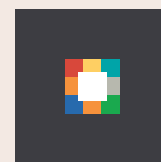


News from Northeast Asia

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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%



of the canned beef imported from the United States. Food in cans was a symbol of modernity and viewed very positively as food that had already been used by American, British, and other Western armies for a long time.

Japan's modernization involved not only building up its military but also establishing a nationwide educational system, large-scale transportation facilities, factories, and other modern institutions. All of them required the introduction of bureaucracy, mass production of food for communal meals, standardization, and rationalization of cooking procedures. It was thought that, to provide meals in large quantities, Western cuisine was more appropriate than indigenous Japanese dishes in terms of nutritional balance for one's health, simplicity of cooking methods, and convenience of preparation.

The third stimulus was the Japanese traditional palate. No matter how vigorous the Westernization and rationalization drives were, one cannot ignore the power of tradition, and the aesthetics of taste that the Japanese possessed. Although the nutritional aspects were emphasized in the early stages of Japanese-Western fusion cuisine development—as reflected in the slogan, "Eat beef and get healthier"—even beef dishes were prepared using Japanese cooking methods and with Japanese seasonings, thereby conforming to the principles of Japanese food aesthetics.

As the consumption of meat by the emperor, political and military leaders, and other elites increased, Western cuisine became more popularized and the demand for it appeared in the middle classes. Sayings such as "If you cannot eat meat, you are uncivilized" were in vogue. Butcher shops opened in cities, and restaurants serving *gyu-nabe* (beef hotpot), made of beef and vegetables seasoned with soy sauce and sugar, sprang up

everywhere. There is no doubt that beef was a Western ingredient for the Japanese since they had not traditionally eaten it, but all the vegetables and seasonings for *gyu-nabe* were indigenous and the dish was eaten in the Japanese way. In other words, there was no problem with staying true to the Japanese cooking system as long as the ingredients were Western.

Japanese-Western fusion cuisine emerged in the early 20th century through this process of incorporating ingredients and some cooking methods of the West. Culinary schools appeared and women's colleges started offering classes on Western cuisine around the same time. Familiarity with Western food among young men who had served in the military and many college students ensured the demand for fusion cuisine. By the end of the Meiji period (around 1910), fusion cuisine evolved into a harmonious mixture of Western and Japanese culinary traditions. Fusion dishes created in modern Japan—*kare-raisu*, *tonkatsu*, etc.—were disseminated to Korea and other regions through colonial rule and gained a wide currency.

One of the obstacles to the introduction of Western cuisine was the difficulty to obtain ingredients. During the early Meiji period, there was a shortage of beef and an insufficient supply of Western vegetables such as onions, cabbage, carrots, celery, and tomatoes. However, from the 20th century, the mass production of onions, cabbage, and carrots started in Hokkaido, which contributed to the development and spread of fusion cuisine.

The establishment of canned food manufacturing, development of refrigeration technology, modernization of cooking utensils, and other industrialization projects played

an important role in the modernization of Japanese food. The popularization of *korokke* was largely related to the large-scale cultivation of potatoes in Hokkaido. The early 20th-century launch of domestically produced curry powder, which had previously been imported from England, led to wider consumption of *kare-raisu*. Cooking the dish in Japanese homes became possible when the manufacturing of solid curry roux began in 1950. Japan also started the industrial production of coarse breadcrumbs for *tonkatsu* and exported them overseas. The simultaneous industrialization and modernization of the country was a decisive factor in the development of Japanese-western fusion cuisine.

So far, rice has maintained its position as the primary staple in fusion dishes. If bread replaces it, this will trigger another major transformation in Japanese food culture. It may usher in a new stage of food Westernization, following the introduction of Western cuisine during the Meiji Restoration and the proliferation of Japanese-Western dishes. On the other hand, culinary traditions from other countries in Asia and beyond are entering Japan, rapidly shifting its food landscape in the multicultural direction. Consequently, the Westernization/modernization fervor is not as strong as it was during the Meiji period, even though Japanese-Western fusion cuisine continues to serve as an important platform for changes in the food culture. It will be interesting to observe how Japanese cuisine will transform in the future based on the influences of different cultures.

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Imperialism and colonialism in the food industry in East Asia: focusing on instant Ramen

Young-ha JOO

ONE EVENT OF PROFOUND INFLUENCE on the food cultures of Korea, Taiwan, and Japan after World War II was the supply of surplus wheat by the United States in the form of grants or on credit. In 1953 and 1954, American farms yielded an extremely bountiful wheat harvest. From the position of the US government, it was a surplus product. In the early post-war years, American surplus agricultural produce was given as aid to the countries of Western Europe. However, as the productive capacity of European agricultural industries quickly recovered, they no longer needed American surplus products. In this situation, Washington turned its focus towards Japan, Korea, and Taiwan as potential destinations for its excess farm commodities. The three countries shared important similarities: all of them suffered from shortages in staple foods and all three were under the political, economic, and military umbrella of the United States.

In 1945–1953, during the periods of the United States Military Government and the Korean War, the United States supplied a substantial amount of foodstuffs to Korea under the Military Defense Assistance Act (MDAA). For instance, between 15 December 1948 and 31 December 1949, the grant-type food assistance amounted to US\$ 13million. From 1953 to 1961, surplus agricultural produce was supplied along with military aid under the Mutual Security Act (MSA). In 1954, the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA), which was in charge of planning American overseas assistance, shipped to Korea barley worth US\$ 1.785 million, wheat worth US\$ 2.007 million, and beans worth US\$ 0.691 million. Korea received even more aid in accordance with the 1956 revised Public Law 480 (PL480). Barley alone amounted to US\$ 13.863 million.

The circumstances in Taiwan and Japan were not much different. Inflow of American surplus wheat to Japan would eventually lead to the invention of instant ramen in the country. The historical reason making such an invention possible was Taiwan's experience of Japanese colonial rule. Japan's first instant ramen was developed by the founder of Nissin Food Products Co., Ltd., Momofuku Ando (1910–2007). Born in Taiwan, he started his own business in Osaka in 1933, married a Japanese, and was naturalized in Japan. There is a good chance Ando's Chikin Ramen (chicken ramen) was inspired by *ji si mian* (雞絲麵, shredded chicken noodles) of the southern region of China. In this way, the occupation of Taiwan by

