

## 第 1 章 Section1

### *Washoku* and Me

#### Let's Talk

1. Have you ever eaten Japanese food? What kind of Japanese food do you like? Why?
2. What is the staple food for your country or region (e.g., bread, rice, noodles)?
3. What kind of things might be in a meal described as “*ichijuu sansai*”? Imagine what it might mean based on the kanji.

\* *ichi* means one, *juu* means soup, *san* means three, and *sai* means vegetable

As the number of Japanese restaurants abroad has increased with the Japanese food boom, we can now enjoy various Japanese dishes overseas. New York, where I'm living, has numerous Japanese restaurants, so you can choose whatever you're in the mood for -- sushi, yakitori, tempura, or ramen. My particular favorite is tempura, and I found the crispy shrimp and vegetables so addictive that I regularly frequented a nearby Japanese restaurant.

However, after a homestay in Japan, my Japanese food preferences changed somewhat. According to my host mother, the foundation of a meal in *washoku* (traditional Japanese cuisine) is called “*ichiju sansai*” (one soup, three dishes). This menu consists of a combination of rice as the staple food, plus one soup and three side dishes. My host family's dinner table always included rice, miso soup, grilled fish, tofu, and stewed vegetables. The food my host mother served was simple, nutritionally balanced, and very healthy. Thanks to the many wholesome dishes I had during my homestay, my overall health improved significantly compared to before I came to Japan.

My host mother said, “In our generation, many people are devoted to *washoku*, but younger people prefer Western food.” Indeed, when I was invited to their son's home, the dinner was rice with Western-style consommé soup, hamburger steak, potato salad, and pickled vegetables as the one soup, three sides. I found it quite interesting to have this type of combination of *washoku* with various other cuisines like Western food.

I came back to the U.S. last month and am thinking about trying to make *washoku* at home for my health. I'd especially like to try *ichiju sansai* with a combination of Japanese and American side dishes.

## 第 1 章 Section2

### Is *Washoku* Disappearing from Homes?

#### Let's Talk

1. Choose one traditional dish from your country and explain its appeal in one minute or less.  
Keywords (            ) (            ) (            )
2. What can you imagine based on the phrase “*washoku banare*”?  
\* *washoku* means traditional Japanese cuisine, *banare* means leaving

While we could name various appealing qualities of *washoku*, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries lists the following four points: 1) It's healthy and has a good nutritional balance; 2) It uses a variety of fresh ingredients; 3) Diners can appreciate nature and the changing seasons through the food and tableware; 4) It has close ties to traditional events. Certainly, *washoku* is low in animal fat, relatively low in calories through the prominence of seafood, soybeans, and vegetables, and nutritionally well-balanced. Fermented foods such as *miso*, soy sauce, and *natto* (fermented soybeans), which are commonly used in *washoku*, are known for their health benefits. Another attractive feature is that you can enjoy a wide variety of foods based on climate and geographical differences since Japan is long and narrow, stretching north to south. Others may be captivated by the presentation of the food and beauty of the tableware in *washoku*. In addition, it is said that foods served at traditional events, such as New Year's *osechi ryori*, hold cultural value.

In 2013, *washoku* was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage as a valuable cultural asset that should be passed down to future generations. However, it has been noted for some time that there is an increasing trend in “*washoku banare*” (a societal shift away from traditional Japanese food) from the dinner tables of Japanese households. The causes given for this include the westernization of food and increased efficiency toward household chores. The shift toward Western food came in the period after World War II. In that time when the food supply was poor, the U.S. provided aid in the form of large quantities of wheat and milk for school lunches, which resulted in a progressively bread-centered diet. Rice consumption declined, and the intake of meat, dairy products, eggs, and processed foods increased. Additionally, as more women entered the workforce, more people found it difficult to spend time and effort on cooking, and Western-style dishes that can be served on a single plate became more desirable.

That being said, it does not mean that *washoku* will end up completely disappearing from the tables of Japanese homes. Recently, there has been a movement to reconsider the merits of traditional *washoku* and to incorporate more of it into daily life. Easy-to-prepare *washoku* recipes are on the rise, and “one soup, one side” recipes with a reduced number of side dishes are being proposed. There is also an increase in interesting recipes that combine *washoku* with Western, Chinese, ethnic, and other diverse flavors. For example, you might have one adding onions, meat, and olive oil to miso soup, or *natto* combined with some bread or spaghetti in *natto* toast or *natto* spaghetti. When observing these kinds of changes, we see that *washoku* is not only a symbol of Japanese tradition but is also continuously changing.

## 第2章 Section1

### Diversity of Regional Cuisine

#### Let's Talk

1. Choose the correct region names to fill in the blanks on the map on the right. Then talk about the areas you know about.
  - a. Hokkaido
  - b. Okinawa
  - c. Tohoku
  - d. Chubu
  - e. Kanto
  - f. Chugoku
  - g. Kinki
  - h. Kyushuu
  - i. Shikoku
2. When you hear the phrases “near the ocean” or “near the mountains,” what kind of ingredients do you think of?

Japan is long and narrow running north to south, surrounded by the sea, and 75% of the land is comprised of mountains. This makes it possible to enjoy delicious local cuisines cultivated in a variety of terrains and climates. I would like to introduce some of the dishes that have left a particularly strong impression on me during my recent travels.

