

TRADITION MEETS MODERNITY: JAPAN'S FOOD ADVANTAGE

INBOUND VISITORS AND FOOD INNOVATION ARE FUELING A NEW WAVE OF POPULARITY FOR JAPANESE FOOD THAT BRINGS AUTHENTIC TASTE AND HEALTHY LIVING ALONGSIDE TRADITIONAL CUISINE. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

In 2025, Japan welcomed more than 40 million international arrivals, many of whom were drawn to the allure of *washoku*, Japanese cuisine. This encompasses the experience, the ambiance of the restaurant, the rituals by which the food is prepared, and, of course, the taste, from deep, rich umami to delicious sweets.

Quality ingredients are the base of every *washoku* experience, and Mitsui DM goes beyond ingredient manufacture with its focus on nutrition throughout life. "We want to accompany consumers throughout life by providing healthy foods, raw materials and products suited to each stage," President and CEO Taku Morimoto said. Products like *Palatinose* provide a sustained energy release, making it ideal for sports nutrition and seniors.

Sankyo Foods President Toshiyuki Nakamura said that Japanese cuisine aligns with global health trends. Traditional techniques and wholesome, fresh ingredients define the diets of the world's longest-lived

people. "Our products stand out because they embody Japanese craftsmanship and culture in a very direct and authentic way," he said. Products like Toyohashi Chicken Curry are deeply tied to the communities that shape them.



"In Japan, omotenashi—our philosophy of heartfelt hospitality—is deeply rooted."

Noriaki Watanabe

President, Tokyo Kaikan

In recent decades, Japan has pushed towards local production and consumption, and Chiba Soy Sauce's Shimosa Soy Sauce is part of that movement. "We wanted to create a soy sauce using Japanese-grown soybeans, wheat and salt," President Kyosuke Iida said. Fermented in old barrels, Shimosa Soy Sauce has

become a favorite among chefs for its deep umami.

Place defines Tokyo Kaikan's legacy. Founded as a meeting place and events space, it has evolved into one of Tokyo's premier event and restaurant venues. Japanese dining at Yachiyo is steps away from the Michelin-starred Restaurant Prunier, renowned for its modern take on French cuisine grounded in classical technique.

Kura Sushi carries the legacy of the world-famous conveyor-belt sushi. "We do not simply serve food; we create experiences," President Kunihiko Tanaka said. The company produces everything in-house, preserving authentic flavors and traditions while innovating service.

Shinsyuichi Miso emphasizes *washoku* as a daily habit rooted in balance and longevity. President and CEO Yoshihiro Hayashi said miso works best when it becomes routine: "Think of miso not as a supplement or a tablet, but as a versatile food that helps people build better habits over time."

MAKE MISO A DAILY ESSENTIAL

SHINSYUICHI BRINGS CLEAN-LABEL JAPANESE MISO TO EVERYDAY MEALS, FROM QUICK SOUPS TO MARINADES WORLDWIDE. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

Outside Japan, miso often shows up as a restaurant flavor. Shinsyuichi Miso Co., Ltd. wants it to live where it started: at home.

President and CEO Yoshihiro Hayashi says the value comes from repetition, not a one-off bowl. "Think of miso not as a supplement or a tablet, but as a versatile food that helps people build better habits over time," he says.

That versatility is practical. If you can't find bonito dashi, Hayashi suggests sautéing whatever vegetables are on hand, adding water and miso paste and calling it dinner. From there, miso moves easily into marinades, stir-fries and quick dressings.

Shinsyuichi keeps that everyday approach visible to



"Miso should be part of everyday life."

Yoshihiro Hayashi
President and CEO,
Shinsyuichi Miso Co., Ltd.



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travelers and locals in Japan, with products stocked in supermarkets and convenience stores such as 7-Eleven, including single-serve "Oishii-ne" cup soups.

Abroad, the company is pushing beyond specialty shops into mainstream chains, citing growth paths that reach stores such as Safeway and Australia's Woolworths and Coles. For shoppers who read labels closely, Hayashi points to "clean label" priorities: no MSG, no additives, no preservatives.

