

School Lunch Program in Japan

School lunches are a common topic when Japanese reminisce about their school life. There is even a small museum¹ in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (MEXT) where the typical school lunches of each generation are replicated. This exhibition receives favorable reviews from visitors, who make comments like, “It was great for conversation with my child,” and, “It brought back memories of those days.” In Japan “eating from the same pot” signifies fellowship and bonds, and this phrase can be applied all around the country in the case of school lunches. This article looks into the School Lunch Service, which the Japanese hold so close to their hearts.

1. History of School Lunch Services in Japan

Modern school lunch services are widely defined as any sustenance given to children under school administration, but in Japan, it originated from local civilian efforts to provide lunch for poor children at the end of the 19th century. Later on, before and during world wars, school lunches were recommended by the Ministry of Education (MOE) as a way of improving the physical health of school children. Starting from the more accessible major cities, school lunches were provided with the goal of reaching out to as many children as possible, but it was only after the establishment of the School Lunch Law, proclaimed and enacted in 1954 under reconstruction following World War II, that the Japanese school lunch program gained lawful authority and was provided nationwide.

1-1 Before and during World War II

The beginning of charity school lunch services in Japan can be traced to 1889, where lunches were provided by a Buddhist confederation for poverty-stricken children in an elementary school in Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture. The majority of school lunches in the *Meiji* (1868–1912) and *Taisho* (1912–1926) periods were limited to impoverished children and had the effect of encouraging them to attend school. Several examples were also seen in Akita, Shizuoka, Iwate and other prefectures, which were funded by school or district budgets as well as private donations. The meals usually consisted of a white-rice ball and *miso* (soy bean paste), with occasional pickled vegetables, or hot soups. In a documentary photo, recipient children can be seen eating in the corner of the school kitchen, while better-off classmates ate their packed home-made lunches in the classrooms.

¹ <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/museumofmext/>; <http://www.mext.go.jp/joho-hiroba/rooms/kyouiku.htm>

Later, in the 1920's, the spread of nutritional science gave rise to a new concept of school meals focused on nutritional value, and the government also started to collect data on the implementation of school lunches in the country. Locally, Tokyo Prefecture conducted pilot experiments jointly with an institute of nutrition with positive results. They developed what was called "nutritious bread," and this bread was delivered to a dozen elementary schools in Tokyo. Another example was seen in an elementary school in Gifu Prefecture, which provided supplementary dishes and also gave nutritional instruction to parents. In 1926, the ministry officially encouraged the spread of school lunches at the School Health Specialist Conference, and since then, school lunch services have been under the administration of MOE's School Health and Physical Education Division.

A school lunch service funded by the central government was started during the economic depression after World War I, because the emergence of over 100,000 malnourished children throughout the country became a serious social problem. MOE for the first time provided a national subsidy to cover school lunch affairs from 1932. These efforts were justified and the importance of school lunches was acknowledged when positive effects on children's health and physique, school attendance and academic achievements were confirmed from the survey in 1934. And in 1940, school lunch recipients were expanded from only the children of poor backgrounds to those of delicate health, undernourishment, and unbalanced diets.

Even during World War II, with the resulting shortage of resources and food, school lunches remained beneficiaries of government funding in national schools (former elementary schools), for nourishing a healthy and strong young generation to confront wartime. The government also supported the set-up of school cooking facilities for night-time middle schools. When the war took a turn for the worse in 1944, the MOE limited funding for the school lunch service to the six major cities of Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Yokohama, Nagoya, and Kobe for the next school year.² There, 100g of rice and 15g of miso were given to each child per day and the construction of serving facilities was carried out hurriedly. Personnel were initially gathered from among mothers, but eventually food service unions were required to organize school lunch service teams and they handed out rice balls spread with miso to the schoolchildren. Unfortunately, these lunches were cancelled in September 1944 with the beginning of the bombing of cities and subsequent evacuation of schoolchildren, and most of the facilities themselves were lost to those bombings. In the records of 1944, wartime supplements such as

² According to records, the number of national schools that provided lunches in each city were 726 in Tokyo, 143 in Kyoto, 286 in Osaka, 79 in Yokohama, 132 in Nagoya, and 83 in Kobe.

fish flour, cod-liver oil, vitamins and calcium can be seen, but those too were abandoned with the worsening of the war.

