Researchers announced in May 2012 that 42% of Americans will be obese by 2030. This rekindled the national concerns for children’s health in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the obesity among American children has tripled since 1980, partly because American society has promoted increased consumption of less healthy food.1 The problem lies in excessive access to so-called drinks and high-calorie foods, particularly in schools, advertising toward children, and lack of regulations. Japan, on the other hand, has always been known as one of the healthiest countries in the world in terms of its diet, which is low in fat and high in protein. And so it was a surprise to find that even Japan could not escape the threats of obesity, and was no exception to the global rule.

Dr. Kaori Takano is a visiting assistant professor of International Business at Colorado State University, Colorado, USA. She has conducted extensive research about food education in Japan. (kaoringum@yahoo.com).

Notes
6 Kikkoman provides a soy sauce lesson; Meiji Corporation (known formerly as Meiji Dairies) provides a lesson about calcium; House Foods talks about the use of spices in food, a chewing gum maker provides a lesson that addresses the importance of chewing your foods properly, and a chocolate maker looks at the beneficial aspects of cacao. All these companies address the positive sides of their signature products, plugging the information into food education lessons, using their expertise and experience-based activities in very creative ways.
7 The national government recognizes this sophisticated strategy. According to the Shokuiku Kihon Ho (Basic Law of Food education White Paper) published by the Cabinet Office Government of Japan in 2007, the government is fully aware that some companies that provide lessons to schools/childhood do so in the form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to help them promote their educational values of healthy eating. However, the McDonald’s Japan campaign raised more than a few eyebrows. A reputable food expert, Makuuchi, criticized scholars and dietitians who had indeed had many disagreements with colleagues about their choice to work with McDonald’s. I continued my dialogue with them, expressing the “opportunities” for partnering with “junk food makers”.