

COOL BEANS: MEET THE COOP MEMBER BEHIND HEYDOH, THE ROLEX OF SOY SAUCES

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Christine Liu of Heydoh

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By Liz Welch

“How are you going to eat that?” This is a question I’ve heard multiple times while checking out at the Coop. Sometimes it’s referring to Fuyu persimmons, or fennel (salad hack: sliced thin with lemon, olive oil and toasted pine nuts).

It happened again one afternoon last spring. I was buying the tuna, salmon and yellowtail sashimi trio that has become a family favorite.

“We make poke bowls, with sushi rice, cucumbers, radishes and a sesame soy sauce

drizzle,” I replied.

“Do you have a favorite soy sauce?” she asked.

I did not. I could barely even remember the names of the ones we had at home. Kikkoman? San J?

Now she was smiling.

The conversation quickly pivoted to the fact that there are not that many to choose from at the Coop—let alone most American grocery stores. Nobody stops to think about soy sauce. And this is when my gregarious cashier, Christine Liu, told me that she was months away from launching her own soy sauce for precisely that reason. She was developing Heydoh, a soy sauce made with single origin Taiwanese black soybeans, with her childhood friend, the journalist and cookbook writer Clarissa Wei.

Flash forward to spring 2026, not only does the Coop stock two versions of Heydoh—“Classic” for cooking and “Silky” for drizzling, finishing, and dipping—but the fledgling brand was written about in *Eater* and *The New Yorker* within the first months of its launch.

In short, Liu and Wei found a sweet spot in a very salty market.



It all started when Wei was working on her acclaimed 2023 cookbook *Made in Taiwan*, and realized that the dishes did not taste the same when she used American bought soy sauces. The ones she found in Taiwan were richer and more complex in flavor. So she contacted Liu in 2024 with an idea: they should develop a soy sauce brand in the United States that tasted like the versions available in East Asia.

Both women grew up in immigrant Taiwanese families—Liu in New Jersey, Wei in California. The two met as girls at a summer camp in New Jersey that their church hosted. They stayed in touch, even traveling together to East Asia when they were in their twenties.

MOST SOY SAUCES IN THE UNITED STATES ARE FERMENTING SOYBEANS THAT HAVE THEIR OILS ALREADY EXTRACTED TO MAKE OIL. THE FACTORIES THEN USE THE LEFTOVER BEAN.

“My mom had passed away earlier in the year, and I wanted to reconnect with her heritage,” she said. “I stayed for a few months. I did not want to go back to tech, and was trying to figure out what I wanted to do next.”

As she listened to her childhood friend map out her vision for a new soy sauce for American appetites, she was intrigued.

“In the Asian category, there will be ten different chili crisp brands to choose from—but no one was doing anything to make a better soy sauce on the bigger market,” she explains.

Liu also started to think about the recent booms in olive oil and hot sauce. (Once upon a time, there was Bertolli or Tabasco! Now there are dozens upon dozens in each category.) She realized that the soy sauce space had the same potential. However, Liu had no background in food products. And she was still grieving her mother.

“My first response was, ‘hell no!’” Liu remembers.

But then Wei convinced her to come with her to a soy sauce factory in Taiwan. Liu agreed, and understood immediately that her friend was on to something.

“The soy sauce is just so much better there,” she explained. “I started to think, ‘Why can’t something of this quality exist in the U.S.?’ ”

The two did several more factory visits. The tasting methods varied. “You either sip it or, in some factories, they pour it over ice cream!” Liu says.

Liu agreed to give her friend a six-month runway to get this idea off the ground—and onto shelves. She returned to Brooklyn, where she lives with her wife, and started crunching numbers.

Back in Taiwan, they found a factory with a culture of transparency around sourcing

and production. What goes into a soy sauce is often a mystery, but Liu speaks about soybeans the way winemakers discuss grapes. “We use black soybeans, which have an earthier flavor,” she explains. “Most soy sauces in the United States use yellow soybean which is 100% a different flavor profile.”

Most soy sauces also use a mix of soybeans, whereas Heydoh, which translates to black soybean in Mandarin, is single origin. It also uses the whole bean in a fermentation process that both gives their product a deep umami dimension—and, as a result, is low in sodium.

“My mom had a kidney illness and needed lower sodium,” Liu said. “So that was another sign—all the lower sodium stuff she bought tasted like crap.”

Heydoh’s focus is on the quality of their beans, and taking time with the fermentation process which is why their products have both a complex taste and a silky finish. The silky version is double fermented for a more concentrated, and velvety texture.

“Most soy sauces in the U.S. are fermenting soybeans that have their oils already extracted to make oil,” Liu says. “The factories then use the leftover bean.”

They also add hyaluronic acid to speed up the fermentation process—and sodium to give it a taste that Liu describes as a “salt bomb.”

“Our product is made the old school way, which is why it’s so delicious,” Liu says.



PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

Once they found their factory and finalized their recipe, they focused on packaging that would convey their vision to the American consumer.

“Clarissa cooks all the time, so she insisted on a cap that had a good pour, and didn’t drip,” Liu says. “We also wanted a flip top, because how many times have you misplaced the top to your condiments?”

For the label, they wanted something nostalgic, decidedly East Asian and culturally accessible to the everyday American. “We settled on a label that looks like the train tickets from East Asia,” Liu explains. The colorful, almost cartoonish design pops off the shelf.

SOY SAUCE FACTORY TASTING METHODS VARY. “YOU CAN SIP IT OR, IN SOME FACTORIES, THEY POUR IT OVER ICE CREAM!”

Heydoh launched in September, and the Coop was among its first buyers. You can find the bottles in the gourmet endcap alongside the fancy olive oils and bespoke jams. It's also available in Pearl River, R&D Goods and Jubilee, as well as 110 stores nationwide.

Liu began selling the product by going door-to-door to gourmet shops and grocery stores. She even packed it in her suitcase for a friend's wedding in Austin, and a visit to a friend in upstate New York, sneaking off for sales visits at local businesses. Since then, the demand for Heydoh has grown exponentially. In fact, that first September shipment sold out in two and a half months, right around the time Heydoh was mentioned in *The New Yorker* as a great holiday gift.

"That became a forecasting issue," Liu said. "We never imagined people would love our soy sauce as much as we do!"

They upped production—thankfully, soy sauce has a long shelf life.

While she's currently talking to distributors, and working with a warehouse in New Jersey and California, she still hand-delivers Heydoh to the Coop, where she has been a member since 2018. When Yuri Weber agreed to stock it back in the fall of 2025, Liu took that as another sign.

"This is our customer base," she said. "People who care about good ingredients and sourcing practices. Who will appreciate a clean ingredient with less sodium. I'm basically selling to myself."



PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist, and book collaborator.