Traditional Dietary Cultures of the Japanese

Itadaki-masu
What exactly is WASHOKU? Maybe even Japanese people haven’t thought seriously about it very much. Typical washoku at home is usually comprised of cooked rice, miso soup, some main and side dishes and pickles. A set menu of grilled fish at a downtown diner is also a type of washoku. Recipes using cooked rice as the main ingredient such as curry and rice or sushi should also be considered as a type of washoku. Of course, washoku includes some noodle and mochi dishes. The world of traditional washoku is extensive.

In the first place, the term WASHOKU does not refer solely to a dish or a cuisine. For instance, let’s take a look at osechi-ryori, a set of traditional dishes for New Year. The dishes are prepared to celebrate the coming of the new year, and with a wish to be able to spend the coming year soundly and happily. In other words, the religion and the mindset of Japanese people are expressed in osechi-ryori, otoso (rice wine for New Year) and ozohni (soup with mochi), as well as the ambience of the people sitting around the table with these dishes.

Food culture has been developed with the background of the natural environment surrounding people and culture that is unique to the country or the region.

The Japanese archipelago runs widely north and south, surrounded by sea. 75% of the national land is mountainous areas. Under the monsoonal climate, the four seasons show distinct differences. The average annual precipitation is as high as 1800mm. In such natural environment, the people are obtaining the wealth of seasonal foodstuff from the sea, mountains and fields. Japanese people respect and live with nature, which brings such blessings to people’s lives. With belief in deities and ancestors, combined with foods, a unique food culture has been developed in this land.

Food culture in Japan has been developed by also incorporating foreign cultures from China, Korean Peninsula and Southeast Asia, and from West European countries in the modern era. As a result, delicious and healthy WASHOKU that Japan can boast to the world developed.

However, such tradition of WASHOKU is now disappearing from Japanese tables. While WASHOKU had been developed by using foodstuff grown in Japan, the food self-sufficiency ratio of Japan is now lower than 40%. Household consumption of rice is decreasing, and traditional local cuisines and dishes specially prepared for certain events are also disappearing.

In its long history, Japan has developed WASHOKU as something beyond mere cuisine but culture. Let us explore the history of WASHOKU, the traditional food culture in Japan, in this booklet.
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* In this booklet, the traditional dietary culture of Japan is expressed as WASHOKU, and dishes with such tradition are expressed as washoku.
Foodstuff used in WASHOKU includes grains (mainly rice), vegetables, mushrooms, fish, shellfish and seaweed. Delicious wagyu beef is also used in recent years. There are two types of rice: non-glutinous rice and glutinous rice. The variety of vegetables ranges widely from indigenous varieties to Western vegetables that arrived in the Meiji period and thereafter. Fish is also an abundant foodstuff, and there are as many as about 4,200 varieties of fish around Japan.

The basic structure of WASHOKU is “one soup and three dishes other than cooked rice.” Such structure comprises dishes that take full advantage of the deliciousness of the ingredients themselves. The key for every dish is *dashi* (stock). It may be prepared from *kombu* (dried kelp) or *katsuobushi* (dried bonito), or by cooking ingredients for a certain time. Deliciously prepared dishes are served in beautiful style.

**What is WASHOKU?**

**Foodstuff, dishes, nutrients and hospitality; the occasion and style of eating are also important elements of WASHOKU**

WASHOKU starts from selecting foodstuff. Then, the menu is composed by taking nutrition into consideration. Then, the dishes are served with a mind of hospitality. How to eat the dishes is also an important element.

WASHOKU. We use the term as a word expressing Japanese-style cuisine. However, does the term WASHOKU merely represent a single style of cuisine? For example, “itadaki-masu” and “gochisou-sama,” the phrases Japanese people say before and after meals, respectively, express thanks to not only the person who prepared the meal, but also to nature in which the foodstuff was grown, and to our ancestors and deities who preserved such nature.

Also, we pay attention not only to the dishes prepared but also the cooking method, the menu structure, plates and bowls used, and how the dishes are served on the table and how they are eaten. These also reflect the feeling and style unique to Japanese people.

In such context, WASHOKU refers not only to cuisine, but also to Japanese customs related to eating.

All tangible and intangible assets, including the wisdom and customs of eating that were generated and built by Japanese people, or the people who created such assets, are included in the concept of WASHOKU. Let’s recognize the word as a collective term for the traditional dietary cultures of Japan.

**WASHOKU is constantly changing over time.**

The basic structure of WASHOKU is “one soup and three dishes,” which means eating cooked rice with side dishes, soup and pickles. This is a style developed to eat rice, the staple food, deliciously. It also generated the characteristic style of combining cooked rice and other dishes and tasting them at the same time in the mouth.

While WASHOKU had been inherited based on this style, it has been actively incorporating foodstuff, recipes and cooking methods from abroad and has been changing its content.

With the active introduction of Western culture in the Meiji period, WASHOKU experienced a further change. The taboo against eating meat was dissolved, resulting in the invention of various Western-style Japanese dishes such as niku-jaga (stewed potatoes and meat seasoned with soy sauce), sukiyaki, curry...
Motenashi, the Japanese concept of hospitality, is not merely a service offered from the host to the guest. It also includes the entire attitude of people who eat at the table. For example, the hospitality of the host expressed in the decoration of the space for eating, or various ideas incorporated in dishes and plates, will be rewarded when the guests notice them. Precisely, WASHOKU is the representative culture of Japan.

Traditional washoku that is low in animal fat ensures the necessary energy for living and an ideal nutritional balance for healthy life, including staple food and side dishes. Eating the main staple food and side dishes alternately, harmonizing the tastes within one’s mouth, is a unique style of eating for washoku. By prioritizing umami, salt content and calories can be effectively controlled.

Nowadays, the dietary life of Japanese people is changing at an unprecedented speed. The style of cuisine has diversified through changes such as westernization, while handing down the culture of WASHOKU is diminishing due to an increase of people who are indifferent to what they eat, or a decrease of occasions for cooking and eating at home.

For this reason, it may be the time for us to reconsider what WASHOKU is.

What are the four elements comprising WASHOKU?

Now, what elements comprise WASHOKU?

The first is foodstuff. In Japan, the four seasons are distinctive, and the climate is temperate and rainy. Agricultural products harvested in such climate are wide in variety, including rice, vegetables, edible wild plants and mushrooms.

Japan is also surrounded by productive fishing ground, where the Japan Current and the Oyashio Current collide. An abundant variety of fish is hauled from sea, and various local fish-eating cultures were developed. While 90% of fishery yields in Norway, which is also a major fisheries country, comprises only eight varieties of fish, that of Japan comprises as many as 28 varieties. This fact shows how abundant the variety of fish in Japan is. The annual consumption volume of fish is about 57kg per person, which is about twice that of the U.S. and 6th in the world. It shows that the blessings from the sea are important foodstuff for washoku.

The second element is dishes. Cooking methods capitalizing on abundant water resources such as steaming, boiling and stewing, cooking utensils such as Japanese kitchen knives that are suitable for processing various types of fish, and dashi stock improved so as to prepare delicious meals mainly using vegetables and seafood, are the pillars of WASHOKU dishes.

The third is nutrition. Washoku is relatively low-calorie and allows the easy intake of different nutrients in a well-balanced manner.

And the fourth is hospitality. The mindset of greeting guests with utmost care is not merely a service for guests. By tasting the dishes and appreciating the decorations of alcoves or tableware used, the guests also reward the host. “Itadaki-masu” and “gochisou-sama” are both words of thanks before and after eating, respectively, and it also makes those offering the hospitality feel satisfied as well.

The manner of using chopsticks, the people’s behavior, decoration that expresses the season and feeling, and the attitude of appreciating them...the idea of understanding the manners and the intention of preparing the eating place, and the feeling of caring for one another, is the spirit of WASHOKU.
The tradition of "Aenokoto" is inherited in the Oku-Noto Region of Ishikawa Prefecture (such as Wajima City, Suzu City, Anamizu Town and Noto Town). The ritual invites the deities of rice paddies inside the house, and lets them stay there from December to the next February until the coming of spring. The deities of rice paddies are husband and wife. Therefore, the tradition prepares two sets of utensils used for the ceremony, including divine tables with dishes, goblets and chopsticks. People welcome the deities with the foodstuff harvested in the nearby region. The dishes offered to the deities include rice cooked with adzuki beans, cod soup, daikon radish, fish and amazake (sweet fermented rice wine). These dishes are given to children after the ceremony. It is one of the Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties designated by the Japanese government, and is also included in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO.

Living with nature: "Aenokoto" in Oku-Noto

The reason why

WASHOKU, developed in life with nature, is a part of Japanese culture

Japanese people lived with nature that shows different aspects by region and by season, and developed various different styles of dietary culture. Let us look for the reason why WASHOKU is a part of the culture.

Nature not only brings blessings, but also shows harshness to people. The lifestyle of Japanese people used to be deeply linked to nature, by accepting the environment in terms of geography or climate.

1. Spiritual nature of WASHOKU

Back in the days when science and technology were not developed as is now, nature existed overwhelmingly over humans. People felt the existence of deities in such nature, and prayed for large hauls and good harvests. The joy and thankfulness of harvests developed into the form of festivals. The lifestyle nurtured the spiritual nature of respecting nature that brings blessings in the form of food.

2. Social nature of WASHOKU

Everyday household tables, celebrations, festivals and annual functions in the communities of villages and towns-WASHOKU has been inherited by people eating the blessings of nature together. WASHOKU plays the role of the cornerstone of society, through family get-togethers, community gatherings and other parties.