While in Hokkaido last winter, I enjoyed fresh seafood to my heart's content. When I went to the restaurants there, I was impressed to find more salmon roe, sea urchin, and crab than I could possibly eat. It had been snowing a lot and was cold in Hokkaido, but the famed local specialty *Ishikari nabe* warmed me all the way to my heart. *Ishikari nabe* is a famous local dish made using Hokkaido's salmon, which is a specialty of the area.

Then, during spring vacation, I went to Osaka, which is renowned for its gourmet food. Osaka has been a center of commerce since long ago. It was called the “kitchen of the nation,”<sup>1</sup> as it served as the distribution hub for the entire country by gathering choice ingredients. Even today, Osaka is said to be a “city of overindulgence in food.”<sup>2</sup> At an *okonomiyaki* restaurant on a shopping street famous as the longest in Japan, when I was approached by a local for conversation, I could feel the kindness of the people of Osaka.

During the summer vacation, I went to Nagano. Nagano has a lot of mountains and stays cool even in the summer, so I enjoyed some hiking there. Walking through the highlands with the pretty white buckwheat flowers blooming in profusion, it felt just as if I were in Europe. Nagano's cool climate and pure water are said to be ideal for producing buckwheat. The flavor of the *soba* (buckwheat noodles) I ate overlooking the beautiful mountains was exceptional.

In autumn, I went to Nagasaki in Kyushu to see the changing leaves and enjoy the gourmet food. In the Edo Period, Nagasaki had an island called Dejima, which served as a point of contact for Japan and foreign entities. Nagasaki, with its history of influence from overseas, naturally has items of Chinese origin, such as *gyoza* and *chanpon*, as part of its regional cuisine. My favorite was the *castella*, a moist sponge cake with refined sweetness. Through the local cuisine of each region, we can learn more about the diversity and history of Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> Kitchen of the nation: The logistics and commercial center

<sup>2</sup> City of overindulgence in food: Means that the people in Osaka have so much delicious food that they spend too much money on it.

## 第 2 章 Section2

### Town Revitalization through Food

#### Let's Talk

1. Is the population increasing or decreasing in the place you're from?
2. Imagine that tourists will start coming to an area where the population has been decreasing and the economy has been shrinking. What benefits do you think this will bring to the area?
3. What do you imagine based on the phrase "food tourism"?

Many regions in Japan outside of the major cities are losing the vitality of their towns due to the declining population and shrinking economy caused by the falling birthrate and aging population. In response, various forms of "town revitalization" are being carried out, aiming to reinvigorate the towns by uncovering the charms of each locale.

One form of town revitalization that is attracting attention is "food tourism." "Food tourism" refers to travel expressly for the purpose of enjoying the cuisine of the location. An increase in tourists coming to enjoy regional cuisine leads to revitalization of the towns. For example, the town of Kagawa in Shikoku, famous for its *Sanuki udon*, is said to now have "udon tourism" because it became known for food tourism devoted to enjoying the *Sanuki udon*. Kagawa now runs tours so that tourists can learn not only about *udon* but also about the other charms of the town. As groups stroll around the town, they learn about the town's history and culture, while sampling *udon* and taking part in hands-on *udon*-making experiences.

*Fujinomiya yakisoba* from Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture, is an example of a locally loved staple that has been successfully used as a tourism resource. This *yakisoba*, consisting of thick, doughy noodles topped with a special sauce, is the soul food of the local people but wasn't much known to people outside the area. However, a local citizens' group worked to promote this dish by holding food events and organizing *yakisoba* tours in cooperation with travel agencies. *Fujinomiya yakisoba* came into the limelight when it was named champion in the "B-1 Grand Prix" in a B-grade gourmet<sup>1</sup> food festival, and the number of day-trippers visiting the area for *yakisoba* increased, bringing a significant economic impact to the region.

Another important aspect when considering community revitalization through food is "local production for local consumption," which encourages local people to learn more about food from their area and consume it within the community. Local production for local consumption has the advantage of providing fresh food without the added cost of shipping. Initiatives such as increasing the number of places where residents can buy local foods and incorporating local foods into school lunches will encourage producers and are tied to supporting sustainable development of agriculture, fisheries, and livestock industries. Also, recipes are being shared specifically tailored toward those who may know about the local ingredients but not know how to use them in cooking. These efforts toward local production for local consumption will be helpful in passing on the beloved local food culture to the next generation.

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<sup>1</sup> B-Grade Gourmet: Cheap, tasty, unpretentious food popular among locals.

## 第3章 Section1

### Fast Food in the Edo Period

#### Let's Talk

1. What was your country like during the Edo period (1603-1869)? For example, were there wars?
2. What does the picture below tell you about the way people ate sushi in the Edo period? How is it different from the way it is today?

The roots of fast food in Japan come from the Edo Period. Edo, as Tokyo was formerly called, was originally dominated by marshy areas and was not well-suited as an environment for people to live. However, in the 17th century, after Tokugawa Ieyasu established the shogunate there, Edo developed into a center of politics and culture, with a population said to reach over 1 million in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During the Edo period when there were few major wars, people's standard of living improved. Meals increased from two per day to three, and interest in food grew. In order to fill the bellies of the many male laborers who moved alone to Edo from various parts of Japan, an industry developed around dining out, with food stalls and restaurants.

