

the japan times

SOY SAUCE SPECIAL

THE BEST OF JAPAN



Attendees mill about the booth of the National Federation of Soy Sauce Manufacturers Cooperatives at the Foodex Japan convention in March.

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JAPAN SOY SAUCE ASSOCIATION

A VERSATILE INGREDIENT

FROM THE ‘SHOYU ISLANDS’ TO THE WORLD

Japanese soy sauce is gaining popularity as pro and amateur chefs explore the fundamental flavoring’s potential

Soy sauce is the foundation of Japanese cuisine, and its global popularity is surging thanks to the boom in Japanese food culture. In 2013, the year that UNESCO designated washoku as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, there were fewer than 55,000 Japanese restaurants outside Japan. By 2023, that number had risen to nearly 190,000. As Japanese cuisine continues to advance and win new fans, worldwide interest in shoyu, as it is known in Japanese, is on the rise.

The history of soy sauce spans millennia. In ancient China, foods like meat and grain were widely fermented, and these techniques eventually reached Japan. It is thought that soy sauce production developed out of techniques for fermenting soy beans and grains with salt. Surviving records of Japanese court banquets from the eighth to 12th centuries indicate that each guest received a set of four seasonings that could be used as preferred — salt, sake, vinegar and a paste called *hishio*, which is thought to have been similar to present-day soy sauce or miso. By the late 16th century, a seasoning not too different from modern soy sauce came into use in Japan. In the following centuries, variations reflecting regional food cultures emerged.

According to Setsuya Hannya, managing director of the Japan Soy Sauce Association, soy sauce has three main aspects: color, flavor and aroma. Soybean proteins and wheat starches are the main elements, and as they ferment and mature, they develop complex flavors, colors and aromatic compounds that give soy sauce its characteristic color and bouquet. “The way they interact with each other during the extended fermentation process produces a harmonious balance of taste and aroma,” Hannya said.

It is this complex harmony, Hannya maintains, that gives soy sauce the ability to enhance the flavor of so many dishes.

To produce soy sauce, a batch of steamed soybeans and roasted wheat is “inoculated” with a small amount of *kōji* mold (a starter



Setsuya Hannya JUNYA KIYONO

culture), which is allowed to spread until it completely covers the mixture. In this stage, temperature and humidity are carefully controlled by veteran brewmasters, with air periodically allowed to enter the container.

The finished mixture, known as *kōji*, is then combined with brine to create a mash called *moromi*. The salt in the brine, which gives soy sauce its characteristic salty taste, suppresses undesirable microorganisms while allowing beneficial ones to thrive.

It is at this stage that fermentation begins. The *moromi* is stirred continuously and aged for six to eight months, or up to two years if fermenting at ambient temperatures. This patient process allows mold, yeast and lactic acid bacteria to do their work. The specific varieties and amounts of microorganisms vary by brewery and influence flavor and aroma in subtle ways.

Pressing the mature *moromi* yields unpasteurized, or raw, soy sauce, which is typically heat-treated to halt microbial activity and sterilize the liquid ahead of final bottling. Alternatively, it can be filtered without heating to remove microorganisms and sold raw. As these microbial processes confer the unique characteristics of each brewery upon the sauce, each has its own signature flavor

and aroma. Enjoying the variety of flavors available from Japan’s 1,035 soy sauce producers, and selecting different types for specific purposes, is one way to appreciate its diversity.

Not soy sauce, but shoyu

Because Japanese soy sauce has distinctive characteristics, the Japan Soy Sauce Association often uses its Japanese name when addressing international audiences to distinguish it from soy sauce produced elsewhere.

Hannya cited diversity as one of the special features of shoyu. The Agriculture Ministry divides it into five types: *koikuchi*

Soybean proteins and wheat starches are the main elements, and as they ferment and mature, they develop complex flavors.



A collage of soy sauce labels arranged as a map of Japan celebrates the rich variety of regional tastes.

(common), *usukuchi* (light-colored), *saishikomi* (refermented), *tamari* (full-bodied) and *shiro* (pale). Each type is best suited to particular uses and preferences.

The most popular variety in Japan is *koikuchi*, which is brewed from roughly equal amounts of soybeans and wheat. Its deep flavor, mouth-watering aroma and bright crimson-orange color give it wide appeal in cooking or at the table. As a general-purpose condiment, *koikuchi* accounts for over 80% of domestic soy sauce production.

Usukuchi shoyu, a light-colored variety from western Japan, is essential to the Kansai region’s food culture. As Kansai dishes began to spread throughout Japan, demand for *usukuchi* rose, and today it is produced outside Kansai as well. Though the basic production method is not too different from that for *koikuchi*, extra salt is added to lighten the color. *Amazake*, a sweet, fermented rice drink, also goes into the mash to produce a mellower flavor. At around 11% of total production, however, *usukuchi*

stands a distant second to *koikuchi*.

Tamari shoyu is mainly produced in the Chubu region, which comprises central Honshu. It is darker and more viscous than *koikuchi*, and its umami-rich flavor and unique aroma are more intense, making it a good match with sashimi and sushi. The primary ingredient used in *tamari* production is soybeans, with little to no wheat. Wheat-free *tamari* is suitable for gluten-free diets and is very popular outside Japan. Around 2% of the shoyu produced in Japan is *tamari*.

Born in Yamaguchi Prefecture, *saishikomi* shoyu is widely produced in the Sanin region and northern Kyushu. Many soy sauces are brewed by mixing brine with *kōji*, but *saishikomi* uses raw soy sauce instead of brine, making it much darker and more strongly flavored. Using soy sauce to make soy sauce in effect involves a double round of fermentation, thus the appellation “refermented.” Around 1% of Japan’s shoyu production is *saishikomi*.

Shiro shoyu, originally from Aichi Prefecture, is a pale amber variety, even lighter in color than *usukuchi*. The main ingredient is wheat, with a minimal amount of soybeans. Sporting a mild but notably sweet flavor and a distinct aroma, *shiro* accounts for less than 1% of soy sauce brewed in Japan.

Even among these five types of soy sauce, each of which calls for a different approach, brewers often approach their craft in their own way. The traditional method known as *honjozo* (standard brewing) yields around 90% of the shoyu produced in Japan. But a brewer may also take a hybrid approach, adding amino acid solutions to the *moromi* midway through the process and continuing fermentation and aging for a month or more while stirring it. Adding amino acid solutions or other ingredients to raw *honjozo* soy sauce is yet another hybrid approach. All these techniques enhance the umami that is characteristic of the final product.