1-2. From the End of World War II till the Enactment of the School Lunch Law

In the period directly following the end of World War II, the nutritional situation of Japanese children was deplorable. At the start of 1946, the First Educational Delegation dispatched by GHQ recommended systematic health education and a school lunch program in Japanese schools. The Allied Forces and LARA (Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia, a U.S. non-governmental organization) actively provided food supplies for this aim. Their assistance mainly consisted of canned foods (meat, fish, and vegetables), powdered skim milk, sugar, salt, raisins, wheat flour, soybean flour, soybean oil, and fish flour.

On the side of the Japanese government, the three Ministries of Education, Agriculture, and Health & Welfare then conferred to set a school lunch program using these overseas supplies. The program started as experimental provision to 250,000 children in the Tokyo metropolitan area within 1946, and the goal of reaching out to children around the nation started from January 1947. At the same time, standards for nutritional intake volumes, principles for sharing school lunch expenses and the installation of a school lunch committee in each prefecture, municipality, and school were decided.

Contents of school lunches at that time were animal protein at least twice a week in major cities and warm supplementary foods at least once a week in rural areas. These meals were prepared using distributed overseas aid supplies, army surpluses, and governmental rations. Expenses paid by parents were limited to the actual cost of ingredients gathered in each region, and the national treasury paid for other costs such as the personnel- and facility-related expenditures. In addition, local municipalities were encouraged to cover other expenses for the improvement of the quality of the meals.

Regarding school lunches during the U.S. occupation of Japan, particular mention should go to UNICEF's donations of powdered milk (1949–1950) and U.S.A.'s donations of wheat flour (1950–1951). As powdered milk played a critical role as a nutritional source in school lunches, schools and parents especially welcomed milk donations and PTAs organized volunteers to help making and serving milk to children. In addition, the U.S. supply of wheat flour, which was a surplus crop product at that time, fixed bread as a popular staple in Japanese eating habits through these school lunch programs. For most of the post-war generation in Japan, the unique fragrance of powdered milk and the solid bread rolls bring back nostalgic memories.

In 1951, Japan regained full independence from the San Francisco Peace Treaty, but this brought about the first crisis of school lunch services because Japan no longer received GARIOA (Government Appropriation for Relief in Occupied Area) funding, which had financially backed the implementation of “complete school lunches”. In post-war Japan, there have been three stages of school lunch services. The milk-only service, the supplemental-foods service with or without milk, and the complete school lunch service. Complete service at that time included bread as the staple food, with supplementary foods and a bowl of milk.

Upon this budgetary crisis, the minister of finance argued for the termination of school lunch subsidies in the Diet, but PTAs from all over Japan opposed the minister, urging for the continuation of the school lunch service, and opposition political parties jointly proposed legislation for school lunches. It was in 1954 that the *School Lunch Law* was finally passed and put into force, because in 1953 big natural calamities continuously attacked Japan and children’s serious malnourishment in the afflicted areas became a big problem. Initially, this law was only aimed at primary schools, but with the 1956 revision, this was expanded to include all kinds of compulsory education schools, including junior high schools and special-needs schools. In addition to the revision of the School Lunch Law, there were related legislations about school meals aimed at primary and secondary education, such as *the Law concerning School Suppers in Part-time Night Courses of High School Education* (1956) and *the Law concerning School Lunches in Special-needs Schools of Pre-primary and Upper Secondary Stages* (1957).

The School Lunch Law at the beginning mainly clarified the following points:

- 1) Objectives of school lunch programs;
- 2) Sharing of expenses of the school lunch service;
- 3) Details of national funding;
- 4) Dispatch of wheat flour for school lunches by the government at a reduced price.

Concerning 2), the division of expenses was set with construction and maintenance of facilities and labor costs being shouldered by the school founders (municipalities) and ingredient costs and energy bills being footed by the parents. The national treasury provided subsidies to founding institutions of private and public schools for necessary facility construction.

