavors of various types of gyoza at one place, Kirasse is a popular spot, where a lot of people wait in line on holidays.

In addition, “Utsunomiya Gyoza Festival” is held




A serving of gyoza with dipping sauce

in a park in the city over two days every November and attracts about 150,000 visitors from Tochigi and neighboring prefectures in the Kanto Region, including Tokyo. “Utsunomiya Gyoza Festival in Yokohama” is also held every April outside the Red Brick Warehouse, a tourist attraction in Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture, a long way from Utsunomiya. It is a large-scale event that attracts about 150,000 visitors over three days.

According to a survey conducted by Utsunomiya City in 2017, nine million visitors came to the city from other prefectures on an annual basis to enjoy eating gyoza. Utsunomiya City also promotes itself as a city of cocktails where leading Japanese bartenders gather, and as a city of jazz where various jazz concerts are held for local promotion making use of the popularity of gyoza. In addition, the city has professional soccer, basketball and bicycle road racing teams. On November 2 and 3, 2019, the 3-on-3 basketball club teams’ world tour final, the Utsunomiya Gyoza Festival and the jazz festival “Miyazaki Jazz In” were held simultaneously, and the city was alive with many people.

“Using gyoza as a pillar of our activities, we want to promote the charms of Utsunomiya’s sports and culture, both within Japan and overseas,” says Suzuki.

In Utsunomiya, gyoza is a source of energy not just for the citizens but for the City itself. 



At restaurants, gyoza are fried in a special pan



The Deep Mochi Culture of Iwate

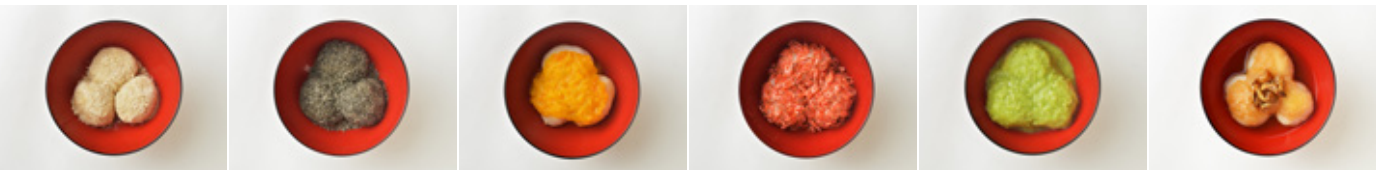
Mochi is a traditional Japanese food enjoyed around the country. In Iwate Prefecture, however, a unique mochi culture has developed and been passed down from generation to generation for some 400 years.

SATO KUMIKO

Mochi, which is traditionally prepared by steaming glutinous rice, pounding it in a wooden or a stone mortar until it becomes sticky, and rounding or flattening it, has been considered a sacred food since ancient times. Even today, eating or offering mochi is a custom associated with significant events

such as the New Year or equinoctial week. In Iwate Prefecture, Ichinoseki City and Hiraizumi Town among other places have such a characteristic culture of mochi cuisine that they have a mochi calendar that requires local people to eat mochi on particular days throughout the year.

Ichinoseki and Hiraizumi was once the territory of the Sendai domain that ruled the stretch of land from what is now southern Iwate Prefecture to Miyagi Prefecture and northern Fukushima Prefecture during the Edo period (1603-1867). The first lord of the domain, Date Masamune, is known as an outstanding samurai general who laid the foundations of the domain's prosperity with numerous policies.



All photos: Courtesy of Sekinoichi Sake Brewery Co., Ltd.

- 1 In a spring custom, small portions of mochi dressed in nine different ways are served
- 2 The classic mochi honzen spread
- 3 Guests enjoy a mochi honzen meal following the traditional etiquette

According to Sato Koki, Chairman of the Ichinoseki Mochi Culture Promotion Council, “Based on an order from the Sendai domain, farmers were required to make mochi and offer it to the gods on Days 1 and 15 of every month. I think that it was one of the domain’s policies on cultural promotion featuring locally produced glutinous rice.” This habit subsequently extended to ordinary people as well. More than sixty days of mochi cuisine throughout the year, such as at the turning points in the seasons, were recorded on a mochi calendar.

“The culture of mochi cuisine originated from samurai culture, which places importance on etiquette. Even today, detailed etiquette exists for mochi cuisine on ceremonial occasions. Because my wife is from a different part of Sendai domain than I am, she was confused early on in our marriage,” says Sato.