3. Functional nature of WASHOKU

Naturally, food also has the functional nature of providing the stuff of people's life. WASHOKU, which uses abundant natural blessings such as rice, vegetables, seafood and seaweed, also represents a healthy dietary culture with amazing nutritional balance. In addition, the dishes for celebration also have the "function" of wishing for health and longevity.

4. The regional nature of WASHOKU

WASHOKU differs widely among regions. Because geography and climate
Living with nature: In the case of Aomori Prefecture

In this region, the entire family cooperates to make “winter-dried daikon radish” for a whole winter. Daikon radish is boiled, immersed in clear icy water, and then dried in cold winter wind. The process is the wisdom of life developed with the spirit of living with nature, capitalizing on the cold weather, rather than trying to resist the cold winters.

1. Spiritual nature
In Sai Village, located at the tip of Shimokita Peninsula and with a population of about 2,500, holds the Yanonemori Hachimangu Festival every September. During the three days of the festival, all houses keep the doors open, and welcome any guests and have drinks together. Deities visits all the places in the village during these three days, and people share the table and strengthen the bonds among them.

2. Social nature
Kenoshiru is a soup in the Tsugaru region that is prepared for the 15th of January as another new year’s celebration, as a replacement of nanakusa-gayu (rice porridge with seven spring herbs) in other regions. Because the common spring herbs cannot be harvested in Aomori in winter, the dish uses root vegetables such as daikon radish and carrots, edible wild plants such as warabi and zenmai, and preserved foods such as freeze-dried tofu, to brighten up the New Year table in the harsh winter. The dish is prepared with the wish for maintaining health and soundness.

3. Functional nature
Mizu is a type of edible wild plant growing throughout the Tohoku Region. This dish is prepared by boiling mizu to remove scum, and immersing it in kombu stock together with steamed horned turban. It is interesting that blessings from the mountain and sea coexist in a single dish. It is a traditional dish for the Nishi-Tsugaru Region, where the distance of the sea and mountain is close, which combines the wealth of both mountain and sea in the same dish.

4. Regional nature

Winter-drying

Family get-together

Kenoshiru

Mizu with kombu stock

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4. Regional nature

varies widely throughout Japan, much-diversified dietary culture had been developed among different regions. From Hokkaido to Okinawa, each region supplied the needs within the region, and was developing original dietary culture up to the early modern period. In other words, WASHOKU is the symbol of regional culture in Japan.

Let us take a look at “Aenokoto,” a ritual inherited in Oku-Noto, Ishikawa Prefecture. This is an agricultural rite to thank the deities of rice paddies for the harvest of the year.

“Ae” means “hospitality,” and “koto” means “festival.” From winter to spring, the deities of rice paddies are invited and welcomed into the house. Abundant blessings from the mountain, sea and fields of Noto Region are offered to the deities.

Another example is the dietary culture in Sai Village located in Shimokita Peninsula of Aomori Prefecture.

The dietary habit of using many preserved foods made of vegetables and edible wild plants was developed, and the tradition has been well-preserved until now, with the unique traditional dishes being inherited. Osechi-ryori (new year dishes) unique to the region is enjoyed at New Year’s, wishing for health and soundness.

These examples show that a lifestyle of living with nature developed unique dishes and dietary habits in different regions in Japan, making up WASHOKU.
(1) Respect for nature

WASHOKU started from respecting nature and has continued to the present.

WASHOKU, supported by plentiful nature, especially clear water, blessed with rich foodstuff, and methods of cooking, utensils, and arrangement were developed. That is why WASHOKU allows us to feel the seasons and reminds us of respecting nature.

Somei No Ido in Nashi No Ki Jinja Shrine in Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto City, is a spring that is familiarly known to local residents for its good-quality water. In every region in Japan, people were blessed not only with river water but also water from springs and wells, and lived thanks to such water.
Tofu, a food solidifying soy bean curd with a coagulating agent, has been widely eaten from ancient times. Tofu made in Japan is unique with its high content of water and softness. Because it is a bland-tasting food, the taste depends largely on the good quality of water used in the preparation process.

**Tofu**

Utilizing good-quality water

WASHOKU takes in the feelings of the season in various styles. The dish called *fukiyose* expresses a scene in autumn where seasonal vegetables, ginkgo nuts and mushrooms all drift with wind inside a basket works.

**Fukiyose**

Expressing seasonal feelings

WANMONO = Using wood materials

Soups are usually served in wooden bowls. Lacquerware made by wrapping cloths over a thinly-carved wooden core and finished with lacquer has been used throughout Japan. Because it is made of wood, it can be held in the hand without feeling the heat even if it contains boiling-hot soup inside.

**Wanmono**

Using wood materials

WASABI = Functionality of nature

Wasabi is a familiar relish for sashimi. Its stinging spiciness is caused by a volatile chemical substance called allyl isothiocyanate, which has strong antibacterial and sterilizing activities. Therefore, it is effectively used when eating raw fish. It is wisdom peculiar to WASHOKU, fully utilizing the efficacy of natural products.

In Japan, where people are blessed with rich products of nature, a mentality to worship and respect nature has been developed from ancient days. Festivals to wish for good harvests and large hauls for each season held throughout Japan express such mentality.

Spring, summer, autumn and winter – the four seasons in Japan are so uniquely distinguished in a way that is almost unseen in other places in the world. Washoku takes in various foodstuff that can only be enjoyed for the season.

The plates and bowls to serve the dishes are also quite unique. Lacquerware, using natural lacquer resin, is tableware invented with the knowledge of nature held by our ancestors, realizing beauty and a high mothproof effect and durability.

It is also characteristic that the season can also be felt with the eyes, such as expressing the season with plates and bowls or with garnishes, or decorating flowers of the season in an alcove.

In addition, one of the important blessings of nature is water.

**Mellow soft water has large influence**

Water is also an object to be religiously worshipped, and has played an important role in formulating food culture in Japan.

The average annual precipitation in Japan is as high as 1800mm. Water suitable for drinking is abundant, and also the water contains less minerals because it stays only for a short period underground. Thus, in contrast to hard water found in continents such as Europe, the water in Japan is soft water (WHO standards: the content of calcium and magnesium is 120mg/L or less), which has a large impact on WASHOKU.

Cooking methods using mild-tasting and mellow soft water abundantly, and dishes accentuating the natural taste of the foodstuff itself, were developed.

One example is Tofu. Because *moments* or *kinu* tofu generally eaten in Japan is made by using a lot of water, the taste of the product depends largely on the quality of water.

It is the same with cooking rice. By rinsing rice several times with water, and by cooking with an adequate amount of water, the rice can be finished softly and without any hard core inside.

Other cooking methods using water abundantly, such as boiling vegetables and rinsing with water thereafter, removing scum with water, or firming the surface of soba noodles with cold water after boiling, are all quite unique and different from methods seen in other regions of the world. The good quality of water in Japan supports WASHOKU.

Also, soft water brings out the taste of *kombu* and *katsuobushi* effectively, which resulted in a cooking method that uses *dashi* stock. With the use of *dashi* stock, the unique taste of ingredients themselves, which are the blessings of nature, can be enjoyed.

Sensitivity to the changes of seasons lies within the spirit of WASHOKU in other words, WASHOKU or food for Japanese people, developing emotions towards the four seasons from childhood, is precisely the expression of respect for nature.
(2) Uniting family and region

Gathering to connect ties among people; role of foods for events and festivals

People strengthen ties among them by eating together. Family get-togethers, celebrations, festivals of the region; annual events... Food plays a central role in uniting people within the traditional culture of Japan.

Daily occasions of family members and relatives sitting around the table is an important situation for communication. By all the members showing up at the table and talking about what they felt or what happened each day while having meals, the bond of the family is strengthened. It is an important opportunity to teach children the manner of WASHOKU such as how to use chopsticks or how to hold bowls, or taste sensation and nutritional balance can be educated through dishes.

Aside from daily occasions, special dishes are enjoyed at annual events such as New Year, setsubun (the day before the calendric beginning of spring) and New Year’s Eve. Such custom is also useful for strengthening ties among family members and relatives. It also results in handing down the taste and tradition of the family to the next generation.

Being connected with people and region through foods

Other than family events, there are also annual events that unite the local community.
Food is also an important factor for festivals of local community. After rites at shrines, there is an eating and drinking ceremony called naorai. It is expected that the deities and people unite and people are blessed, by eating and drinking the food and wine offered to the deities. Nowadays, the ceremony also has the meaning of a party after the rite, and people drink together after the rite is carried out. This works to develop familiar feelings and reinforce the awareness as the same community.

Such parties can also be said to be a part of Japanese culture in terms of food.

There are also situations where the local community is united through the intermediary of foods, other than festivals. For example, imoni-kai (taro-cooking gathering) held frequently in Yamagata and Miyagi Prefectures in autumn is a seasonal event where friends, colleagues or members of the local community are invited and gather at riverside. The pot-dish served on the occasion generally contains ingredients such as taro and beef and is seasoned with soy sauce in the inland parts of Yamagata Prefecture. On the other hand, in Miyagi Prefecture, taro and pork are cooked and seasoned with miso. Although there are such regional differences, there are common factors that people gather around a dish cooking regional foodstuff of the season in a large pot. It is suggested that exchange and the feeling of unity are strengthened not only by eating together but also by preparing the dish together.

The bonds of family, relatives, region and community are strengthened through foods. This is one of the characteristics of WASHOKU, its social nature.

