Sho in the Kamakura Period

In the previous issue of Food Culture, I noted that both liquid sho and unrefined sho were manufactured during the Heian period (794-1185); that the term sho was generally used to refer to unrefined sho; and that the use of liquid sho gradually declined. In this continuation of my article, I would like to discuss the situation in the subsequent period; that is, during the medieval age, up until the appearance of soy sauce.

The Chiri-bukuro, a dictionary thought to have been compiled during the Bun-ei and Koan eras (1264-87) of the mid-Kamakura period (1185-1333), contains an entry for miso. The passage explains that miso was originally written using the characters matsu (meaning “powder”) and sho. The matsu of miso was later mistakenly substituted with a different character, mi, meaning “not yet.” It notes that the term kisho was generally used when the ingredients are not ground into a powder, and that miso was used when the ingredients were used in their powdered form. For this reason, the dictionary says, the character matsu or “powder” should not be used when writing miso, but the character mi (“not yet”), which is similar to the character for “powder,” used instead. The passage goes on to state that the kishi radical was now used in conjunction with the character mi (“not yet”), and that so (“formerly”) was written instead of the character sho. The character sho could be read either as kisho or aemono, which indicates that in the mid-Kamakura period, kisho was used in granular form and may have been the same as the unrefined product known as aemono.

The Chuji-ruki, a record of recipes and manners of cooking compiled during the late Kamakura period, contains references to ground kisho used as a seasoning. The sweated fish dish called mukago-yaki, for example, was made by taking slices of carp with skin still attached, coating them with suri-bisho (ground kisho), and then browning them.

The Development of Nimono

The most common meat dishes during the Heian period were preserved foods such as dried fish, kubokutsuzakimonono (a kind of salted and fermented fish), and simmered dishes, along with the occasional broiled dish, soup, or dish mixed with miso or other seasonings. The medieval era saw the variety of such dishes increase, along with the development of nimono, or simmered dishes, which formed the basis of the vegetarian diet that was common at the time, particularly in Zen temples. The Teishin-ourai, compiled in the early Muromachi period (1333-1373), gives examples of vegetarian dishes that should be served during a Buddhist mass. These include simmered dishes made with burdock, seaweed, and butterbur.

The Chiri-zakku Motogaturi (1568) describes the following episode. Motojui Samanokami (Motojui Ashikaga) was an epicure. One day, he summoned his cook and ordered him to carefully prepare a soup made with broiled carp. After broiling one side of the fish well, the cook presented it to Motojui in hot miso soup. Motojui began to eat the meal and found it to his liking, but after eating half the fish he turned it over to find the other side uncooked. Enraged, Motojui summoned the cook. The cook was certain he would be put to death, but in the end he was spared. In this story, the broiled fish was simmered in miso.

The various diaries and guides to customs and manners that appeared from ancient times until the medieval age contain numerous references to dishes, but little is known about how they were seasoned. The story above relates to Motojui, the son of Takanui Ashikaga, who later went on to become the first chief administrator of the Kanto district. This particular episode relates to the time when he was a head official in charge of the stables (1352-59), and is a valuable source of information indicating that miso was actually used in simmered dishes at the time. As this example shows, miso played an important role in the development of simmered dishes throughout the medieval era.

The Appearance of Tate-Miso

Recipe books from various cooking schools indicate that by the mid-Muromachi period, miso was commonly used as an ingredient in simmered dishes and soups. In addition, there was widespread use of tare-miso, or processed liquid miso extract, as a seasoning.

Tare-miso is a liquid seasoning made by adding water to miso, boiling it down, and then straining the mixture by suspending it in a cloth bag. A method for making tare-miso can be found in the Ryori Mogattari, compiled in 1643. According to this source, three sho (one sho is about 1.8 liters) and five go (one go is about 0.18 liters) of water were added to one sho of miso. The mixture was boiled until it was reduced to approximately three sho, and then strained using a cloth bag. The same book contains a different recipe for nama-dare, which is a form of tare-miso prepared without cooking.

Namo-dare, three sho of water was added to one sho of miso, which was then strained through a bag. However, as historical records from the Muromachi period contain no reference to nama-dare, it is assumed that both products came to be known as tare-miso.