The streets of Edo were lined with stalls offering *nigirizushi* (hand-rolled sushi), *tempura*, grilled eel, *soba*, *udon*, and *amazake* (sweet sake), and the cheap, easy-to-eat food could be called the fast food of the Edo period. The number of restaurants increased, and there were more than 3,700 *soba* restaurants alone. Food stalls where people could stand and drink alcohol appeared, and with that, the custom of drinking and eating outdoors became widespread. In addition, customers could buy sake at the *sakaya* (sake shops) and drink it on the spot. This is said to be the origin of today's *izakaya* (dine-in bars).

In the late Edo period, high-class restaurants were established where wealthy merchants and warriors could enjoy banquets. They served alcoholic drinks and extravagant meals and were used to entertain guests as they mixed with geisha. Incidentally, the *kaiseki ryori* that was served at these restaurants for the purpose of enjoying sake, had the fundamental courses of "one soup, three sides" with sashimi, a grilled dish, and a stewed dish, and still can be found today at banquets, weddings, and traditional inns.

## 第3章 Section2

### Japanized Western Dishes in the Meiji Period

#### Let's Talk

1. What is depicted in the picture below?
2. What kind of impression do you think Japanese people in the Meiji period had about Western food?

As the Edo Period ended in the latter half of the 19th century and the Meiji Period began, society entered a major period of transition known as “civilization and enlightenment.” The new Meiji government aimed to modernize the country by adopting Western politics, economics, culture, technology, and thought, and by developing the telephones, postal services, railroads, and other infrastructure that would form the foundation of industry and daily life. This trend toward Westernization also affected people’s dietary habits. The meat-based dishes which had been taboo up to that point now came to be accepted. A stew of beef simmered with *miso* and onions in the traditional Japanese way became popular among wealthy city dwellers. This beef stew is said to be the original incarnation of today’s *sukiyaki* (a hot pot seasoned with soy sauce, *mirin*, sugar, etc.).

Since people at that time were not familiar with the cooking methods or ingredients of Western food, many found it to be unpalatable. It was also not easy to obtain Western ingredients. For this reason, “Japanese-Western food” was created, in which Western food was gradually brought closer to the preferences of Japanese people and adapted into more of a Japanese style. Curry rice, which is now considered Japan’s national dish, and croquettes and *tonkatsu*, which are popular among both children and adults, are Japanese-Western food with Japanese twists on the original Western dishes.

Curry is a dish that came into England from India in the 18th century and then passed from England to Japan in the Meiji era. Although curry rice was presented as a Western dish in “*Seiyo Ryori Shinan*” (*A Guide to Western Cooking*, 1872), a cookbook published in the early Meiji period, it used ingredients which could be obtained in Japan at the time, such as green onions, shrimp, sea bream, and frog meat. In the late Meiji period, dishes combining curry rice and traditional Japanese dishes were created, such as curry udon and curry soba. This unexpected combination of spicy curry with Japanese *udon* is still beloved today and is popular among children for school lunch.

During the Meiji period, which was the period of the formation of the modern nation, people encountered “Western cuisine” along with Western culture, and began to consider what their own traditions were and what differences they had in comparison with the West. They became interested in new food cultures and went on to develop an original food culture fusing the merits of all of them. This fusion of food cultures across national borders might appear to be a phenomenon of today’s globalized society, but in fact, it is not. By knowing the history, we can appreciate the wisdom of our predecessors and the potential food has for hybridization.

## 第 4 章 Section1

### Mankind is Noodlekind

#### Let's Talk

1. There are many different kinds of noodles in the world. What kind of noodles do you know? What kind of noodles do you like?
2. Have you ever eaten *ramen*? Where did you eat it? What do you think is the reason for its popularity in Japan?

Noodles are a global food loved by people around the world. Among these, ramen is very popular as one of the national dishes of the Japanese people. There are more than 20,000 ramen shops throughout Japan. For the popular ones, long lines form out front, with customers waiting for hours at times. Ramen broth comes in a variety of flavors, including salt, *miso*, soy sauce, and *tonkotsu* (pork bone), and the noodle textures and toppings vary as well. Finding your favorite ramen restaurant among the many is fun, like a treasure hunt!

Ramen originally came to Japan from China in the latter half of the 19th century. The original version of present-day ramen is said to have been created by a restaurant called Rairaiken in Asakusa, Tokyo, in 1910. After World War II, when wheat, the main ingredient for ramen noodles, was imported in large quantities from the U.S., ramen became a cheap and delicious food for the common people and firmly established its status as a national food.

The popularity of ramen is growing overseas as well, to the point that it's safe to say ramen shops can now be found in all major cities in the world. There are two reasons behind the spread of ramen overseas: the overseas expansion of Japanese ramen stores and the creation of a ramen boom by local business owners. As it expands overseas, the restaurant called Ippudo, for example, is highlighting the charm of the Japanese custom of slurping the noodles. Also, ramen restaurants started by local people have played an important role in the ramen boom, such as Momofuku which developed a chain of restaurants in New York. People all over the world incorporate noodles into their diet: *mien* in China, *naengmyeon* in Korea, *pho* in Vietnam, and spaghetti in Italy. In short, ramen has also become a global favorite, involving people in the culinary industry throughout the world, just as Momofuku Ando, the creator of instant ramen, once said, "Mankind is noodlekind."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Thus Spoke Momofuku Ando, Founder of Nissin Foods Corporation," Nissin Foods Public Relations Department, August 2007

## 第 4 章 Section2

### “Sushi Police”

#### Let's Talk

1. Have you ever been to a sushi restaurant in your country? What kind of sushi did you eat there?
2. Do you know what ingredients are used in traditional sushi? Are there any ingredients unique to your country?