Along with the sheer variety of shoyu available in the country, there is a wide range

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Soy sauce enhances the flavor of dishes with its unique properties: it produces an appetizing aroma and rich color when heated, and helps mask unwanted odors such as fishiness.

GETTY IMAGES



Scores of products recognized by the 51st National Soy Sauce Competition in October 2024

JAPAN SOY SAUCE ASSOCIATION



Crowds peruse the displays of the Kioke Shoyu Export Facilitation Consortium and the National Federation of Soy Sauce Manufacturers Cooperatives at Foodex Japan in March.

→ Continued from page B2
of seasoning products based on the sauce as well, with each formulated for a specific culinary use. These include ponzu shoyu (soy sauce blended with citrus juice and vinegar), *kaki* shoyu (soy sauce with oyster extract), kombu shoyu (soy sauce with kelp umami) and a dizzying array of products for seasoning noodles and other dishes that appear frequently on Japanese tables.

A sauce for each cuisine
Hannya noted that Japan's tremendously varied regional food cultures are behind the diversity in shoyu.

"Japan has 47 prefectures. Today, with the exception of Okinawa, every prefecture has at least one soy sauce producer. The number of brewers varies by region, but there are

Japan's soy sauce brewers are keepers of an iconic element of Japanese culture ... but the industry is facing a shortage of successors.

Hannya also pointed to the unmatched versatility of soy sauce.

"This is an all-purpose seasoning that works well in almost any culinary setting and application, including dipping, topping, grilling and simmering," he said, adding that it complements a wide range of cuisines and can even be used in sweets.

Hannya further noted that soy sauce has a wide range of functional properties that make it ideal for many cooking applications. Even a small amount can boost flavor, whether during prep or at the finishing stage. In addition, shoyu neutralizes fish odors, making it ideal for sashimi and grilled fish. When mixed with ingredients containing sugar and heated, such as teriyaki sauce or yakitori dipping sauce, it browns beautifully and its aroma stimulates the appetite. Its salt content and acidity have bacteriostatic properties that promote food preservation, allowing pickles made with soy sauce, for example, to stay fresh longer. Soy sauce can also heighten perceived sweetness and reduce perceived saltiness. And when added to dashi, it boosts the already strong umami of

the broth even further, creating an ideal dipping sauce for noodles or tempura. The broad advantages offered by soy sauce are what make it ideal for so many chefs.

Spreading around the world
According to Hannya, international reach is the third distinctive feature of Japanese soy sauce.

"Full-scale entry of Japanese soy sauce into international markets began in 1957, when Kikkoman, Japan's largest soy sauce producer, established a sales company in the U.S. Kikkoman eventually started producing soy sauce in the U.S., and awareness of the flavor of Japanese soy sauce started to spread across America. Today, there are six Japanese soy sauce producers with overseas breweries, producing soy sauce at 13 locations in eight countries and regions."

Presently, Japan produces 680,000 kiloliters of the sauce domestically, while international demand, which is met by local production and exports from Japan, amounts to roughly half that volume. Efforts to expand production and consumption beyond Japan's shores have had a major impact in promoting the internationalization of this iconic seasoning. Outside Japan, Hannya said, soy sauce is considered such a compelling pairing with meat dishes that it gave rise to teriyaki sauce, a soy sauce-based creation that appears on menus in all sorts of overseas eating establishments.

Hannya also noted that this condiment has become most at home in the U.S., with roughly 60% of American households keeping a bottle on hand, while many European chefs, including top names in France, are increasingly using soy sauce to add a hint of Japanese flavor to their dishes.

To understand the appeal of soy sauce, the fact that it's fermented is impossible to overlook.

"People don't create foods like soy sauce," Hannya said. "The real producers are the microorganisms — mold, yeast and lactic acid bacteria working over time. Humans simply create and maintain environments where these microorganisms can thrive. No two soy sauce brewers use identical kinds and amounts of microorganisms. That diversity drives soy sauce's richness and its vast diversity of flavor profiles."

Challenges, today and tomorrow
Japan's soy sauce brewers are keepers of an iconic element of Japanese culture. Yet the industry is facing a serious challenge: a shortage of successors. "There are over 1,000 soy sauce breweries of all sizes, but many brewers say they have no successor. If no successor is found, those producers will simply go out of existence," Hannya warned.



The ripple effects of this crisis threaten Japan's regional food cultures. Each region has its deeply rooted culinary traditions, ways of using locally sourced ingredients and seasonings, and locally produced soy sauce plays a vital overall role. As Hannya noted, "If a brewer that is important to the community has to close down, a pillar supporting that region's food culture disappears, and the local cuisine may disappear with it."

But the appeal of soy sauce is undiminished, and it will go on attracting those who seek authentic value. "The Japan Soy Sauce Association is working to connect notable smaller soy sauce brewers in Japan with international consumers. As part of this effort, it is our goal to boost the number of producers who generate more than 10% of their sales from exports to over 100 companies by 2030," Hannya said.

Achieving that goal requires social settings that bring together brewers and people who can best appreciate their products. International exhibitions to introduce Japanese soy sauce to food industry professionals are one such example. In the past year, 14 soy sauce producers participated in the SIAL Paris food exhibition held in October 2024. The next month, 10 exhibited at the Japanese Food Culture Association's Japanese Food Expo 2024 in Los Angeles, and four at the JFCA Expo in New York. Eleven soy sauce producers were featured at the Sirha Lyon food exhibition in January 2025. Foodex Japan, one of Asia's largest food and beverage exhibitions, was held in Tokyo in March. There, the National



Hannya delivers a passionate talk on the unique appeal of Japanese soy sauce. JUNYA KIYONO

Federation of Soy Sauce Manufacturers Cooperatives exhibited at a booth where small and midsize soy sauce makers from across Japan showcased their signature products.

Hannya concluded: "There is no single best soy sauce. Across Japan, every region boasts its unique sauces, each shaped by centuries of history and remarkable diversity. Japan is quite literally the 'Shoyu Islands.' And just as they would at wineries or sake breweries, I encourage people to tour soy sauce breweries, experience their traditions firsthand and discover the unique flavors of soy sauce for themselves."

SHIBANUMA SOY SAUCE

FROM SHOGUNATE TO TABLE

A HISTORY OF BREWING TRADITIONAL FLAVORS

Generational company maintains excellence through the blending of tradition and innovation

Shibanuma Soy Sauce Co. crafts soy sauce using a traditional method of natural fermentation in wooden barrels that has been passed down from generation to generation for 338 years. The brewery is about an hour's drive northeast of Tokyo in Tsuchiura, Ibaraki Prefecture, which thrived as a major production region for soy sauce during the Edo Period (1603 to 1868).