A special bag was used for the manufacture of tare-miso. The Toji-hyakugo-monjo contains a number of entries under the heading Komyokohodoogakubumi. The first of these refers to the use of a tare-miso bag on December 30, 1432, and the entries continue up until December 31, 1446, indicating that a new tare-miso bag was prepared for the Komyoko, a Buddhist mass, each year. In other words, tare-miso was already being manufactured, using special bags, in the first half of the fifteenth century. In addition, according to a December 1, 1454 entry in the Komyokohoyokuku-sanyojo, the budget for the Komyoko mass requires money to be set aside for tare-miso bags, indicating that these bags were also bought and sold.

Cooking with Tate-Miso

Cookbooks from the Muromachi period contain numerous recipes using tare-miso. These include the following:

1. "Jellied dishes. Small carp should be used, but other kinds of fish may also be used. Simmer in tare-miso until the mixture congeals, then serve." (Jellied crucian carp) From the Shojoryu-hoshobo, 1489.
2. "Oriental pickling gourd soup. A wax gourd may be used instead. Cut the gourd into thick slices, one sun and five bu (approximately 4.5 cm) long. Simmer in tare-miso. Add shaved dried abalone." (Oriental pickling gourd with abalone) From the Yamanouchi-cyoreisho, 1497.
3. "Matsukawa-iri is made by cutting diamond shapes into the flesh of a sea turtle. Cut diagonally. When simmered, the putty resembles that on pinecones. Simmer in tare-miso." (Simmered sea turtle fillets with lattice cut)
4. Preparation of bean-curd refuse: “Cut the cuttlefish. Simmer in usu-tare. Add greens." (Simmered cuttlefish pieces) Recipes three and four are from the Hoko-ikigaki, late Muromachi period.

Meals prepared for weddings in samurai families during the mid-Muromachi period also included dishes made by simmering yams and pheasant meat in tare-miso. One of these recipes involved cutting peeled yams into pieces into one sun (approximately 3 cm) long, simmering them in tare-miso with pheasant meat, and then sprinkling amanori seaweed over the top (Tonomakasa-no-koto). Diaries from this period also indicate that a variety of simmered dishes prepared using tare-miso were offered when entertaining guests. An August 2 entry in the Kinsuninshin-ke-zaiki refers to the preparation of a tare-miso dish containing rice cakes, boiled and dried sea cucumber, abalone, dried cuttlefish and beans.

As these examples reveal, tare-miso and usu-tare, a diluted version of tare-miso, were used in a variety of simmered dishes. In addition, tare-miso was also used in making soups and dressings, indicating that it was used during the medieval age as a liquid seasoning prior to the appearance of soy sauce. This is following the so-called tare-miso period that soy sauce and tamari eventually appear on the scene.

Tou-Miso in the Tamonin-nikki

The Tamonin-nikki was a diary compiled from 1478 to 1618 by Eishun and other Buddhist priests at the Tamonin, a small temple attached to Nar’s Kofukuji temple. The diary...
contains details on the manufacturing processes for miso, hishio and various other foodstuffs, and is a valuable record in understanding how miso and hishio were used during this period. Included are references to yoko-miso, ooha-miso and tou-miso, along with recipes for each of these varieties of miso.

With tou-miso, we find that the manufacturing process was not yet well established, and that a variety of different methods were used. These included a method that calls for mixing boiled soybeans with crushed, roasted wheat or barley, or both to make koji, then adding salt water, after which came fermentation. This procedure is extremely similar to that used in the manufacture of soy sauce during the Edo period. References to "tou-miso soup" and "casks of tou-miso stock" suggest that the finished product was in liquid form.

As for the proportions of the ingredients, the oldest surviving recipe for tou-miso is from June 12, 1550. This states that soybeans, wheat and salt should be added in equal parts, and that the amount of water added should be equivalent to the combined volume of the other ingredients. There are numerous references to tou-miso recipes in later texts, and most of these indicate similar procedures. Barley was sometimes used instead of wheat, but usually both barley and wheat were added.

If we compare these proportions with the relatively early recipes for soy sauce found in records from the early Edo period, we find very similar figures, as shown in the table below. This also indicates that tou-miso was a forerunner of soy sauce in the Edo period.

The question remains, however, as to why the term tou-miso is used when it first appears in the Tamonin-nikki in 1550 when, as we shall see below, the term shoyu (soy sauce) was already in use at that time. The term shoyu appears in the Tamonin-nikki in at least two places after 1530. Yet the relationship between the two is unclear, as there is no mention of how shoyu is made, and the term tou-miso continues to appear after this.