The samurai class ate a dish called *mochi honzen* (full-course mochi dinner). Honzen is a formal dish for celebrations that is considered to originate from the etiquette of the samurai class during the Kamakura period (1185-1333). Although the Sendai domain complied with this protocol, it also invented mochi honzen, introducing dishes with mochi in them. Mochi honzen is accompanied by small dishes of *zunda* (sweet crushed *edamame* green soybeans) and *june*, which people eat by tossing ingredients such as perilla and *numaebi* (freshwater shrimps) with mochi, as well as *zoni*, which is soup with mochi in it. At a mochi honzen party, a person called the *otorimochiyaku* manages the party. After the *otorimochiyaku* says, “I am very happy to have all of you here today,” people enjoy eating their mochi meal while following instructions from the *otorimochiyaku*.

“Our food culture seems unique in the eyes of people in other regions. The local people said that mochi was everywhere around the country. But we


came to consider that mochi culture in Ichinoseki and Hiraizumi could be said to be a local food culture that is peculiar to this region,” says Sato.

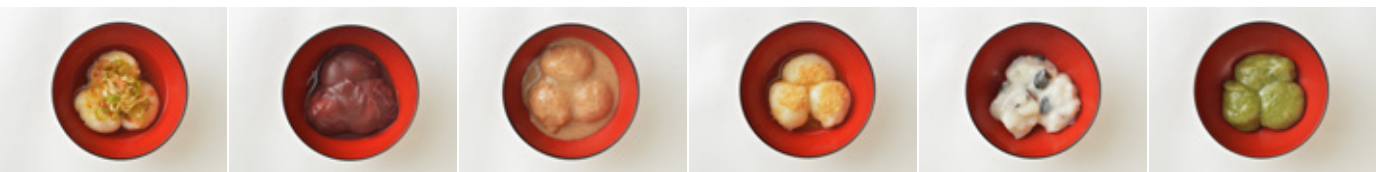
The Ichinoseki Mochi Culture Promotion Council, which was established in 2010 as a result of a call from Sato, sends out information on mochi culture in Ichinoseki and Hiraizumi to people inside and outside the region, and holds seminars to teach mochi culture through lectures and practice. Since 2012, the Council held the Nationwide Local Mochi Specialties Summit every year, at which event characteristic local mochi specialties are gathered from around the country. (The event is scheduled to be held under the new name of “Mochi Festival” in April 2020.) In 2016, Ichinoseki and Hiraizumi were designated as “SAVOR JAPAN” areas certified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries as key areas that send information about traditional local food cultures overseas.

In recent years, mochi dishes in Ichinoseki and Hiraizumi, which were originally adorned with colorful seasonal ingredients, have included an even greater variety of ingredients including cheese, tomato and curry, and now number more than 300.

“Mochi dishes have become extremely casual. However, we would like to properly pass the background of the creation of the culture of mochi cuisine and our long-standing tradition to future generations,” says Sato.

At specialty restaurants and Japanese-style inns in Ichinoseki and Hiraizumi, you can eat casual *mochi gozen* (a bowl of mochi) or, if you make a reservation, authentic mochi honzen meals following the traditional etiquette, including a message from the *otorimochiyaku*.

I recommend visitors to Ichinoseki and Hiraizumi try to fully enjoy the 400-year history and culture of eating mochi as well as its flavor. 



Some of the more than 300 mochi dishes prepared in Ichinoseki and Hiraizumi



WASHOKU

The Expression of Tradition and Expertise

- 1-3 Washoku dishes prepared by Aso Shigeru
- 4 The entrance to Aso's restaurant in Kyoto
- 5 A dining room in the restaurant



All Photos: Courtesy of Hanakagami

Inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, "Washoku" is the traditional dietary culture that expresses Japanese tradition and expertise.

SASAKI TAKASHI

In general, Japanese food contains a wide variety of dishes, ranging from traditional recipes to culinary creations from foreign countries adapted to Japanese tastes, such as ramen and curry rice," says Aso Shigeru, owner of Hanakagami, a traditional Japanese restaurant in Kyoto, and chairman of the board of the All Japan Authorized Cooks Association. "However, the term *washoku* not only refers to food, such as *kaiseki-ryori* (a traditional multi-course meal) and *kyodo-ryori* (regional specialties that have been passed down for generations), it includes the plates, bowls and trays for serving the food, flower arrangements and hanging scrolls adorning the room, and the layout of the garden that opens out from the room. We can say that *washoku* expresses Japanese tradition and expertise."

In 2013, Japan's traditional *washoku* cuisine was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Aso is one of the Japanese cuisine experts, along with academics and government officials, who contributed to this successful listing. Born in Kyoto in 1948, Aso enjoyed eating from a very young age, and his love for delicious food created a path for him to become a chef.