As Japanese food attracts more attention overseas, localization of Japanese food has been progressing in each country and region. One instance of that is the “California roll,” a localized hybrid sushi roll which includes avocado, imitation crab, and cucumber instead of fish. It is said to have been originally invented in Los Angeles by a Japanese sushi chef for local people who weren't fond of *nori* (seaweed) or raw fish. Other rolls continue to evolve, such as the Peking roll with Peking duck or a sushi roll with mozzarella cheese, incorporating flavors and ingredients favored by the people of each country.

However, feeling uncomfortable with the localization of Japanese food overseas, there is also a movement to teach “correct Japanese food” to the rest of the world. Around 2006, the Japanese government attempted to introduce a “certification system for Japanese restaurants overseas” to draw a distinction between restaurants serving food prepared with traditional Japanese cooking methods and ingredients, and those that were not. This move was dubbed the “sushi police”<sup>1</sup> by the American media, who bashed the government for its stance of not allowing freedom in the way people eat. Although this system was never implemented, they are still devising recommendations for “proper Japanese restaurants” in the form of “Guidelines for the Certification of Cooking Skills for Japanese Cuisine in Foreign Countries.”<sup>2</sup> Some people call such a move a form of food nationalism in that it seeks to regulate production and consumption by defining one's native country's food as “correct.”

Just as there are many young people overseas who have become Japanophiles because of Japanese anime and video games, an increasing number of people are visiting Japan with the aim of authentic Japanese food after developing an interest through their experiences with localized Japanese cuisine. In recent years, Western-style dishes with a Japanese twist have made their way overseas, such as rice burgers using rice instead of bread. Meanwhile, sushi burritos and other unique foreign variations of Japanese food have been imported back into Japan and become a popular topic of conversation. Those who object to the localization of traditional cuisine may be unaware of how this Japanese food, with some alterations in taste and form, is contributing to international exchange and the introduction of Japanese culture. Rather than getting hung up on the legitimacy of Japanese food overseas in an attitude like the “sushi police,” shouldn't we enjoy the diverse transformation of food even more?

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<sup>1</sup> The anime “SUSHI POLICE” produced in Japan (Tokyo MX, 2016) also amusingly depicts the Sushi Police trying to impose correct sushi and the battle between chefs from around the world. <http://sushi-police.com/>

<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) established the “Guidelines for the Certification of Cooking Skills for Japanese Cuisine in Foreign Countries” on April 1, 2016. <https://www.maff.go.jp/j/shokusan/syokubun/tyori.html>



## 第 5 章 Section1

### Food in Anime and Manga

#### Let's Talk

1. Have you ever seen Japanese anime or manga? What kind of works were they?
2. What can you learn about Japanese cuisine and food culture from anime and manga?

It was because of anime that I became interested in Japanese culture and started learning Japanese. A lot of food scenes appear in anime, but one that particularly has made an impression on me is the family dining table in "Crayon Shin-chan." The scenes of Shin-chan's family sitting around the table eating together always overflowed with happiness and made me, who was living alone, feel that happiness. After watching this series, I started making Japanese home-style dishes such as *nabe*, *shabushabu*, *yakiniku*, and curry rice.

Another food scene in anime and manga that has left a strong impression on me is the scenes at school with *bento* (lunch box) and *kyushoku* (school lunch). From the frequent scenes in anime of mothers getting up early in the morning and making cute bento boxes for children, I learned that bento boxes are a symbol of a mother's love in Japan. In Hayao Miyazaki's "My Neighbor Totoro," there is a scene in which the main character, a young girl Satsuki, in place of her sick mother puts all she has into making bento boxes filled with love to give her family members. They were simple, cute bento. I would like to try making a bento like that someday.

Bento scenes in anime and manga are also useful in understanding the feelings and school lives of junior high and high school students. I couldn't help but smile at a scene in an anime when a girl confesses her feelings for a boy she likes by giving him a bento with a heart shape drawn out of *nori* on top of the rice. I sympathized with a high schooler shown desperately making *nikujaga* (meat and potatoes) for the person they liked, and I tried making it myself. I am sure there are many people like me who became interested in bento because of anime and manga. By trying to recreate the food or bento appearing in anime and manga, we might feel a bit closer to the world of those stories.

## 第 5 章 Section2

### Food in Dramas and Movies

#### Let's Talk

1. Do you know of any dramas or movies with a food theme or set in a diner or restaurant?
2. Watch the trailers for “Midnight Diner” or “What Did You Eat Yesterday?” on a video streaming service. Imagine and discuss how the stories are related to food.

The following three films and dramas share the common themes of “life” or “human relationships.” For example, one notable production which depicts the heart connections between a restaurant owner and his customers is “Midnight Diner.”<sup>1</sup> The diner is a place where anyone can casually enter, but because it opens at midnight, it is also visited by bar proprietresses and people who tend to be marginalized in society, such as strippers and yakuza. If requested, the owner will basically make whatever a customer wants to eat. The customers’ anecdotes and their feelings about the dishes bring empathy and warmth to the hearts of the people there. This restaurant provides each and every customer, regardless of race, occupation, age, or gender, a special and comfortable third place of belonging that is neither home nor the workplace.