Sharing the table as a part of rite is an important occasion for people who implement the festival to reinforce the ties among them. The photo below shows the table at a festival in Osaka Prefecture. Dishes served here included a pot dish of hamo (conger pike) and matsutake mushroom, and local eggplant pickles. On the other hand, imoni-kai (photos right) held frequently in Miyagi and Yamagata Prefectures in the Tohoku region in autumn is usually held not only by the regional community but also among colleagues, relatives and friends. By all participants bringing foodstuff and preparing the dish together, the feeling of togetherness is reinforced.
Wish for health and longevity with dishes for special occasions

For example, osechi-ryori preserves the unique culture of different regions throughout Japan. While the content varies widely among different regions, the wish for health and longevity is expressed in every region by eating the dishes.

There are special ceremonial days in the life of Japanese people. One is an annual event as New Year, and another is milestone days in a person’s life such as childbirth, coming-of-age, marriage or kanreki (60th birthday), which are called rites of passage. There is one thing in common in these special days: people eat special dishes to expel evil spirits, bad luck and disasters, and wish for health and longevity.

On New Year’s Day, people celebrate the start of the year by welcoming the “deity of the year” to each household. It is an important annual event that takes place only once a year. Kadomatsu, which is a decoration set at the entrance of the house, is a mark for inviting the deities. On New Year’s Day, family members gather and have meals together, wishing for happiness throughout the year. Osechi-ryori dishes are served on that occasion. Osechi-ryori dishes vary widely among regions: some

**Osechi-ryori**

The content of osechi-ryori varies among different regions. The above is a sample of osechi-ryori in Tokyo. The tier of food boxes (at the front) contains the three dishes for celebration, namely kuromame (sweet cooked black soybean), kazunoko (herring roe) and tazukuri (dried small sardines), which represent wishes for health, for the prosperity of descendants, and for good harvest, respectively. Other dishes for celebration include red-and-white (considered auspicious colors) kamaboko (minced and steamed fish), grilled shrimp representing a wish for longevity, and tataki-gobo (crushed and seasoned burdock) representing a wish for a good harvest. The content differs by region. A vinegared dish (in the small box at the left) and nishime (vegetables cooked with dashi) (in large box at rear) are also some popular dishes for osechi-ryori.
include a lineup of appetizers for drinking alcohol, while there are regions where only nishime (vegetables cooked with dashi) is prepared as osechi-ryori. However, it is common that the dishes express the wish to beckon fortune and ward off misfortune, while sharing the table with deities.

Ozohni (soup with mochi), also eaten on New Year’s Day, was originally the most important and formal appetizer for drinking alcohol among samurais. On New Year’s Day, ozohni with mochi inside and otoso (rice wine for New Year) are always served. Round-shaped mochi as used in kagamimochi symbolizes the souls of deities. It is also called “hagatame-mochi (mochi for firm teeth),” and eating kagamimochi on January 11th has a meaning of wishing for longevity with healthy teeth.

Other events for sharing the table and wishing to be able to spend every day in peace include five sekku (season-related festivals). These are January 7th (“jinjitsu”), when people eat nanakusa-gayu (rice porridge with seven spring herbs), March 3rd (“joushi”), when people eat kusamochi (sweet mochi seasoned with mugwort) that is believed to have the effect on quelling negative vibes, May 5th (“tango”), when people wish for health by eating chimaki (steamed rice wrapped in bamboo leaves) and kashiwamochi (sweet mochi wrapped with Kashiwa oak leaves), July 7th (“shichisieki”), wishing to stay disease-free by eating thin noodles called sakubei, and September 9th (“chouyou”), wishing for immortality with kikuzake (sake served with chrysanthemum petals).

As for rites of passage, sekihan (red rice), which was believed to quell negative vibes and bad luck, used to be eaten not only on celebrating occasions but also in Buddhist ceremonies such as bon festivals and in funerals.

The tradition of WASHOKU, constantly in pursuit of things good for one’s body, culminated in a healthy food culture that is rarely found in other regions of the world. Strong orientation towards the wish for health and longevity lies at the heart of WASHOKU.
There are regions eating simple ozohni using kombu and katsuobushi dashi stock, seasoned with miso, and including cooked round mochi, turnip and turnip leaves. Miso is either white miso or red miso.

The common type is the combination of cooked round mochi and clear soy sauce-seasoned soup. In the Izumo Region, people eat ozohni called “adzuki zohni” including only adzuki beans and mochi, similar to zenzai.

Generally, round mochi and white miso are used. However, in Kagawa prefecture, there is unique “an-mochi zohni,” putting mochi with sweet bean paste inside in white miso soup. The soup also includes daikon radish, carrot and taro.

There are different variations of dashi stock such as using flying fish, kombu or chicken, but all are seasoned with soy sauce. Kamaboko is included. In northern Kyushu, some regions use mochi with sweet bean paste inside.

“Ozohni Map

Ozohni eaten on New Year’s Day varies widely among regions and households, in terms of the ingredients of dashi stock and seasoning used, the shape of mochi, and other ingredients in the soup. Dashi ingredients include kombu, katsuobushi, dried small fish, dried squid, conger and chicken. For seasoning, salt, soy sauce and miso are used. The shape of mochi is different, either round or square, and there is also a difference of baking it or not before cooking with soup. In some regions, mochi with sweet bean paste is stuffed inside is used. Other ingredients in the soup include vegetables, seafood and chicken, and the specialty product of the region is often used. In Okinawa, people eat nakami-jiru (soup using pork organ meat) instead of ozohni. The map here shows some of characteristic ozohni types throughout Japan.

Diversity of food culture generated from the difference of climate

In lands far from sea, wisdom was developed to improve the storage life of fish. In the northern region experiencing harsh winters, techniques improved to preserve vegetables for a long time.

Dried fish, mochi, pickled ume, freeze-dried tofu, etc. are all long-life processed foods created a long time ago. Similarly, fermented food is also a type of ancient processed food in Japan. These are foods with improved storage life, nutritional value or flavor by the agency of microorganisms or with the effect of enzymes.

Pickled vegetables are one such fermented food.

The climate generated the diversity of WASHOKU

Because the Japanese archipelago spreads wide north-south, there is a wide variety of regional food culture. There are local cuisines and processing/preservation techniques inherited in each region.

The more you know about the map of Japanese food, the more interesting it becomes.
Dashi
other cases, seasoned soup is used. In places, clear soy-sauce stock is made of kombu and clear soup is served on New Year's Day. In some regions, tofu and burdock are also included, and in some cases with sesame or walnut seasoning.

It is common to use baked square mochi and season with soy sauce. In some regions, tofu and burdock are also included, and in some cases with sesame or walnut seasoning.

For example, there is iburigakkō, a local cuisine dish of Akita Prefecture. Daikon radishes are hung over the open hearth and smoked with an open fire using oak and cherry wood. Then, the radish is made into pickles with rice bran and salt. This is wisdom in Akita Prefecture, where winter comes early, to dry daikon radish quickly to improve its storage life. With time and effort, the flavor is condensed and a rich taste is generated that is different from fresh vegetables.

An example of preserved seafood is narezushi. Fish is matured with salt and cooked rice for several days to several months and fermented with lactic acid bacteria. It holds down the growing of bacteria, and preservation for a long period became possible. In addition, it adds umami. Some of the nare-zushi local cuisine dishes throughout Japan are funa-zushi of Shiga Prefecture, nare-zushi using mackerel and Pacific saury of Wakayama Prefecture, heshiko-narezushi of Obama City, Fukui Prefecture and hatahata-zushi of Akita Prefecture.

Fermented seasoning such as miso, fermented soy bean, and soy sauce can be considered as the key to the taste of Japanese cuisine. There are also differences in preparation methods and taste among these, depends on the region. For instance, there are many variations of miso: Tsugaru miso, a salty miso using soy bean and malted rice and fermented for a long period, mildly sweet white miso using boiled soy bean and matured for a short period.

Miso in Japan
Region and characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major type and region</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tsugaru miso</td>
<td>Mature for long period. The mainstream is salty, red miso type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sendai miso</td>
<td>Traditionally inherited in Sendai. The mainstream is salty red miso type matured for a long period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinshu miso</td>
<td>Mainly made in Nagano Prefecture. Salty miso with light orange color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edo sweet miso</td>
<td>Mildly sweet red miso using more malt and less salt compared to ordinary miso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saikyo miso</td>
<td>Mildly sweet white miso containing a lot of rice malt, mainly in the Kansai Region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanuki miso</td>
<td>Mildly sweet white miso made in Kagawa Prefecture. It is also used for an-mochi zohni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuchu miso</td>
<td>Mildly sweet white miso containing a lot of rice malt, mainly made in Hiroshima Prefecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley miso</td>
<td>Kyushu, Shikoku, Chugoku, Mildly sweet light orange miso fermented with malted barley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy bean miso</td>
<td>Hachio miso/Sanshu miso</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shape of mochi
The result of interview on the shape of mochi included in ozohni is as follows. The share of square mochi is large in the east and that of round mochi is large in the west, bordering at the Chubu region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefecture</th>
<th>Square mochi</th>
<th>Round mochi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hokkaido</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tohoku</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kanto</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chubu</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kinki</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chugoku</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shikoku</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyushu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: "100 Selected Ozohni" (Agency for Cultural Affairs)
The road WASHOKU takes

Chronicled table of WASHOKU

The chronological table shows the establishment and changes of washoku, and it becomes visible that washoku has been constantly improved by the people of each era by also being influenced by food culture abroad.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heisei period</th>
<th>Showa period (after World War II)</th>
<th>Showa period (before World War II)</th>
<th>Taisho period</th>
<th>Meiji period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

It is said that rice arrived in the late Jōmon period, and that the cultivation of rice spread throughout Japan in the Yayoi period.

