

■ Kyoto Lecture by Dr. Harold McGee (October 18, 2010)

Harold McGee is a world-renowned authority of chemistry of foods and cooking. He studied physics at California Institute of Technology and literature at Yale, and has written two award-winning books; *On Food and Cooking* and *The Curious Cook*, as well as many articles and reviews. His books are must-have items not only for students of culinary schools such as the Culinary Institute of America but also for students of food science at major universities.

His best known book, *On Food and Cooking ~The Science and Lore of the Kitchen~*, was translated into Japanese in 2008. His books captured wide range of readers from professionals to home cooks, as cookery encyclopedia with rich scientific data and as a treasure box full of short articles on essential food that we can not live without even a single day. His words stimulate and turn on our curiosity about food. Furthermore, we are encouraged by his footsteps; creating the new world by connecting two seemingly different disciplines, science and cookery.

Thanks to Japanese Culinary Academy and Ajinomoto Co., Inc., his first visit to Kyoto came true. In the morning of his departure, Dr. McGee shared his current interest and what he felt during his stay in Kyoto. Hiroyuki Kawasaki, Ph.D in food science at Jin-ai University, Fukui prefecture hosted the session.

In the first-half of the presentation, after introducing people who proclaimed “nouvelle cuisine” in modern Europe, Dr. McGee talked about a dozen of standard-bearers of contemporary cuisine with emphasis that all of them who were also his close friends respected not just technique but ingredients.

Michel Bras, France Recognized by his innovation. McGee introduced his “salad” which reminded of us the Japanese influence.

Ferran Adria, Spain “Alginate for Caviar” His motto is, “Be creative. Do not copy.” (1988)

Wylie Dufresne, USA Quick-witted “Sunny-side Up” in Italian taste.

His unique version of “Surf & Turf,” fish fillet covered with pork skin using transglutaminase (meat glue) instead of lobster and filet mignon

Jose Andres, Spain “Olive Oil Caramel” using isomalt (sugar substitute)

Andoni Luis Aduriz, Spain “Carpaccio of watermelon” using vacuum packed pouch

Joan Roca, Spain “Oyster in Transparent Earth” effectuated by rotary evaporator

Jordi Roca, Spain “White Chromatism” with startling gap between its appearance and taste

Heston Blumenthal, England “Sound of the Sea” served with i-pod in a sea shell.

Rene Rezepi, Denmark He organizes a series of gathering of younger chefs who are interested in innovation and essential facts of cooking and eating

David Chang, USA Dashi means a kind of essence for him. He made dashi from a honey pine nut, cheese and garlic flowers.

David Kinch, USA He thinks more than ordinary chefs. In his soup “Tidal Pool,” he came up with differentiation of temperature between surface and bottom by using agar.

The most distinctive feature in Dr. McGee’s presentation was that he wove his impression of a couple of days in Kyoto into his accounts. Reminiscing beautiful memories such as warm conversation with Japanese chefs, visiting temples and a shrine, tea ceremony and incense listening, he expressed how he had a wonderful time in Kyoto.

Following Dr. Kawasaki’s introduction on Japanese Culinary Laboratories’ activity, the participants exchanged their views rather than asking questions. The participants from different backgrounds, scientists and chefs, Japanese and Westerns, expressed their points of view.

Dr. Kenzo Kurihara, chairman of UIC, asked Dr. McGee if French chefs still dominated in the culinary world. McGee’s answer was partly Yes partly No. He added that most of chefs in his presentation on that day were Spanish and they were more innovative than French. Chef Yoshihiro Murata of *KIKUNOI* said, “Kyoto chefs don’t cook for the sake of cooking. We cook for a meal. That means we don’t look for surprise. I cook for my customers ranging from teenagers to people in their eighties and I have to prepare what they feel familiar with.” Chef Yoshihiro Takahashi and chef Motonari Nakamura followed chef Murata saying that the cooking is not a creation of surprise in the prepared dishes; chefs mission is to prepare the most flavorful meals out of fresh seasonal ingredients.

Dr. Toshihide Nishimura, vice president of UIC, asked how to handle transglutaminase to give final products a proper texture. Regarding using industrial ingredients, chef Takuji Takahashi of *KINOBU* shared his opinion. “We use baking soda daily for removing harshness of taste. We don’t care whether the ingredient is industrial or not. To keep using the method, not in a fashion, has significant meaning. To leave a heritage in cuisine for generations is crucial. Invention turns into tradition and heritage. It’s a Japanese way.”

Two hours session was too short to reach conclusion. Everyone felt that this workshop was époque making. The success was mostly attributed to Dr. McGee’s gentle and open attitude that allowed participants to express their opinions freely.

Dr. Takashi Yamamoto, vice president of UIC, closed the workshop with a quote of a well known experiment. The human brain is divided into the left and right spheres, with each having different

functions. The right brain is called the music sphere because it is where the sounds of music, machinery and noise are processed. The left brain is called the language sphere, because it processes sound logically and intellectually, namely being where the spoken word is comprehended. Up to this point there is no difference between Japanese and Westerners.

But there is a difference in the location where the sound of crickets processed. The experiments revealed that while Westerners process insect sounds together with machinery and noise sounds in the music sphere, Japanese capture insect sounds in their language sphere, meaning that Japanese hear insect sounds as "insect voices." Thus, there is a big gap lying in between Westerners and Japanese. The same can be said in eating. Dr. Yamamoto wrapped up, "However, I have just begun to feel that we can clear the gap."

