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著者 (英)	Naomichi Ishige
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The History of Food Culture Exchange for Long-term Periods: Japan as an Example

长时段视角下的饮食文化交流史：以日本为例

Naomichi ISHIGE

石毛直道

National Museum of Ethnology

(日本) 国立民族学博物馆

ABSTRACT

The study of food culture should consider the cultural aspects of human activities related to a series of actions, from the acquisition of food from the environment, through cooking and eating with cutlery, to finishing the digestion process. This chapter focus on the level of ‘ethnic food’, equivalent to ‘national food’, paying special attention to its relationship with ‘foreign food’.

Chinese civilization had a strong influence on the history of East Asian culture, comprising China, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan. The biggest event in the history of Japanese traditional food culture was the introduction of paddy rice cultivation in the first half of the final millennium BC. By starting rice cultivation, Japan became a full-scale agricultural society, and the nation was established. Since then, rice has become the most important food in the Japanese diet. Traditional Japanese cuisine was developed with the goal of skills to match the taste of rice cooked without any seasoning and of sake made from rice. In the Edo period (1603–1868), when Japan was under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the country was isolated from foreign influences. During this is period the traditional Japanese food culture reached its maturity. In the early 20th century, ‘western food stores’ where popular western cuisine could be eaten prospered in the cities. However, in a western restaurant, rice was more likely to be served than bread, adapting western cuisine to match the taste of Japanese customers. This is how a unique local western cuisine was born, including curry with rice and pork cutlets, croquettes, omelette and rice, and so on. However, western food was only eaten at home by upper- and middle-class families, whereas common people maintained their everyday eating habits as an extension of the Edo period. Today, traditional Japanese cuisine is renowned for its healthiness due to limited use of meat and fat. Also, by emphasizing the natural taste of ingredients based on the principle that ‘no cooking is the ideal way of cooking’, Japanese cuisine appears

somewhat eccentric among the world's cuisines. Dining at Japanese restaurants, people around the world experience a taste they have not tried before, and for many, Japanese specialties become their favourite food.

摘要

饮食文化研究应当思考人类从获取食物，使用餐具制作和食用食物，到完成消化过程等一系列相关活动中寓含的文化。这篇文章将把关注的焦点放在“种族饮食即民族饮食”这一层面上，并尤其注意其与“外国饮食”的关系。中华文明对包括中国、朝鲜半岛和日本在内的东亚文化的历史产生过重要的影响。日本传统饮食文化史上的最大一件事就是公元前一千年上半期水稻耕作技术的传入。由此，日本完全变成了一个农业社会，国家也开始出现。自此时开始，稻米成为了日本人饮食中最重要的食物。江户时代（1603-1868），在德川幕府的统治下，日本隔绝了外国的影响。这个时期日本的传统饮食文化达到成熟阶段。20世纪初，在日本城市的“西方食物商店”里人们已经可以吃到受欢迎的西式烹饪。但西式饮食为适应日本人的习惯进行了调整：在西式饭店，人们吃到的更可能是稻米而非面包。一种极为独特的西式烹饪就此产生，包括咖喱饭和猪排、炸肉丸和蛋包饭等。

然而，只有上流家庭和中产阶级家庭家里吃西餐，普通民众仍然保持着他们自江户时代延续下来的日常饮食习惯。现在，传统的日式烹饪因其健康而广为人知——理由是：日式烹饪中的肉和脂肪含量少。同样地，基于“没有烹饪就是最理想的烹饪方式”的理念，日式烹饪强调食料本真的味道，这使其与世界上的其他烹饪都有所不同。在日式饭店用餐，世界各地的人们都能体验到他们从未体验过的一种味道。而对很多人来说，日式特色菜会变成他们最喜爱的食物。

FOOD PROCESSING SYSTEM AND MEAL SYSTEM

The study of food culture should consider the cultural aspects of human activities related to a series of actions, from the acquisition of food from the environment, through cooking and eating with cutlery, to finishing the digestion process.

Therefore, food culture is an extremely broad research field with close ties to sciences such as agriculture, a research field related to food acquisition, as well as nutrition and physiology, fields that study the relationships between the human body and food. Food culture is located at the core between the food processing and food behaviour systems, as shown in Figure 1.

The food processing system is a broad culinary system with the added cultural value of cooking utensils and technology. The food behaviour system involves values and behaviours related to food, comprising different concepts such as favourable food selection principles, dietary behaviours, and other cultural ideas and human behaviour expressed according to those ideas.