Daikyo ryori in the Heian period was a cuisine to welcome guests by aristocrats. It was a style serving steamed rice firmly and highly in a bowl, ceremonial dishes served on occasions such as weddings, and was inherited up to the Showa period. Dishes like cooked rice, soup, main and side dishes and pickles are put on hori-zon, and contributed on the establishment of a traditional style of meal, centering around cooked rice. Sake and appetizers enjoyed with sake also developed with traditional style of meal, centering around cooked rice. Sake and appetizers enjoyed with sake also developed with traditional style of meal, centering around cooked rice.

In the Azuchi–Momoyama period, the kaiseki style developed with tea ceremony. Based on the “one soup and three dishes” style, kaiseki incorporated spiritual nature as well, by focusing on the use of seasonal foodstuffs and paying attention also to the decoration of the eating space. This style was handed down to the modern era together with its spirit.

In urban areas in the Edo period, eateries such as soba, tempura and sushi stalls and luxurious restaurants diffused. There was also frequent publishing of books on cuisine, and kaiseki ryori enjoying sake and appetizers at restaurants was also formulated. In addition, the basics of Japanese sweets were generally incorporated in the Edo period.
Changes in home cooking and having meals individually at home were recognized as problems, the Great East Japan Earthquake. Sustainability became a social issue.

Genetically-modified foods developed. Environmental issues such as global warming became a serious problem.

The penetration of microwave ovens reached 90%. Food self-sufficiency ratio decreased to 39-40%.

Japanese-style dietary life with ideal nutrition balance was advocated. The number of family restaurants and fast food stores increased.

Refrigerators/freezers became widely used and frozen foods became popular.

Standard figure for people’s nutrition was set by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. Movement developed for improving the living of agricultural households. Instant foods such as instant noodles developed and started commercial sale.

Food prices increased. Black market emerged throughout Japan.

Post-war style of school lunch with milk and bread started. Production of substitute foods such as sweet potatoes increased. Rice, by ration tokens.

Food distribution control was introduced. The government distributed almost all foods, including
distribution was introduced. The government distributed almost all foods, including

Food was in shortage due to war. The National Institute of Nutrition was founded and nutrition science was developed. Semi-Western dishes became widespread in urban areas.

Consumption of substitute foods such as potatoes and breads was encouraged in reaction to

The ban on eating meat was lifted and eating

Wagashi (Japanese sweets) was completed. Cultivating sweet potatoes and potatoes were encouraged in preparation for the time of famine.

(Russian) became a boom. Kegare (uncleanness) became

Keisoku-ryori, dishes to welcome guests by samurai

Dishes to welcome guests by the aristocrats of the Heian period

Honzen ryori, dishes to welcome guests by samurai

established in this period.

On the other hand, the everyday staple food in Japan was generally katemeshi, mixing barley, various grains and potatoes, or foods using wheat such as udon. The tendency continued up to the Showa period, and the original culture of WASHOKU developed in each region.

Since the Meiji period, where Japan started to actively import Western culture, books on Western cuisine were published, and Western-style restaurants opened in urban areas. In the late Meiji period, many cookbooks for households were published one after another, and many semi-Western dishes, which customized Western dishes and incorporated washoku, were introduced.

Nutrition science was developed with the foundation of the National Institute of Nutrition in the Taisho period, and interest in the nutrition of everyday meals gradually diffused.

After World War II, where the country experienced hunger, it was recommended to take animal protein and fat as side dishes other than carbohydrates in rice. As a result, by around the 1980s, the meals of Japanese people further improved their nutritional balance, adding an adequate amount of milk, dairy foods, meat, fish and vegetables to cooked rice. The dietary habit of this period is referred to as the “Japanese-style dietary habit.” However, the Westernization and simplification of the dietary habit progressed thereafter, and the food self-sufficiency ratio declined below 40%. The basic style of meals is being changed mainly among young people, and skipping meals or eating alone has become an issue. Thus, it is now required to review washoku once again.
Soup and dishes are for eating cooked rice. “One soup and three dishes” is the basic style of washoku.

“One soup and three dishes” is a combination of cooked rice, soup and pickles, with several dishes added.
Rice is deeply involved with the lifestyle of Japanese people.

Japonica rice and Indica rice

Major varieties of rice grown today throughout the world include Indica rice (Indian-type rice) and Japonica rice (Japanese-type rice). Indica is a type called long rice, while Japonica is a short, round rice widely eaten in Japan today. Starch, the main component of rice, includes amylose and amylopectin. While Indica rice containing more amylose is less sticky, Japonica rice including less amylose is more sticky, and tastes delicious to the palate of Japanese people. Dishes like onigiri and sushi, with cooked rice shaped in balls, were invented with this Japonica rice. The production amount of rice in the world is about 600 million tons, approximately the same as wheat, and more than 90% of rice is grown in Asian countries, including Japan. Japonica rice accounts for about 15% of the total, and is mainly cultivated in Japan, the Korean Peninsula, the northeast part of China, and the northern part of Taiwan. On the other hand, the cultivation area of Indica rice is mainly South Asia, including India, the Bengal region of Bangladesh, Indochina Peninsula (mainly Thailand), the central and southern part of China, and Indonesia.

Non-glutinous and glutinous rice

Japanese people usually eat non-glutinous rice at meals, while they use glutinous rice for making sekihan and mochi. While the nutrition value is virtually the same, the composition of starch is different. The ratio of amylose and amylopectin of non-glutinous rice is about 2:8, while glutinous rice is composed mostly of amylopectin. That is why glutinous rice is stickier than non-glutinous rice, and is suitable for making mochi. In Japan, the characteristics of both types of rice are utilized effectively to create various dishes and confectionaries by using rice grain or flour, or by fermenting into sake and mirin (sweet rice wine).

Cooked rice; soup of dashi stock made of kombu or katsuobushi and seasoned with miso or salt, with some ingredients; pickles such as salted pickles or pickles using bran or sake lees; side dishes such as grilled, stewed or dressed foods. “One soup and three dishes” is the combination of these four elements.

As a basic rule, “one soup and three dishes” refers to a style including one soup and three side dishes. Pickles, that refresh the mouth during the meal, are always served as basic items, so they are not counted as a part of the “three dishes.”

In contrast to the “one soup and three dishes,” which is the structure of daily meals, “two soups and five dishes” appeared frequently in the Edo period. This means two types of soup and five side dishes, which used to be the basic structure of meal to welcome guests. Two small tables were used for one person. In contrast, “one soup and three dishes” is served on a single small table. This means two types of soup and five side dishes, which used to be the basic meal structure in Japan. Two small tables were used for one person. In contrast, “one soup and three dishes” is served on a single small table. This means two types of soup and five side dishes, which used to be the basic meal structure in Japan.

Where did rice come from, which is essential for WASHOKU?

Let us also look at cooked rice, which is indispensable for WASHOKU.

There are two types of rice: glutinous rice and non-glutinous rice. Glutinous rice, which is strongly viscous, is used for okowa (hard, steamed rice) like sekihan, while non-glutinous rice is less sticky and is usually eaten as cooked rice for daily meals.

It is said that the cultivation of rice started more than 10,000 years ago, originally by growing wild rice. The land of origin according to the widely-accepted theory is the basin of the Yangtze River in China. Indica rice diffused westward from there, while Japonica rice diffused eastward and settled in East Asia.

It can be said that the purpose of the menu of WASHOKU is to eat cooked rice with soup and side dishes. In other words, everything from niku-ga (stewed potatoes and meat seasoned with soy sauce) and korokke (Japanese-style croquette) to tonkatsu (Japanese-style cutlet) was fine as a side dish as long as it goes with cooked rice. The flexibility of side dishes is due to the strongly established WASHOKU style which places cooked rice as the main dish. If it were not for the basic structure referred to as “one soup and three dishes,” there would be no difference with cuisines in other countries.
Characteristics of WASHOKU (2) Foodstuff

Foodstuff at the base of washoku

The secret of deliciousness and diversity

The deliciousness of washoku is enforced by the original taste of the ingredients. Foodstuff in Japan produced from nature in all four seasons has a surprisingly wide variety.

Japanese food culture is based on two main foodstuffs, vegetables and seafood

WASHOKU dishes had been prepared mainly by using vegetables and seafood. That is because various types of fish and vegetables could be obtained or grown abundantly throughout Japan, and also because eating meat was generally prohibited until Japan lifted its seclusion and started taking in international cultures.

It is said that the number of types of vegetables currently distributed in Japan is as many as about 150. There are also many categories, such as potatoes, legumes, root vegetables, stalk vegetables, leafy vegetables and fruit vegetables. In addition, edible wild plants in forests such as mushrooms and wild mountain plants have also been widely consumed as foodstuff with improvements in cooking methods.

Many WASHOKU dishes use vegetables, and the number of types of vegetables currently distributed in Japan is as many as about 150. There are also many categories: potatoes, including potatoes and sweet potatoes; legumes including soy bean and adzuki bean; root vegetables such as daikon radish and turnip; stalk vegetables such as Welsh onion and udo; leafy vegetables such as Japanese mustard spinach and Chinese cabbage; and fruit vegetables including eggplants and cucumbers. In addition, there are mushrooms such as shiitake mushroom and shimeji mushroom, and edible wild plants such as ferns. Although we can obtain various kinds of vegetables throughout the year thanks to the development of logistics systems, it does not mean the same vegetables can be harvested throughout the country. For example, sweet potatoes are largely grown in the Kyushu region, while potatoes that are resistant to cold weather damage and grown in cool climates are cultivated in mountain areas such as Yamanashi and Nagano Prefectures, or the northern part of Japan. In addition, traditional vegetables that are the specialty products of certain region are now beginning to attract attention.
Seafood has been a precious and important foodstuff for Japan, an island country, from ancient times. According to the Quality Labeling Standard for Fresh Foods set forth by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, aquatic products consumed in Japan varies seawater fish such as tuna, bonito, sardines and horse mackerels, freshwater fish (stream fish) such as carp and eels, shellfish such as clams, crustaceans such as crabs and shrimp, aquatic animals such as turtles, and seaweed such as kombu and wakame. According to the results of the survey on people’s taste preferences, conducted by Ajinomoto Co., Inc. in 2000, seafood was preferred over meat as a foodstuff. Among others, crab, shrimp and tuna were particularly preferred, and it seems that these are recognized as “luxurious foodstuff.”

