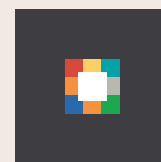


# News from Northeast Asia

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## History and hybridity of East Asian food culture

KIM Chong Min

Asian foodways today are as diverse and multifaceted as the complex political, ecological, institutional, and socio-cultural transformations the region underwent throughout its modern history. Extensive inter-cultural exchanges in food culture in Asia occurred on the occasions of colonization, wars of various scales, and, more recently, globalization. These changes made at macro-political levels often introduce new factors to the local food practices, influencing and enriching the ways of preparing and consuming food at the everyday level. In this issue of News from Northeast Asia, we have three articles each capturing key aspects of the history of Asian foodways: the article by Seejae Lee examines acculturation in the formation of Western-Japanese fusion cuisine in modern Japan that began with the Meiji Restoration in late 19th century; Young-ha Joo writes about the history of the instant ramen industry in Korea, Japan and Taiwan, which reflects the exchanges and hybridization of food in colonial and post-colonial East Asia; and the article by Zhao Rongguang illuminates Chinese national culinary culture, focusing on philosophical, historical and cultural dimensions.

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### Formation of Japanese-Western fusion cuisine in Modern Japan

Seejae LEE

MODERN JAPAN has created Japanese-Western fusion dishes such as *kare-raisu* (curry rice), *tonkatsu* (pork cutlet), and *korokke* (croquette) in the process of adopting Western culture. Three factors served as the impetus in the advancement of fusion cuisine in Japan, which fundamentally changed the food culture of the country.

Firstly, during the Meiji Restoration, Japan pursued a policy of active importation of Western food culture. Driven by the agenda for Japan to 'leave Asia and join the West', the Meiji Restoration was a set of structural reforms aiming to Westernize every institution from state systems, industries, and military, to education and culture. The movement to adopt Western food culture was also triggered by these reforms.

Following the Meiji Restoration (1867), Japan started brisk imports of Western dishes and ingredients. As is widely known, since its debut in the country at the birthday banquet for Emperor Meiji in November 1871, French cuisine has been invariably served in Japan at all official receptions for foreign diplomats. As eating meat had long been prohibited prior to the Meiji Restoration, the introduction of Western cuisine focused on meat dishes signified a radical transformation in the food culture. The announcement that the emperor partook of beef was aimed to Westernize Japanese eating habits, but it was also intended to weaken the power of the Buddhist doctrine of *ahimsa*, in the process of suppressing Buddhism and establishing Shinto as the state religion.

After the announcement, Japanese government officials, intellectuals, businessmen, and other elites started consuming Western food en masse. Representative reformist Fukuzawa Yukichi became a passionate proponent of a meat diet after drinking milk helped him recover from a serious disease in 1871. He criticized the traditional taboo on consuming meat, saying, "It has been a long-standing custom for over a thousand years in this country to consider eating meat as contaminating, and many people have recklessly hated it. In the end, it is the hearsay of the unschooled and unlettered who know nothing of human nature". Thus, the announcement of the emperor's consumption of meat created favorable conditions for the spread of Western cuisine and the development of fusion dishes.

The second factor was the introduction of meal provisions in the military, schools, hospitals, and other modern organizations. After the Meiji Restoration, in 1868, the state took the initiative, claiming that Japan cannot build a prosperous and powerful state if its soldiers are frail, so they should eat beef just as Westerners do. Western food came to be associated with a strong army and, consequently, a strong nation. Soldiers were provided with Western-style meals from the early years of the Meiji period. The Japanese government considered the consumption of meat as an important part of its strategy for achieving national prosperity and military power and started canned food manufacturing for the purpose of supplying meat in field rations. During the Sino-Japanese War (1894), the army received a supply of canned food worth 2 million yen, with 25%

