

# Instant Ramen as Forrest Gump: Postwar Japan in Food

by

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write. I hope that, at times, it will make you smile. But overall, it will probably make you hungry.

## Introduction

In December 2000, the Fuji Research Institute, a think tank attached to the generally staid Fuji Bank headquartered in Tokyo, conducted a survey with 2000 adults in the region to rate the greatest 20th century Japanese invention from three categories: manufactured goods, culture, and technology. Respondents were asked to consider worldwide acceptance of the various customs and inventions.

From CD players to Blu-ray, from androids to rice cookers, from anime to video games, modern Japan boasts of many technological and cultural marvels. Headphone stereo sets, TV video games, CDs and cameras ranked three through six respectively. As a nod towards practicality, automobile-related technology came in at number nine, but was beaten out by the great filmmaker Akira Kurosawa and Pokemon, holding seventh and eighth respectively. The ostensibly life-changing technology of karaoke came in second place.

Yet when it came to the top of this list, participants of the survey were apparently not thinking with their heads nor their hearts, but instead with their stomachs: 692 people named instant ramen as the greatest Japanese invention of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> While the Fuji Institute's survey may not have been the most scientific, it does suggest one thing: technology may rule the world, but at least in Japan, it all begins with food.

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Chorlton, "Japanese Name Noodles Best Invention," *ABC News*, December 12, 2000. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=81946> (accessed November 1, 2014).

Critics of food historians claim that food is too mundane and too trivial to warrant scholarly attention as a historical subject. However, food might be legitimated by its very universality: something that affects the life of every person, every day, ought to carry enormous weight in history.

Certainly, instant ramen is ubiquitous. As of 2013, the world devours over 100 billion packages of instant ramen a year, according to the World Instant Noodles Association. China slurps up more than 46 billion portions, while Indonesians eat nearly 15 billion portions. Americans consume over 4 billion portions, and in 1996, even elected to erect a giant billboard advertising instant ramen above Times Square in New York City.<sup>2</sup>

While Japan ranks a mere third in instant ramen consumption at a little over 5 billion portions a year, nowhere else is the presence of instant ramen so pervasive. Instant ramen can be found in books, in vending machines, in video games, and even in museums: the exaltation of instant ramen in popular culture is difficult to overstate. Any attempt to discuss culture in modern Japan is therefore incomplete without an understanding of its food, particularly so for the postwar period.

Postwar Japan was a period of tumultuous change that has transformed the way Japanese view their world and act in it. This ideological transformation was driven and reinforced by institutional changes, economic development, and the dynamic tension between prevailing norms and shifting realities. Following

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<sup>2</sup> World Instant Noodles Association, "Expanding Market: Global Demand for Instant Noodles," <http://instantnoodles.org/noodles/expanding-market.html> (accessed November 1, 2014).

surrender in World War II, a hungry Japan was faced with the challenge of drastically altering its traditional diet. Economic development spurred by the Korean War begot further changes to the Japanese social landscape. Japanese families began to emulate the lifestyle of the American nuclear family, and televisions, microwaves, and refrigerators began to proliferate Japanese households. At the same time, increasing numbers of young people travelled to urban centers on their own looking for work, women began to shift their perspectives on what it meant to be a woman in Japan, and students' lives became consumed by both their education as well as violent activism. It is under this backdrop of transformation that instant ramen is born.

How can we understand many of the defining transformations of postwar Japan through the perspective of instant ramen? Much like how the titular character of the 1994 film *Forrest Gump* stumbles through some of the defining events of American Cold War history, instant ramen witnesses, and in some case influences, some of the characteristic changes in Japan following the surrender in 1945 till the end of the era of high-speed industrialization in 1973. Each incarnation of instant ramen is attributable to a contingent set of social and economic circumstances that underlie the changing social atmosphere of postwar Japan. This work aims to answer the above question by demonstrating how the historical invention and development of instant ramen intersected with greater social movements that define Japan's postwar.

*What is Instant Ramen?*

A full grasp of what instant ramen necessitates an understanding of its elder brother, traditional ramen. As a filling dish originating in China and introduced to Japan in the late 19th century by migrant cooks from the Guangdong region, traditional ramen is now considered a national food (*kokuminshoku*) of Japan. Although there are many types and regional varieties of ramen, the most basic components of a bowl are the noodles, the soup broth, and the flavoring sauce.

The noodles (*men*) are made from wheat flour, salt, and water infused with baking soda (*kansui*), the latter of which gives the noodles their yellowish color and chewy texture. The soup broth (*shiru*) is made by simmering some combination of meat (generally chicken or pork), seafood, and vegetables. Finally, the concentrated seasoning sauce (*tare*) provides the flavor of the soup base, and usually comes in three varieties - salt (*shio*), fermented soybean paste (*miso*), or soy sauce (*shoyu*).

