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Wartime issue of the magazine *Katei to Ryōri* (Home and Cooking)

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Alongside the industrialization of production and the commercialisation of consumption of food, many societies over the past hundred years have seen increased government intervention in their diets. The dissemination of nutritional science through state institutions denoted newly-emerging connections between power, welfare and knowledge within the workings of the nation-state. The most direct interventions by the state were seen in times of war, when accountants and dieticians determined the diets of hundreds of thousands of drafted individuals, and when civilian consumption was restricted by food shortage and policy-making (Bentley 1998, Helstosky 2004). This was also the case in wartime Japan, where the involvement of the state in public nutrition became particularly pronounced after 1937. In line with the new doctrine of 'total war' emphasizing the total mobilization of the civilian population, nutritional knowledge was rapidly transformed from a scientific domain of specialists into practical advice for the people. State institutions singled out diet as an important home-front weapon essential for preserving order and productivity, and actively participated in popularising nutritional knowledge.

This claim stands in sharp contrast with the image of wartime Japanese society sketched by Ruth Benedict in her best-seller *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, where she argues that 'the Japanese do not recognize the one-to-one correspondence which Americans postulate between body nourishment and body strength' (Benedict 1990:182-183). Sound nutritional policies of the wartime government were also overshadowed by the patriotic symbolism of the 'Rising Sun Lunch Box' (*hinomaru bentō*), whose nutritional value can easily be questioned. *Hinomaru bentō* consisted of plain boiled rice and plum pickle (*umeboshi*) placed in the centre of a rectangular lunch box, which together resembled the Japanese flag. The origin of the *hinomaru bentō* is attributed to a 1937 initiative of a girls' school in Hiroshima prefecture, where this patriotic lunch box was consumed by pupils each Monday as

a token of solidarity with the troops fighting in China. By 1939, the idea was adopted by schools all over the country, and during subsequent years the 'flag lunch' rose to a symbol of national unity (Kosuge 1997:169, 178).

Yet, despite its symbolic potential, *hinomaru bentō* was by no means representative of the general approach to nutrition in wartime Japan. Knowledge of how to make maximum use of limited resources was seen as essential for national security, and therefore the authorities propagated science-based practical advice on nutrition. Like other projects undertaken after 1937 for the sake of improving the health and welfare of the populace, military initiative was responsible for placing nutrition high on the agenda of policy makers.

Feeding the troops

Efforts to improve the army diet could be observed since the turn of the twentieth century, but thorough reforms began after World War I. The objective behind these reforms was to maintain soldiers' bodies and morale in the best possible

drafted peasants' sons became acquainted with multicultural military menus drawn on pre-war urban gastronomy

condition at minimum cost. In other words, food served to the troops needed to be nourishing, tasty and cheap. Innovations to achieve this goal involved a wide-ranging educational program for army cooks, as well as the introduction of modern cooking equipment to economize on human labour (meat grinders, vegetable cutters, dish washers) and ingredients with long shelf life (dehydrated vegetables, powdered fish stock, tinned food). In 1929, further reforms were implemented at the organizational level – the assignment of kitchen personnel was changed from a shift-based to a permanent system, and the delivery of provisions was extended to include all ingredients. Thus far, only staple foods (rice, barley, wheat) had been delivered by the depot while remaining provisions were purchased locally by each unit (Yasuhara and Imai 2002:9).

By the 1930s, army catering turned into a model of efficient mass catering, with specialized equipment, motivated and well-educated personnel, and exciting menus that included Japanese-Western and Japanese-Chinese eclectic dishes. Japanese authorities had three important reasons for incorporating foreign dishes into their menu. First of all, the Japanese cooking repertoire did not include meat dishes, while meat was considered essential for the strength of the troops. Second, foreign cooking techniques such as stewing, pan-frying and deep-frying used fat – another foodstuff that was lacking in Japanese cuisine – and provided a cheap source of calories. Strong flavouring agents, such as curry powder, helped to hide the smell/taste of stale ingredients. Third, stews, stir-fries, curries and croquettes were not only hearty, relatively inexpensive and convenient to make, but also unknown, and therefore equally uncontroversial to all soldiers regardless of their regional taste preferences. By the time the Sino-Japanese war broke out, these dishes had become soldiers' favourites and had acquired a clear military connotation (Cwiertka 2002).