The organization in charge of school lunches under the jurisdiction of MOE and MOA was the Japan School Lunch Association (1950–1982), and the law for this association was enacted in 1955. It contributed to such matters as the following:

- 1) To play a leading role in encouraging the spread and qualification of school lunches;
- 2) To undertake certain government-commissioned services, especially control of food supply and distribution³;
- 3) To organize in-service training for staff for the school lunch services and programs;
- 4) To hold liaison councils between local school lunch associations, as well as hosting school lunch research conferences and annual meetings.

The Japan School Lunch Association merged with the School Safety Association in 1982 to become the Japan School Health Association. In 1986, it was incorporated into the National School Health Center of Japan. After several re-organizations, the Federation of Prefectural School Lunch Associations of Japan succeeded the roles of the original Association.

2. The Development and Change of School Lunch Programs

2-1. School Lunch Programs as Part of the School Curriculum

In pre-war times, school lunches were seen as a form of nutritional supplement for schoolchildren and were not counted as part of the school curriculum. It was after WWII that school lunches began to have a positive educational meaning. In the School Lunch Law of 1954, four objectives for the school lunch program were listed:

- 1) To encourage a correct understanding and nurture desirable eating habits in daily life;
- 2) To enrich school life and foster lively sociability;
- 3) To boost health through appropriate eating habits and improved nutrition;
- 4) To learn and gain correct knowledge about the production, distribution, and consumption of foods.

Here, school lunches became not just for providing nutrition to schoolchildren but were also an important means of educating children. However, they still did not have an official standing within the school curriculum until the revision of the Course Study in 1958, which placed school lunches as part of “School Events” among the four components of the school curriculum: “Subjects,” “Morals,” “Special Activities,” and “School Events.” However, as its position in “School Events” did not accurately express its purpose in daily school life, it was moved and has stood as “Class Instruction” under “Special Activities” since the next round of revisions (in 1968 for the elementary section, in 1969 for junior high school section).

³ In the 50’s to 60’s it covered the role of distributing milk and other foods except for wheat flour, which was directly covered by the Ministry of Agriculture. From 1971, the Japan School Lunch Association also covered wheat flour.

In classrooms around the nation, school lunch education has been ardently carried out through activities such as: nutritional instruction through menus handed out monthly by the classroom teacher, lunch-time instruction of table manners to weed out picky eating, and practice of role-sharing and self-control with rotating rosters of preparation. Serving and cleanup duties were also important, carried out by children wearing caps and white *kyushoku-gi* (aprons). The practice of expressing thanks for the people, society and nature that allowed for the meal and appreciation for being able to eat together by saying *itadaki-masu* (before meals) and *gochisou-sama* (after meals) in unison is also instilled here. There is much for schoolchildren to pick up through school lunches.

In 1970, the Health and Physical Education Council submitted the *Report for the Improvement of School Lunches* to the minister of MOE. In their report, they claimed that, in the prosperous society of the time, school lunches had more significance than ever in providing a safe and balanced meal and opportunities for cultivating good relationships with others. They strongly advised taking steps in reducing the number of public schools where a complete school lunch service had not yet been implemented,⁴ and also suggested introducing rice-based lunches rather than the bread-based meals. The bread that had started out as a surplus crop product from America had by then firmly fixed itself as part of school lunches, and the introduction of rice, which was Japan's own surplus supply, was a major overhaul. The report was also progressive in that they recommended the installation of personnel with nutritionist qualifications in individual schools as school nutritionists.

Serving rice in school lunches costs more than bread, and at this point it was only experimentally implemented at first. Later, the sectional branch of the School Lunch Council released a report on the educational significance of rice introduction in school lunches and rice-stapled lunch was formally implemented in all schools' lunch menu from 1976. In the beginning, rice-based menus appeared only once or twice a month, on some special occasions, but then increased to about half of the week. Rice for school lunches was also at the government's disposal and sold to schools at a discount compared to market prices, which also served to absorb surplus rice product. With the introduction of rice-based menus, Japanese traditional and local food and eating utensils, such as chopsticks, also came to be a part of school lunches, and this was also welcomed by children and parents.