For the dishes served in his restaurant, Aso emphasizes seasonality, creating food tailored to the occasion. For example, the New Year's festival with a history of over 1,000 years called *Hatsu Tenjin* takes place at the Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in Kyoto on January 25. It features the custom of eating oysters, which are in season in winter. Aso makes sure to include oyster dishes on the menu of his restaurant.

"There are special dishes to be eaten in accordance with annual events. Thanks to this custom, we know what to eat at home and can consume seasonal ingredients with gusto. This is known as living wisdom."

The proposal by Japan to UNESCO specified that *washoku* has characteristics not only related to dishes, such as respect for a variety of fresh ingredients and their natural flavors and a well-balanced healthy diet, but also a close relationship with the four seasons and annual events in Japan, described as representation of the beauty of nature and seasonal transitions and close links with the country's annual events, such as the New Year. For example, on New Year's Day people do *mochitsuki* (making rice cakes by pounding steamed rice in a wooden mortar with wooden mallets) or eat *osechi ryori* (special food beautifully served with local ingredients in stacked boxes) to welcome the New Year's gods.

To protect this food culture, *shokuiku* (food education) programs have been actively conducted in schools and communities throughout the country. There have also been initiatives to spread Japanese food and *washoku* internationally. As part of these efforts, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has appointed Goodwill Ambassadors to Spread Japanese Cuisine every year since 2015. Aso, who was appointed as an ambassador in 2016, consulted with Japanese restaurants in Shanghai, Bangkok, Macau and other locations. He realized that the skills of local cooks had dramatically improved and Japanese ingredients had become more readily available with improvements in freezing technology, making very delicious Japanese food increasingly accessible overseas. He points out improvements in the handling of food ingredients as a challenge to be addressed in the future.

"In the case of fish, for example, the slaughtering method can have a significant impact on the freshness and taste. The same goes for vegetables—the quality can change greatly with a little ingenuity applied to harvesting and transportation. I believe that these skills cultivated in Japan will not only make food delicious but also aid in the effective use of resources."

Aso not only wants to disseminate cooking and flavoring techniques from chefs of Japanese food but also other professional skills and knowhow from experts in a variety of related fields. 

Japanese people have a custom of eating thick sushi rolls called *ehomaki* on the night of Setsubun on February 3 or 4. However, *ehomaki* that remains unsold at convenience stores and supermarkets are disposed of in large amounts, which has become a problem

Promoting Reduction of Food Loss and Waste

Japan is undertaking a wide range of measures to reduce its food loss.

THE CONSUMER AFFAIRS AGENCY

As can be seen from Goal 12 of the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, reduction of food loss and waste is one of the most important international challenges today.

Japan is estimated to have an annual food loss of six million tons or more. With many people around the world suffering from nutritional deficiencies, reducing food loss is an issue that Japan, which depends on imports from overseas for many of its foods, needs to address in earnest.

In Japan, the Act on Promotion of Food Loss and Waste Reduction came into force on October 1, 2019. This law defines reduction of food loss as a social measure for preventing still-edible foods from being discarded. It was enacted to encourage all Japanese people to tackle the issue independently in an effort to promote food loss reduction as a national movement.

According to a consumers' attitude survey conducted by the Consumer Affairs Agency in 2018,

public recognition of the food loss issue is 74.5%. In response to the question, "In which dietary setting are you particularly conscious of food waste?," 55.7% of respondents noted a setting in which they discard food that is past its expiration date without eating it, 48.7% noted a setting in which they see others' leftovers at restaurants, 37.5% noted a setting in which they see their own or their families' leftovers, and 21.5% noted a setting in which they throw away waste (kitchen waste in particular).

In response to the question, "What can you do to help reduce food loss?," 60.7% of respondents, the largest number, answered, "Eat up all of the food." Some 40% or more answered, "Preserve food by freezing," "Avoid cooking too much food" and "Avoid throwing away food that is past its expiration date right away, and decide whether the food is still edible by one's own determination." Other answers also included not ordering too much food at restaurants and remaking leftovers into other dishes. The Consumer Affairs Agency has established "The Kitchen of the Consumer Affairs Agency" on Cookpad, a cooking recipe website, to introduce recipes that are free from food waste.

In the food distribution industry, food products are returned or disposed of due to business practices



Japanese schools are taking measures to reduce food loss from school lunches



At this restaurant at Kawagoe City Hall, Saitama Prefecture, diners can reduce the amount of rice they receive when ordering a meal


such as manufacturers' delivery deadlines fixed by retailers and the fixing of stores' sales deadlines, which leads to food loss. In response to this situation, some companies take measures for improvement, such as relaxing delivery deadlines and extending expiration dates with quality preservation technologies. In addition, progress is also being made in the development of containers and packaging that are useful for reducing food loss by making use of advanced technologies, such as containers that are able to control food degradation after their packages have been opened and prolong the freshness maintenance period, packaging that is able to increase the barrier performance of oxygen and steam so that food can be kept for a long time, or containers and packaging the correct size for using up or eating up food.

