

Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month

WEEK 3-4

Japan and Miso Soup

Welcome to Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. This year the theme is ‘Building Leadership: Embrace the Cultural Values and Inclusion.’ For week three and four, I have provided a brief introduction to Japan and a recipe for Miso Soup.

Japan is an island nation in East Asia located in the Pacific Ocean. The characters that make up Japan’s name mean “sun origin”, which is why Japan is often referred to as the “Land of the Rising Sun”. Japan is an archipelago made up of more than 6,500 islands and has the world’s tenth largest population. The *de facto* capital city Tokyo and several surrounding government bodies make up the largest metropolitan area in the world with over 30 million residents. The first known inhabitants of Japan are dated to around 30,000 BC, and Japan appears first in written history in the Chinese *Book of Han*.

Japan is a constitutional monarchy where the power of the Emperor is very limited. The emperor serves as a ceremonial figurehead and is defined in the constitution as “the symbol of the state and the unity of the people.” The Prime Minister of Japan serves as the head of government and the bicameral parliament consists of the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors.

Agriculture, forestry, and fishing form the primary section of industry of the Japanese economy along with the mining industry. However, these industries only account for 1.3% of the gross national product. This is in part due to the fact that only 20% of Japan’s land is suitable for cultivation, and the agricultural economy is heavily subsidized and protected. Much of the countryside is used for rice paddies, including floodplains, terraced slopes, wetlands and coastal bays. The remaining farmable area is used to grow wheat and barley in the fall and sweet potatoes, vegetables and dry rice in the summer. The practice of intercropping is often used by farmers where they alternate their crops with beans and peas. Japan is ranked second in the world behind China in the tonnage of fish caught in 1989. They have also greatly advanced techniques of aquaculture. They use artificial insemination and hatching techniques to breed fish and shellfish, and release them into the rivers and seas. Japan has an abundance of forest resources, but do not have a well developed lumber industry. Forestry is often a part-time activity for farmers and small companies.

Japanese cuisine is based on combining white rice (*gohan*) with one or several main and side dishes (*okazu*). This is often accompanied by clear or miso soup and pickles (*tsukemono*).

The Recipe

Miso Soup

- 12-ounce block firm silken [tofu](#)
- 2 quarts dashi
- 6 tablespoons dark or red miso
- 2 tablespoons light or white miso
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced

Directions

Wrap the block of tofu in 2 layers of paper towels and lay on a plate. Invert a second plate on top of the tofu and weigh down with a 28-ounce can. Leave for 20 minutes then cut the tofu into 1/4 to 1/2-inch cubes.

Heat the [dashi](#) in a 4-quart saucepan over medium-high heat. When the dashi reaches 100 degrees F on an instant-read thermometer, ladle 1 cup into a small bowl. Add the miso, and whisk until smooth.

Bring the remaining dashi to a bare simmer, approximately 10 minutes. Add the [miso](#) mixture and whisk to combine. Return to a slight simmer, being careful not to boil the mixture. Add the tofu and scallions and cook for another minute or until heated through. Remove from the heat, ladle into soup bowls and serve immediately.

References:

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/alton-brown/miso-soup-recipe/index.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture,_forestry,_and_fishing_in_Japan

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_cuisine