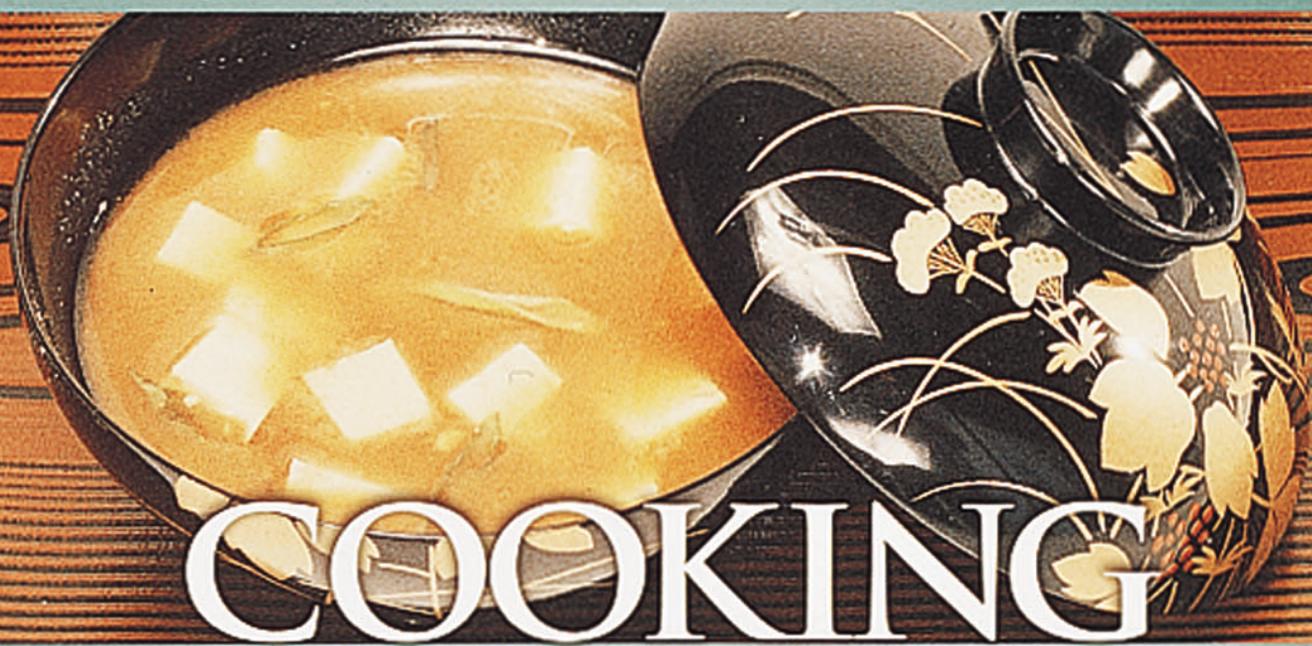


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Reiko Weston

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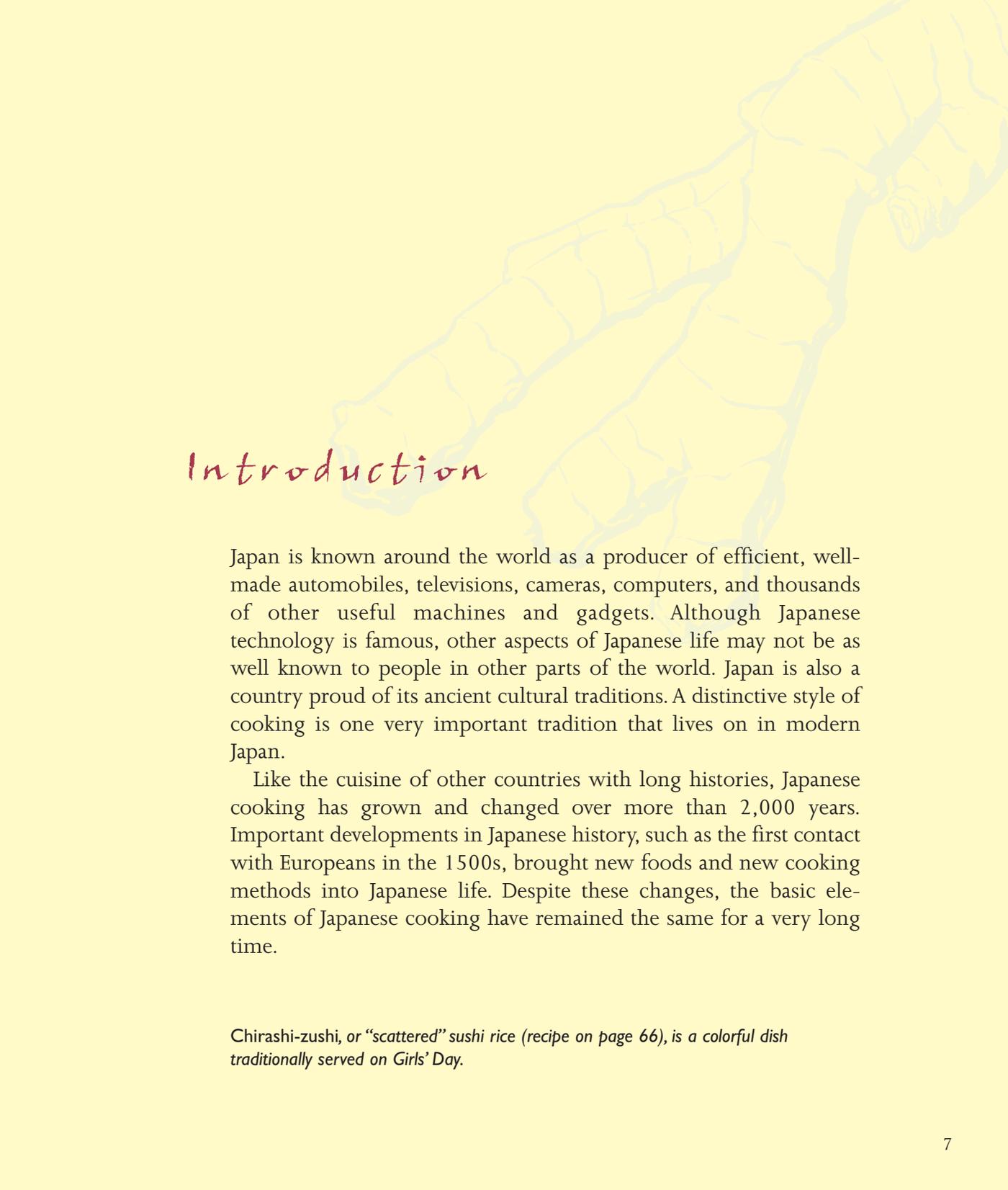
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Introduction

Japan is known around the world as a producer of efficient, well-made automobiles, televisions, cameras, computers, and thousands of other useful machines and gadgets. Although Japanese technology is famous, other aspects of Japanese life may not be as well known to people in other parts of the world. Japan is also a country proud of its ancient cultural traditions. A distinctive style of cooking is one very important tradition that lives on in modern Japan.

Like the cuisine of other countries with long histories, Japanese cooking has grown and changed over more than 2,000 years. Important developments in Japanese history, such as the first contact with Europeans in the 1500s, brought new foods and new cooking methods into Japanese life. Despite these changes, the basic elements of Japanese cooking have remained the same for a very long time.

Chirashi-zushi, or “scattered” sushi rice (recipe on page 66), is a colorful dish traditionally served on Girls’ Day.

Japanese believe that the products of the earth and the sea should be used in ways that preserve their natural forms and flavors as much as possible.

When they plan meals during the year, Japanese cooks try to use the fruits and vegetables that grow in that particular season. In spring, wild plants such as *warabi* (fern shoots) and *seri* (Japanese parsley) can be gathered in woodlands and forests. Summer brings the ripening of such familiar garden vegetables as tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, eggplants, beans, and peas. In the autumn, a wild mushroom harvest takes place when the large *matsutake* appears in pine forests. Winter meals feature root vegetables such as carrots and turnips as well as daikon, a large white radish, and the root of the burdock, a plant viewed as a weed in the United States.

