

Italy–Japan Joint Symposium on “Foods as a first medicine”

October 22nd and 23rd, 2009, Italian Institute of Culture, Tokyo, Japan

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Under the auspices of:

- The Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry;
- The Embassy of Italy, Tokyo, Japan;
- and BUONITALIA (The society for the promotion and valorization of Italian agricultural and food products)
- In collaboration with Slow Food Japan.

Italian and Japanese people are amongst the most long-lived in the world (female, more than 85 years and male, more than 80 years!). There are many common features between these two populations contributing to their longevity. Among them, one of the most important factors should be, beside their excellent national sanitary system, traditional food habits. Eating Italian and Japanese traditional foods has widely been considered as an excellent way of maintaining physical and mental health. Indeed, Italian and Japanese foods have often been considered as an elixir of long life. However, Italian/mediterranean and Japanese foods seem to have a few in common either in the first materials or in the mode of their cooking. Indeed, distinct use of main foods in two countries such as pasta versus rice, olive oil versus soy sauce, basil versus shiso, mozzarella cheese versus tofu, gorgonzola cheese versus miso, wine versus sake and water versus green tea, strengthens the consideration that foods and cooking in Italy and Japan have little in common. Regarding fishes frequently eaten in both countries, eating raw fishes in Italy has not been so popular as in Japan. The same is inversely true for raw ham or raw meats.

The word “antioxidants” is becoming very popular in both countries as a synonym of healthy foods without a

correct scientific meaning of this word. There are indeed a number of foods containing antioxidants such as polyphenols. They include colored vegetables and fruits. It is well documented that both Italian and Japanese cooking make a frequent use of them. However, the precise understanding on what biological action these compounds really exert in the body has been elusive.

This consideration has led us to organize at Tokyo, under the frame of “Italy in Japan 2009: promoting the Italian system” (<http://sedi.esteri.it/Autunno2009>), Italy–Japan meeting on “Foods as a first medicine” on October 22nd and 23rd, 2009, under the auspices of the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, of the Embassy of Italy in Tokyo, Japan and BUONITALIA, Roma, Italy, mainly aimed to try to answer the following questions:

1. Are there some common features linking apparently so different foods and the way of cooking them between Italy and Japan?
2. Are there foods compounds with remarkable biological action contributing to physical and mental health?

To our knowledge, there has been no scientific comparison between Italian and Japanese foods factors so far. This meeting will represent a starting line for the future collaboration between two countries either in scientific or commercial fields.

Review, mini-review, and view point/hypothesis (peer reviewed) by speakers to this meeting will be published in a special issue “Healthy diets: Japan and Italy facing towards” of *Genes and Nutrition* (Springer).