“What Did You Eat Yesterday?” is a TV drama based on a comic book, depicting the daily lives of a gay couple who are the main characters. It attracted attention as a show about a new type of family relationship that had rarely been shown on TV before. Each episode shows how to make a delicious meal. Then, the two savor the meal at the dinner table, exchanging conversation filled with both laughter and tears. Through various dinner-table scenes, the relationship between the protagonists and the people around them deepens. For example, in the episode where the main character Shiro takes his partner Kenji to his parents’ house for the first time on New Year’s Day, we can sense a new connection within the family as the scene depicts people gradually opening their hearts to one another over the New Year’s feast at the dinner table.

The documentary film “Jiro Dreams of Sushi” depicts the work and life of a perfectionist chef. Jiro, a legendary sushi chef who has earned three Michelin stars, maintains a strict spirit of craftsmanship and a stubborn business policy. The restaurant, with just ten counter seats, has introduced a time-based system and serves only sushi priced at 30,000 yen or more. Chefs such as Jiro have become masters after a long and rigorous apprenticeship and impress many customers with their wonderful cuisine. However, this level of craftsmanship and the way these chefs live their lives makes it hard to attract young people these days and has given rise to a reduction in the number of chefs who will be successors in the *washoku* industry.

In this way, from various Japanese media works we have an opportunity to think anew about life, lifestyles, and the pattern of human relationships as portrayed through the lens of food.

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<sup>1</sup> “Midnight Diner Part 5” (Premium Edition) Blu-ray Box now on sale.

Released by: Amuse, Shogakukan, MBS; Sold by: Amuse; Price: 14,300 yen (tax included)

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## 第 6 章 Section1

### The Taste of Home

#### Let's Talk

1. What was your favorite home-cooked dish as a child? Who made it?
2. What do you think “*wagaya no aji*”<sup>1</sup> means?

One of the most memorable “tastes of home” for me is the vegetable *nimono* that my mother used to make for us practically every day, with shitake mushrooms and daikon. *Nimono* is a dish in which ingredients are simmered in a broth of *dashi*, which is so essential to *washoku*, seasoned with soy sauce, *mirin*, and other seasonings. When I was in elementary school, I did not think it was very tasty, but once I became an adult, before I knew it, I had come to appreciate the charm of its simple flavor.

There is an old phrase in Japanese, “*ofukuro no aji*,” which means “the taste of mom’s cooking.” This phrase may be a remnant of an era when it was taken for granted that women would do the housework and cooking. However, just because the phrase “the taste of mom’s cooking” is still used today, it does not mean that the ones who do the cooking are necessarily mothers. As the shape of the family continues to change, the cook of the household also varies.

When my friend Mr. Murakami was a child, he and his father lived as a family of two. His dad’s back seemed so big and warm when he cooked each night after coming home from work. The *oyako-don* that his father made for him had the texture of fluffy eggs and a simple flavor. It became his favorite dish and is the “taste of home” that he wants to pass down to his children, too.

The favorite “taste of home” for my Chinese friend Ms. Chin is fried egg with tomatoes. It’s a dish that her grandmother, who lived with them, used to make. Ms. Chin, who was in boarding school, greatly enjoyed going home on holidays and talking with her grandmother over fried egg with tomatoes at the dining table. Even after coming to Japan, she often makes this dish when she is feeling lonely. When she pours the eggs into the hot frying pan, she pictures her grandmother’s face. The “taste of home” is a taste of happiness we never forget.

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<sup>1</sup> *wagaya* = my home, *aji* = flavor

## 第 6 章 Section2

### “Dude Food” vs. Mom’s Home Cooking

#### Let’s Talk

1. What kind of food do you imagine when you hear “*otoko no meshi*” or “*otoko no ryori*”?<sup>2</sup> Why is that?
2. What kind of words or expressions are used to distinguish between men and women in your country (e.g., *ore*)?

Search the Internet for “*otoko meshi*” (dude food) or “*otoko no ryori*” (food for men), and you will notice that it brings up easy, hearty recipes for things like steak, *donmono*<sup>3</sup>, and pasta. Rather than simply referring to dishes prepared by men, *otoko meshi* recipes are characterized by words that generally conjure up images of men, such as “substantial” and “hearty,” and by words that mean “simple” and “hassle-free,” giving the impression that food for men is perceived as something special.

From the start, the Japanese language has had words such as “masculine” and “feminine” to classify people based on their sex. From a gender perspective, they are considered socially constructed expressions which imply that certain roles, behavior, activities, and statuses are appropriate for either men or women. While the term “*onna meshi*” (gal food) is rarely heard, the term “*ofukuro no aji*” (taste of mom’s cooking) has been used since the Showa period. While it has a positive connotation of nostalgia for one’s mother, it is also said to create a gender stereotype by associating women with cooking, as if the role of cooking in the home belongs to women.

In recent years, the dual-earner lifestyle has become common in Japanese society, but the gender-based role-sharing mentality of “men work” and “women do the housework and childcare” persists, and there are many households where housewives are left to handle the household chores and childrearing completely on their own. According to a community survey, “cooking” is the most distressing household chore for working mothers in their 20s to 40s, with more than 70% of women feeling obligated to cook every day. One of the reasons given for this is “that’s the way my parents’ generation did it,” which shows the influence of the family environment in which they grew up.