As can be seen by the fact that a large amount of the shells of abalone, clams and oysters are found in the shell mounds of the relics of the Jomon period, shellfish has been consumed as foodstuff from prehistoric era in Japan. Clam-digging is a familiar spring event, where people gather clams from the seabed when the tide is low. It is said that nearly 6,000 species of shellfish live in the waters of Japan, and especially bivalves such as clams and snails such as horned turban and whelk are familiar foodstuff. They are used in various dishes such as sashimi, clear soup, miso soup, stew, grilled shellfish and cooked with rice. They are also used for preparing dashi stock. They can also be stored for a long time when dried, so they were valued highly in trade from long ago.

Freshwater fish (stream fish) have been appreciated as a precious source of protein in regions such as mountain areas where it is difficult to obtain fish from the sea. The above photo shows ayu, but various other stream fish including carp, eel, loach, wakasagi and funa are used as foodstuff in Japan. They are rarely consumed raw, because of the risk of fish being infested with parasites. Instead, various different cooking methods have been developed. Although freshwater fish has a unique scent and strong taste compared to seawater fish, it can be improved with cooking. For example, koikoku dishes hold down the scent of carp by stewing the fish meat for a long time, and kabayaki of eel adds strong seasoning. Another example of such improvement is funa-zushi made in Shiga Prefecture, which ferments funa fish caught in Lake Biwa with lactic acid bacteria together with salt and cooked rice, in order to improve the storage life and brings out umami.

Seaweed has been consumed in Japan from ancient days. It is still used conveniently in washoku, as a low-calorie foodstuff containing abundant minerals and vitamins. In Japan, about 50 kinds of seaweed are consumed. An ethnic group processing and eating such various types of seaweed is quite rare in the world. Seaweed can be categorized into three groups: red algae including funori and tengusa, brown algae including wakame, kombu and mozuku, and green algae including green laver and sea grapes. The use of them also varies. Some like kombu are used for preparing dashi stock. Some like nori are eaten after being dried, and some like wakame are used for miso soup and vinegar dressed dishes. In addition, seaweed has been regarded as an important tribute to the deities, so it not only is consumed in daily meals but also is presented as offerings in festivals and rituals.

Seafood is also an indispensable foodstuff for WASHOKU. There is an abundant variety of seawater fish hauled in Japan, and there are about 4,200 varieties, just by counting those that live in waters around Japan. Japanese coastal waters are a mine of fish, including sea bream that is always appreciated as a lucky charm, horse mackerels, sardines and saury.

Not only seawater fish, but also seaweed (stream fish) such as carp, ayu, funa, eels and loach that can be found in rice paddies were also a precious source of protein in regions far away from the sea. These foodstuff are used in dishes from long ago. Eel kabayaki is one of the popular menus. The cooking style also varies, as seen in koi-ko-arai, immersing the thin strip of carp fillet in hot water at about 50 degrees for a short time and then dipping into icy water, and eating with vinegar seasoned, or koikoku, where the chunk of carp meat is stewed with thick miso sauce.

Seaweed is also an essential foodstuff for washoku. Kombu has been used through the ages as a source of umami. Wakame is used in various dishes, including miso soup. Nori is indispensable for making onigiri (rice balls). There is also a wide variety of shellfish, and noshu-awabi, which is an abalone cut into thin strips and dried, is used as a symbol for rites and celebration.

Recently, the food self-sufficiency ratio of Japan is declining. There is also the issue of the increased use of imported foodstuff. However, the original WASHOKU is based on the natural blessings of Japan.
Characteristics of WASHOKU (3) Cooking

Cut, stew, grill, steam, boil, dress, deep-fry... Arrange the foodstuff this way and that to make it even tastier.

The base of a well-balanced menu of “one soup and three dishes” is cooked rice. Cooking methods of side dishes developed in order to eat cooked rice even more deliciously.

**Steamed dish** *(Chawan-mushi)*
This method adds heat to foodstuff by using the vapor of boiled water.

**Deep-fried dish** *(Tempura)*
This is a method to deep-fry foods in heated oil. Oil is usually heated to 150-200 degrees.

**Pickled dish** *(Cucumber and daikon pickled with rice bran and takuan pickles)*
This is one of the methods to preserve perishable foods. In addition to the effect of salt, lactic acid fermentation is frequently used.

**Soup** *(Nameko mushroom miso soup)*
This is a method mainly using *dashi* stock. Variations include clear soup, miso soup and thick soup.

Various cooking methods to bring out the deliciousness of seasonal foodstuff

There are various cooking methods for side dishes for washoku, such as stewing, grilling, steaming, boiling, dressing and deep-frying. By combining these methods with seasonal foodstuff such as vegetables, edible wild plants, seafood and seaweed, a wide variety of side dishes are prepared for the table.

Among various cooking methods used in washoku, the most characteristic should be the “raw dish.” The foodstuff is cut raw, placed on the plate and accompanied with seasoning and relishes. In most cases, sashimi refers to those using seafood, and the techniques such as cleaning, cutting and placing on the plate are currently winning attention from throughout the world. The method is completed with the combination of technology to keep ingredients fresh and to place food beautifully on the plate. The combination of relish and seasoning is also closely considered, so that it goes perfectly with the fish. Relishes such as wasabi, ginger and mustard, the julienne daikon radish called “tsuna” or “ken,” green *shiso* (Japanese basil) leaves, parsnip roots, smartweed buds and *shiso* flowers that have antibacterial effect are added so that the dish also looks beautiful on the table.

Soup is an indispensable factor on the table together with cooked rice. The base of the soup is the umami of *dashi* extracted from *katsuobushi*, *kombu*, dried small fish or dried shiitake mushroom, and the umami of other ingredients included in the soup. Some chunky soups are eaten also as a side dish.

Boiling is the method that takes advantage of the abundant water resources.
Dressed dish
(Vinegared cucumber and wakame)

This method dresses vegetables and seafood with sesame, miso or vinegar.

Stewed dish
(Chikuzen-ni)

This is a method to season foodstuff in cooking liquid while adding heat.

Grilled dish
(Salted and grilled saury)

Foodstuff are grilled by being placed relatively far from strong open fire. There also are methods to grill with indirect heat.

Boiled dish
(Mori soba)

This is a method to boil noodles made of wheat and buckwheat.

Simmered dish
(Komatsuna ohitashi)

Ohitashi is seasoned by immersing into seasoned liquid.

Raw dish
(Bonito sashimi)

Raw dishes include sashimi, arai, vinegared fish and pickled fish.

A generous amount of water is boiled and foodstuff is dipped and heated. In cases like leafy vegetables or soba, the foodstuff is further rinsed with running water after being boiled in order to remove scum and improve texture. Ohitashi of spinach or Japanese mustard spinach we prepare and eat as ordinary foods are dishes established in Japan, blessed with abundant water resources, and is quite unique in the world.

Traditional grilled dishes like salted and grilled saury are prepared by sprinkling salt over foodstuff and grilling slowly over direct heat.

Stewing must be one of the most popular cooking methods throughout the world. In Japan, the original taste of ingredients is brought out while arranging the taste with fermented seasonings made of soy bean, such as soy sauce and miso.

Pan-frying with oil is rarely used for traditional washoku dishes, but it is very popular nowadays and is adding further variety to washoku.

The examples of cooking methods and dishes given here are mainly eaten with cooked rice. However, there are other main dishes using the flour of wheat, buckwheat and other grains. The representative example is noodles, such as udon, soba and somen. They are usually boiled, but are also stewed for dishes like nikomi.

Washoku is a combination of various types of dishes. If the taste of the ingredients and strong umami can be brought out, deliciousness can be felt with minimum seasonings. This concept allows us to enjoy various types of dishes.
Umami, the greatest wisdom discovered by Japanese to “eat deliciously”

The most important element for the taste of washoku is dashi stock. It is the base for miso soup and clear soup, and is the cornerstone of flavor that determines the taste of various dishes including stewed dishes and ohitashi.

The fifth sense of taste, umami, is something Japan can be proud of to the world.

What cannot be forgotten when explaining the flavor of washoku is the presence of dashi stock. It is used as a base for various dishes such as soup and stew.

Why are Japanese people so fond of dashi? The key to the answer to this question is umami. In the book of cuisine written in the Edo period says that “dashi is precisely the foundation of cooking.”

In 1907, Dr. Kikunae Ikeda was the first in the world to discover that one of the umami contents is glutamic acid, a type of amino acid. Study was further carried out thereafter mainly among Japanese researchers, and umami is now widely known as the fifth sense of taste, in addition to sweetness, saltiness, 

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**About dashi**

The general method to prepare dashi is to extract the umami components from seafood or vegetables into water or hot water. The most frequently used ingredients for dashi are kombu and katsuobushi. Others include niboshi (dried small fish), vegetables, dried shiitake mushroom, fish guts, heads and bones. There are other methods to utilize the umami of ingredients, such as ushio-jiru.

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**Kombu**

Kombu, made by drying boiled small fish, is often used for preparing soup. The most common ingredients of niboshi is Japanese anchovy. It is usually prepared with a relatively small fish like round herring, silver-striped round herring or flying fish.