Restaurants and hotels encourage customers to order an appropriate amount of food, offer a service that allows customers to take their leftovers home, and provide the option of smaller portions on the menu. Retail stores sell products divided into small portions and urge customers to purchase goods from the front of the product shelves (products whose sales deadlines are close).

Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture, is promoting the "Let's Eat Up Everything! 30/10 Campaign," which is intended to reduce leftovers by encouraging people

to remain seated and enjoy eating for 30 minutes after a toast and ten minutes before the end at dinner and drinking parties, and the city also recognizes restaurants and companies that encourage food loss reduction as official members of the campaign. Similar movements to the 30/10 Campaign are spreading nationwide.

Fukui Prefecture implemented the "Delicious Fukui Eat Up Everything Campaign," a campaign for cooking and eating an appropriate amount of delicious food using fresh ingredients, ahead of all other prefectures in Japan. In 2016, Fukui Prefecture appealed to other local governments to participate in its network, resulting in the establishment of the "Nationwide Delicious Eat-Up Campaign Network Council." With sharing and distribution of information and the nationwide collaborative campaign being the pillar of activity, the area of activity had expanded so extensively that 408 local governments are participating in the network (as of October 10, 2019).

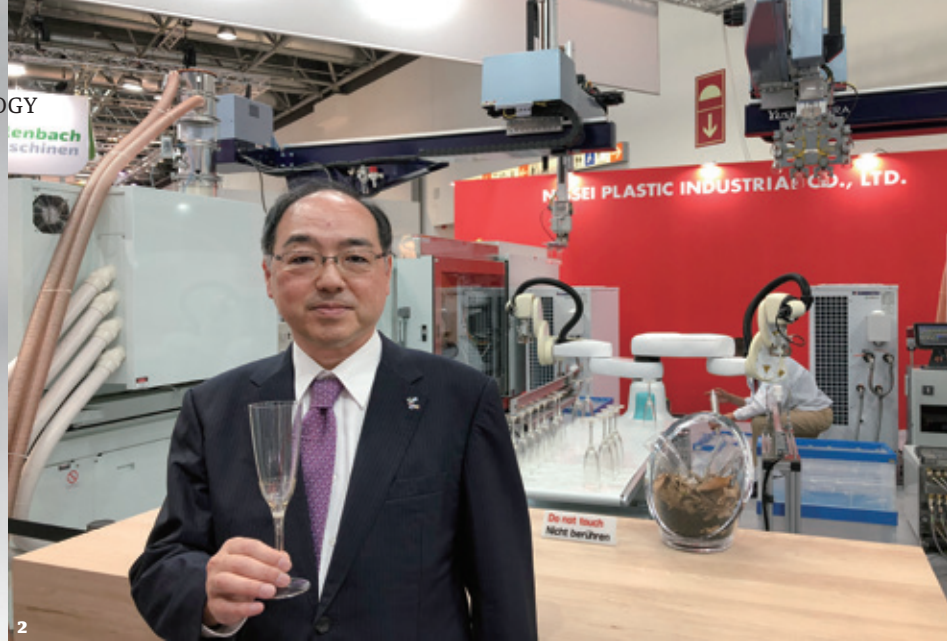
A demonstrative project for reducing household food loss by the Consumer Affairs Agency in Tokushima Prefecture found that the amount of food loss had been reduced by about 20% by undertaking measurements of food loss in homes, and that the amount of food loss had been reduced by about 40% by making efforts to reduce it as well as measurements. These findings can be considered to show that the project participants noticed how much food loss they were generating by measuring its amount and that they later improved their actions. Based on these results, the Consumer Affairs Agency produced awareness-raising materials and has used these materials to promote measures for reducing household food loss. 



The 1st Nationwide Food Loss Reduction Convention was held in Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture, in October 2018



1 2



Low-Cost Bioplastic to Reduce Plastic Waste



3 4



5

A Japanese company has developed a technology for mass-producing biodegradable plastic products at low cost which is attracting attention around the world.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

MANY plastic products made from oil, including PET bottles and food trays, can be found all around the world. Disposal of these plastics affects ecosystems because if they are burned, they contribute to global warming, and if they flow out into the sea, they create marine litter and microplastic pollution. The

World Economic Forum announced in 2016 that by 2050, the amount of plastics drifting in the sea around the world is projected to surpass the amount of fish in terms of weight.

