

REPORT: Getting to Know Japan Through Fermented Foods Fermentation Seminar, The IUNS-ICN 22nd International Congress of Nutrition in Tokyo



The 22nd International Congress of Nutrition (ICN) held in Marunouchi in December 2022 offered Japanese Cultural Experience Programs giving participants exposure to Japanese culture. These programs were part of a framework provided by Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau for the purpose of supporting international conferences. Together with EAT & LEAD, a project active in the Marunouchi area, DMO Tokyo Marunouchi prepared a special program "Fermentation Seminar" held on December 8. At the seminar, a lecture of Japanese fermentation culture was given to the attendees and they enjoyed the tasting of Japanese fermented food dishes.

EAT&LEAD is a reboot of the SHOKUIKU MARUNOUCHI project (Dietary Education), which has been in the area for some time. Based out of MY Shokudo Hall & Kitchen located on the third floor of Tokiwabashi Tower, the project brings together Marunouchi chefs, cooks, and office workers to ponder many themes centering around food, including health and beauty, regional revitalization, and food culture. Fermentation is one such major theme, and the project implements vibrant activities such as the permanent installation of the Miso Soup Bar and the fermentation event, HAKKO MARUNOUCHI. Thanks to these past achievements, we could implement a fermentation seminar this time. The fermentation seminar with 2

sessions - one in the afternoon and one in the evening, aroused the interest of many participants and the 20 available slots for both sessions immediately filled up.

The program offered a lecture on fermentation and foods by Masahiro Tsujita from Kojiya Saburoemon, a traditional miso manufacturer in Nerima district, Tokyo, and Hisae Daikokuya, a culinary researcher who runs the cooking school “Kotobukiya” in Kamakura city. The composition of seminar allowed participants to learn about Japanese fermentation culture experientially by tastings and meals.

Kojiya Saburoemon is a miso manufacturer established in 1839. They make additive - free miso using the traditional method starting with creating “koji (malt)”. Kojiya Saburoemon is also enthusiastic about dietary education and carries out activities such as holding workshops on miso at nearby elementary schools.



Mr. Tsujita asked the seminar participants, “What’s the difference between food spoilage and fermentation? Also, how different the fermented foods in your countries from those in Japan?” He gave an explanation on koji mold, the “national mold” of Japan, and on miso, a fermented food particular to Japan. There are different types of koji, such as malted rice, malted barley, and malted soy, which make the difference between rice miso, barley miso, and soy miso. While listening to the lecture, participants tasted a simple miso soup made by dissolving each

type of miso in hot water so they could grasp the difference in the savoriness and flavor of each. Incidentally, the participants liked barley miso the most. The participants could be seen many times nodding along as they listened to Mr. Tsujita explain the differences in miso flavors, as if agreeing with his words.



Hisae Daikokuya served dishes prepared with fermented foods and gave detailed explanations about them. They were served the four dishes of “pickled Nerima radish,” “salad with soy sauce koji and sesame dressing,” and “salted koji rice balls/rice balls grilled with amazake, soy sauce, and miso flavoring.” The salad with soy sauce koji and sesame dressing was a dish of garland chrysanthemum and Kintoki carrots seasoned with soy sauce koji and sesame. Soy sauce koji brings out a natural sweetness. The participants appeared impressed when told the dish was made without any sugar. The rice balls were prepared using rice cooked with salted koji. They were brushed with a mixture of amazake (a sweet, fermented rice drink), ginger juice, and miso, then grilled. Ms. Daikokuya noted the key is adding salted koji to the rice when it is cooked to increase the sweetness of the rice. In addition, the miso soup was prepared with vegetable broth made from dried kelp and dried shiitake mushrooms, and contained Shogoin radish, taro, and deep-fried tofu. The resulting flavor was very mild. Of course, miso from Kojiya Saburoemon was used.

getables



Following the lecture, there was a discussion and Q & A time while the participants enjoyed the meal. There were discussions on the benefits and usage of fermented foods as well as questions about key points and ways of using miso overseas.

The reaction of the participants was very positive, and the lecture was filled with their smiles from beginning to end. When we asked about their impressions after the event, we received the following feedback.

“I joined because I’m interested in Japanese food culture. The aroma of miso is so good, and I was really interested in the ways to eat it by combining different ingredients. It was a good experience.”

(A participant from Southeast Asia) *“There are also many fermented foods in my country, but I feel Japanese fermented foods are very mild and tasty. As I expected, food culture is a good theme to know a country. I think it’s a great idea for this kind of program to be offered at ICN.”*

“Next time, I’d like to learn about sake as a part of fermentation.”

Mr. Tsujita, the lecturers from Kojiya Saburoemon, also commented about having a fermentation seminar as a side event for international MICE.

“Naturally, there were many nutrition professionals since it’s a food-related international MICE, and it seems like there are many who gained some interest in Japanese food culture. I feel being able to share Japanese fermentation culture with such people is extremely meaningful. Food culture represents a country and is an important factor in forming preferences and identity. Knowing food culture leads to understanding the country, so I believe that the demand for seminars like this will continue to grow in the field of international mutual understanding.”

This was the first time Ms. Daikokuya lectured at a seminar for non-Japanese, but she remarked that she was satisfied with the participants' high appreciation for the Japanese food.

“The people have various backgrounds, so this time I put a menu of vegetable-based foods together, including the broth. I’m happy they told me the foods made with fermented seasonings were delicious.” I made the pleasant realization that not only Japanese people, but people from other countries also enjoy the taste of fermentation. According to books, koji isn’t the star of the show, but instead enhances the flavors of ingredients and makes them better. Maybe the participants appreciated the flavors of Japan because of the koji. It reminded me of the great capacity of koji.”

It was a great success for DMO TOKYO Marunouchi to be able to welcome visitors with Japanese-style meals--featuring fermented food culture, no less--in Tokyo, a global gourmet capital of various food cultures.

Furthermore, by offering food-themed experiences to nutrition experts and researchers attending in the conference, we were able to contribute to increase the participant satisfaction. DMO TOKYO Marunouchi is making it possible to offer and coordinate contents tailored to MICE in a variety of fields. We will continue to build on these achievements unique to Marunouchi area to attract and support the business events.