Since the brewery's establishment in 1688, its soy sauce-making techniques have been passed down to the family's eldest son, and President Hideatsu Shibanuma is part of the 18th generation to preserve its traditional flavor.

"Many soy sauce breweries across Japan made sauce to supply their communities, but the Tsuchiura breweries were official suppliers to the shogunate in Edo (present-day Tokyo), providing large quantities of high-quality soy sauce. As a result, Tsuchiura soy sauce was also widely loved by the ordinary people of Edo," Shibanuma said.

"Tsuchiura developed as a soy sauce brewing area because it was near Mount Tsukuba, where the ingredients for soy sauce — high-quality soybeans and wheat — could be produced. This location also meant that finished products could be transported by river to Edo," he said.

Today, most manufacturers brew in stainless steel tanks, but Shibanuma continues to use the traditional method of natural fermentation in wooden barrels. This involves fermenting soybeans, wheat and salt in large cedar barrels, then maturing the mixture slowly — like wine and whiskey — to develop a distinctively rich flavor and aroma.

Shibanuma says that the secret to their soy sauce is the *kura* (storehouse) where it is brewed and matured and the barrels they have used for over 100 years. Living in said building and barrels are around 100 different microorganisms, which give rise to the sauce's distinct umami flavor during the brewing process. This production method utilizing wooden barrels requires more time and effort than its modern stainless steel tank counterpart. Regardless, at Shibanuma they remain committed to this traditional process, believing that these microorganisms are the key to its sauce's distinctive flavor.

This traditional technique is used to make the company's flagship soy sauce, Ohitachi.



Hideatsu Shibanuma

First, using locally grown ingredients, *kōji*, a mixture of soybeans and wheat covered with *kōji* mold, is prepared in the brewery's barrels. Then, domestically produced salt is added, and the mixture is aged for around two years to produce *moromi* (a fermented mash). Pressing the *moromi* produces Ohitachi, which is a raw (unpasteurized) soy sauce. The lees are used as livestock feed by local farmers. The manure is then used to fertilize farmland where soybeans and wheat are grown, completing the production cycle.

Tradition and innovation

Most manufacturers sterilize soy sauce by pasteurizing it before bottling, but to preserve its flavor and aroma, Ohitachi is not heated. Shibanuma combines innovation with tradition to deliver the authentic taste of traditionally brewed soy sauce.

According to Shibanuma, heat sterilization alters the color and aroma of soy sauce. Instead, the brewery uses newer technologies, such as sterilization by ceramic filtration and aseptic filling in a clean room, to deliver the original soft color, clean taste and rich aroma of raw soy sauce to the customer's table.

The brewery uses modern technology to help it maintain the traditional methods and flavor of its sauce. Yet, that doesn't mean preserving heritage is easy.

"Seventy years ago, Japan had 6,000 soy sauce manufacturers. Now the number is only about one-sixth of that. Once, there were 19 soy sauce breweries in Tsuchiura, but now it's just us. We became deeply worried that if things went on as they were, we would not be able to extend our history to 350 or 400 years," Shibanuma said.

However, in 2010 a ray of hope came from an unexpected source. An Australian trading



Massive wooden barrels, including some 180 years old, are used to make soy sauce at Shibanuma's Tatsumigura storehouse, built more than 100 years ago.

company had seen Shibanuma Soy Sauce's website and decided to contact the brewery. Impressed by the brewery's story and history, it made an enthusiastic offer to import Shibanuma's products. Having had no prior export experience, at first Shibanuma was hesitant, but within a month he decided to visit Australia.

"I flew to Melbourne and Sydney with samples of our soy sauce, and also visited Japanese restaurants. They were all surprised and impressed by our over-300-year history and how we have been family-run for 18 generations. People really admired the 100-year-old wooden barrels that are our company identity, and the flavor of the soy sauce brewed in them."

Shibanuma returned home with the strong impression that it was not only the Japanese market that appreciated the traditional flavor, and before long he received an order from Australia for 20 cases of soy sauce. This grew to 50 cases, then 100 cases and eventually container loads. At that point, Shibanuma decided that it was time to travel the world to sell his authentic soy sauce.

Responding to changing needs

"Starting in the U.S., I traveled through Asia, the Middle East and then Europe. In the end, I visited more than 70 countries myself," Shibanuma said. "I had a particularly good response in Europe. If you consider the EU to be a single block, larger manufacturers have an edge because they can fill the market with their products. But in fact, customer preferences and ways of thinking are different in

each country. In that respect, small manufacturers like us can be more agile. Our big strength became that we could actually visit various local stores, listen to needs in each country and respond carefully to them in detail."

Not only is Shibanuma's traditionally made soy sauce now popular in many countries, but there is also strong demand for the brewery's other products, such as their soy sauce-based ponzu and teriyaki sauces.

"We have obtained FSSC22000/ISO22000 certification and set up a system to handle not just the soy sauce brewing, but also everything up to the final bottling ourselves. We can adjust the taste and thickness of the soy sauce according to the preferences of our export customers, and they are very happy that we can customize the size of products and label designs.

"Additionally, since regulations on ingredients are different in each country, we comply with those before shipping. We have also developed a halal-certified soy sauce."

It's easy to imagine how much effort and money such careful attention to customer needs must require, but the company has converted this hard work into a significant strength. Even as he describes how difficult it is to meet particular customer needs, Shibanuma's face is cheerful and full of confidence.

The company's soy sauce is now exported to 62 countries, providing products that meet local regulations with flavors adjusted to national preferences. The brewery's flagship Ohitachi is used by high-end restaurants around the world, including London-based Japanese cuisine chain Zuma and Michelin-starred restaurants. It is also stocked in luxury department stores.

"When our soy sauce was used by a three-starred restaurant that serves French cuisine, I really felt that our authentic taste had been recognized. Only a tiny amount was used in the food, but a top chef had sought out authenticity for just a subtle flavor and arrived at Ohitachi."

A house that is over 300 years old built using traditional construction methods still stands on the company grounds. Shibanuma grew up in the house, and today it is open to the public as a museum of the brewery's history. The wooden barrels used from the Edo Period to the early 20th century are an impressive sight. They are physical evidence of Shibanuma's continuous production of authentic, barrel-brewed soy sauce.



Shibanuma's barrel-brewed soy sauce is incorporated in a variety of the company's sauces and seasonings.



Left: Shibanuma meets with chefs from Zuma Dubai at the Gulfood show in Dubai in February 2024. Above: The restaurant uses the company's soy sauce in some of its dishes.