An 'individual' food culture is formed by the integration of these two systems. As we will see next, the group unit holding the individual food culture spreads from home to the world, and we must consider the historical changes caused by the interaction of groups. In other words, it is necessary to add a spatial

axis and time axis to Figure 1.

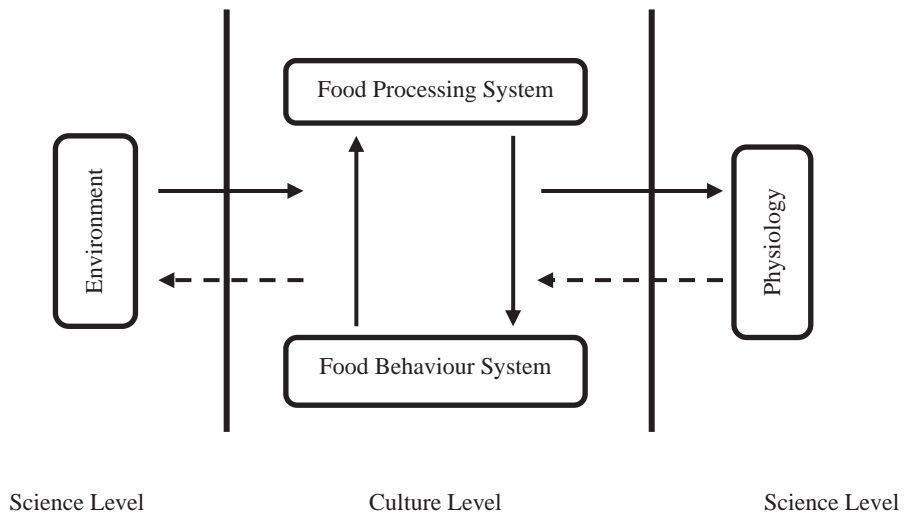


Figure 1 The broad research field of food culture

SPREAD OF FOOD CULTURE

Culture is communicated through language. It is said that ‘language is a vehicle for culture’. Therefore, let us explain the spatial spread of food culture with language (Figure 2).

During early childhood and family life, human beings acquire basic language abilities. The language used at home differs subtly between families. If we call this ‘home language’, food culture would correspond to ‘home food’, typified by home cooking. Even in the same area, everyone has a slightly different ‘taste of home’.

The concept of ‘local food’ is established to focus on commonality of food culture in certain areas. The corresponding language concept would be ‘dialect’. The largest unit of people who historically sharing the same traditional culture is represented by ethnicity; the corresponding term for ‘ethnic language’ would be ‘ethnic food’.

Home Language	Dialect	Ethnic Language	National Language	Foreign Language
Home Food	Regional Food	Ethnic Food	National Food	Foreign Food

Figure 2 The spatial spread of food culture as related to language

When a nation integrating multiple ethnic groups is established, the concepts of 'national language' and 'national food' are created. The area outside that nation is recognized as 'foreign', symbolized by 'foreign language', positioning a food culture of 'foreign food'.

In East Asia, 'ethnic food' and 'national food' are nearly identical, and in the Korean Peninsula and Japan, the 'ethnic language' and 'national language' are also consistent (there is a minority in Japan with Ainu language and food traditions, although this has now all but disappeared). In a multi-ethnic state such as China, 'ethnic languages' and 'ethnic food' exist. And in the modern world, where opportunities to encounter 'foreign language' have increased, 'foreign food' has also become popular.

This chapter focuses on the level of 'ethnic food', equivalent to 'national food', paying special attention to its relationship with 'foreign food'.

CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

The main unit of traditional culture was ethnicity, prior to the formation of the modern state. Here, setting aside the differences of individual ethnic cultures, as well as their particularities and history, 'civilization' will be expressed as cultural characteristics that spread universally.

Chinese civilization has had a strong influence on the history of East Asian culture, comprising China, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan.

The northern part of Vietnam, regarded geographically as southeast Asia, was ruled by China from the Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty, so the influence of Chinese civilization is strong in this region as well. Speaking specifically of food culture, eating with chopsticks and spoon, as well as certain cooking methods, are shared in common with China.

In Mongolia, which is adjacent to China, food is based in a heterogeneous lifestyle called nomadism; therefore, the traditional food culture differs from the food culture of East Asia, which is a cultural society.

In this chapter, the history of Japanese food culture will be taken as an example to introduce the culture and civilization of East Asia.