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**Niboshi**

Niboshi, made by drying boiled small fish, is often used for preparing soup. The most common ingredients of niboshi is Japanese anchovy. It is usually prepared with a relatively small fish like round herring, silver-striped round herring or flying fish.

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**Dried shiitake mushroom**

Shiitake mushrooms, containing abundant umami components, are also one of the foodstuffs used for dashi. For preparing dashi, dried shiitake mushrooms are used because the umami and fragrance components of shiitake mushrooms increase when dried.
sourness, bitterness. Today, seasonings that allow the use of an umami component easily are widely used such as umami seasonings and soy sauce seasoning with dashi. They are popular also abroad, and used daily in Japan.

Other than dashi, what essential for the taste of washoku is seasonings such as salt, sugar, miso, soy sauce, vinegar, sake, mirin (sweet rice wine) and fish sauce. Ingredients like wasabi, mustard, ginger, Japanese pepper, chili pepper and yuzu citrus are also used as relishes. With these relishes, the flavors of ingredients are brought out while allowing one to enjoy seasonal feelings at the same time, which is the wisdom of WASHOKU.

In Japan, where the climate is hot and humid in summer, fermented foods developed just like in other countries in Asia. Therefore, fermented seasonings, such as miso and soy sauce vinegar, are frequently used for washoku. Most of them are made by fermenting salted soy bean and grains. In the course of preparation, the protein contained in the ingredients is degraded into amino acids, and changes into seasonings containing abundant umami components.

There are also various types of fermented foods. Fermented foods, which utilize the activities of microbes such as molds and yeasts to increase the amino acid (umami) contained in food, have developed in different regions in Japan. Takuan pickles were invented as a preservation food for winter. There are other types of pickles made by fermenting vegetables, such as sugukina-zeuke of Kyoto which is made through lactic acid fermentation using salt, nukazuke, a type of pickles using rice bran, and narezuke, which uses sake lees. Fermented food is also made with seafood to improve storage life, such as shiokara, kusaya, narezushi and katsuobushi. There are also soy bean fermented foods, such as natto, made by fermenting soy bean with hay bacillus, and tera-natto, made by fermenting soy bean with koji molds and maturing after drying.

WASHOKU has been nurturing wisdom to wisely utilize umami and to eat foodstuff deliciously.

**Fermented foods and seasonings**

**Miso**

Miso is one of the representative seasonings of Japan, made by fermenting and maturing steamed or boiled soy bean by adding koji and salt. It is often used for miso soup and stewed dishes. It is also characteristic that the type of miso varies largely among regions.

**Soy sauce**

Soy sauce is made by fermenting, maturing and pressing “moromi,” which is koji made with soy bean and wheat diluted with salt water. It is used for a wide variety of dishes including sashimi, grilled fish, stewed dishes and pan-fried dishes. Soy sauce is divided into five groups: koikuchi (dark), usuukuchi (light), tamari (rich), sai-shikomi (twice-brewed) and shiro (white).

**Vinegar**

Vinegar is a seasoning to add sourness in washoku dishes like sushi and namasu. It is made by adding acetic acid bacteria to sake brewed from rice. The preserving property of food is improved by dipping into vinegar.

**Miri n (Sweet rice wine)**

Miri n is a fermented seasoning made with steamed glutinous rice and rice malt, and by maturing for 40 to 60 days. Compared to sugar, its sweetness is softer, and it also has the effect of killing the smell of foodstuff. It is also used to make the surface of food glossy for dishes such as fish teriyaki.

**Fish sauce**

Fish sauce, having a unique odor and strong umami, is made by fermenting salted fish. Shottsuru of Akita, made with Saitin sandfish, and Iishiru (or ishiri) of Noto Peninsula, made with squid and sardine, are well-known.

**Salt**

Salt has been used widely as a seasoning from ancient times in Japan, which is surrounded by the sea. Not only for seasoning dishes like grilled dishes and sashimi, it is also utilized for preserving foods, such as pickles and dried fish.

**Sugar**

Sugar is one of the essential seasonings for modern washoku, which includes many dishes focusing on sweetness compared to the cuisines of other parts of the world. However, it is rarely used solely, but by combining with soy sauce, salt and miso in various dishes including stewed dish.
WASHOKU is the ideal model of nutritional balance

Comprised of vegetables, fish, meat and rice, WASHOKU is also well-known for its excellent nutritional balance. Recently, in some regions, school lunch is served with cooked rice menus for all five school days of the week instead of traditional post-war bread menus. Let’s find out the secret of the nutrition of washoku, one of its distinct characteristics.

Examples of school lunch menus in Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture

These are the examples of lunch menus served at elementary and junior high schools in Sanjo City. The Koshihikari breed grown within Sanjo City is used for cooked rice. Some people say that “because rice is digested slowly, children are satisfied even without much dessert.” Chinese or Western style dishes are selected to go well with cooked rice. The menu always includes some kind of soup.

Washoku, combining the main dish of cooked rice (also including barley and other grains) with seafood, meat, vegetables, fermented seasoning and dashi, is a well-balanced meal also from a nutritional perspective.

From a historical point of view, it used to be a diet strongly balanced towards grain, with heavy consumption as the main dish in everyday meals. However, there are many things we can learn from the traditional diet, such as efficiently taking amino acids in cooked rice by eating tofu, natto and miso soup together, or enjoy eating seafood on special occasions such as annual functions.

Especially, the basic structure of washoku that has been handed down for centuries is excellent.

Dishes including abundant protein such as fish, meat and tofu are served as the primary plate of side dishes. And then, other dishes including vegetables and potatoes are prepared. Soup is prepared so that it goes well with the primary plate. Grilled fish, stewed vegetable, leafy vegetable ohitashi and miso soup represents a favorable nutritional balance.

The basic style of washoku was preserved in each household until about the 1980s. The amount of main dish decreased slightly, and side dishes increased, particularly showing the growth of the ratio of milk and dairy foods and meat. The PFC balance, which is one of the indexes to measure nutritional balance, showed the ideal ratio around that time (refer to the next page).

However, thereafter, occasions for eating out increased and the Westernization of home cooking progressed, and rice consumption decreased sharply and the problem of lifestyle-related diseases due to excessive fat intake arouse. In such context, movement to review people’s dietary habit started in various regions in Japan. One example is the effort made with school lunch.

The fully-supplied school lunch with the style of bread, milk and side dishes started in 1950, in the midst of post-war food shortages. School lunch with bread that continued until 1976, when rice was introduced into school lunch, also had an impact on the basic style of washoku.

The ratio of school lunch with cooked rice gradually increased, and in 2010, more than 90% of elementary and junior high schools serve school lunch with cooked rice more than three times a week. However, the ratio of schools serving rice all five days of the week is still low at around 7%.

Let us take a look at the case example of Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture, which switched to serving rice school lunch all five days of the week in 2008. The city decided to introduce school lunch serving rice all five days of the week with an aim to build healthy bodies, and to acquire ideal dietary habits and live healthy for a lifetime by having a balanced diet while growing up.

For the main dish, the Koshihikari breed rice grown within the City by reducing the amount of pesticides used, and polished with rice bran slightly remaining. The menu is based on this main dish and side dishes include some dishes with cooked rice menus for all five school days of the week. Although bread goes well with fat and sugar and can easily lead to obesity, rice with bran remaining is digested slowly, which not only resulted in a decrease in the number of children who eat snacks, but also resulted in a sharp decrease in the number of children who eat snacks.

Let’s find out the secret of the nutrition of washoku, one of its distinct characteristics.
What is PFC balance

PFC stands for protein, fat and carbohydrates, which are the three major nutrients especially essential for humans. PFC balance is the caloric ratio of protein, fat and carbohydrates of every meal. The ideal PFC balance for healthy life is protein: 15%, fat: 25%, and carbohydrates: 60%.

Changes of PFC balance in Japan

The PFC balance of Japanese people was weighted toward carbohydrates in 1965, but was excellently balanced in 1980. However, the dietary life of Japanese people thereafter tended to have too much meat and fat, with a decreased amount of rice, and it has been coming closer to a Western type of diet in 2010.

PFC balance in the U.S. and France

Some people point out that food preferences among children changed after switching to rice menus. When children are asked their favorite side dishes, they raise washoku dishes such as "grilled fish" and "natto" other than standard dishes such as "Hamburg steak" and "curry and rice."

Itadaki-masu” and "Gochisou-sama" are said out loud by all students at lunchtime to show their appreciation. Dietary education is also prioritized, and the connotation of these phrases is taught at school.

decreasing trend in the number of children with obesity. It is considered that the rhythm of their dietary life improved.

Side dishes that go well with cooked rice can use locally-grown vegetables easily. Therefore, menus with a wide variety can be prepared for each season. As a result of the education on the concept of "one soup and three dishes," the number of children who leave foods uneaten decreased.

By adding new ideas to side dishes within the basic eating pattern, it is possible to enjoy a wide variety of meals. It also allows for learning about seasonal foodstuff, and to acquire knowledge on annual functions.

It is also crucially important that children experience the basic style of washoku through school lunch every day. The habit may not be acquired just by experiencing it occasionally, but may become a standard and take root by repeating it every day. It is expected that children will gradually think about the combination on their own. It is considered that school lunch should play an important role in the future.

Children who finished the first served lunch rushed and made a queue to have another serving of cooked rice. There were no leftovers this day.
Before welcoming guests, water is sprinkled at the front of the restaurant. It shows that the place is purified with water and is well prepared. Selecting hanging scrolls for the alcove that match the entire concept is also one of the basics of hospitality. Flowers decorated are hand-grown and arranged in the vase of the alcove by the host. About 150 varieties of plants and flowers are grown in the garden in preparation for the arrangement. The guests are welcomed by the warm hospitality of the madam or the hostess.