A 300-year-old house on the company grounds serves as a museum showing the history of the brewery.

FUNDODAI

RETHINKING THE BASICS

INNOVATIVE KYUSHU BREWERY BREAKS THE MOLD

Kumamoto’s top maker takes low-key approach to soy sauce, but daring to be different turned it into a clear winner

Kumamoto Prefecture occupies a large portion of central Kyushu, the westernmost of Japan’s main islands. Its diverse terrain includes plains, plateaus and mountains along with three distinct coastal zones. It’s therefore no surprise that Kumamoto is a veritable hive of agriculture, fisheries and livestock production and a well-known cornucopia of sustenance.

The groundwater stored in the geological layers formed by Mount Aso, an active volcano in northeastern Kumamoto, is known for its abundance and quality. There are no dams or purification plants in the city of Kumamoto, the prefecture’s largest urban area with close to three quarters of a million residents, making it Japan’s “leading groundwater city.” Its groundwater is so plentiful, residents say high-quality mineral water is as close as the nearest tap. The prevalence of pure water also underpins Kumamoto’s thriving rice-growing and sake-brewing industries.

For 156 years, soy sauce manufacturer Fundodai Inc. has played an important role in Kumamoto’s rich food culture. The company ranks No. 1 in the prefecture for market share, reflecting the importance of its products in Kumamoto cuisine. When asked to explain the source of Fundodai’s brand strength, President Osamu Yamamura gives a surprising answer, “If I had to describe our soy sauce, I’d say its flavor is low-key.”

Across Kumamoto and Kyushu as a whole, *amakuchi* (sweet) soy sauce is the standard, and its restrained saltiness and mellow sweetness reflects local preferences. But Yamamura also describes his soy sauce as understated. The reason can be found in Kumamoto’s uniquely varied cuisine.

“Kumamoto is blessed with abundant food, from vegetables and fish to meat and more,” Yamamura noted. “For more than 150 years, our company has been proud to supply the basic seasoning for Kumamoto cuisine, which is all about fresh ingredients. This is why our soy sauce shouldn’t overshadow the taste of those ingredients.”

For generations, Fundodai’s support for local food culture was indeed low-key. But in 2019, on the occasion of the company’s 150th anniversary, the company drew wide attention in Japan and beyond by releasing a bold new soy sauce that dispenses with the familiar color of the sauce itself. Fundodai calls it Clear Soy Sauce.

Fundodai’s Clear Soy Sauce is as colorless and transparent as water. It’s hard to believe



Osamu Yamamura FUNDODAI

a clear liquid could deliver such aroma, flavor and umami, but tasting is believing. As noted, Kyushu soy sauce is generally on the sweet side, but the attributes of this transparent sauce are inspired by the deeper flavors preferred in the metro Tokyo market.

Yamamura said the company’s special brewing techniques not only achieve a colorless result, but also preserve all of the other characteristics of Japan’s most popular variety of soy sauce. Since the release of Clear Soy Sauce, Fundodai has shipped more than 1.5 million bottles.

Uncovering new markets

Yamamura’s career has been unusually varied. He started as a sales rep in a securities firm before jumping to an industrial mold manufacturer, and from there to an agricultural products processor in Kumamoto, where he was a director. After his employer merged with Fundodai, he was made president and charged with revitalizing the organization and reenergizing its business. When one of his development staff told him about a patented technology that could strip soy sauce of its color, he was intrigued.

Yamamura also remembers the initial reluctance that had to be addressed before Clear Soy Sauce could be brought to market. His industry veterans were especially hard to convince, and many thought the very idea of transparent soy sauce bordered on sacrilegious. However, it was Yamamura who gave the green light, saying, “Doing what everyone else is doing is the wrong approach. The point is to break out of that mindset and uncover new product concepts.”

Yamamura said the initial concept during product development was that colorless soy sauce would leave no stain on tablecloths and clothing if accidentally spilled. But after release, it drew serious attention from German sausage makers and Italian and French chefs, even finding its way to the kitchen of Alleno Paris au Pavillon Ledoyen, a three-starred Michelin restaurant in Paris known for its history and prestigious reputa-



Demachi Hisaya, Fundodai’s flagship store in Tokyo’s Asakusa district, is popular with tourists and residents. FUNDODAI

tion. The product was praised for allowing soy sauce to demonstrate its versatility without affecting the color of other ingredients.

Fundodai’s soy sauce, nurtured within Kumamoto food culture, has found value in other culinary traditions as well, thanks to its unique concept.

“This made us realize that even in the traditional world of soy sauce, there’s still room for innovation,” Yamamura noted. “We discovered that by eliminating the color, soy sauce could be used in a much wider range of applications.”

Fundodai used to export to just a few countries. But since the launch of Clear Soy Sauce, exports have risen dramatically.

“Last year we exported to 32 countries and regions. Opening doors in that many markets is a tremendous asset,” Yamamura said.

Fundodai is riding this momentum and developing entirely new concepts in soy sauce.

This year, it launched two innovative products: “foam-type” and “leaf-type” sauces. Foam-type soy sauce is a creamy, mousse-like product with a smooth texture and a consistency that allows for the creation of visually attractive elements. It maintains this state for around 30 minutes, making it suitable for a wide range of culinary applications. Leaf-type soy sauce is a flat sheet, 0.2 millimeters thick, that can be cut to size, opening the door to culinary presentations that were impossible with liquid soy sauce. The sheets can be used to top dishes, as wrappers or layered with other ingredients. Fundodai has also released leaf-type miso products.

The aroma, flavor and umami of soy sauce, as well as its color and form, were once inseparable. But Fundodai has liberated the culinary advantages of soy sauce from these restraints.

“Soy sauce has aspects that can be transformed through subtraction,” Yamamura explained. “Low-sodium soy sauce is a prime example. When salt was subtracted, the market expanded. Using patented technology, our company has successfully created alcohol-free soy sauce by subtracting alcohol, and Clear Soy Sauce by subtracting color.”

Following Kumamoto cuisine

Yamamura is convinced that promoting Kumamoto cuisine along with Fundodai

products is a win-win move.

For example, after hearing that a Kumamoto garlic processing company had developed a garlic with an odor that disappears within three hours, he developed and launched a sauce for grilled meat that pairs this special garlic with a base of Fundodai soy sauce. Hearing, “I’ve been waiting for a product like this!” from a dentist who spends much of the day in close proximity to patients reinforced his conviction that hidden demand can be revealed when product concepts receive a fresh look.