In this situation, biodegradable plastics are attracting attention as a replacement for the current plastics made from oil. Biodegradable plastics are considered

- 1 Champagne glasses made of biodegradable polylactic acid
- 2 Komatsu Michio in front of the biodegradable plastic products manufacturing machine
- 3 A close up of the Champagne glasses injection molding machine in action
- 4 Biodegradable plastic products on display at the K 2019 plastics and rubber trade fair in Düsseldorf, Germany
- 5 Biodegradable plastic products including baby tableware on display at a reception celebrating the 83rd birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan at the Lyon Consulate Office in France

Photos: Courtesy of Komatsu Michio (2,3,4 and 5); Umezawa Akira (1)

to lessen the environmental load because they are ultimately decomposed into carbon dioxide and water by microorganisms in the natural world. Polylactic acid, one of the biodegradable plastics, which is made from corn starch or sugarcane, began to be used as a material for products such as dishes and garbage bags about twenty years ago. But polylactic acid was so hard to process and polylactic acid products were so expensive that they did not become popular at all.

Komatsu Michio, the president of Komatsu & Associates, a professional engineer's consulting firm in Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture, overcame the processing challenges and developed a technology of mass-producing polylactic acid products at lower cost than by using existing methods. The main reason why polylactic acid is hard to process is that it is far more viscous than plastics made from oil. Generally speaking, to process plastics, people use the processing method called injection molding, which involves heating and melting plastics, injecting the molten plastics into a mold, putting them into a shape, waiting for them to cool down and solidify, then ejecting them from the mold. In the case of highly viscous polylactic acid, however, the materials do not flow to the end of a mold cavity by normal injection molding, and the article cannot be molded well.

To solve this problem, Komatsu focused his attention on a super critical phenomenon. Matter can exist as a solid, liquid or gas according to the temperature and pressure conditions. But if you keep applying pressure and heat to matter, it will enter a super critical phase in which it is indistinguishable from a gas or a liquid.

"Matter in a super critical phase is called super critical fluid and has both the diffusiveness of a gas and the solubility of a liquid. By mixing carbon dioxide in a super critical phase into melted polylactic acid, we succeeded in increasing the fluidity of polylactic acid," explains Komatsu.

Molding polylactic acid had another significant issue. Ordinary plastics gradually solidify when they cool down, whereas a heat-resistant grade of polylactic acid contracts rapidly when it reaches a certain temperature. Once it reaches this state, it is caught in the


mold core and impossible to eject. Because of this, it takes a lot of time and effort to get the molded article out, and they cannot be produced at the same pace as ordinary plastics.

Komatsu also overcame this issue by making use of his experience of working as a mold expert for a leading electronic parts manufacturer.

"I put an infrared temperature sensor in a mold and measured the temperature of the polylactic acid in units of thousandths of a second. After repeating the measurements many times, I found that as soon as the temperature falls to 110°C, the polylactic acid begins solidification. I found that the polylactic acid could be detached easily by capturing that timing and injecting air into the gap between the mold and the polylactic acid article," says Komatsu.

By using the technology developed by Komatsu, a company based in Aichi Prefecture succeeded in mass-producing tableware for babies that had good heat resistance and strength. In January 2018, Komatsu won the Prime Minister's Award at the Seventh Monodzukuri Nippon (Japan's Manufacturing) Grand Award, which is granted to individuals or groups with advanced technology in the manufacturing industry. The developed technology acquired numerous patents around the world.

In January 2018, the European Union (EU) proposed putting an all-out ban on all inter-regional disposable plastic containers by 2025 and declared that it would aim to make all inter-regional plastic packages recyclable by 2030. The demand for biodegradable plastics as materials to cope with these environmental regulations is expected to grow. Orders for the biodegradable baby tableware are pouring in from overseas, including Europe, as well as from around the country.

"We still have an issue in terms of the high material costs. But we have recently seen an increase in the number of polylactic acid manufacturers and production volumes, which leads to lower costs. In this situation, I think that products using polylactic acid will gradually become popular. I will be extremely happy if the technology I developed helps preserve the natural global environment," says Komatsu. 



Fine French Cuisine, *Kappo* Style

Chef Dominique Corby from France serves fine French cuisine using Japanese ingredients and seasonings at his friendly *kappo*-style (open kitchen) restaurant.

SATO KUMIKO

FRENCH *Kappo* Dominique Corby, a restaurant run by Dominique Corby from France, is located near Shimbashi Station in Tokyo. The dishes served at the restaurant all look like gorgeous French cuisine. However, Corby's dishes use little flour, butter and cream, which form the basis of French cuisine. Instead, his dishes use traditional Japanese seasonings, such as soup stock and miso. The miso he uses is of his own making.