In 2021, a group of high school students who objected to the name of a convenience store’s original brand of prepared food called “*Okasan no Shokudo*” (Mom’s Diner) made the news with their petition to get the name changed. In the end, the campaign did not reach its target number of signatures, but it generated a lot of discussions both for and against on social media, with opinions ranging from, “We should change the Showa-era value system that says cooking is the mother’s role,” to “It’s a warm and friendly name.” It’s undeniable that this episode had the effect of raising awareness toward gender equality if nothing else. In the present day, with the increase of convenient ingredients and cooking appliances, it has become easier for both men and women to make *jitan ryori*<sup>4</sup> these days, and it is important to reexamine the notion that “cooking = women,” and to think about gender-free cooking.

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<sup>2</sup> *otoko* = men, *meshi* = meals, *ryori* = cooking

<sup>3</sup> *donmono*: A dish of rice served in a bowl with side dishes on top. Tempura bowl, cutlet bowl, chicken and egg bowl, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *jitan ryori*: Simple dishes that can be prepared in a short time.

## 第7章 Section1

### Memories of School Lunch

#### Let's Talk

1. What kind of lunch did you have at your elementary school? What was your favorite menu item?
2. In Japan, they have “*kyushoku*” (school lunch). What do you know about school lunches in Japan?

When I was a child, lunch period was my favorite time of the whole school day. My particular favorites on the menu were *takikomi-gohan* (たくこみごはん), curry udon, and melon bread. I remember that on days when my favorite foods were served, starting in the morning I could hardly wait for lunch.

Speaking of the lunch period, that reminds me of the job of “lunch duty.” The students on duty have the task of bringing the meals prepared by the cooks to the classroom and distributing them to the class members. It felt like a weighty responsibility because I had to wash my hands, put on the white smock, and work quickly or the lunch would be late. A fond memory I have now is how I would serve up a bit extra *yakisoba* to the boy I admired when he came through the line because I knew he liked it.

Other things I learned through school lunch were to eat a well-balanced diet without being picky and an attitude of not wasting food. After lunch at my school, the children washed and returned the dishes and rinsed and recycled the milk cartons, so I learned that it was important to avoid leaving leftover food as much as possible. However, the teachers pushed us to finish our meals, so at times I struggled to force myself to eat everything. Now, teachers are more considerate of children’s diversity than in the past. At one school, for example, they have students take less of the foods they don’t like and don’t scold them if they can’t eat everything and leave some on the plate.

Education through school lunches (nutrition education) holds an important place within school education in Japan. 99% of elementary schools and 89% of junior high schools serve school lunches, and this supports the health of children (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2019).

## 第7章 Section2

### *Kodomoshokudo* and Community Links

#### Let's Talk

1. What kind of cafeteria (restaurant) do you think of when you hear “*kodomoshokudo*”<sup>1</sup>?
2. Are there any facilities like “*kodomoshokudo*” in your country?

“*Kodomoshokudo*” refers to a community initiative by volunteers, local governments, and non-profit organizations to provide free or low-cost nutritious meals and warm gatherings for children in the local area. The program began in Tokyo in 2012 and is rapidly spreading across Japan, reaching more than 6,000 locations around the country by 2021.

This increase in the number of *kodomoshokudo* is attributed to changes in family structure and Japan's recent social and economic instability, such two major recessions (the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1990s and the 2008 financial crisis in the 2000s) as well as the spread of COVID-19 in the year 2020. Due to declining family incomes, the relative poverty rate for children has been increasing year by year, with approximately one in seven children currently living in poverty. The poverty rate for single-parent families is at a particularly high level of 48% (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2019).

Family poverty has a serious impact on children's eating habits, at times producing a situation known as “solitary eating.” “Solitary eating” means a lonely meal eaten alone, and it is said that the deficiency of communication with family members can lead to increased despondency about food and a lack of social skills. These problems children face regarding food are what is behind the establishment of the *kodomoshokudo*.

The first *kodomoshokudo* was established by a grocery store owner for children who couldn't get enough to eat due to family circumstances. At this *kodomoshokudo*, children can have a delicious meal for 5-yen, 10-yen, 50-yen, or even foreign or game coins. As for why the meals are not free, the manager said, “I don't want the children to think that they are receiving charity. I want them to maintain their self-respect by paying some money for it themselves.” At the same time, there are also many *kodomoshokudo* that provide meals at no cost.

*Kodomoshokudo* are not places that simply serve cheap and delicious food. Recently, they have become a place where anyone can drop in and enjoy a meal, not only children, but also the elderly, people with disabilities, or adults who are having trouble making ends meet. By eating all together, it becomes a place where children can be exposed to a variety of learning experiences while being supported in their growth, as well as a place to meet and communicate with others. In an age when connections between neighbors are fading, the *kodomoshokudo* plays an important role as a place that connects people in the community.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kodomo* = child, *shokudo* = diner

## 第 8 章 Section1

### Longevity and Fermented Food

#### Let's Talk

1. What kind of food is considered “healthy”? Why is it healthy?
2. What kind of fermented foods do you know of (e.g. yogurt)?

According to the “State of World Population 2022,” Japanese people rank first in the world for both sexes in longevity, with average life expectancy of 88 years for women and 82 years for men. The secret to this longevity is thought to be healthy *washoku*. *Washoku*, which is said to be good for health, has the essential seasonings of soy sauce, *miso*, and vinegar, all of which are fermented foods. Fermented foods are produced by the action of invisible microorganisms.

Another important fermented food for making *washoku* is *katsuobushi* (bonito flakes). From *katsuobushi*, which is made by fermenting dried bonito, one can make *dashi*, an essential ingredient in *washoku*. *Dashi* does not have the fat content of Western soup stocks because the fat from the bonito has been broken down by fermentation. Furthermore, *dashi* broth contains umami, which is considered the fifth basic taste in addition to sweet, salty, sour, and bitter tastes. It is said this *dashi* is what makes Japanese cuisine healthy and delicious.