Fundodai’s spirit of collaboration with the community extends beyond soy sauce.

Several years ago, a foreign company contacted Fundodai about the possibility of creating a wasabi-flavored sauce. The problem was that when wasabi is added to soy sauce, its aroma and flavor dissipate quickly. Yamamura tried for more than three years to develop a product without success, and was finally forced to abandon the idea.

Then one day, while chatting with a businessman from Higoseiyu, a local maker of edible oils, the topic of wasabi-flavored products came up. The man noted casually, “If you enclose the essence of the wasabi in oil, maybe that will solve your problem.” This inspired Yamamura, who launched a collaboration project with Higoseiyu. Making use of Kumamoto’s thriving production of canola oil, which has a neutral flavor and a high smoke point, the oil was found to preserve the wasabi’s pungency and aroma and yet still blend well with different ingredients and seasonings.

That was the start of a project whose participants were brought together by a shared food culture.

“Ultimately, we were able to create an extremely high-quality product that we simply named Wasabi Oil. At our shop in Tokyo’s Asakusa district, it’s the top seller by far,” Yamamura said with satisfaction. Customers abroad particularly appreciate this product’s convenience and, while Wasabi Oil does not contain soy sauce itself, its use in various food settings that do is expected to help drive up soy sauce demand.

In Yamamura’s view, breakthrough products like Clear Soy Sauce hold the key to business success. “If we discover the seeds of a breakthrough product internally, and if developing it promotes internal cohesion, we’ll commercialize it aggressively.”

But according to Yamamura, developing breakthrough products with unique concepts is not Fundodai’s ultimate goal. He emphasizes the importance of promoting such products not for their uniqueness, but on the basis of what they bring to the dining table. The foundation of this approach lies in the company’s profound connection with Kumamoto’s rich food culture.

“Fundodai is not just about products. We want to propagate Kumamoto flavors and food culture more broadly. Doing so will ultimately help propagate Fundodai flavors too.”



Fundodai’s Clear Soy Sauce upgrades any dish with the umami and other rich flavors of shoyu, adding a cool, refreshing touch. FUNDODAI



Above: Fundodai’s foamy clear soy sauce pairs artfully with a seafood dish at Ohmori, a restaurant in Tokyo’s Akasaka district. The sauce turns white when whipped. Left: The Fundodai Clear Soy Sauce series covers a range of flavor profiles. FUNDODAI

YAMAROKU SHOYU

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

AUTHENTIC SOY SAUCE MADE IN WOODEN BARRELS

Shodoshima brewery keeps tradition of wooden soy sauce barrels alive through construction workshops

Shodoshima is the second-largest island in the Seto Inland Sea. Its name literally means “small bean island,” and indeed, a small bean has supported life on the island for over 400 years. That is the soybean, and Shodoshima is a major producer of soy sauce.

Like wine, soy sauce is made through fermentation. In wine production, although stainless steel tanks have become the norm, some wineries still use wooden barrels. Likewise, today most soy sauce manufacturers use steel tanks. On Shodoshima, however, many of the island’s soy sauce producers continue to use traditional wooden barrels, and among them is Yamaroku Shoyu Co., a producer well known for its dedication to this traditional, time-honored method.

“The history of our company isn’t clear, but according to my grandmother, it goes back at least 150 years,” said the brewery’s fifth-generation President Yasuo Yamamoto.

There are thought to be around 3,000 wooden soy sauce barrels in Japan, including more than 1,000 on Shodoshima, making the island truly the home of wooden soy sauce barrels. According to Yamamoto, only about 1% of Japanese soy sauce is produced in such barrels.

Yamaroku Shoyu itself has 90 of these vessels and is popular with tourists who come to view its historic brewery buildings. And although guiding visitors adds significantly to Yamamoto’s workload, he doesn’t seem to mind.

“I am solely responsible for all manufacturing processes of Yamaroku soy sauce all the way up to the preparation for bottling,” he said.

This is quite extraordinary, given that in soy sauce breweries it is typical for a single employee to manage between 10 and 20 barrels. But Yamamoto says while it’s true that he is the only one directly involved in manufacturing, it isn’t actually him who makes the soy sauce.

“The soy sauce is made by the bacteria that live in the wooden barrels, pillars and beams of our soy sauce brewery,” he explained. “Even if we put the ingredients together, we humans cannot ferment them ourselves; that is the job of the bacteria. The brewery itself is home to a huge number of microorganisms, and it is impossible for people to control them, however, by creating the best environment for them to live in, we can help them create a delicious final product.”

The brewery building was constructed over a century ago and is home to over 100 types of yeast and lactic acid bacteria. Yamamoto notes that Shodoshima’s mountains absorb heat from the sun, creating updrafts and giving rise to a distinctive warm and dry breeze. This unusual breeze nurtures an environment that is perfect for fermentation by these microorganisms.

It is in this environment that Yamaroku Shoyu produces its flagship product, Tsuru-



Yasuo Yamamoto

bishio, a soy sauce crafted in pursuit of the ultimate in smoothness and rich flavor. It is aged for between one and two years before being returned to the barrel, where soybeans and wheat are added so that it may ferment for a further two to three years — it is a laboriously made product that actually uses finished soy sauce as one of its ingredients.

The last barrel maker?

Few brewers have such a strong enthusiasm for barrel production as Yamamoto. When he took over as the brewery’s president in 2001, it owned 34. Since 2009, he has gradually increased that number to 90.

“There are no bacteria in new barrels,” he said, “but microorganisms from all around the brewery building float around and attach themselves to the new vessels. That’s how the flavor of Yamaroku soy sauce is passed down.”

Though the typical lifespan of a barrel is said to be around 100 to 150 years, some of those used at Yamaroku Shoyu are even older and will soon need to be replaced. However, with a lack of skilled craftspeople to maintain and build these vessels, replacing them — and by extension, preserving the characteristic flavor of the brewery’s soy sauce — is no easy task. In fact, at one point, there was only one company left in Japan that could make such barrels. For a while, Yamamoto made do by reassembling and reusing old barrels, but that eventually became impossible, and in 2009 he ordered new ones.

Upon ordering, Yamamoto was surprised when the builder told him that his company hadn’t received any work from such a brewery since the war. The longevity of the barrels means requests are highly infrequent, leading to a decline in the number of people working in the trade. When the barrels were delivered, the builder told Yamamoto that he might retire soon, meaning Yamamoto would likely have to repair his own barrels in the future.