Characteristics of WASHOKU (6) Arrangement

Mindset and formality of welcoming people

Hospitality is not a unilateral style offered to a guest. It is a comfort generated from the mind of caring for one another.

The well-groomed garden is swept over and sprinkled with water. The alcove is decorated with hanging scrolls and arrangements of seasonal flowers. The fusuma panel of the room is replaced with a screen window in summertime to make the space feel cooler, while keeping warm in winter. These are all preparations for welcoming guests. That is what we call shitsurai, the arrangement of the space. For washoku, and especially for kaiseki for tea ceremony, shitsurai is a critical element together with foodstuff and types of dishes.

Even in households, those who prepare meals imagine the faces of those who eat them. Those who eat imagine the feeling of those who prepared the meal for them. The joy of hospitality arises from this exchange of imagination. Hospitality in ryotei restaurants is the ultimately-sophisticated form of such culture of hospitality. Let us hear from Mr. Eiichi Takahashi, who is the 14th manager of the long-established ryotei restaurant in Kyoto, “Hyoutei,” and was designated Holder of Intangible Cultural Techniques of Kyoto Prefecture as the first chef, about the spirit of such hospitality.

“It can be said that ryotei is where Japanese culture is concentrated. Even the pathway leading from the entrance to the room gives the atmosphere of the season. A scroll of the season or the event is hung in the room, and the room is decorated with flowers especially selected for it. We prepare the room so that the atmosphere is naturally accepted by the seasonal sense that Japanese people have naturally acquired, and welcome the guests. Although ryotei is a special place that is different from people’s daily life, we try to offer natural shitsurai and hospitality that are not excessive but lack nothing.”

Flowers decorated in the rooms of “Hyoutei” are hand-grown by the manager in the garden, and are also arranged by the manager himself. “I am always reminded of Sen no Rikyu’s words, ‘flowers should be as growing wild in the field,’ at the root of hospitality. That may sound easy but is very difficult.” Even at the well-established restaurant, the host devotes himself every day to improving the decoration to welcome guests in a natural style.

Expressing the four seasons

Spring
The plate with a cherry blossom pattern adds floridness as if a flower bloomed on the table. Sashimi is garnished with vinegared parsnip root and wild-grown nori seaweed.

Summer
Ice is filled inside a slightly deep glass bowl. You can feel the coolness both with eyes and tongue. Sashimi is garnished with shiso (Japanese basil) buds and Malva nut.

Autumn
The plate is the shape of a chrysanthemum, the flower of autumn, and combined with the deep color, provides an atmosphere that goes well with autumn. Sashimi is garnished with iwatake mushroom and chrysanthemum petals.

Winter
The crane is a lucky charm and motif that is also used for the New Year table. Sashimi is garnished with Suizenji nori and purple shiso shoot.
Characteristics of WASHOKU (7) Chopsticks and bowls

Chopsticks and bowls that support WASHOKU

Japan is the only country where only chopsticks are used for meals. WASHOKU takes pride also in a unique culture of utensils, together with plates and bowls that give seasonal feelings.

Japanese people use plates and bowls in everyday meals casually, by putting cooked rice in a rice bowl, miso soup in a wooden bowl, and grilled fish on a flat plate. The types, shapes and materials used for these plates and bowls vary widely. There is no country, either among nearby countries or in the West, where such a wide variety of plates and bowls are used. That is not irrelevant to the fact that the country has distinct seasons.

“Just using different plates for the season changes the mood even at home,” says Mr. Takahashi of “Hyoutei.”

For example, try using something with florid colors and shapes for spring, materials like glass and celadon that give a cool feeling for summer, something with harvesting colors for autumn, and thick earthenware or wooden plates and bowls that give a feeling of warmth for winter. It is possible to express the season just by changing colors, materials and shapes. This is the enjoyment that is available only with WASHOKU.

Japanese use chopsticks at every meal without giving it much thought, and they are the representative utensils of food culture in Japan. The tradition of using spoons disappeared since the Nara period, and people started to use only chopsticks, which established the style of holding a bowl in one’s hand and sipping the hot soup inside directly from the bowl. At the same time, it became standard that there are exclusive bowls and chopsticks owned by each person. This is different from the food culture in other Southeast Asian countries, where spoons are used and particular bowls and chopsticks are not assigned to an individual. Japan is the only country where people eat only with chopsticks among the cultural zone of chopsticks. In addition, there is also wide variation in chopsticks according to their use, such as for eating, serving or cooking. Even among shoku-bashi used for eating, there is a lineup of different shapes, materials, finishing process and length.

How chopsticks work

Chopsticks for Japanese people are an important utensil covering the whole process of cooking, serving and eating. Because shoku-bashi for eating are basically owned by individuals, it is characteristic that people can select a pair suitable for them.

Types

There are chopsticks used for eating and chopsticks used for cooking. Sai-bashi for cooking, are about 30-50 cm long to protect the hands from heat, and some pairs are tied with a string so that one does not go missing. Tori-bashi for serving is also a type of sai-bashi. Because shoku-bashi are basically owned by individuals, you can select a pair with a suitable length for you. Many of them are decorated with lacquer or raden (mother-of-pearl work) decoration.

Shape

Shapes of chopsticks used in households include square type, square type with rounded corners, five-sided, six-sided, seven-sided, eight-sided and carved. You can select the one that fits in your hands. There are also types that are specially processed at the tips. As for individual chopsticks for guests and disposable chopsticks, there are types such as gennou-bashi, with an oblong cut surface and slit and chase for splitting, and niku-bashi, which is wide at the center and narrow at both ends.

Materials

Not only the shape, but also the materials vary. Hard wood like ebony and ironwood are frequently used in recent years. Among trees in Japan, Japanese cedar has a unique fragrance and has been used for chopsticks in kaiseki for tea ceremony and disposable chopsticks. Hinoki is resistant to water and humidity, has a strong preservative quality, and is light and easy to hold. Bamboo is strong, bows adequately and easy to pick up small objects.

Learn the manners of using chopsticks

[Bad-mannered use of chopsticks]

The basic pattern of washoku is to eat cooked rice in between side dishes and soup, i.e., to eat a bite of cooked rice and then have a bite of a side dish, or eat a bite of cooked rice and then have a sip of soup. Please remember that the following uses of chopsticks are regarded as poor manners.

Utsuri-bashi (skipping)

First placing the chopsticks on a dish and then moving to a different dish without picking any food up

Mayoi-bashi (wavering)

Moving chopsticks over dishes as if hovering to choose what to pick up

Sashi-bashi (pointing)

Pointing to people or things with chopsticks while eating

Watashi-bashi (bridging)

Placing the chopsticks over a plate or a bowl before finishing the meal

Yose-bashi (pulling)

Pulling plates or bowls to oneself with chopsticks
Japanese sake that accentuates the appeal of WASHOKU and relaxes your mind

Rice is the staple food for Japanese people, and is also a spiritual cornerstone of the culture. Japanese sake, brewed from rice, is an indispensable element for WASHOKU. It is also the “national liquor” of Japan.

Japanese sake is made mainly with rice, rice malt and water and by fermenting the ingredients. As for ingredients, rice especially bred to have properties favorable for sake-brewing is used, which is different from ordinary rice for cooking. Water, which comprises 80% of the components of Japanese sake, is also an important element that determines the quality. Good-quality water that does not perish the flavor of sake is essential.

The sake-brewing process incorporates a wide variety of techniques. For example, there is a technique to polish the rice grain to adjust the taste and fragrance of the finished product. The purpose is to remove protein and fat from the outer side of the grain that may cause bad taste, but in the case of exquisite daiginjo, sake is made by rice milled to less than half of the original grain size.

Another example is the technique to ferment rice. In the case of sake brewing, fermentation means the process of yeast eating sugar and generating alcohol. However, rice does not include sugar, so starch in rice must be first transformed into sugar with the enzyme of koji molds, and then fermented by adding yeast. Such a complex process (duplex fermentation) is necessary for brewing sake. Koji used for this process is also a unique type used in Japan called bara-koji. It is unique in that it has a strong glycation effect (transforming into sugar), and has a large impact on the fragrance and taste of Japanese sake.

In Japan, where culture has developed mainly around rice cultivation, much importance is placed on rice, mochi and sake made of rice, regardless of region. It was believed that every grain of rice holds a deity in it, and that sake can be brewed because of the blessing of the deity. Similarly to foods, sake was used as a tool to come closer to deities from ancient days.

At the same time, sake also has an important role to connect ties among families, relatives and regions. For example, omiki is sake for deities. At festivals, people drink the omiki offered to deities after the rite. The region and the community enhance their unity by drinking the same sake with the deities and by sharing it among others.

Shochu, using rice, barley or sweet potatoes as ingredients, is also the national liquor together with Japanese sake. Japanese liquor has important roles of relaxing people’s minds, enhancing relationships and accentuating the taste of dishes and warming up the table.
**Characteristics of WASHOKU (9) Japanese sweets and Japanese tea**

**Wagashi (Japanese sweets) and tea that are close to people’s lives**

Wagashi expresses appreciation for the blessings of nature and the delicate changes of season. Japanese tea is not only for quenching thirst, but also for fulfilling your mind and elevating your feelings.