INTRODUCTION OF PADDY RICE CULTIVATION

Since the beginning of human history, exchange has existed. From chipped stone to polished stone tools, the transition from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic era that occurred around the world, characterized by the use of earthenware, agriculture, and livestock raising, has been explained by the civilization covering the individual culture.

Civilization was propagated in the island country of Japan through movement across the sea from the coastal parts of mainland China and the Korean Peninsula.

The biggest event in the history of Japanese traditional food culture was the

introduction of paddy rice cultivation in the first half of the final millennium BC.¹⁾ By starting rice cultivation, Japan became a full-scale agricultural society, and the nation was established. Since then, rice has become the most important food in the Japanese diet. From ancient to modern times, Japanese agricultural policies have been developed with a main focus on securing rice production. Traditional Japanese cuisine was developed with the goal of cooking skills to match the taste of rice cooked without any seasoning and of sake made from rice.

THE FORMATION PERIOD OF JAPANESE FOOD CULTURE

If the history of food culture in Japan after formation of a unified state can be macroscopically classified as an era, the period from the latter half of the 6th century to the 15th century can be regarded as ‘the period of formation of the Japanese food culture’. This was a period of absorbing the food culture formed in Chinese civilization and making it Japanese, forming the basis of the nation’s own independent food culture.

Before contact was made with the civilization of western Europe in the 16th century, Chinese civilization was the norm for Japan, as it was for other ethnic groups around China, such as Vietnam and the Korean Peninsula. During this time, China and other continental countries were under Chinese rule.

In contrast, Japan, being isolated by the sea, was not organized under the control of the Chinese empire and never compelled to join Chinese civilization. Therefore, Chinese civilization was not adopted as a system, making it possible for Japan’s people to decompose the civilization into its component elements, selectively picking only those that were attractive to them. Words from the context of Chinese civilization could be selected and placed within the context of Japan. In other words, ‘Japan-likeness’ was formed by receiving great influence from Chinese civilization, but declining its contextualization.

This era can be boldly divided into two periods, before and after the borderline of the beginning of the 10th century, when prohibition of meat consumption spread.

PROHIBITION OF MEAT CONSUMPTION

Buddhism originated in India and was introduced to Japan from China via the Korean Peninsula in the middle of the 6th century. The Mahayana Buddhist command against killing living creatures spread in East Asia, leading to the prohibition of fish and meat consumption.

However, only the clerics observed this prohibition in China. The eating habits of ordinary Buddhist believers could include meat, except on specific days, such as a close relative’s death.

According to records from the Korean Peninsula, in the 6th century the king of Silla and Baekje issued an order that prohibited the killing of animals based on

Buddhist beliefs, but meat consumption was not strictly prohibited. Under the Koryo Dynasty (918–1392), which unified the Korean Peninsula after Silla, Buddhism became widespread; people no longer consumed animal meat, and no slaughter was conducted.

In the 13th century, the Korean Peninsula became a kingdom of the former Mongolian Dynasty founded by Mongolian pastoralists in China. Mongolians stationed on the Korean Peninsula developed pasture, and consumption of meat resumed.

In Japan, Emperor Tenmu enacted the first meat consumption prohibition in the year 675, but only of specific meat, as well as specific hunting and fishing methods for certain periods. It is presumed that this law was enacted for reasons other than Buddhism ideology.

In the 8th century, the national governance system based on Buddhist philosophy was established, and political thought uniting kingship and religion formed. The fact that orders prohibiting meat consumption were issued many times up to the end of the 12th century tells us how difficult it was for people to forget the taste of meat.

In the 10th century, a custom of guilt towards consuming meat was established among nobles, priests, and the urban population. Indigenous religion and Shintoism began to challenge meat consumption, gradually causing people in rural areas to avoid eating meat.²⁾

Livestock was not raised for meat until modern times, when consumption was re-established. Chickens were raised, but because they were regarded as messengers of the gods, their meat and eggs were not consumed until the 17th century.

Because meat, milk, and their derivative products were absent from Japan's traditional diet, intake of animal protein was limited to seafood. This is how fish and marine food came to occupy the throne of Japanese cuisine.

THE FORMATION PERIOD OF THE JAPANESE DIET

The ancient nation of Japan dispatched a delegation to China (Japanese Missions to Tang China) focused on incorporating Chinese civilization and strengthening the relationship between the nations. However, the dispatch was stopped after the 10th century, when diplomatic relations were abolished and only monks who wished to study abroad and practice Buddhism in Chinese temples were allowed to go to China. Those monks brought tea plants and vegetarian cooking techniques to Japan.