The sense of crisis felt by Yamamoto became even stronger, for if the barrels were unavailable, it would have made it impossible for Yamaroku to produce authentic barrel-aged soy sauce. Yet, as he agonized over this problem, he realized that the entire issue could be resolved by making the barrels himself.

Yamamoto moved quickly. In the autumn of 2011, he set up the Kioke Craftsmen Revival Project (*kioke* means barrel).

First, he ordered three new barrels from the last living barrel maker at the time. Then



Yamamoto (left) and another member of the Kioke Craftsmen Revival Project bind a wooden barrel with bands of woven bamboo.

In January 2012, Yamamoto and two carpenter friends apprenticed under the craftsman. Hoping to become proficient himself, Yamamoto took part in the making of the barrels he ordered and, after two years of training, he and his friends completed them.

Today, Yamamoto also works as a barrel craftsman, serving customers who include makers of miso, sake and soy sauce.

“We make a huge loss, but crafting barrels is fun. Of course, if wooden barrels had run out, we would have had the option to repurpose wooden water tanks or bathtubs. But when there are various options available, I have my own rule for deciding. That’s, ‘Is it fun or not?’ Regardless of how difficult a task may be, if it isn’t enjoyable, it won’t be sustainable.”

Yamamoto notes that the passion he feels for the barrel-making process translates directly to the flavor of the soy sauce produced, and he believes this helps to not only sell their own soy sauce, but also that of other companies who use similar production methods. Furthermore, if the increase in sales leads to a shortage in barrels, then it will also serve as a catalyst for the barrel makers to finally resume their work, the outcome of which will be a satisfactory result for consumers, producers and craftspeople alike.

Yamamoto’s Kioke Craftsmen Revival Project has attracted fresh groups of participants with each passing year. These include manufacturers and distributors of foods and drinks made in wooden barrels, as well as carpenters and chefs. Each year, participants gather on Shodoshima to make new barrels and share skills, thus increasing the number of craftspeople and ensuring the future of these crucial vessels. In recognition of these efforts, Yamaroku Shoyu was presented with the 2025 Sustainable Japan Award by The Japan Times in September.

But Yamamoto and his associates are looking even further afield, recognizing that despite the abundance of soy sauce manufacturers in Japan, wooden barrel soy sauce only accounts

for around 1% of the condiment’s production. Consequently, it is cooperation, not competition, that will prove vital in promoting the taste of the product both in Japan and worldwide.

“It is important to popularize the taste of authentic wooden barrel soy sauce. If 1% of Japan’s population enjoys this authentic flavor, then there must be others around the world with the same preference. Even if they account for only 1% of the world’s population, that is still a larger market than that of Japan’s 1%. Upon realizing this, we saw the significance of also targeting the world market.”

Not just any soy sauce

“Many people hear the word ‘sauce’ and imagine soy sauce being made by mixing ingredients together in a factory,” Yamamoto said. “Wooden barrel soy sauce, however, is made through fermentation and aging using the power of microorganisms that live in the barrels. In this sense, it shares several similarities with wine and whiskey. Different breweries have different barrels, so complex flavors and aromas are created, giving each soy sauce brewery its own unique style. That’s completely different from ordinary soy sauce mass-produced in stainless steel tanks.”

That’s why Yamamoto uses the Japanese name *kioke shoyu* for overseas markets.

“The only way for regional *kioke shoyu* manufacturers to survive is to deliver authentic soy sauce to people who appreciate the authentic taste.”

Yamamoto opened his brewery to the public so that visitors could experience his passion for authentic soy sauce with all five senses. Around 50,000 people visit the brewery each year, including about 10,000 from overseas, enjoying the tours that are available, without reservations, 365 days a year. Many chefs and buyers also visit the brewery during trips to Japan.

“Overseas guests are often surprised by the wooden construction of our brewery. The barrels differ completely in size from those used in wine or whiskey production; some have been used for 150 years, and the soy sauce is brewed by microorganisms in the barrels. No matter how much I explain, seeing it and tasting the final product is best.”

Yamamoto’s ambitions are gradually coming to fruition. Right now, almost 40% of Yamaroku’s products are shipped overseas.

Yamamoto has taken enormous care to ensure that microorganisms can survive comfortably in his brewery, and he has produced the barrels himself to save both the craft and the vessels themselves from extinction. When he talks about his role in the future of barrel-aged soy sauce, it is with a smile.

“When you visit Shodoshima, which has more wooden barrels than anywhere in Japan, see our traditional soy sauce brewery and taste *kioke shoyu*, I’m sure you’ll understand its appeal.”



Far left: Yamamoto (left) receives a Sustainable Japan Award from The Japan Times’ Satoyama Consortium adviser Takashi Mitachi on Sept. 18, for Yamaroku’s efforts to uphold tradition while driving innovation. Left: Yamaroku uses its barrel-aged soy sauce to make a variety of products.

SHOKUNIN SHOYU

SPREADING THE WORD

120 FLAVOR OPTIONS FROM ACROSS JAPAN

Staff offers advice on soy sauce attributes as well as recommendations for optimal food pairings

Soy sauce is *the* essential seasoning in Japanese cuisine. While soy sauce is known around the world, few have heard of a specialty shop selling around 120 varieties from across Japan. That shop is Shokunin Shoyu, which roughly translates as “Artisans of Shoyu.” The shop is in Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture, and has an online store as well.

“Shoyu is not a commodity,” said Shokunin Shoyu’s owner Mantaro Takahashi, using the term for Japanese soy sauce. “It is its own genre, within which there is a diversity of characteristics.”

Takahashi has been all over Japan, collecting information on hundreds of shoyu breweries firsthand. He has tasted sauces, listened to brewers and their stories and selected their finest products for sale in his shop. This is the Shokunin Shoyu concept.

“Shoyu that has been crafted by artisans with strong convictions and is rooted in a concept that can be put into words, is going to be delicious,” Takahashi said.

Takahashi would never have guessed that his life would one day revolve around Japanese soy sauce. In 2006, after a career selling precision optical equipment for a major maker of automation equipment, he quit his job and traveled all over Japan, developing an interest in traditional industries. Soy sauce in particular fascinated him. He started making trips to breweries around the Kanto region, and the more he spoke to brewers, the more his interest was piqued.

Takahashi had always viewed soy sauce as just sauce, but he discovered that there are many distinct types, with various brewers using different ingredients and methods within the same type. Some use high-tech equipment while others stick to traditional wooden barrels. In the world of shoyu, diversity prevails.