"I hope that customers will enjoy savoring the taste of all the menu items through to dessert, the last item on the menu. That is why I try not to use anything that weighs heavily on the stomach, such

as butter and flour," says Corby. "And Japanese soup stock culture is extremely profound. Soup stock extracted from quality kelp and shiitake mushrooms creates an outstanding, delicate flavor."

Corby became a chef when he was 14 years old. Recognized in French cuisine circles early on in his career, Corby was headhunted by La Tour d'argent, a three-star restaurant in Paris, and assumed the post of head chef of La Tour d'argent Tokyo, Tour d'argent's only branch restaurant outside France, at the age of 28. He subsequently moved to a hotel restaurant in Osaka where he encountered *kappo*, which determined the course of direction of Corby's current restaurant. *Kappo* restaurants are restaurants that serve traditional Japanese-style cooking and where it is common for customers to enjoy dining while sitting at the counter facing the kitchen.

"I became a regular customer at a *kappo* restaurant in Osaka. At this *kappo* restaurant, I could relax and enjoy my meal alone and also talk to the chef over the counter. I made up my mind to open that style of restaurant myself," says Corby.

Corby launched his own business in 2015, opening



Dominique Corby's homemade miso
Photo: Kato Kumazo



Corby preparing food
at the counter
Photo: Kato Kumazo



Sake is served with a
dish at the counter
Photo: Courtesy of
Dominique Corby



Bottles of sake and
French wine
Photo: Kato Kumazo

French Kappo Dominique Corby in Tokyo. He has since relocated his restaurant several times, but he has consistently adhered to the kappo style that enables customers to watch Corby cooking and talk to him.

His restaurant has a menu change two or three times a month. Each time, Corby introduces ingredients that he has found himself in many parts of the country and develops the menu further.

“The climate of Japan is so diverse that each region has many delicious ingredients of its own, such as seafood, meat and vegetables,” says Corby.


In early October when we interviewed him, Corby was using Higashidori beef from Aomori for the salad, the appetizer; sea urchins from Hokkaido for the amuse bouche—a *chawan-mushi* steamed egg custard; and figs from Osaka for the dessert. Corby also introduces ingredients that are unique to Japan to his cooking, such as ginkgo nuts and blood clams, which are not used in French cuisine.

Corby spends about a year looking for ingredients and participating in events in the local regions of Japan. During these trips, he enjoys visiting local

sake breweries.

“Today, people enjoy sake in Europe and the United States as well. However, unknown small local sake breweries have many types of truly tasty sake,” says Corby.

Corby’s restaurant always has about seventy brands of sake in stock. Some of them are brewed by a sake brewery managed by a married couple, and others are brewed by a sake brewery run solely by women. All these brands of sake have extremely small production quantities and rarely appear on the market. But Corby visits the sake breweries in person, tastes their sake and purchases them directly from the producers. At his restaurant, Corby recommends the perfect sake match for each dish from among his stocks of sake and French wine.

Corby was for many years the executive chef of the Japanese branch of French cooking school Le Cordon Bleu, many of whose graduates now work around the country. Corby has a dream to open a new French kappo restaurant together with several graduates of the school as apprentices and looks forward to realizing this dream. 

World Ballet “Superpower” Sends Message of Peace

Ballet legends Morishita Yoko and Shimizu Tetsutaro continue to perform – and teach – with peace in their hearts.

ROB GILHOOLY

THE performers take their places, their colorful, finely decorated costumes reflecting endlessly in the mirrors that cover the walls of the Matsuyama Ballet Foundation studio in central Tokyo. Right on cue, they respond with light-switch immediacy to the rousing music, a shimmering, harmonious wave of graceful body arches and feather-light limb movements, twenty-two ballerinas come together as individual, yet inseparable parts of a living work of art.

At the center emerges Morishita Yoko, who glides effortlessly *sur les pointes* as choreographer Shimizu Tetsutaro, the Foundation’s Executive Director, moves purposefully from ballerina to ballerina, making minute adjustments to positioning and posture that are unidentifiable to the untrained eye.

Morishita and her partner Shimizu are towering figures in Japanese ballet. In the 1970s and ‘80s they

wowed audiences far and wide, with Morishita’s emotion-laced bravura earning her plaudits even in the established power houses of Europe. Her performances also secured her a gold medal at the prestigious International Ballet Competition in Varna, Bulgaria—the first time for a Japanese national to win a major European competition.

She subsequently became the first Japanese ballerina to gain recognition on the international scene, earning her the sobriquet “Prima Ballerina of the World,” and “Pearl of the Orient.”

Her success in Bulgaria came in 1974, when Morishita was just 25, but by then she had already been lacing up her pointe shoes for 22 years having been sent to ballet classes aged three by her parents to make their sickly child stronger.

