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

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

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

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

Tuesday, November 28
The Way of Rice: Sushi & Beyond

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

Saturday, December 2
Rice in Asia: The Grain that Shapes Culture

Morning Session
Greeting: John Wheeler, Vice President, Japan Society
Panel Discussion 1: A Lunch with Rice
Karen Dugald & Jeffrey Alford, Journalists/Photographers
Charlotte Anderson, Anthropologist, Wesleyan University
Toshinao Yoneyama, Dean, Otemae University, Kyoto, Japan

Panel Discussion 2: The Way of Rice: Rice & Beyond
Chee Beng Tan, Chairman, Dept. of Anthropology, Chinese University of Hong Kong
Panel Discussion 3: Rice Culture and Cuisine in Vietnam
Nicole Routhier, Chef/Award-Winning Cookbook Author

Afternoon Session
Panel Discussion 1: Sacred Offerings in Japan
Charlotte Anderson, Anthropologist, Gerald Villoit, Art Historian/Photographer
Panel Discussion 2: Perspectives on Rice (god of harvests) at Pattani Inari Shrine
Karen Smyers, Professor of Religion, Wesleyan University
Panel Discussion 3: Rice on the Japanese Table
Elizabeth Andoh, Journalist/Food Culture Specialist
Panel Discussion 4: White, Green, Yellow—Rice Used in Rituals of Chinese-Vietnamese
Nir Avieli, Anthropologist, Hebrew University

Reception: Mochi (rice cake) pounding demonstration

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

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

The audience was also treated to tales of some of the unique rituals that persist throughout Japan, including rain ceremonies, which play such a vital role in rice cultivation. Japanese food expert Elizabeth Andoh then presented a special lecture on The Way of Rice: Sushi & Beyond, and continued with panel discussions throughout the morning and afternoon sessions.

Dr. Andoh began with a slide presentation entitled Landscapes of the delights of Asian rice. Guests also enjoyed a demonstration of the Japanese New Year’s ritual of oshechi-yori, traditional Japanese dishes served at New Year, before the audience was treated to a selection of oshechi-yori dishes.

Day two of the forum ended with a meal of Vietnamese food and sushi, prepared to remind guests of the close ties between rice and the Vietnamese New Year’s ritual of moi-chi-thok, or rice-cake pounding.

At the reception
Mochi pounding demonstration
Shoyu (soy sauce) tasting workshop
2000 Gregory Cherin (p. 25)

Close Ties to Asian Culture
Under the theme of Rice in Asia: The Grain that Shapes Cultures, the second day’s symposium focused on the role of rice not just as food, but as an essential element in the region’s festivals and rituals.

The day began with a slide presentation entitled Landscapes of the delights of Asian rice. Guests also enjoyed a demonstration of the Japanese New Year’s ritual of oshechi-yori, traditional Japanese dishes served at New Year, before the audience was treated to a selection of oshechi-yori dishes.

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

Toshinao Yoneyama, dean of Otemae University, presented a lecture entitled The Culture of Rice, which focused on the close ties between rice and the Vietnamese New Year’s ritual of moi-chi-thok, or rice-cake pounding.

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

Welcoming Address: Michael Soburn, President, Japan Society
Lecture & Slide Show: The Way of Rice: Sushi & Beyond
Naomi Duguid & Jeffrey Alford, Journalists/Photographers

24 FOOD CULTURE

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

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

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

Lecture and slide show by Naomi Duguid and Jeffrey Alford

Yuzaburo Mogi, President & CEO, Kikkoman Corporation

2000 Gregory Cherin (p. 25)