Tasting sets invite exploration

One day, Takahashi was visiting a major department store. As he stared at the shelves crowded with a multitude of choices, he was shocked to discover that his hard-won shoyu knowledge, which made him an expert, was of no help when it came to selecting one for a specific use. Moreover, buying multiple liter-size bottles simply for tasting purposes wasn’t going to work. It was in that moment that the idea of selling soy sauce in 100-milliliter bottles dawned on him.

Takahashi went back to several breweries to pitch his idea, but they were doubtful that



Mantaro Takahashi SHOKUNIN SHOYU

consumers would buy such tiny bottles. Eight brewers finally agreed to come on board, but the resulting lineup of eight sauces in small bottles somehow lacked impact. Takahashi decided he would have to astonish customers with an extensive choice. So he expanded his search to promote his 100-ml bottle concept nationwide and ended up visiting more than 400 breweries.

Shokunin Shoyu currently offers around 120 varieties of shoyu from 60 breweries. Despite the extensive selection, customers who visit need not feel overwhelmed. Knowledgeable staff are on hand to guide them, recommending varieties that match preferences with specific uses. The website also offers abundant information on how Japanese soy sauce is made, the types available and how to choose one. For newcomers, Takahashi has assembled a balanced starter set that features six varieties.

All bottles are the same size and shape, with each producer handling the filling and labeling. “Labels are reduced in size, but otherwise they’re as close to the brewer’s full-size label as possible,” Takahashi noted.

With such a variety of products on offer, Shokunin Shoyu can showcase the condiment’s rich diversity of color, aroma and umami notes. Japanese soy sauce is especially known for its exceptional bouquet, Takahashi said. He explained that soybeans primarily contribute umami and wheat adds fragrance, but the uniqueness of the condiment lies in the balance achieved between the two, a balance that discretely brings out the flavor contributions of dashi and the individual ingredients in delicate Japanese cuisine.

Takahashi uses a chart to make his point. The chart shows six pieces of sushi, each placed against a different background color. “The color of each background is actually the color of the shoyu itself,” Takahashi explained.

In other words, each piece of sushi pairs best with a certain type of sauce, from the light ones on the far left to the dark ones on



Above: The main store of Shokunin Shoyu is in Takahashi’s home prefecture of Gunma. Left: Shokunin Shoyu’s unique six-category soy sauce chart matches each type of fish to a complementary variety of soy sauce. SHOKUNIN SHOYU

the far right. Takahashi continued:

“The *koikuchi* (common) shoyu shown in the center is the most standard type. The *shiro* (pale) and *usukuchi* (light-colored) on the left are lighter but saltier, with an umami that is restrained. The tamari (full-bodied) on the right has been aged for a long time. It has dark color and strong umami flavor.”

In Japan, there are five categories of soy sauce, according to the Agriculture Ministry. But Shokunin Shoyu is unique in using its own six-category system. Takahashi counts

There are breweries all over Japan that welcome visitors and can provide an experience as rewarding as visiting a winery.

the three on the right as red wines. So, for example, a meuniere or carpaccio of white-fleshed fish would pair best with a white wine. A steak would usually be paired with a red wine. These sorts of relationships apply to soy sauce as well.”

As the sushi chart shows, the fish used ranges from light-flavored, white-fleshed types to fatty, red-fleshed ones. Matching soy sauces to fish types does much to bring out their respective flavors. Similarly for salads, simply mixing soy sauce with olive oil and vinegar creates a fresh dressing that

enhances the natural taste of the vegetables, Takahashi said.

Importance of fermentation

Takahashi emphasized the importance of understanding that soy sauce is a fermented food. It is precisely because the ingredients undergo long-term fermentation through the power of microorganisms that each brewery can produce a unique sauce. He cited shoyu brewed traditionally in wooden barrels as a prime example.

“In a natural environment, raw ingredients placed in wooden barrels undergo years of fermentation and aging by the microorganisms living in the brewery and in the barrels themselves. Ultimately, aging is everything. Since each barrel imparts a different character, the unique traits of each brewery emerge in the shoyu, fully distinct. The brewer’s personality and philosophy can be found there as well.”

Takahashi pointed out the similarities between soy sauce and products like balsamic vinegar and wine. Seen in this light, it is easier to understand the diversity of soy sauce and how its use can vary depending on specific dishes or personal preference.

He recommends brewery tours as a way to experience this diversity firsthand. There are breweries all over Japan that welcome visitors and can provide an experience as rewarding as visiting a winery.

“To make your favorite foods even more delicious, why not search out the best-matching soy sauce?” Takahashi suggested.

Soy sauce has evolved along with regional food cultures, adapting to the climate, ingredients and customs of each. As such, there are as many varieties of shoyu as there are culinary traditions. The lineup of 100-ml bottles at Shokunin Shoyu could very well spark a fascination that leads to the world of artisanal soy sauce.



Takahashi uses a chart to help explain the varieties of soy sauce to customers. SHOKUNIN SHOYU



Around 120 varieties of soy sauce are readily available for purchase in 100-ml bottles at Shokunin Shoyu’s online store. SHOKUNIN SHOYU

CULINARY MUST-HAVE

A TASTE OF ASIA

THE EXPANSIVE WORLD OF JAPANESE SOY SAUCE

Rich in umami, this flavorful ingredient adds a unique twist to a wide variety of global cuisines

For many people worldwide, soy sauce is often just seen as that dark, savory liquid that accompanies sushi and gyoza, or serves as a seasoning to stir-fries. Yet, in Japan, a country with a deep history and culture surrounding this humble ingredient, shoyu, as the natives refer to it, is far more than just a condiment. It is a vital and refined part of a culinary heritage that dates back centuries and has evolved into a staple that enriches not only traditional dishes but also global cuisines.

From its diverse regional expressions to specialized brews, Japanese soy sauce boasts an incredible depth of flavor, aroma and versatility that continues to captivate professional chefs and home cooks alike.

The five founding flavors
Japan's soy sauce is mainly divided into five types: *koikuchi* (common), *usukuchi* (light-colored), *saishikomi* (refermented), *tamari* (full-bodied) and *shiro* (pale). Each has distinct characteristics. Koikuchi is balanced and aromatic and usukuchi is lighter in color but saltier and more popular in the Kansai region. Saishikomi is intensely flavored due to its unique brewing process, tamari is thick and umami-rich, often used for glazes or finishing grilled dishes, and shiro is pale and preserves the color of the ingredients. These form the foundation of Japan's soy sauce offerings, and each has a distinctive flavor profile and culinary role.

Beyond these core types, soy sauce has given rise to a variety of derivatives and regional variations. These include ponzu (a citrus-based soy sauce); *mentsuyu* (soy sauce in a dashi-based noodle soup base); and even sauces infused with kombu (kelp), garlic, or mixed with oyster essence. The southern main island of Kyushu prefers a sweeter brew, adding a blend of sugar and other sweeteners at the end of the production process.