Until the 10th century, Japanese people tried to import and imitate the food and meal practices of China and the Korean Peninsula. From the 10th to the 16th centuries, these foreign influences were digested, resulting in an era in which eating habits were reorganized according to Japanese customs, forming a Japanese diet passed down until today.

For example, the traditional seasoning miso is a fermented food originating from the Chinese kernel sauce; the production method of kernel sauce was introduced to the Korean Peninsula and Japan in ancient times. Until the 10th century, it was a luxury commodity in Japan, appearing in meals for the court nobility, to be eaten alone or in combination with other food. In the 12th century, the mortar was popularized, and miso was processed into a paste easily soluble in water. From that time until the popularization of soy sauce years later, miso was used as a versatile seasoning. Even farmers prepared homemade miso. This is how miso soup, the basis of all Japanese meals, was born.

A CIVILIZATION OF CHOPSTICKS

A basic characteristic of the East Asian food system is use of chopsticks. When chopsticks are used, it is easier to eat food in bowl-shaped tableware rather than on a dish. This is why bowl-shaped dishes developed in areas where chopsticks are widely used. East Asian food practices were thus formed based on the use of chopsticks and bowls.

The custom of eating with chopsticks and spoon spread from the northern parts of China, the centre of Chinese civilization since the 5th century BC, to the surrounding areas. The Korean Peninsula had been under the rule of China since the year 108 BC, for nearly 400 hundred years. The custom of eating with chopsticks and spoon was introduced to the Korean people at that time. In ancient China, it was originally customary to eat with chopsticks and spoon. In the Mei Dynasty, established in the latter half of the 14th century, people in China started eating rice with chopsticks, using spoons only for soup; prior to that, rice was also consumed using a spoon.

The old Chinese custom of using a set of chopsticks and spoon is still in use in the Korean Peninsula. There, foods like rice, soup, and water kimchi are eaten with a spoon, whereas chopsticks are used to pick up side dishes. Consequently, all the dishes stand on the table, without being lifted towards the mouth. Only chopsticks and spoons are used to take the food to the mouth. Lifting a bowl of rice or soup with the hands, as is customary in Japan, is said to be 'the way beggars eat'. On the contrary, in Japan it is considered impolite to eat without lifting the bowl of rice or soup with one's hands.

When official diplomatic relations with China were broken during the 10th century, the nobility stopped using the spoon, and all Japanese came to eat with chopsticks only.

PERIOD OF CHANGE

From the 16th century to the first half of the 17th century came a period of change in Japanese society, during which the medieval order collapsed and the feudal system was reorganized. During this period, Europeans visited Japan, Japanese

people went overseas, and Japanese settlements were formed throughout southeast Asia. New foods were transferred to Japan, leading to the cultivation of sweet potato, pumpkin, chili, and tobacco, among others.

This cultural exchange had a big impact in Japan. For example, cultivation of sweet potato was introduced into the southwest parts of the country, which were not suitable for paddy rice fields, sharply increasing the population in these regions.

Traditionally, sugar was imported from China, but it was more valued as a medicine than a seasoning. With the start of exchanges with Southeast Asia, sugar was imported in large quantities, enabling its use in various confectionery items. This is reflected not only in the traditional Japanese sweets as we know them nowadays, but also in the Japanese castella and spring sugar that are moulded according to the cake and candy preparation methods brought by the Portuguese.

Sugar cane cultivation started in Okinawa in 1623. In the 18th century, domestic production began in several parts of southwest Japan, leading to the spread of sugar cane cultivation in the country.

Distillation technology was brought from Thailand to Okinawa, where Awamori was produced. Shochu and mirin were brought from Okinawa to mainland Japan, and were produced in the country ever after.

As a result of missionary activities carried out by Portuguese clergy in the mid-16th century, Japanese followers of Christianity increased rapidly. Those who converted to Christianity were released from the meat consumption taboos and began eating European meat dishes. However, when Christianity was later repressed, meat dishes again disappeared from the Japanese table.

The replacement of meat with tofu and other ingredients transformed such dishes into Japanese-style meals, though some European dishes, known as 'Nanban cuisine', remain until now. For example, the source of the word *tempura* comes from the Portuguese language.

THE PERIOD OF MATURITY OF TRADITIONAL FOOD CULTURE

In the Edo period (1603–1868), when Japan was under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the country was isolated from foreign influence. During this period the traditional Japanese food culture reached its maturity.

