

HOW JAPAN IS PRESERVING FOOD TRADITIONS

JAPANESE COMPANIES THINK GLOBALLY AND ACT LOCALLY TO PRESERVE AND NURTURE JAPANESE FOOD CULTURE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*



1. BYO Restaurant - Washoku sake EN
2. Odagaki Shoten Black Soy Beans
3. Chiba Soy Sauced based Yakitori
4. Hanamaruki Aged Koji Powder

Food traditions are inherently local. They're inherited, shaped by community and passed from parent to child, master to student. They weave familiarity into daily life, bringing people together to share their joys.

For condiment producer Kubara Honke's president and CEO, Tetsuji Kawabe, the heart of *washoku* lives within the home. "Ideally, traditional cuisine and culinary traditions should be passed down within households," he explains. Authenticity begins with cultivation. Koufuku Holdings, a rice-focused innovation company, supports local farmers to preserve these traditions. President Takeshi Kitamoto emphasizes, "We are working to make farming more sustainable and appealing for current and future generations."

Local ingredients are the backbone of culture. Odagaki Shoten, Japan's premier supplier of *tambaguro* black soybeans—essential in holiday sweets—understands this deeply. "Black soybeans play a key role in *osechi ryori*, not only as a healthy ingredient but as a symbolic one," says President Noboru Odagaki. Food also brings communities together, and Kamada Soy Sauce has facilitated this for over 230 years. CEO Takeo Kamada notes, "When it comes to our *dashi* soy sauce and other products, we believe the key lies in balancing authenticity with localization."

Culture, however, does not stand still. Koji Nakano, president of restaurateurs B.Y.O., shares, "Our company philosophy is to innovate Japanese cuisine while preserving and passing on traditional Japanese culture." For nearly 110 years, *koji* and miso manufacturer Hanamaruki has adapted its processes for modern tastes. President Shuichiro Hanaoka explains, "This 'oiki-kouji miso' uses the oiki-kouji method, which is a revival of a method we used 70 years ago."

Preserving tradition also means protecting the environment. Tsuji Oil Mills champions sustainability by upcycling unused resources. President Takehiko Tsuji states, "One of our basic principles is to find new value in the effective use of unused resources."

Together, these *washoku* masters embody the harmony of tradition and modernity.

KUBARA HONKE SHARES AUTHENTIC DASHI, EXPANDING CULINARY TRADITIONS GLOBALLY

AS JAPANESE CUISINE REACHES NEW HEIGHTS, KUBARA HONKE AIMS TO SHARE DASHI WITH A NEW GLOBAL AUDIENCE TO PRESERVE ITS CULTURAL HERITAGE.
By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Paul Mannion

The first thing that springs to mind in conversations about culture is often the great works of art—literary, musical and architectural. It’s also the intangible, a familiar spirit shared between people or the knowledge passed on from generation to generation. A culture’s food bridges the gap between tangible and intangible; it is something to be shared and passed on. As purveyors of Japanese seasonings, ingredients and condiments, Kubara Honke is entwined with *washoku*—Japanese cuisine—which was designated as an intangible cultural heritage in 2013 by UNESCO.



Kubara Honke President and CEO Tetsuji Kawabe says that the succession of local cuisine doesn’t necessarily have to rely on restaurants. “Ideally, traditional cuisine and culinary traditions should be passed down within households,” he explains. As a company that provides ingredients for home cooking, Kubara Honke plays a key role in this process by offering products that align with traditional flavors and cooking methods. “If our products are embraced and incorporated into daily cooking, we believe we can contribute to preserving Kyushu’s rich food culture for future generations,” Kawabe says. He describes one of the company’s proudest achievements as contributing to the nationwide popularity of flying fish

dashi. The company made it the focus of its product development early on, and over the years, it grew in popularity beyond Japan’s southern island of Kyushu. “Our company played a key role in introducing and expanding the appreciation of flying fish *dashi* across Japan,” Kawabe proudly states.

Delivering Washoku to a Global Audience
Kawabe says that the Japanese food industry needs to do more to promote authentic *washoku* home cooking around the globe. With its rise in popularity in the wake of the UNESCO designation and the influx of tourists after the pandemic, people are seeking authentic experiences in their home countries. “Compared to many other global cuisines, Japanese food tends to be lighter and lower in calories, which likely contributes to its growing appeal among health-conscious consumers,” Kawabe remarks on *washoku*’s increased profile.

