

# Japanese People Contributing Worldwide

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## An Acclaimed Master of French Gastronomy

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Fumiko Kono, a Japanese culinary creator, has won international acclaim in the world of French gastronomy. Kono graduated at the top of her class at Le Cordon Bleu, the famous cooking academy in Paris, in 1997. Working at L'Arpège, a three-star restaurant in the French capital, she advanced to the position of second chef. In 2000 she went independent so as to be able to create her own recipes. She quickly achieved global recognition with her successful work at parties attended by international celebrities, including a reception hosted by Bernadette Chirac, France's first lady at the time. With her cooking equipment packed in a suitcase, she flew around Europe and to more distant destinations, such as the Middle East and North America, where she delighted gourmets with her creations.

In 2005, Kono was recruited as executive chef at Fauchon, a renowned producer of gourmet foods. She continued to distinguish herself, collaborating with Pierre Hermé, the "Picasso of pastry," in creating a new menu for the rooftop restaurant at Galeries Lafayette, an upmarket department store in Paris, and teaching at the cooking school of Alain Ducasse, the grand master of French gastronomy. Ducasse sings her praises, declaring, "She has a palate with 'absolute taste' like the ears with absolute pitch that some others have. She creates recipes that magically balance the Japanese and French culinary cultures" (*L'Express*, June 3, 2015). Kono herself suggests that her work may reflect the influence of traditional Japanese cooking, citing such distinctive elements as presentation of dishes that evoke the seasons, delicate flavoring, and careful arrangement of food on the plate.

In March 2015, "Goût de France/Good France," a celebration of French cuisine, was held at restaurants and embassies in 150 countries. Kono was one of eight chefs chosen to prepare dinner for ambassadors to France and other distinguished guests at the Château de Versailles, the main site of the celebration. Looking back on this occasion, she declares, "When people from different countries sit around the same dining table, they converse about shared topics, and through food the links between countries become stronger and their relationships deeper. I felt that gastronomy is truly 'diplomacy.'"

Though she has achieved the status of a first-class chef, Kono is unique in her firm stance of continuing to work as a "traveling chef"; she has no restaurant of her own and has declined offers of posts from top-ranking establishments. She now travels regularly between Tokyo and Paris and has broadened the range of her activities, appearing on cooking programs, producing airline menus, and authoring books. Looking ahead, she says she hopes to open a salon-like café where many people will gather—a place oriented to contributing to society, where the profits will be donated to organizations like UNICEF to help children in impoverished regions. Another idea is to cooperate with relief efforts by developing preserved foods of high nutritional value. Through such activities, she would like to offer up some of the enthusiasm that she has devoted to gastronomy, putting it to work for the sake of those in need.



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1. Kono (front, third from left) was part of the team of eight chefs headed by Alain Ducasse (fourth from left) who prepared food for French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius (second from left) and other international dignitaries at the "Goût de France/Good France" celebration of French cuisine in March 2015. 2. "Soupe de Miró," one of Kono's signature dishes, was inspired by the image of a painting by Joan Miró. 3. Kono prepared the summer 2015 menu for this restaurant at the iconic Hotel Plaza Athénée in Paris and has been asked to do so again in 2016. 4. Teaching at Alain Ducasse's cooking school in Paris.

### Fumiko Kono

A Tokyo native, Kono teaches at a cooking school and is active as a culinary creator. She has attracted attention with dishes that are both subtle and elegant, bringing out the flavors of the ingredients, and has been invited to cook for celebrities in locations across the globe, including Britain and Switzerland, North America and the Middle East.