Such variations reflect how soy sauce is far from just a single product; it can have a wide range of flavors shaped by local preferences, ingredients and taste.

Soy's hidden powers
While the primary function of soy sauce is to provide flavor, its utility in the kitchen extends far beyond that. A splash of the koikuchi type in a hot skillet of steak, for example, not only seasons the dish, but also releases an aromatic cloud that stirs the appetite. Mixing the usukuchi type with lemon juice, however, creates a delightful sauce perfect for white fish meuniere, enhancing the delicate flesh without overshadowing it. Meanwhile, a teaspoon of shiro can elevate a wobbly *chawanmushi* (steamed egg custard) without compromising the

smooth, golden hue of the dish.

Beyond its culinary uses, soy sauce also plays a key role in preservation. It contains compounds that help reduce or mask the raw smells of fish and meat, making it a popular choice in marinades. Its natural antimicrobial properties also made it a valuable tool in pre-refrigeration Japan, extending the serving time for seafood and vegetables, a practice that continues to this day.

A global pantry essential
Today, soy sauce continues to evolve and inspire chefs far beyond Japan. Thai chef Naree Boonyakiat, a culinary ambassador for Japanese soy sauce, showcases its versatility by incorporating it into traditional Thai recipes. Her creations, featured at international events such as the Japanese Shoyu Manufacturers Tasting & Business Matching gathering, demonstrate its transformative potential in unexpected contexts, inspiring chefs to experiment with an adaptable condiment that seems to integrate effortlessly with all culinary traditions.

These dishes are also a testament to the fact that Japanese soy sauce is not merely a local flavoring, but an indispensable condiment that lends its complexity and elegance to cuisine worldwide.

To appreciate the complexity and versatility of Japan's soy sauce, it is best to experiment with different types and incorporate them into various dishes. Summarized below are five cooking ideas for dishes that showcase the unique characteristics of each type, allowing people to explore how shoyu interacts with different ingredients and textures. Three of the ideas are from Shokunin Shoyu's website and two from Boonyakiat.

Soy-marinated tuna bowl
For this dish, mirin and sake are briefly brought to a boil to reduce the alcohol, then seasoned with koikuchi shoyu. Once cooled, slices of sashimi-grade tuna or salmon (if tuna is unavailable) are marinated in the sauce.

After a few minutes, the marinated fish is layered over a bowl of freshly cooked rice. The soy sauce gently marinates the fish, infusing it with umami and resulting in a glossy, flavorful finish. Furthermore, its richness complements the fatty texture of the fish, transforming leftover sashimi cuts or cheap tuna into a luxurious dish.

Sea bream meuniere
This simple and refreshing recipe features spring-to-early-summer sea bream meuniere, lightly coated in flour and pan-fried in butter until golden brown.

The fish is paired with a light sauce of lemon and usukuchi shoyu in equal parts, which enhances the natural umami of the white fish without overpowering its delicate flavor. Lightly sauteed pea shoots are served on the side, allowing their fresh flavor to shine. It's an elegant way to enjoy seasonal seafood without overpowering its subtle taste.

Tomato soy sauce
This smooth tomato sauce brings a savory twist to any barbecue, thanks to the rich



Raw shrimp, clear soy sauce and wasabi dressing offer a zesty taste. CHEF NAREE BOONYAKIAT



Tom yum goong with yuzu soy sauce offers a blend of Thai and Japanese cuisines. CHEF NAREE BOONYAKIAT

depth of saishikomi shoyu.

The sauce features sauteed garlic, chili peppers, canned tomatoes and extras, such as chickpeas. The simple seasoning of salt, pepper and a dash of saishikomi results in a well-balanced mix of tangy, savory and smooth. Perfect with grilled vegetables, skewered meats or burgers, this quick and easy sauce delivers bold flavors with minimal effort.

Raw shrimp with soy-wasabi sauce
Boonyakiat's refreshing appetizer highlights the delicate texture of raw shrimp, complemented by a zesty and aromatic dressing.

This dish sees deveined and cleaned shrimp on a plate topped with a vibrant dressing of lime juice, bird's eye chili, garlic, clear soy sauce and wasabi oil. Garnished with crispy shallots and fresh herbs, it achieves a perfect balance of heat, acidity and umami without overpowering the shrimp. It can be served chilled for a lively start to any meal.

Tom yum goong with yuzu shoyu
This bright twist by Boonyakiat to the classic tom yum goong recipe basically blends bold Thai aromatics with the citrusy elegance of Japanese yuzu soy sauce, which adds depth and umami by replacing some of the lime juice and fish sauce traditionally used in the dish.

The result is a smoother, more balanced flavor profile with a layered tanginess that complements the heat from the Thai chili paste.

First the stock is brought to a boil, before galangal, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves and crushed chili peppers are added. Mushrooms

and prawns are added and simmered until the prawns are cooked through. The chili paste, lime juice and yuzu shoyu provide a tangy, flavorful finish, and a few drops of fish sauce can be added as desired. Served hot with a handful of fresh coriander leaves, this warm, spicy and refreshing soup represents a fusion of two culinary traditions.

Innovation built on tradition
Soy sauce is a cornerstone of Japanese cuisine, deeply ingrained in the country's culture and culinary traditions. It brings balance to a variety of flavors — saltiness, sweetness, acidity, bitterness and umami — making it indispensable in both home and professional kitchens.

What's truly remarkable about soy sauce is its ability to remain grounded in tradition, even as it evolves.

Across Japan, small, family-owned breweries continue to produce soy sauce using time-honored methods passed down through generations. Each bottle reflects its region's unique climate and the expertise of its makers, offering a personal touch in every drop.

At the same time, brewers are developing innovative varieties by pushing boundaries while honoring tradition, resulting in a diverse range of sauces from classic to contemporary.

In the rapidly changing world of cuisine, soy sauce endures both as a condiment and a cultural ambassador, with shoyu representing the culinary wisdom of Japan. Whether used in traditional recipes or innovative creations, shoyu brings depth and flavor to dishes around the world. More than just a dip, it's something to explore, adding character to every kitchen it touches.



Sea bream meuniere is best enjoyed in spring and early summer. SHOKUNIN SHOYU



Soy-marinated tuna bowls are a popular dish. SHOKUNIN SHOYU



Tomato sauce can be flavored with soy sauce to provide a delicious twist to skewered meat. ADOBE STOCK