At any time of the year, Japanese cooks can buy fresh fish caught in the waters that surround the island nation. Fish markets display tuna, sea bass, yellowtail, and cod along with other products of the sea such as octopus, sea urchins, and many delicious kinds of edible seaweed. Excellent beef, pork, and chicken are also available and appear on Japanese menus.

Cooking the Japanese Way

When they prepare food, the Japanese use basic cooking methods that preserve or enhance the natural flavors of all the ingredients. Most of these methods are simple and easy, but they produce dishes that taste delicious and look beautiful.

One of the most common styles of Japanese cooking is called *nimono*. This category includes dishes that are made by gently boiling or simmering ingredients such as fish, meat, or vegetables in a seasoned broth. *Yakimono* is food prepared by broiling, usually over a charcoal fire. The famous Japanese *tempura*—food that has been deep-fried in batter—belongs to the general group of *agemono*, or fried things.

About the Author

Reiko Weston came to Minneapolis, Minnesota, from Tokyo, Japan, in 1953. She studied math at the University of Minnesota but interrupted her studies in 1959 to open a Japanese restaurant called Fuji-Ya in downtown Minneapolis. Fuji-Ya has changed locations several times, but continues to be a popular eating place.

Weston was named Small Businessperson of the Year in 1979. In 1980, she became the second woman to be elected to the Minnesota Hall of Fame. Ms. Weston played an active role in managing her restaurant until her death in 1988.

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