These three elements come together in a bowl to make traditional ramen, served today in over eighty thousand restaurants in Japan, of which about thirty-five thousand specialize in ramen. Each region of the country features a different style of soup, noodle, and toppings, and new combinations of ingredients are always being tested in new shops. Today, an average bowl of ramen in Tokyo costs 590 yen (\$6.50).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Japan Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Bureau of Statistics, "2011 National Survey of Prices," [www.e-stat.go.jp](http://www.e-stat.go.jp) (accessed November 1, 2014).



Instant ramen is the commercialized and mass-produced version of this national food, sold more often in supermarkets, convenience stores, and vending machines rather than restaurants. Like traditional ramen, instant ramen has many variations, but all iterations include one essential thing: a dried block of noodles. These noodles are the same as the *men* of traditional ramen, but are dipped in boiling hot oil. This process of flash frying rapidly removes all moisture from the microscopic pores inside the noodles, allowing for the now dry noodles to be preserved for extended periods of time. When time comes for eating, “reanimating” the noodles to its original soft and chewy texture becomes a simple matter of pouring boiling hot water over the noodles and letting it sit for three minutes; this effectively reverses the drying process, as the heat from the water expands the inner air pockets and allows for the water to enter the noodles again. The convenience of instant ramen should instantly be apparent; one portion can provide a meal in mere minutes at the behest of the eater.

Instant ramen comes in two main varieties - packaged instant ramen and ‘cupped’ noodles. Packaged instant ramen, in its most basic form, is simply a block of dried noodles sealed in a plastic bag. Flavoring for the soup broth (now the hot water added to the instant ramen) can either be added on to the noodles themselves (as the hot water pours over the noodles, the flavoring mixes with the water and forms the broth), or can be found in separate packets as a powder that is poured over the hot water and mixed together by the consumer, allowing control over the level of flavor. Dried vegetables may also be found in a package of instant ramen in order to beef up nutritional value.

Cupped noodles offer another layer of convenience to the instant ramen equation. The basic components of cupped noodles remain the same as its packaged brethren - flash fried dry noodles and usually some type of flavoring or dried vegetable mix. However, as its name implies, cupped noodles are sold in a Styrofoam cup. The cup, which weighs little and is a poor conductor of heat, allows for maximum portability while eating; with chopsticks or fork in one hand and cup of noodles in the other, consumers can enjoy ramen while literally on the go.

Within the two general categories of packaged and cupped ramen, there are literally hundreds of different brands and flavors of instant ramen. Mainly five main companies today provide instant ramen production in Japan: Nissin Foods, Toyo Suisan, Myojo Foods, Sanyo Foods, and Ace Cook. Nissin Foods dominates the market, with roughly 40 percent of the Japanese market share. Toyo Suisan is a distant second with only 18 percent, and the remaining three each hold less than 10 percent. Each company operates multiple brands of instant ramen; Nissin alone boasts a consistent pattern of introducing over a thousand new ramen products each year, each targeting different demographics.<sup>4</sup> In terms of instant ramen flavor, the variety is endless as well. From curry flavor to seafood flavor to even cheese flavor, there is something for everybody in today's instant ramen landscape. However during the early postwar period, there was only one flavor available: chicken.

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<sup>4</sup> Nissin Foods Holdings Co., Ltd., "Annual Report: Year ended March 31, 2014," [https://www.nissin.com/en\\_jp/ir/library/annual/](https://www.nissin.com/en_jp/ir/library/annual/) (accessed November 1, 2014).

## *The History of Instant Ramen*

*Chikin Ramen* (a romanized version of the name “Chicken Ramen”), the first successfully marketed brand of instant ramen, was born in 1958 under the creative efforts of Ando Momofuku, a Taiwanese-Japanese businessman, inventor, and ex-convict. After observing his wife make *tempura*, or battered and deep fried seafood, Ando was struck with the idea that using methods similar to deep frying could result in a quick-dried noodle that could be preserved, resulting in the invention instant ramen. Yet to think that instant ramen was the result of a happy accident would be a grave misconception.

Instant ramen was as much a brainchild of Ando as it was a child of the times in postwar Japan. Following World War II, U.S. Occupation-period containment policy gave rise to the unprecedented proliferation of wheat flour into the Japanese diet. As part of its food aid program designed to get Japan back on its feet as a useful East Asian ally against Communism, the U.S. began to export massive tonnage of surplus wheat flour into Japan which threatened the position of rice as a staple grain for the Japanese. Government propaganda and works by nutritionists began to tout the nutritional value of wheat versus that of rice, associating loss in the war with a poor rice diet. Though the U.S. had intended on the popularity of bread spreading from a school lunch program, with the availability of excess wheat flour came the rise of ramen as local street food sold in pushcarts in large cities. Under these conditions of widely available cheap wheat flour and rising popularity of ramen, Ando Momofuku was able to successfully conceive of instant ramen.