The home front

The Army Provisions' Depot was from the late 1920s also increasingly involved in reforming civilian mass catering. Its influence was channelled through the umbrella organization of *Ryōyūkai* (Provisions Friends Society). Officially, *Ryōyūkai* was not part of the military. However, its headquarters were established at the Central Army Provisions Depot in Tokyo, its projects were supervised by the depot's people, and its board included high-ranking officials of the army.

The major activities of *Ryōyūkai* was publishing of the monthly magazine *Ryōyū* (Provisions Friend), which included practical advice on civilian mass catering and accounts of various activities coordinated by *Ryōyūkai*, such as educational courses for caterers at hospitals, schools and factories. After more than a decade's experience in training its own personnel, in 1939 *Ryōyūkai* opened the School of Provisions (*Shokuryō gakkō*), which provided practical education in nutrition and cookery for approximately 500 civilians yearly. Graduates of the school were offered employment in institutions related to mass catering, food processing, food rationing and public nutrition, as well as *Ryōyūkai*'s own infrastructure throughout the empire.

At first, activities coordinated by

Ryōyūkai aimed at persuading the general public to embrace the military model of efficient nourishment represented by hearty stews and curries and industrially processed provisions. However, as the war progressed, nutritional advice for civilians inevitably shifted towards relief food. The severe food shortage was caused by the disruption of food imports from the colonies, on which the home islands were heavily dependent, and the build-up of manpower for the Japanese army and navy. As provisioning the troops was considered the priority, the home front had to make do with what was left. For example, between 1940/41 and 1944/45, the amount of rice supplied to the armed forces rose from 161 to 744 thousand tons, making it impossible to retain rationing standards for civilians (Johnston 1953:152).

Yet, the government's confidence in a scientific solution for food shortages remained strong until its very end. Special campaigns advocating methods to economize on rice through careful chewing, and mixing it with vegetables and other grains, were carried out through posters and pamphlets. Consumption of more efficient staples that contained more calories and were cheaper to produce, such as sweet potatoes and squash, were propagated as well. As the moment of capitulation approached, public campaigns shifted to instructions on maintaining vegetable gardens and brewing soy sauce out of fish bones.

Food shortages remained a major problem in Japan after 1945 despite US food relief programmes. On the top of millions of hungry Japanese in the homeland, over six million military men and civilians who were by 1948 repatriated from the colonies and occupied territories had to be fed. This situation led to several hundred victims of starvation and widespread malnutrition during the second half of the 1940s (Dower 1999:54, 89-97).

However, long-term consequences of the food shortage on the Japanese diet went beyond hunger and deprivation. The wartime experience wrapped up the construction of the Japanese national diet – a process that replaced the diversified, class and community-tied practices of the pre-modern era with homogeneous consumption practices that the overwhelming majority of postwar Japanese could identify with (Cwiertka 2005). The austere diet that had continued for more than a decade bridged the gap between urban and rural areas so characteristic of the pre-war period. While city dwellers experienced the hand-to-mouth existence of farmers, a great number of drafted peasants' sons enjoyed the luxury of having rice three times a day and became acquainted with multicultural military menus drawn on

pre-war urban gastronomy. Furthermore, the militarization of nutrition, and the chronic shortage of rice, set the stage for the post-war transformation of the Japanese diet, represented by the diminishing quantitative importance of rice and increased consumption of bread, noodles and industrially-processed food.

Most importantly, however, the work initiated by the Army Provision's Depot and supported by the wartime government continued. Military menus were reproduced in restaurants, canteens, schools and hospitals where cooks and dieticians educated during wartime found employment. Gradually, the militaristic connotation of the innovations implemented by the armed forces disappeared, amalgamated into the mainstream civilian culture of the post-war era. Nutritional research was carried on in the institutes that had been established during wartime, and military experts on nutrition continued to educate the public. In February 1946, the popular magazine *Shufu no Tomo*, (Housewife's Friend) began publishing a series of articles dealing with scientific aspects of cookery by the former member of staff of the Army Provision's Depot, ex-Major-general Kawashima Shirō. <

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