The main ingredient in hishio is barley; the amount of soybeans is equivalent to roughly thirty percent of the amount of barley. Moreover, the soybeans are added in more or less a granular state. The amount of water added is also just over thirty percent, which is small compared to the amount used when making tou-miso. However, one passage refers to the need for a smaller quantity because the hishio had recently become watery. Apparently, the finished product resembled name-miso.

The Appearance of the Term Shoyu

The term shoyu was first used in China. The Chinese characters for shoyu appear in both the Sankaisakiyo (written by Rinko) and the Chakudoro (edited by Hoko Goshi) in the thirteenth century. Although we do not know how it was made, we know that it was used as a seasoning. By the time the Eikigai (figure above), compiled by Katoeki, appears, in roughly the fourteenth century (late Yuan or early Ming dynasty), however, we do see details of the soy sauce manufacturing process. Questions have been raised concerning the relationship between the soy sauce made according to this method and the soy sauce we use today, but there is no doubt that something called shoyu was being manufactured in China as early as the fourteenth century.

In Japan, the term shoyu first appears in dictionaries and diaries in the sixteenth century. An early example is the Buemon-setuyoshu (edited by the Shinobu-ji monk). This appears to be the first time the contemporary characters were used. An entry in the same diary for August 24, 1582 uses different characters to refer to soy sauce. By this stage it seems that the Tamon-in had also started using the term shoyu when referring to tou-miso.

Next we find an entry for shoyu (using contemporary characters) in the Eikrinbon-setuyoshu (1597). The oldest of these dictionary-like setuyoshu is thought to be the Buemonbon-setuyoshu. Following its publication, similar volumes appeared successively, but none of these contains any reference to shoyu. The entry in the Eikrinbon-setuyoshu appears to be the first reference to shoyu in a setuyoshu. By this stage it seems clear that soy sauce was in common use, both in name and in practice.

An entry in the Rokukan-nichiroku for September 8, 1559 mentions a breakfast menu that included a dish of maitake mushrooms simmered in soy sauce. Subsequent entries also refer to dishes made by simmering various foods in soy sauce. In addition, as mentioned before, the Nippogi-sho, Japanese-Portuguese Dictionary, published in 1603, mentions that soy sauce is "frequently added when cooking meals and to add flavor to food." The term shoyu for soy sauce, tamari, a product made from miso, was also being manufactured at this time. Entries in the Japanese-Portuguese Dictionary confirm that by the Edo period, both soy sauce and tamari were in common use. Soy sauce is described as "a liquid used to season food, equivalent to vinegar but saltier. Also known as suzaki." The entry for susaki describes it as "a liquid made from wheat and beans frequently used in Japan to season and flavor food." Tamari, on the other hand, is described as "a pleasent-tasting liquid made from miso and used to season food.

The above entries indicate that soy sauce is a liquid made from wheat and soybeans, while tamari is a liquid made from miso. Soy sauce later evolved into a unique product, quite distinct from both miso and tamari. In the next issue of Food Culture, I hope to examine this topic further.

Notes:
1. The Hocho-kiikoji (late Muromachi period) describes suhi- shio as follows: “Suzu-hishio is made by cutting the fish and putting them in salt. It is then sprinkled with salt and sake is poured on it.” This is thought to be the standard method of preparation, but in the example cited, it is taken literally to mean ground hishio.
2. Daisukon-komonjyo, Lewake-junozan (edited by the Historiographical Institute, University of Tokyo).
3. For further information on fermented soybean products of the Tamon-in-nikki, refer to Japanese Food and Sake (Hajime Yoshida, Ishibun Shoin).
4. Questions have been raised regarding the references to soy sauce appearing in the Sankaisakyo and the Chakudoro. In fact, references to eating habits in China (pp. 352-3) (translated and edited by Takashi Nakamura, Heibonsha Toyobo Banko).
5. Regarding the soy sauce recipe in the Eikigai, Osamu Shinoda, in History of Chinese Food (Shibata Shoten), states on page 255: “It notes that when making soy sauce, combining one of beans and six kin of salt with a large quantity of water will result in the beans sinking to the bottom and the oil floating to the top. It is unclear whether this is a reference to what we know today as soy sauce, or whether it is simply odd.”
6. The same book also gives the traditional reading hishio for the character shio.
7. Japanese Food and Sake (p. 212).
8. Osakou ke ryou-cho, a recipe book generally regarded as dating from the Muramachi period, contains numerous recipes using soy sauce. However, much of the text was added during the Edo period, and as this may extend to those passages relating to soy sauce, I have chosen not to include quotations from this source.