*Natto* (fermented soybeans) is one of the most common fermented foods that Japanese people consume. *Natto* is made from soybeans, which contain a large amount of protein. You can make a healthy *natto* soup by adding *natto* to miso soup, which is also made from those protein-rich soybeans. Adding tofu to the soup makes it even richer in protein, and adding vegetables makes it a source of vitamins as well. *Natto* is also said to boost the immune system in the intestines. Some people may dislike the smell of *natto*, but it is a healthy food rich in protein. My friend who loves fermented foods calls *natto* soup “super protein healthy delicious soup.”

## 第 8 章 Section2

### New Style of Food: *Modoki Ryori* (Mock Food)

#### Let's Talk

1. Do you know what kind of processed soybean products there are? What are they?
2. Have you ever eaten soy meat? How does it compare to meat?

It is said that *washoku* is good for health because, along with fermented foods, it generously incorporates foods containing plant-derived proteins. Also, within *washoku* there is “*shojin ryori*,” which is eaten by Buddhist monks during their ascetic training. Prepared with vegetables, beans, and grains, but no meat or fish, *shojin ryori* is a plant-based, high-protein, low-calorie cuisine. Since it is made to imitate the appearance and texture of meat and fish, it is also called “*modoki ryori*” (mock food) and has recently been attracting interest among health-conscious people.

The word “*modoki*” in “*modoki ryori*” means to imitate something else, and thus soy meat, which is processed from soybeans, can be called “*modoki* meat” that is posing as meat. Soybeans have long been a fundamental part of the Japanese diet as processed foods or ingredients, but soy meat was developed in the United States in the 1920s as a meat alternative. It then expanded its market in the West, targeting vegetarians and vegans, and has become available in Japan as well.

Nowadays, Japanese supermarkets and convenience stores display neatly packaged soy meat hamburgers and sausages. Even at fast food chains, soy burgers and soy chicken nuggets have started to gain attention as healthy and tasty foods. Recipes using soy meat are also spreading through the Internet and cookbooks. Soy meat is said to be more environmentally friendly than beef because there is no need to raise livestock, and it is also an example of “food tech,” which uses the latest technology to develop new foods and cooking methods. Recently, advances are being made using food tech to develop “perfect foods,” such as pasta and bread that provide all nutrients. Food tech, which is now being developed globally, is also being used to solve social issues related to the SDGs and to produce food using new ingredients such as insects. Since it involves the process from food production to distribution and preparation, food tech is expected to be a solution to food shortages and food loss, and it is also predicted to control the way human beings live in the future.

On the other hand, soy meat is a processed food and therefore contains additives to maintain the meaty texture and for preservation. In addition, some types are high in sodium and calories, or contain genetically modified soybeans. Therefore, as consumers, we need to be careful about whether or not we can say these meat alternatives are health foods.



## 第9章 Section1

### Changing Convenience Stores and Influx of Foreign Workers

#### Let's Talk

1. Do you often use convenience stores? Do you have favorite convenience store products?
2. What do you know about convenience stores in Japan?

Convenience stores in Japan used to have the image of a place where single men went to browse through magazines and buy rice balls and snacks, but today they are used by a wide range of customers, including students, the elderly, and housewives. The reason for this is that, in addition to the easy-to-purchase and delicious bento boxes, salads, and sandwiches, convenience stores also offer a wide variety of ready-to-eat side dishes, such as hot fried chicken and croquettes. In recent years, convenience store operators have also focused on developing their own lines of sweets and have succeeded in attracting more female customers by offering a variety of tasty-looking and stylishly packaged products, such as *wagashi* (traditional Japanese confectionery), cakes, and pudding. Some people even say that we have reached the point where all you need is a convenience store to get by.

The type of people working in convenience stores is also becoming more diverse. In the past, most part-time workers were Japanese, but due to a severe labor shortage, the number of foreign staff has increased. At the convenience store near my house, a staff member from Nepal always greets me with a friendly smile. It has been about a year since I started seeing the clerk there. At first, she had a hard time every time she answered a customer's question, but recently she has gotten completely accustomed to her job and has become a core part of the convenience store staff.

The other day, when a customer complained about the service at this convenience store, she calmly looked the customer in the eye and answered in clear Japanese. Impressed by her response, the customer said, "Hey, you speak good Japanese and know what you're doing, huh?" She smiled and replied, "I was trained by the customers."

When foreign staff work in a convenience store, there must be many difficulties, such as the language barrier and differences in working styles. However, from the way she handled the customer, I felt the confidence and radiance she had from being trusted in her role.

## 第9章 Section2

### *Omotenashi* and “The Customer is Always Right”

#### Let’s Talk

1. Have you ever heard the term “*omotenashi*”? Where did you hear it?
2. What do you think “*okyakusama wa kamisama*”<sup>1</sup> means?

Japan is often referred to as the land of “*omotenashi*,” or hospitality, where customers are warmly welcomed. The “*motenasu*” root of “*omotenashi*” means to welcome guests with meals, entertainment, and special treatment. This spirit is valued throughout the hospitality industry, from convenience stores to restaurants and luxury inns.