⁴ In 1970, 92.4% of compulsory school pupils in the nation received school lunches, and of them, 73.6% were the recipients of complete lunches. Of elementary students, 90.8 % received complete lunches, while of lower-secondary students, only 40.2% received them.

School nutritionists were defined by the School Lunch Law (revised in 1970) as school staff overseeing school lunches, and the job required nutritionist qualifications and a certain amount of knowledge and experience concerning school lunches. School nutritionists' specific duties included:

- 1) active participation in drawing up base plans on school lunches;
- 2) nutrition management, such as planning school lunch menus;
- 3) Advisory instruction and hygiene control on preparation, serving and facilities;
- 4) Personal or group instruction to students on desirable diets with classroom teachers acting as an adviser; and
- 5) promoting closer ties between parents and local communities through school lunches.

2-2. Current Situation of School Lunches

Sports and Youth Bureau of the School Health Education Division of MEXT currently oversees school lunch programs. As mentioned above, there are three types of school lunches: 1) complete lunches, consisting of a set of staple food, a main, side dish and a carton of milk with or without desserts; 2) supplementary lunches, where schools provide only a supplementary dish with or without milk and required students to bring their own staple food; and 3) milk lunch, where only milk is handed out and students procure other food themselves. Complete lunches are mainstream in compulsory education schools in Japan. According to the data of 2007, school lunches are nationally provided to 7.08 million children in 99.2% of elementary schools and 2.9 million students in 85.8% of lower secondary schools, with complete lunches being provided at 97.9% of elementary schools and 75.4% of lower secondary schools. Almost 10% of all lower secondary schools provide only milk.

When sorted out by institution foundations, 99.7% of public and 46.2% of private elementary schools carry out school lunches. At the junior high school level, lunches are given out in 91.0% of public, and 13.9% of private schools. Children in private schools mainly eat packed lunches they bring from home.

Of Japan's mandatory education level, elementary and lower secondary schools with cafeterias as part of the school facility are extremely rare. Furthermore, in the 80's as the birth rate declined and the population of children decreased, many municipal public schools terminated cooking in their own cookeries. The areas covered by centralized school cookeries spread, especially in under-populated regions. These trends caused nationwide debates on the points of cost reduction and maintaining the quality of school lunches.

On the other hand, also regarding the situation of the declining children's population, there has been a rising number of schools converting empty classrooms to lunchrooms for the pupils to enjoy their lunches in a cozy atmosphere. This policy was welcomed and government subsidies have been invested in these cases since 1988. Eating in lunch rooms was quite a novel idea in Japan's mandatory schools, and schools can have an enjoyable lunchtime in various ways, such as cross-grade exchange lunches and lunch parties with local special guests or parents, etc.

2-3. Changing Roles of School Lunch Programs: Introduction of Food and Nutrition Education (*Shokuiku*) and Nutritional Teachers

After the revision of the School Lunch Law in 2009, several new objectives were added, and school lunches were given increased importance in education. The aims of school lunches are now provided as follows:

- 1) Sustaining and improving health through proper nutrition;
- 2) Fostering understanding, decision-making and eating habits for an appropriate diet;
- 3) Livening school life and encouraging an actively social and considerate spirit;
- 4) Furthering appreciation of the gifts of nature that support us, fostering respect of life and nature and encouraging a spirit of environmental conservation;
- 5) Acknowledging how the food industry is supported by the activities of many people and respecting their hard work;
- 6) Furthering understanding of Japan's and the local region's traditional cuisine;
- 7) Leading a correct understanding of the mechanisms of food production, transportation and consumption.

The change to expanded roles of school lunch programs means the updating to social and environmental changes surrounding families and children. More directly, it was in accordance with the promulgation of *the Basic Law of Food and Nutrition Education* by the Cabinet Office of the government in 2005, which clarified how to implement life-long learning for healthy and sustainable dietary life of Japanese people. It refers to the basic philosophy, roles of the governments, prefectures and municipalities, schools, medical and health institutions, those who engage in farming, fishery and food industry, and the people themselves. Food and nutrition education is called *shokuiku* in Japanese, and *shokuiku* at schools is defined as a base of knowledge, moral culture and physical activity. School lunches are the main component of foods and nutrition education at school, and can contribute as lively learning materials.