Then, the ballet climate in Japan was very different, says Morishita, who continues to hone her art as prima ballerina at the bustling Matsuyama Ballet Foundation, which she runs with Shimizu.

“Our *senpai* (seniors) only had music scores to work from, which must have been a struggle and nothing like today when everything is available at the press of a button,” says Morishita, who was born



Video by Satoshi Tanaka

in Hiroshima just two years after the very first performance of *Swan Lake* by Japanese performers.

“But they took it very seriously and studied meticulously with great sensitivity, processed it and passed it on, which is a strength of the Japanese, I think.”

This ultimately created something that, while still highly “technical” at its core, was less weighed down by centuries-old rules, etiquette and status, partner Shimizu adds. “I think that’s why it has flourished here,” he says.

Ballet dates back to the Renaissance courts of fifteenth-century Italy, but didn’t make its way to Japan until the beginning of the 1900s. Then, classes were offered at the opera department of the Imperial Theater in Tokyo, with instructors often Russian artists who had fled the social and political unrest of the time.

But it wasn’t until after World War II that ballet began to find a wider appreciation. Schools opened up one after another, and by the time an 11-year-old Morishita had persuaded her parents to let her move to Tokyo to study at a ballet school, it had started to thrive in the capital.

One of the first schools to open after the war was the Matsuyama Ballet Foundation, which was founded in 1948 by Shimizu’s father, Masao, and renowned ballerina Matsuyama Mikiko. Morishita decided to join the Foundation because she was so impressed by Matsuyama’s dancing.

Today, there are around 4,500 ballet schools across Japan attended by more than 400,000 students, according to the Association of Japanese Ballet Companies. The numbers show Japan is an unparalleled “ballet superpower,” Shimizu says.

This is also reflected in the increasing numbers of Japanese who have found success on the international stage. While Morishita and Shimizu blazed a trail in the 1970s, performing alongside some of ballet’s greats, such as Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn, today there is barely a ballet troupe worldwide without Japanese members.

The principal of the Royal Ballet in London and the Polish National Ballet are both Japanese female dancers. And Japanese ballerinas regularly stand on the winners rostrum at contests around the globe. In 2012, of the twenty-one finalists at the prestigious Prix de Lausanne competition, five were Japanese nationals.

That same year Morishita Yoko was awarded the

Shimizu makes some minor adjustments



Ballerinas in rehearsal



A children's ballet class

Praemium Imperiale to add to her long list of accolades, which include the Laurence Olivier Award in 1985.

After accepting the award in Tokyo, she commented that “flashy” dancing alone could never guarantee success and ballerinas aimed to “inspire hope, dreams and courage,” she said.

“When we take to the stage we ballerinas don’t perform just to show off our skill and art,” says Morishita, who still rehearses six hours every day. “There’s still conflict in the world, and we perform with a message of peace in our hearts. Ballet is the international art of peace.”

Her humble dream is that ballet will become a lingua franca for peace. **W**

The Kure Line



Experiencing the Seto Inland Sea by Train

The sightseeing train Setouchi Marine View on the Kure Line close to the sea

The Kure Line in Hiroshima Prefecture offers passengers beautiful views of the Seto Inland Sea and access to historic port towns and islands along the route.

SAWAJI OSAMU

THE Kure Line, operated by West Japan Railway Company (JR West), in Hiroshima Prefecture connects the 87 kilometers between Mihara Station in Mihara City, where the San'yō Shinkansen bullet train stops, and Kaitaichi Station in Kaita Town in about two hours and 20 minutes. Much of the Line, which was completed in 1935, runs close to the Seto Inland Sea.

“Some sections of the Kure Line run right along the coastline,” says Nakano Yuta of JR West Hiroshima Branch. “Passengers can enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Seto Inland Sea with its many islands from the train windows.”

A sightseeing train that allows passengers to fully enjoy the scenery of the Seto Inland Sea as though on a sea trip is Setouchi Marine View. The two-car train is painted a marine blue and the front is dressed with paddles and a lifebuoy. Inside, the train is decorated with compasses and nautical charts evoking a cruise ship ambience. The train makes one round trip daily between Hiroshima Station and Onomichi Station via the Kure Line, mainly on weekends and holidays.

“Setouchi Marine View has large windows on the side of the train facing the sea so that passengers can fully enjoy the scenery. Box seats and sofa seats help make for a relaxing sightseeing experience. The views in the section between Tadanoumi Station and Aki-Saizaki Station are particularly beautiful. Here the train runs so close to the coast that passengers can enjoy the full expanse of the sea through the windows,” says Nakano.