Shinsyuichi exports to 50 countries and is open to making private-label miso for retailers. Hayashi's target: by 2030, the group aims for over 50 percent of Japan's miso exports.



Production Plant



Instant miso soup 20 servings
30 percent Less Sodium



MIKO BRAND SHIRO MISO

TOKYO KAIKAN: A DINING LANDMARK

AT ITS MARUNOUCHI HOME, TOKYO KAIKAN PAIRS FRENCH PRECISION AND JAPANESE TRADITION, OFFERING INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS A REFINED DINING EXPERIENCE SHAPED BY A CENTURY OF HOSPITALITY. *By Daniel de Bomford and Paul Mannion*

In a city that rebuilds itself every few years, permanence is rare. Tokyo's Marunouchi district, now a forest of glass towers grown from global capital, still houses one institution that has shaped how the city eats, meets and celebrates for more than a century: Tokyo Kaikan.

Founded in 1922, Tokyo Kaikan was not the vision of a single family or chef. It was created by the Tokyo business community as a gathering place, at a time when such spaces did not yet exist. Tokyo Kaikan President Noriaki Watanabe said that in those days, most celebrations took place in someone's home, rather than a formal venue such as a chapel or hall.



"You could say Tokyo Kaikan was one of the pioneers in shifting Japanese cultural practices toward modern ceremonial venues," he said.

From the beginning, French cuisine stood alongside Japanese, setting a tone of cultural fluency that remains central today. The building survived wartime requisition, postwar recovery and repeated reinvention, emerging as a symbol of continuity in an ever-changing city. While widely associated with celebrations requiring hospitality and ceremony, such as weddings, for many visitors, the



experience begins at the table. "When someone chooses us, we commit fully to making it exceptional," Watanabe said.

At the heart of the building is Restaurant Prunier, Tokyo Kaikan's flagship French dining room, which has held a Michelin one-star rating since 2023. Under chef Hiroyuki Matsumoto, who trained in three-Michelin-star kitchens in France, Prunier offers an elegant, modern expression of French cuisine grounded in classical technique. Japanese ingredi-

ents are treated with respect rather than novelty, appealing to diners who value precision and history.

Just steps away, Yachiyo presents a different cadence. The restaurant brings together charcoal grilling over an irori hearth, seasonal kaiseki and counter-style sushi. Guided by decorated Japanese cuisine adviser Naoto Suzuki, Yachiyo emphasizes preservation as much as pleasure, reflecting a belief that technique and culture are inseparable.



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"In Japan, *omotenashi*—our philosophy of heartfelt hospitality—is deeply rooted."

Noriaki Watanabe

President, Tokyo Kaikan



TOKYO KAIKAN



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These restaurants, along with the other three within Tokyo Kaikan, capture its enduring role and appeal. In an evolving world, traditions and continuity keep us grounded to our roots. It's a place where Japan's culinary past and present continue a confident conversation, one course at a time.





MITSUI DM SUGAR CO., LTD.: SWEETENING THE FUTURE WITH NUTRITION AND HEALTH

THE COMPANY IS POSITIONING ITS NEXT PHASE OF GROWTH AROUND A PRAGMATIC IDEA: STRENGTHENING ITS SUGAR FOUNDATION WHILE EXPANDING INTO NUTRITION AND HEALTH SOLUTIONS. *By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O’Neill*

“It is precisely because we have a solid sugar business that we can actively take on challenges in new business areas.”

—Taku Morimoto
President, Mitsui DM Sugar Co., Ltd.

A sugar cube doesn’t look like much until it hits hot tea. Melting into the liquid, it begins the work for which it was made: rounding out the edges of a flavor, lifting aroma and developing the cup’s overall taste. Mitsui DM Sugar Co., Ltd., one of Japan’s longest-established sugar refiners, is making a comparable bet. Sugar remains essential as the company’s core product, but its future will be measured by the products it dissolves into: food and ingredients that support various people, from athletes to the elderly, from hospital patients to families seeking everyday wellness.