### Classification of wagashi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>October</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanabira-mochi</td>
<td>Kashiwamochi</td>
<td>Minazuki</td>
<td>Inoko-mochi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweetened burdock and sweet white miso paste are wrapped inside red or white mochi or gyuhi. The origin is “hagatame (firm teeth)” mochi for wishing for longevity in one of the New Year events back in the Heian period (8th-12th century). Due to the combination of mochi and miso, it is also referred to as “tsutsumi (wrapped) zohni.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Round and flat shaped mochi made of rice flour is folded in half, holding adzuki bean or miso paste inside, and is wrapped with Kashiwa oak leaf. Because the leaves of the Kashiwa oak tree do not fall off until new buds sprout out, they are used with a wish for one’s descendants to prosper. It is used as a tribute for the sekkou of tango on May 5th in the old calendar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adzuki tsuuban (sweet red-bean paste) is spread on the surface of white uiro (sticky steamed cake). It is eaten in early summer, reminding one of “Nagoshi no Harai,” held on misoka (30th) of June in the lunar calendar in Kyoto. The adzuki bean has the meaning of expelling evil spirits, and the triangle shape represents ice.</td>
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| Source: “Exhibition on the History of Wagashi” from the 50th Toraya Archives Exhibition |

This list is a rough classification of wagashi according to its process of manufacturing. There are other ways of classification, such as namagashi, han-namagashi and higashi according to moisture content, or jo-namagashi, namigashi and dagashi according to the class.

- *Oka-mono means the combination of already-finished products (example: kinton = ame-dama + soboro-an)*

Sweets are also a critical part of WASHOKU. They can be divided into jo-namagashi for guests, and manju and mochi-gashi that are eaten daily. There are also various other types of wagashi, including higashi and dagashi. In addition, there is a classification according to the process of manufacturing, such as mochi-mono including dango and daifuku, ner mono including gyuhi and an, or nagashi-mono including nishi-dama and misu-youkan. A wide variety of sweets have been created with ingredients such as rice, barley, adzuki and other beans, sugar and misuume (thick sugar liquid).

There are also sweets for tea ceremony, enjoyed with matcha (green powdered tea). Ingredients, colors and design are determined according to the season, to be enjoyed not only with the tongue but also with the eyes.

There are also sweets connected to annual functions. For example, March 3rd in the lunar calendar is “Hina-Matsuri (girl’s festival),” and people eat kusamochi, made of mochi seasoned with yomogi (mugwort), which is a symbol of strong vitality and is believed to have the effect of expelling evil spirits.

Japanese tea is appropriate to enjoy with wagashi. Green tea arrived in Japan from China in the 12th century. However, the manufacturing process of green tea has been established as an original style in Japan of steaming raw tea leaves and then kneading before drying. Caffeine included in green tea has an alerting influence, while catechin has an antioxidant effect. It also contains abundant vitamin C and is good for health. The fragrance and umami peculiar to Japanese tea is the essence of Japanese culture.
Necessity of dietary education

WASHOKU is now endangered. How can we hand it down to future generations?

Experiencing major transformations in the past 150 years, washoku is now starting to decay. Where is the cause?

The culture of WASHOKU in Japan has been changing constantly not only due to the natural environment but also from influence from abroad.

After modernization, new dishes were invented, such as meals combining Western-style dishes with the basic style of washoku (for example, korokke and tonkatsu), or stewed dishes and dressed dishes containing meat and vegetables. Many of them are inherited while maintaining the element of WASHOKU, such as the basic style of washoku, use of seasonings such as soy sauce and miso, or dishes that can be eaten with chopsticks.

However, when Japan entered the high-growth period after World War II, people’s dietary habits started to change rapidly.

The first fast food and casual dining restaurants opened in the 1970s. Convenience store franchises also developed.

Changes in dietary habit

What will become of WASHOKU with less consumption of Japanese products?

The food self-sufficiency ratio of Japan is constantly declining. While it was 73% in 1965 (based on calories), it was 39% in 2012. The major reason for this is a decline in the consumption amount of rice, fish and vegetables that can be provided within Japan, and an increase in the consumption of livestock products grown with grain feeds that are difficult to produce in Japan, frozen/processed foods and wheat that tend to rely on imported ingredients. Is there a future for healthy WASHOKU, which allows for well-balanced intake of carbohydrates, protein and fat?

Changes in the food self-sufficiency ratio of Japan

Prepared from the Food Balance Sheet by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Rice consumption amount halved in 50 years!? What increased instead are meat and dairy products.

What can be found when looking at the food consumption amount per capita by items? It shows that the amount of rice consumed by Japanese people is showing a striking decline. While the consumption of rice per day per person was about 315g in 1960, it almost halved to about 163g in 2010. What increased instead are milk and dairy products (from about 60g to about 240g) and meat (from about 14g to about 80g). It shows changes in the style of WASHOKU, eating cooked rice with side dishes mainly containing vegetables and fish.

Net food supply per capita per day

Prepared from the Food Balance Sheet by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Even eating at home, occasions for cooking at home are decreasing!?

In contrast to “eating out,” home-made meals are prepared and eaten at home. However, there is another pattern, purchasing ready-to-eat dishes such as bento and prepared foods and eat at home. In fact, this pattern of eating prepared food at home is increasing. While the ratio of eating out is generally unchanged since 2000, the ratio or eating prepared food at home is constantly increasing, while that of preparing and eating foods at home is decreasing. If the number of households where families eat at home but do not prepare meals at home is increasing, wouldn’t that mean that occasions to convey the important elements of WASHOKU to children are decreasing?

Ratio of those who wouldn’t be able to stand not eating cooked rice at least once every day

Prepared from “Fixed-Point of Living 2012” by the Hakuhodo Institute of Life and Living
Although the balance of a main dish and side dishes struck an ideal balance by around the 1980s (p.26), the consumption of rice declined further thereafter, while the consumption of bread increased. Consumption of meat, fat, milk and dairy products also increased, and the food self-sufficiency ratio declined. Eating out with family became an everyday affair, and meals at home are also Westernized.

With the diffusion of microwave ovens and frozen and instant foods, preparation of meals became highly convenient. On the other hand, this means the occasions for cooking at home decreased.

In such context, how can we convey the advantages of WASHOKU to future generations? In addition to handing down the tradition of meals at home from parents to children, it should be necessary to transmit the message to children and also to their parents through school education. It is also required to learn specifically about WASHOKU from elderly people.

Selection of foods from the weaning period and enriching the eating experiences during infancy are especially important. Dietary habits developed during childhood continue to have a strong influence thereafter.

The concept of WASHOKU can be conveyed through buildup of activities such as experiencing the deliciousness of dashi every day or tasting fish and learning how to remove bones with chopsticks in an enjoyable atmosphere.

When people encounter a taste they have never experienced before, they recognize it as a foreign culture. Any cooking method can be difficult for a person who has no experience with it, even if the steps are actually simple. Building up experiences such as observing the process of preparing meals every day, enjoying helping, using beautiful plates and bowls with great care, sharing the same foods with family and friends and eating together at festivals and flower-viewing parties, should not only result in the conveyance of WASHOKU as a culture, but also lead to developing people’s power to live.

**“I’m okay without rice.” Such people are increasing!?**

There are data showing that the ratio of those who wouldn’t be able to stand not eating cooked rice at least once every day has been decreasing in the recent 20 years. The ratio was 71.4% in 1992, but it decreased to 56.4% in 2012.

**The ratio of those who eat osechi-ryori is gradually decreasing every year.**

During New Year, families and relatives gather and celebrate being able to start the new year in peace while sharing osechi-ryori together. However, the ratio of those who eat osechi-ryori is also decreasing every year. While it was 86.6% in 1992, it declined to 74.8% in 2012.

Many modern kitchens face the living room instead of a wall. In this household, with the husband and wife both having jobs, the husband also cooks in the kitchen frequently. The important elements of WASHOKU can be handed down to the next generation by preparing meals together with children like above.

**Prefer bread and noodles over rice; is the tendency accelerating?**

Expenditure on rice, which took up more than 80% in 1962, is largely replaced by bread in 2010. Although the consumption volume of rice is larger than bread, expenditure for eating ready-to-eat breads and noodles at home is increasing compared to that for rice, which must be cooked before eating. This may also indicate that occasions for cooking at home are decreasing.
“Gochisou-sama.”

“Itadaki-masu.”
The future of WASHOKU

After entering the 21st century, washoku is becoming a boom in the world. The taste and healthiness is attracting people's attention, and many Japanese food stores and restaurants can be found in every part of the world.

Even though WASHOKU is becoming a focus of attention in the world, its future is at risk in Japan, its place of origin.

As we have seen so far, the history of WASHOKU had been taking in something new quite flexibly. From time immemorial, Japanese people had been incorporating the food culture brought from foreign countries into their own dietary habits, and succeeded in developing the unique food culture of Japan. They have been creating dishes perfectly fit for the environment of each region. Dishes eaten and how to eat them have also been changing in each period and region.

However, there are things that are kept unchanged: improving the cooking method so as to bring out the deliciousness of foodstuff obtained from rich nature and to taste it; decorating the table with the atmosphere of the season and holding eating occasions where the feeling of hospitality can be shared; regarding the combination of “one soup and three dishes” as the basic style of meals and living a healthy dietary life; and eating osechi-ryori in New Year and sekihan on celebration day together with the members of the family. In other words, meals work as ties bonding the family.

Just like the rich nature, isn’t WASHOKU, which allowed Japanese people to live healthy and strengthened ties among them, also an important Japanese culture that we must preserve?

Let’s say “itadaki-masu” and “gochisou-sama” properly. Only this may bring our feelings closer to WASHOKU. It can unite people with warm ties.

All in all, Japanese people favor eating cooked rice. Soup with rich dashi flavor will fulfill their minds as well as their stomachs. No one would feel that WASHOKU, a wonderful asset Japanese people have been developing over a long history, should be left to go extinct. It would be a real pleasure if this booklet serves as a starting point for people to feel proud of WASHOKU, being praised as a good food culture in the world, as a Japanese asset, and cherish it and to hand it down to next generations.
WASHOKU

“Gochisou-sama”