The Seto Inland Sea has been an important maritime transportation hub and abundant fishing ground since ancient times, and there are many




Video by Satoshi Tanaka

large and small coastal ports along its shores. Visiting ports close to a station is one of the attractions of the Kure Line. Kure is a major port on the Line. The port grew as a military base during the Meiji period (1868-1912) and has since developed as a port for domestic and international vessels, with many shipbuilding factories also operating after World War II. At Kure, visitors can see scenes unique to a shipbuilding town, such as dockyard sheds and a row of large cranes. The hit 2016 animated movie *In This Corner of the World* was set in Kure, drawing many people to the port to visit the bridges and warehouses that appeared in the movie.

Passengers on the Kure Line can cross to islands in the Seto Inland Sea by ferry from the ports along the way. Ohkunoshima, about 15 minutes from the port of Tadanoumi and Tadanoumi Station, is a popular island to visit. Ohkunoshima, which has a circumference of around four kilometers, is known as the “island of rabbits” and is inhabited by more than 1,000 wild rabbits. Many tourists from Japan and abroad visit just to see the rabbits hopping around on the island.

Traditional Japanese townscapes remain along the Kure Line. Takehara City Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings, a 15-minute walk from Takehara, is particularly famous. Takehara has thrived as a leading Japanese salt producer since salt pans were created on the reclaimed land of Takehara Bay in the early Edo period (1603-1867). There is a row of houses and sake cellars built by merchants who made a fortune in the salt making, shipping and sake brewing businesses, mainly from the Edo period to the Meiji period in the preservation district, and the traditional Japanese townscapes are beautifully preserved. The district is often used as a location for shooting commercials, TV dramas and movies.

“In Takehara, which is known as the ‘little Kyoto of Aki’ [Aki is an old name for Hiroshima], tourism that makes use of its townscapes is flourishing. Visitors can have a relaxing time in hotels and cafés located in traditional houses,” says Nakano.

A ride on a Kure Line train delivers not only the beautiful scenery of the Seto Inland Sea but also the history and culture cultivated by those living alongside it. 



- 1 A Setouchi Marine View carriage
- 2 Kure Port
- 3 Takehara City Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings

Courtesy of © Aomori Prefectural Government



GI JAPAN PRODUCTS



CLAMS

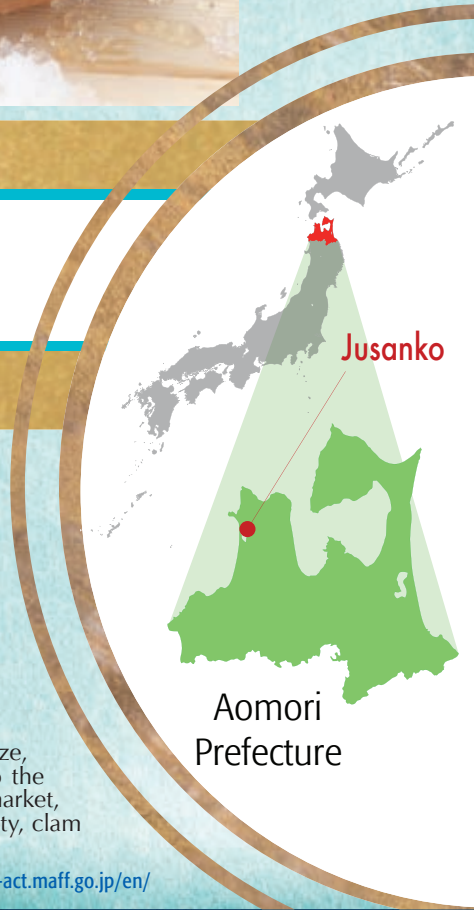
Jusankosan Yamato Shijimi

Yamato Shijimi is a species of small, edible brackish water clam endemic to Japan. "Jusankosan Yamato Shijimi" is caught in Jusanko (Lake Jusan), a brackish water lake in western Aomori Prefecture close to the northernmost tip of Honshu, the main island of Japan. (In eastern Aomori Prefecture there is another GI-registered Yamato Shijimi named "Lake Ogawara Brackish Water Clam.")

Jusanko is located downstream of the Iwaki River, which originates in the Shirakami Mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The lake, which is only a few meters deep, has a sandy substratum and maintains a good level of dissolved oxygen, providing excellent conditions for the growth of Yamato Shijimi.

The clam is dredged by hand or fishing boat and sieved for size, with those smaller than the shipping standard being returned to the lake floor. Only the healthiest, fully grown clams make it to market, where they are prized for use in clam soup and, in a local specialty, clam ramen noodles.

For more information about Japan's GI products, go to <https://gi-act.maff.go.jp/en/>



Jusanko

Aomori Prefecture

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