With the declining population, Kawabe says the company needs to expand into global markets. It has already made a concerted effort in the United States and has a presence in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Europe. The company



**“We hope that Kaya-
noya will become syn-
onymous with dashi all
over the world.”**

Tetsuji Kawabe
president and CEO,
Kubara Honke Group Co, Ltd.



KAYANOYA®

Produced by
Kubara Honke founded in 1893

already has a dedicated e-commerce site for the United States. “One of our potential strategies is leveraging our online recipe collection to attract Americans who are open to trying new seasonings and condiments in their everyday meals,” Kawabe suggests. To promote dashi in the United States, on October 15, 2024, Kubara Honke established National Dashi Day. It used the event to



share information about the origins of dashi, the different types of dashi and the importance of dashi in Japanese cuisine. It also hosts the annual Ago Matsuri (Flying Fish Festival) in Japan. The company believes that promoting dashi goes hand in hand with its business expansion and plans to continue National Dashi Day in 2025.

One of the challenges of exporting Japanese ingredients abroad is that a smaller percentage of people in these markets cook at home. Kawabe says that the company must be considerate of what products it offers and have a deep understanding of each market to find ways to incorporate its ingredients into everyday cooking. “Getting home cooks to adopt our products as part of their daily staples will be crucial, though it presents a high hurdle for us to overcome,” he says. The company is already rolling out its domestically popular “*dashi* soup” overseas, which can be prepared quickly and only requires hot water to serve. Looking ahead, Kubara Honke is considering new paths for growth. “While we are currently focused on seasonings, food ingredients and condiments, we may explore expanding our product portfolio in the future,” Kawabe explains. He suggests potential avenues for ready-to-eat meals or other innovative products that align with evolving consumer needs. “Offering ready-meal options, making it easier for consumers unfamiliar with Japanese cooking to experience authentic flavors in a convenient way,” he says.

Innovative Strategies and Partnerships Strengthen International Position

Kawabe describes Kubara Honke’s sales approach as “unconventional,” having established e-commerce stores before physical ones. “We initially bu-



<https://usa.kayanoya.com>



Inspired by Nature Crafted for Centuries

follow us:



ilt our brand through e-commerce, and once our products gained nationwide popularity, we began opening stores in key locations to further strengthen our market presence,” Kawabe says.



The company plans to enhance its brick-and-mortar stores to create a distinct atmosphere that appeals to customers as it strengthens its flagship locations. “At the same time, we will continue to expand our e-commerce presence, as we believe that physical stores and online sales should complement each other,” Kawabe explains.

Another critical facet of Kubara Honke’s strategy is its partnerships with foreign chefs in the United States. Currently, it is partnering with Chef Ivan Orkin of Ivan Ramen, who has been a believer in the Kubara Honke’s Kayanoya Dashi for a long time. In collaboration with Chef Ivan, the company created a recipe for truffle ramen with Kayanoya vegetable dashi and posted an instructional video with the chef online. “I have used Kayanoya dashi for a very long time at Ivan Ramen,” Chef Ivan says in his testimonial.

Between partnerships and International Dashi Day, Kubara Honke aims to communicate the value and uses of *dashi* with consumers. Japanese

cuisine is perceived by the market as healthy, and *dashi* is a key reason for this in many dishes. “*Dashi* is a powerful alternative to salt due to its natural umami, allowing for reduced sodium intake without compromising flavor,” Kawabe says. The company has long recognized this inherent strength in promoting healthier eating habits. “Moving forward, we aim to better communicate *dashi*’s health advantages and educate consumers on how it can be used as a flavorful, low-sodium alternative in everyday cooking,” he says.



The company’s goal is to have its products integrated with everyday cooking around the globe. “We are actively exploring pathways to achieve this and remain open to ideas that can help introduce our seasonings, condiments and *dashi* to a wider audience,” Kawabe says. He believes finding the right approach is key to expanding the company’s reach and ensuring its products become a natural choice in home kitchens. He hopes to secure this piece of culture’s future before passing it on to the next generation to nurture and grow. Sharing his dream for the future, he resolutely states, “In the future, we hope that Kayanoya will become synonymous with *dashi* all over the world.”