

Japan America Society of Colorado
25th Anniversary Celebration

October 2, 2014

Consul General Ono

-Remarks

-Washoku Presentation (10 min)

Good evening everyone. Thank you very much for having me tonight, for this meaningful reception in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the Japan America Society of Colorado. On this occasion, I am sincere in expressing my honest respect for its contributions to developing the Japan-US relationship over many years.

It has been three years since I came to Denver as Consul General of Japan. During this time I have always been happy to assume my duties in full cooperation with the Japan America Society of Colorado, in a relationship tied by strong bonds with the Consulate. In our efforts together, I truly believe we have been able to obtain a great deal of success.

Tonight, I would especially like to thank the founding members of this Japan America Society, who are here, for their long and remarkable efforts to strengthen the friendship and trust between the people of Japan and Colorado. Many younger members, including President Hiraga, now stand together with them, to further support and carry on the strong foundations of JASC that have been built. I am greatly encouraged by these figures within JASC, and confident that the relationship between Japan and Colorado will continue to strengthen and develop still more over time. Congratulations are certainly in order for all.

Now, the theme of this reception calls for a joyful celebration, with food culture at the forefront. So tonight, I have the distinct pleasure and privilege to talk with you about “Washoku”, or traditional Japanese cuisine.

Many of you may know that in 2013 Washoku was officially registered by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in the world. It was chosen largely in respect to the following characteristics:

- 1 Its use of a variety of food materials and fresh flavors
- 2 Its benefits for a healthy diet and good nutritional balance
- 3 Its reflection of the beauty of nature and changing of the four seasons
- 4 Its close connection to annual social functions

Like many Japanese traditions, Washoku is based on the essential spirit of “Respect for Nature”. This connection with nature influences many parts of our daily life, annual events, and other important life moments. Washoku refers to dietary aspects and those related social practices of our lives, in union with this spirit of nature.

Japan is geographically diverse and generally mountainous, stretching from tropical south to chilly north, and offers a rich variety of natural environments from region to region. There are four distinct seasons, and so a variety of seasonal ingredients are available.

These resources and ingredients have come to be regarded as a gift from nature, used sustainably and with a sense of reverence by the Japanese people. In this sense, Washoku can be seen as a social practice, based on a comprehensive set of skills, practices, and traditions under that general theme of respect for nature.

As a social practice, Washoku is closely connected with annual events. Especially, the traditions surrounding New Year's celebrations involve Washoku, and pass along basic knowledge of social customs and cultural characteristics from generation to generation.

People come together at the New Year for rice pounding traditions, to make 'mochi' rice cakes to share among community members and with local deities. Families gather from all over Japan at the New Year, and special meals are prepared to celebrate the holiday gathering and share wishes of good health in the coming year.

These beautifully decorated dishes include favorites such as O-Sechi, Zoni, and Toso. O-Sechi dishes are a delicacy made from various locally available ingredients, beautifully packed in special nested boxes. Each item is said to hold an auspicious meaning, which is passed from old to young in continuing the tradition.

Beyond annual traditions, a respect for nature can also be seen overall in the traditional settings and handicrafts of Washoku. Tableware is generally decorated with a natural motif, using flowers or leaves or bamboo as a theme.

Further, the well-known phrase "Itadakimasu", which is said before each meal with a clap of hands, is also rooted in an appreciation of nature. The phrase literally means 'I humbly receive these gifts'.

The practical and spiritual aspects of Washoku are handed down in daily home life as skills and manners. Proper seasoning and home cooking is called 'Ofukuro-no-aji', or 'Mom's Home Cooking', and is passed down each generation.

As you can see, Washoku very much plays a role in fostering family and social cohesion within Japanese society. In sharing at community events and gifted ingredients from nature at mealtime, bonds of fellowship and solidarity are reinforced.

I hope this has given you all a better idea of the spirit behind Washoku Japanese food, as a social practice rooted in a deep respect for nature. Please try to keep this spirit in mind today and whenever you enjoy Washoku, and do be sure to say Itadakimasu! Thank you for your interest.

Once again, congratulations on this very special occasion. I am sure the next 25 years will be as successful as the last 25 years for the Japan America Society of Colorado.