Mitsui DM has built a nationwide supply system in Japan and has expanded overseas for decades, including operations in Asia and the Middle East. In a market where sugar is often treated as an interchangeable commodity, the company differentiates itself through consistent quality control from procurement through delivery, as well as applied research to meet the needs of an evolving society.

Make the Core Stronger at Home

This discipline matters because the sugar business is still the engine room. It’s a business where price cycles, energy costs and logistics can squeeze margins. In the com-



pany’s view, stability comes from operational rigor and a commitment to modernize. Japan’s domestic market is shrinking, pressured by population decline and changing preferences, so the company has prioritized supply stability by optimizing production bases and distribution networks.

President Taku Morimoto outlined steps to build resilience in volatile conditions, including supplier diversification and improved forecasting supported by digital tools. The objective is straightforward: protect the foundation so the company can invest in what comes next.

The company’s global strategy is the second half of that same discipline: build a reliable value chain and then extend it

where demand is growing. Morimoto points to a network of bases with specific functions across Thailand, China, Singapore, the Middle East and Vietnam, creating a value chain centered on Asia. The broader point is that overseas expansion is not a single bet on one market. It is a portfolio of capabilities designed to supply and compete in multiple regions over time.

The path forward is guided by a corporate philosophy centered on “Work closely and flexibly with you, as your lifetime partner, to help you enjoy sweeter living,” a theme the company uses to link its legacy to broader nutrition and health ambitions. “Our Group has adopted the slogan, ‘Nutrition by Life Stage,’” Morimoto said, de-

scribing the shift. The company breaks down life stages into specific demographics. For example, the seniors category has distinct stages: “Active Seniors,” “Defensive Seniors,” “Gap Seniors,” and “Care Seniors,” each with different nutritional needs and preferred food forms. In other words, the company’s nutrition strategy isn’t built around a one-size-fits-all pitch; it’s tailored.

Build a Nutrition and Health Growth Engine

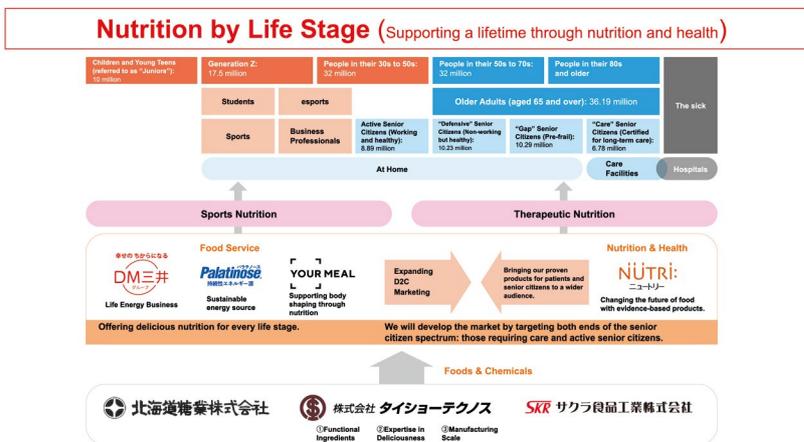
This is where the company’s “Life Energy” business comes into play. While sugar remains essential, the Life Energy portfolio is designed to address health-conscious demand and Japan’s demographic realities, especially among an aging population and an expanding focus on lifelong wellness. Morimoto framed sugar itself as more than a sweetener. “Fundamentally, sugar is an important source of nutrition that provides the energy necessary for life, in addition to imparting deliciousness and desirable physical properties to food,” he said. At the same time, he acknowledged the limitations of competing in a commodity market and the need to broaden the company’s value proposition beyond price and reliability.



The balancing act is explicit. “It is precisely because we have a solid sugar business that we can actively take on challenges in new business areas,” he said. The company is not walking away from sugar; it is positioning sugar and its new businesses as two pillars that reinforce each other.