Fear that people who converted to Christianity like 'Ran of Shimabara' were powerful enough to oppose Tokugawa, the economic side of trade with Portuguese vessels, and the large imports of gold and silver from abroad were some of the factors that pushed the banning of foreign trade and negotiation on several occasions in 1630.

As a result, Christianity was forbidden, the Portuguese were expelled from the country, and Japanese people were prohibited from travelling abroad. Except for the Dutch and Chinese boats that were allowed to enter the port of Nagasaki, and the Korean dynastic mission of Mr. Lee that came to Japan, a period of no

contact with other countries continued for the following two hundred years. This was a period without civil war, when peace was maintained and traditional food culture reached its maturity.

In the Edo period, traditional Japanese culinary techniques were established and popularized, such as using bonito and kelp in broth preparation and applying soy sauce in seasoning meals. During this period, several culinary methods, serving styles, and table manners still used to the present day were established. At the same time, with the appearance of places like restaurants and Japanese bars, a culture of eating out developed in big cities.

French and Chinese culinary cultures are based on a culinary philosophy that ‘a cuisine is a system of techniques applied to create a taste that does not exist naturally’. In contrast, the culinary philosophy formed during the Edo period was that ‘the ideal cuisine avoids cooking’ and ‘in a sophisticated cuisine, the cooking techniques should be applied to a minimum extent in order to keep the natural flavour of the ingredients’. Thus, Japan developed a paradoxical cuisine perspective. Sashimi symbolizes this idea. With emphasis on the seasonal feeling of the ingredients and specific arrangement on the tableware reminiscent of a Japanese garden, the aesthetics of the unique Japanese cooking were formed.

RESUMING MEAT CONSUMPTION AND SPREAD OF WESTERN FOOD

The Tokugawa regime collapsed in 1888, and Japan was once again opened to diplomatic relations with foreign countries. This led to the formation of a modern state modelled after Europe and the US.

The Meiji government, based on the Fukoku policy ‘Enrich the state, strengthen the military’, believed that the Japanese physique and physical strength were poor compared to westerners because they did not consume meat. Therefore, meat and milk consumption was encouraged, and meat dishes originating in western Europe appeared in the meals of soldiers.

The *gyunabe* (beef pot) that began at the Bakumatsu (end of the Tokugawa Period) developed in *sukiyaki* with the introduction of meat as a new ingredient taken from western cuisine.

One may expect that meat dishes from Chinese and Korean cuisines, which could be eaten with chopsticks, would have gained popularity among the Japanese population, but due to the overwhelming influence from Europe and the USA, this did not happen until later. Chinese restaurants gained public attention after 1910, whereas Korean restaurants became popular only after the World War II.

In the early 20th century, ‘western food stores’, where popular western cuisine could be eaten, prospered in the cities. However, in a Western restaurant, it was more likely for rice to be served than bread, adapting Western cuisine to match the taste of Japanese customers. This is how a unique local western cuisine was born, including curry with rice and pork cutlets, croquettes, omelette and rice, and so on.

Having western food at home was limited to upper- and middle-class families, whereas common people were keeping their everyday eating habits as an extension of the Edo period. According to the statistics for the years between 1934 and 1938, the average daily consumption of meat per person was only 6.1 grams.

JAPANESE FOOD CULTURE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

The war period lasted between 1937 and 1945 in Japan. Because the war lasted for so long, it was difficult to secure food and the population suffered from hunger. After defeat, the most important policy for the government was to increase food production, especially rice. It was not until the mid-1950s that rice production re-attained the levels it reached 15 years before the war.

In the 1960s, growth of the Japanese economy was remarkable. This economic growth brought about not only a quantitative increase of food, but also a significant qualitative change, such as an increased intake of animal protein from seafood and meat products. The daily appearance of meat dishes on the Japanese table was one of the biggest changes to the traditional diet, which had been largely dependent on rice and vegetables. As the intake of fats and oils increased, spices that had not traditionally been used in Japan found their way into the Japanese kitchens. The amount of people eating bread for breakfast increased as well. Foreign cooking techniques that came from Europe, the US, China, and the Korean Peninsula widely spread.

Consumption of rice decreased continually after 1962. A traditional meal pattern in which rice occupied a central place with a few small side dishes as appetite enhancers changed to a new meal pattern focused on a variety of side dishes to entertain the taste.

SPREADING JAPANESE FOOD RESTAURANTS OVERSEAS

Until the 1970s, there were only a few Japanese restaurants around the world. Japanese food was available only in former colonies, like the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan, or places with many Japanese immigrants. Customers were mainly Japanese citizens and a small number of local people familiar with Japanese culture.