There are various theories as to the origin of the word “*omotenashi*.” One of them is said to come from the spirit of hospitality toward guests at a tea ceremony with the feeling “we may never meet this way again.” The “spirit” of taking good care of guests is highly valued. However, can this mentality alone explain the attentive service of the Japanese hospitality industry?

One of the phrases associated with good *omotenashi* at restaurants is “the customer is God.” The phrase “the customer is God” means to take good care of customers and provide satisfactory service. It has been used employee training in the service industry as a motto expressing the understanding that employees should have. Certainly, good *omotenashi* based on the premise that “the customer is God” is comfortable for customers and will increase their satisfaction with the restaurant. However, as customers come to feel that level of attentive service is the norm, they will become dissatisfied with restaurants that do not treat them as politely, leading to complaints and excessive demands on employees. When Japanese people go abroad, it is not uncommon for them to feel disgruntled that they do not receive the same kind of courteous service they receive in Japan. This is probably because many Japanese people take courteous service for granted.

However, the Japanese service industry’s *omotenashi* is now at a crossroads. As Japan’s economic environment worsens, some companies are finding it difficult to spend time training employees or retain experienced and talented staff. For workers in difficult work environments, it can also contribute to excessive workloads when a business demands that customers are provided a consistently high level of *omotenashi*.

Overwork is also known as “black labor” in Japan and refers to such harsh labor that workers are forced to work long hours without rest, suffer physical and mental illness, and have to quit their jobs. This is a problem that can exist in any company, not only in high-end restaurants that trade on the finest *omotenashi*, but also in fast food, family restaurants, or convenience stores that are pushing toward streamlining. When you think about it like this, you can catch a glimpse of not only the wonderful aspects of the word “*omotenashi*” but also its negative aspects.

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<sup>1</sup> *okyakusama* = customer, *kamisama* = god

## 第 10 章 Section1

### Food Waste and the SDGs

#### Let's Talk

1. Have you ever heard the term “food loss”? What do you think it means?
2. Have you ever had the experience of throwing away food you bought because you couldn't eat it all or couldn't use it up?

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Food Waste Index Report 2021, about 930 million tons of food were discarded worldwide in 2019. Japan is no exception, with some 5.7 million tons of food thrown away in fiscal year 2019, with household food waste accounting for more than half of that amount. The reason cited for this is “food loss”: buying too much food, not being able to use it up, and having no choice but to throw it away. To reduce food loss, we can do various things, such as cooking only the amount of food we can eat, not leaving food uneaten at mealtimes, and preparing delicious dishes that make people want to eat the whole thing. Also, when eating out, it is important to order only what you can eat.

The problem of food loss by businesses is also serious, with convenience stores reportedly discarding 200,000 to 300,000 tons of food per year per store. Recently, however, convenience stores are working on various strategies. For example, they are using AI to manage inventory levels and reduce excess stock, discounting foods close to their expiration dates, and developing products that can be stored for a long time.

In order to solve the problem of food loss, it is necessary to pursue both “responsible production” and “responsible consumption,” which are addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. One of the typical approaches is the “food bank,” a non-profit organization that collects food waste from corporations and provides it to those in financial need. This system saves companies money on food disposal, benefits the environment by reducing waste, and allows those who receive the food to economize. There is also a smartphone app that companies have started based on this concept. Restaurants discount their excess food or unsold baked goods and upload them to the app where members buy them, thus attempting to combine business and food loss reduction. We expect to see initiatives like this continue to increase in the future.

## 第 10 章 Section2

### Food-based Social Enterprises and Solutions to Social Issues

#### Let's Talk

1. Have you ever participated in any social contribution activities?
2. Have you ever heard of “social business”? What do you think it means?

Social business<sup>1</sup> (social innovation) refers to businesses and initiatives that use business methods to solve social problems such as poverty and discrimination. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) identifies sociability, feasibility, and innovativeness as the three characteristics of social business, and promotes the creation of new social values by developing products and services that contribute to society and by popularizing sustainable business activities throughout society.

Known as the mother of modern nursing education in the 19th century, Nightingale believed that activities supported solely by volunteers would prove unsustainable, so she established a nursing school and supported women's advancement in society. She is also considered to be a pioneer of social business because she combined social contribution and business. In recent years, the number of investors wishing to invest in social businesses has been increasing, and social businesses are showing expansion in society.

One example of a food-related social business in Japan is a small restaurant called “*Mirai Shokudo*”<sup>2</sup> (translated as Future Eatery). At this diner, anyone who helps out with restaurant tasks for 50 minutes is entitled to a free employee meal plus a “free meal ticket.” If they don't use the free meal ticket and post it at the entrance of the restaurant, an individual who doesn't have money can use the ticket to get a meal. This system is not only poverty alleviation but also provides a place for customers to contribute to society.

There are also restaurants in Tokyo that serve meals accessible to people with dietary restrictions such as Halal or allergies, and that allow people with different eating habits to gather around one table while being inclusive of food diversity. There are also mixed-profit cafes that use local facilities and government subsidies to provide workplaces where people with disabilities can enjoy working while bonding with customers through song.

Furthermore, training of workers to take up social business is being conducted in various educational settings, and project-based activities that link social business with solutions to SDG issues are one such example. Social business has become more well-known in society over the past several years and is expected to spread increasingly in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Social business is a term used by economist Muhammad Yunus. The term social innovation is also widely used.

<sup>2</sup> A restaurant located in Hitotsubashi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo. “Future Eatery – order your ‘usual’”  
<http://miraishokudo.com/>