One example of how that thinking translates into product strategy is Palatinose, a slow-digesting carbohydrate used in sports and medical nutrition. “Many people may associate sugar with causing diabetes or leading to weight gain,” Morimoto said, addressing common concerns around sugar. “However, rather than avoiding sugar completely, incorporating a moderate amount into your lifestyle can improve your Quality of Life.” He argued that in sports and nutrition, “the quality of the sugar, not just the quantity, has a significant impact.”

The Life Energy shift is also changing how the company thinks about its customers.



Historically, refined sugar and many food ingredients are sold business-to-business, far from the end consumers. Morimoto signaled interest in a more direct relationship through subscription-based delivery models. “I believe a direct-to-consumer subscription model, which regularly delivers suitable food products, is well-suited to meeting individual needs and goals,” he said. However, he added that a physical retail presence still matters for awareness and trial, particularly in categories such as sports nutrition.

Put Group R&D to Work, Faster

Underpinning these ideas is an R&D structure designed to move ideas from the lab to the market more efficiently. Mitsui DM group has consolidated capabilities at the DM Mitsui Research Institute, with collaborations spanning themes including plant-based proteins, lactic acid bacteria and functional ingredients derived from sugar by-products. That integrated approach aims to leverage the strengths of different group companies, aligning research expertise with product development expertise and go-to-market strategies.

Growth, in Morimoto’s view, also requires partnerships. “We are considering business and/or capital alliances with companies that can accelerate our progress in sales channels, R&D and manufacturing,” he said. The company’s “Nutrition by Life Stage” concept is not limited to Japan, and the group is open to potential overseas acquisitions and partnerships as it expands across Asia. Simultaneously, Morimoto acknowledges that the same strategy that works in Japan won’t necessarily have the same success abroad. “Even with an excellent product in Japan, marketing strategies are not universally applicable and must be re-evaluated for each local market,” he said.

Make Growth Compatible with Sustainability

Another window into the company’s broader agenda is an initiative called “Osakana Kakumei,” or “Fish Revolution,” which aims to develop a plant-based tuna alternative using ingredients such as konjac and seaweed. Morimoto was careful not to frame it as a replacement for seafood. “Rather than being seen as a mere substitute for fish, we aim to create an entirely new category called ‘Osakana Revolution,’ much like the relationship between real crab and ‘kanikama’ (imitation crab sticks),” he said. A core strength is the flexibility of the product’s nutritional profile, which can be fortified with vitamins, minerals and other functional ingredients.



For a company built on an ingredient that disappears into other people’s products, the strategic challenge is visibility. Mitsui DM Sugar’s answer is not to abandon its time-honored refining expertise. It is to apply that same discipline to new categories where nutrition, function and trust carry greater weight. If the company succeeds, its name will remain synonymous with sugar. It will also be known for what that sugar helped make possible: solutions that meet people where they are and support them on their journey.

Mitsui DM Sugar Co., Ltd.

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“Our products stand out because they embody Japanese craftsmanship and culture.”

Toshiyuki Nakamura
President, SANKYO FOODS Co., Ltd.

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SANKYO FOODS' APPROACH TO AUTHENTIC TASTE

A FIVE-DECADE COMMITMENT TO REGIONAL INGREDIENTS, CAREFUL TECHNIQUE AND FOOD THAT DELIVERS BALANCE, TRUST AND DELIGHT AT THE TABLE. *By Bernard Thompson and Kyann Edouard*

Part of the human experience is sharing meals with our loved ones. It's a kind of magic that renews bonds and brings us closer together. For Sankyo Foods, this magic is the basis of the company's philosophy. President Toshiyuki Nakamura said the philosophy is embodied in the Japanese word *wakuwaku*: the joy, anticipation and delight that food can bring. "Through our products, we want to share that joy globally," he said.