At the end of the 1970s, restaurants based in New York and Los Angeles started the sushi boom in the US, and restaurants serving Japanese food opened in cities around the world. In a survey in 2013, the total number of Japanese restaurants in certain parts of the world reached a total of about 55,000. Considering that the number of restaurants in Tokyo in the year 2014 was about 83,000, it can be said that Japanese cuisine has acquired a status as part of a global dining-out culture.

Today, traditional Japanese cuisine is renowned for its healthiness due to

limited use of meat and fat. Also, by emphasizing the natural taste of ingredients based on the principle that ‘no cooking is the ideal way of cooking’, Japanese cuisine looks somewhat eccentric among the world’s cuisines. Dining at Japanese restaurants, people around the world experience a taste they have not tried before, and for many, Japanese specialties become their favourite food³⁾.

INTERACTION WITH THE WORLD

Whereas Japanese food is appreciated overseas, the traditional Japanese food culture is declining in Japan.

It is now common at home to serve meals originally from Europe, the US, China, and the Korean Peninsula, among other places. They seem to enjoy a fusion cuisine. This is appropriate, since these dishes have been transformed to agree with the taste of Japanese people.

Due to interaction with other food cultures, not only foreign meals but also many foreign ingredients are being imported. The current self-sufficiency food rate in Japan, calculated on a calorie basis, has decreased to 40%. Japanese people enjoy a rich diet dependent on food imported from all over the world. Until the 1960s, most restaurants in big cities abroad served only western, Chinese and Korean food. Today, even local cities have a variety of ethnic restaurants serving Italian, Mexican, Southeast Asian, and Indian food, among others.

DECLINE OF HOME FOOD CULTURE

As mentioned initially, the basis of food culture lies in the food served at home. In the past, people learned about local and ethnic food by eating at home. However, in the modern society of large-scale industrialization and information technologies, the proportion of home food is steadily decreasing.

Since the end of the 20th century, there has been a strong tendency for publicly produced food to replace home cooking. Home cooking was supported by the private kitchen and dining table. In contrast, public kitchen supply comes from the food industry, while the restaurant industry plays the role of the dining table. Since the first half of the 1990s, the Japanese food industry has risen to a significant industrial sector dealing in huge amounts of money, following the electrical equipment, automobile, and petroleum industries, and followed by the steel and food service industries.

In contemporary Japan, lunch at home is only for housewives, old people, and toddlers. Schoolchildren and those who work outside the home eat out at the public table. In addition, it is very common to simply warm up a ready-made food supplied by the food industry, the public kitchen, in a microwave and serve it on the private table at home.

Due to the overall industrialization of food, eating alone has become a widespread habit. Family members go to work, school, academies, and so on,

following different schedules and being home at different times. This makes it increasingly difficult for family members to eat together, and more common for individuals to eat alone. At the same time, even when eating together, not all family members have the same meals. Foods are prepared according to individual tastes, and ready-made foods are also served.

This demonstrates how the function of the family as a place to inherit food has weakened. Therefore, the ‘Basic Law on Food Education’ enacted in 2005 transfers a part of the role to the public sphere in the form of schools and other educational facilities.

NOTES

- 1) There is a theory that paddy field rice cultivation in Japan was introduced via the southern parts of the Korean Peninsula, and brought from downstream of the Yangtze River. Based on a study of a stone knife as a rice harvesting tool, my theory is that the rice crop was transferred to the southern part of the Korean Peninsula and Kitakyushu from downstream of the Yangtze River via the sea route. See Ishige, N. 1963. Genealogy of Japanese Rice Culture (Top) Harvesting Method of Rice (Bottom) from a Stone Knife. *Shirin* 51 (5-6). Historical Society (repr. 2012. *Selected Work Collection of Ishige Naomichi, Vol. 10*. Domesu Publishers, Inc.). (in Japanese).
- 2) For the history of meat consumption by the Japanese people, please refer to the following: Ishige, N. 2015. *History of Japanese Food Culture: From the Paleolithic Age to the Present*. Iwanami Shoten. (in Japanese).
- 3) The following reference was examined to understand why Americans started to eat Japanese food. Ishige, N., Koyama, S., Yamaguchi, M., and Shoji, E. 1985. *Japanese Restaurants in Los Angeles: A Cultural Anthropological Study*. Domesu Publishers, Inc. (in Japanese).

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