Another progressive change in accordance with nutritional education is the introduction of the nutritional teacher's license in 2007. Under this new system, 2,600 nutritional teachers, who

used to work as school nutritionists, had been licensed by the end of 2009. As seen above, they are required to have both teacher and nutritionist licenses. Nutritional teachers are working as coordinators of food and nutrition education activities, for example, developing school lunch menus as suitable materials of the *shokuiku*; giving instruction at lunch time with home-room teachers; coordinating the *shokuiku* lessons for home economics, morals, integrated study hours and cross-curricular activities.

Nowadays children's dietary needs are more and more individualized because of food allergies, eating disorders, etc. of younger generations or of growing ethnic diversity in classrooms. Food and nutrition education through school lunches is also crucial for tackling these complicated problems.

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日本の学校給食（要約）

School Lunch Program in Japan

学校給食は、日本人が学校時代について語るときに何故か必ず話題となるような国民的関心事である。ここでは、そのような学校給食制度について概観する。

日本の学校給食の起源は、明治期の民間の慈善的努力による貧困児童のための学校の昼食提供にある。その後、給食は、救貧児童への就学督促の面でも国民の体位向上の面からも文部省によって奨励され、都市部を中心に可能な地域から、普及がはかられてきた。給食に国家助成が適用されるのは1932年からで、これは第1次大戦後の不況により全国に10万人以上の欠食児童が出たことに起因する。

第2次世界大戦の直後には日本の児童の栄養摂取の劣悪さを救済するため、連合軍、合衆国、ユニセフ等の海外支援物資と政府配給物資を活用した学校給食が開始した。学校給食が体系的かつ全国的に実施されるのは「学校給食法」(1954年)以降のことで、その実施運営や安全な食材の安定的確保、スタッフ研修等に関しては各県の学校給食会とその連合組織が担当してきた。

学校給食法により給食には、食事への正しい理解と望ましい習慣の育成ほかの教育目的が付与されている。学校給食が学習指導要領にも位置付けられるのは1958年から現在は「特別活動」のうちの「学級指導」の中に位置付けられている。給食を通じて子どもたちは栄養や食習慣、他者への奉仕、友とのコミュニケーション、食物への感謝などを学んでいる。

1970年の保健体育審議会答申は、豊かになった日本でこそ給食の教育的意義は高まっていることを指摘、米飯の導入と学校栄養職員の配置を提言している。

学校給食の現状については2011年現在、全国のほぼ100%近くの小学校と80%あまりの中学校で完全給食が実施され米飯給食実施は週の半分以上を占めるようになっていく。日本では初中段階の学校にカフェテリアが設置されていることは非常に少ない。学校ごとに付設されてきた調理場も、少子化に伴い学校外の共同調理場利用に移行するケースが目立ってきた。これに関しては給食のコスト削減と質の維持の点で多くの議論が存在する。一方政府は、空き教室の専用ランチルームへの改修に関して1988年より補助金を出している。ランチルーム給食は交流の工夫もでき、概して好評である。

現行の学校給食法は、2009年の改正によって給食の目的を、栄養摂取・健康増進、望ましい食習慣育成のほか、健全な食生活への判断力育成、食と環境問題・伝統的食文化理解等にまで多様化させている。これらは、家族と子どもを取り巻く社会環境の変化を如実に反映している。

現在、重視されているのは、学校給食を通じた「食育」(根拠法:「食育基本法」2005)の推進である。このために「栄養教諭」資格が新たに設けられ(2007年)た。栄養教諭は食育に適した学校給食メニューの開発、給食時間におけるのみならず他教科や他の教育活動との共同で行う食育のコーディネートも行う。

教室の国際化や子どもの食アレルギー等により、食の個別化も進む今日、給食を通しての食育の役割はますます大切なものとなっている。