Packaged in a retort pouch but firmly rooted, the curry reflects Toyohashi's agricultural abundance and Sankyo Foods' commitment to local production for local consumption. "Our company has been based in Toyohashi for fifty years," Nakamura said. "We want to give back to Toyohashi, which has supported us throughout that time." Made with locally sourced ingredients, the curry serves as both a regional specialty and an introduction to the company's broader approach to food.



Based in Toyohashi City, Aichi Prefecture, the company has spent five decades refining ingredients and techniques that rarely draw attention to themselves but are felt deeply at the table. Its outsized presence is best felt in its premier product, edible chili oil, which has recorded cumulative sales of more than 5 million units nationwide.

Unlike many products created to chase trends, Sankyo Foods' TABERU chili oil emerged from hands-on experimentation. Nakamura recalls combining elements the company already produced in-house: sesame-based chili oil, coarsely ground chili peppers, crispy fried garlic and dried onions, only to discover something balanced. "The result was unexpectedly delicious," he said. "Its success is also due to the quality of the ingredients we produce ourselves, combined in just the right balance." The product spread steadily from Toyohashi to Japan's major cities, driven more by word of mouth within the food service industry than by marketing.

The same focus on balance shapes another of the company's signature offerings: Toyohashi Chicken Curry.

Behind these consumer-facing products is an infrastructure designed for consistency and safety. Sankyo Foods holds JFS-B, ISO 22000 and FSSC 22000 certifications, in line with standards that are increasingly essential in a globalized food supply chain. For Nakamura, these systems are not ends in themselves, but part of a larger responsibility to customers and partners alike.

That sense of responsibility extends beyond the factory. The company conducts monthly beach cleanups at Omotemachi Beach and runs outreach classes at local elementary schools to promote food education and regional agriculture. As the company's philosophy posits, food carries social meaning. "Meals are more than nourishment," he said. "Eating delicious food naturally brings smiles and happiness. Food has a kind of magic."

It's a simple idea, but one that explains Sankyo Foods' success. The company has chosen a path grounded in flavor, place and bonds between people.





WHY VISITORS SEEK OUT KURA SUSHI

AN ADDITIVE-FREE PHILOSOPHY, PATENTED TECHNOLOGY AND PLAYFUL DESIGN ALLOW KURA SUSHI TO SCALE JAPANESE AUTHENTICITY WITHOUT LOSING ITS SOUL. *By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Kyann Edouard*

The power in Japanese sushi resides within what you can't photograph: the depth of umami, the clean flavor and the care taken. Kura Sushi's success comes from taking those fundamentals seriously, even at scale.

As international interest in Japanese cuisine continues to rise, Kura Sushi has positioned itself as a steward of *washoku* values,

its rotating belt, freshness controls and hygiene technologies allow customers to choose visually while maintaining safety and quality.

Innovation extends beyond engineering. Its Smart Kura Project and interactive in-store programs treat the restaurant as a place of discovery rather than a routine consumption destination. Change, Tanaka believes, is essential. "People change, and restaurants must change with them," he said.



adapted for modern life. The company's approach begins with flavor. Rather than relying on additives or heavy seasoning, Kura Sushi derives flavor from natural ingredients such as kombu and bonito, honoring techniques refined over centuries. "The foundation is always natural umami," President Kunihiko Tanaka said. "Even with sushi, we produce everything in-house rather than outsourcing."

Kura Sushi's authenticity extends beyond food. While many chains have abandoned the traditional conveyor belt in favor of order-only systems, Kura Sushi has doubled down on the original *kaiten* experience. Protected by an extensive portfolio of patents,

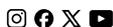


Kura Sushi's Osaka-Kansai Expo restaurant drew strong global attention, prompting inquiries about expansion in more than eight countries.

As Kura Sushi expands internationally, its guiding principle remains consistent: adapt language and systems while preserving the essence. In Tanaka's words, the goal is simple: food that is "safe, delicious and pleasant."



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"We do not simply serve food; we create experiences"

Kunihiko Tanaka

President, Kura Sushi

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