Since its invention, instant ramen became a runaway hit in Japan; between 1965 and 1976, instant ramen consumption increased from 2.5 billion servings to 4.55 billions servings annually.<sup>5</sup> This surge in popularity coincided with the diffusion of household kitchen machinery such as electric freezers and refrigerators that began to homogenize the Japanese domestic space. The rapid incorporation of instant and frozen foods into their diets and the subsequent obsolescence of inherited cooking knowledge marked a significant generational change in food habits for the people of Japan.

Instant ramen wasn't necessarily cheap; its success lied in the pure convenience and speed it offered for the consumer. From ambitious students to workaholic businessmen to weary housewives, Japanese people were finding themselves busier and busier as part of an increasingly fast-paced and industrialized society. At the same time the first Japanese bullet train sped between Tokyo and Osaka in 1964, instant ramen was speeding up the lifestyles of many Japanese at the time. This focus on convenience also coincided with a desire on the part of Japan to leave her mark on the rest of the world, manifesting in the hosting of the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. This need to globalize culminated in the introduction in 1971 of the cupped-style of instant ramen, once again conceived by Ando Momofuku, and initially geared to meet the eating habits of non-Japanese. Cup Noodles, as the product was called, signaled the internationalization of instant ramen, and the product has evolved

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<sup>5</sup> George Solt, *The Untold History of Ramen: How Political Crisis in Japan Spawned a Global Food Craze*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 132.

into somewhat of a global phenomenon, going so far as to becoming an unofficial national food of Mexico.

Traditional ramen is one of the most minutely documented foods in Japan. From ramen cookbooks for the home chef, to regional ramen guidebooks for the cross-country traveler, to ramen shop manuals for the would-be entrepreneur, and to ramen history books for the prospective historian, the sheer volume of ramen literature represents an exhaustive myriad of perspectives. In particular, traditional ramen from the perspective of the historian has been explored extensively, and many academics and journalists have proudly examined the history behind this national dish. Hayamizu Kenro provided one of the most successful attempts at this type of ramen literature in his book, *Ramen to Aikoku* (Ramen and Nationalism), in which he contextualizes ramen's place in greater historical events and trends throughout Japan's history in order to ascertain the secret behind its popularity.

Instant ramen, on the other hand, receives much less academic attention. Though books on instant ramen are hardly scarce, the variety they represent is limited. On the one hand, many of the books relating to instant ramen are simply lists of creative recipes to make your instant ramen more delicious. For the books that do grapple with history, the life and motivations of Ando Momofuku, celebrated inventor of instant ramen and founder of Nissin Foods, generally takes center stage, and instant ramen is depicted as existing in a historical void. Even in the cases where it does receive some contextualization as a historical

object, such as in *Ramen to Aikoku*, instant ramen lives in the massive shadow of either its creator or its traditional elder brother.

Strangely enough, the English-speaking part of the world has yielded historical literature that treats instant ramen relatively fairly. While sparse, and though usually found in books covering traditional ramen, studies of instant ramen in Japanese history have been rigorous and well contextualized. Most recently, *The Untold History of Ramen* by George Solt dedicates half a chapter on Japan's postwar economic recovery to instant ramen in his overarching goal to understand the progression of traditional ramen's cultural and political significance over time. Making extensive use of television advertisements and public editorials about instant ramen, Solt adds to the historiography of instant ramen by shifting the focus of instant ramen history from its creator onto the dish itself, as well as its relationship with historical trends in Japan.

A natural thing to question at this point would be the value in studying instant ramen separately from traditional ramen; since the former is simply an iteration of the latter, do they each deserve unique attention as historical objects in their own right? While the two dishes consist of the same fundamental components, traditional ramen and instant ramen inhabit different and often opposing culinary spheres. Traditional ramen is artisanal by nature, an art form revolving around an appreciation of the slow and demanding process of making the noodle soup rather than driven by the bottom line of profit for the traditional ramen shop. Instant ramen, as the commercialization of that art, is in many ways its antithesis; it values speed and convenience, and is closely associated with the

profits of the large companies that provide it. As such, history from the lens of instant ramen can provide a perspective unique from that of traditional ramen. Today in Japan, traditional ramen shops and instant ramen producers rarely interact with each other.

There are some advantages associated with writing about a commercialized product as well. Since profit for a company such as Nissin Foods is directly associated with the volume of its sales, instant ramen benefits from its aforementioned universal presence; instant ramen is experienced in the everyday lives of many people, and can thus serve as a useful vehicle for studying the historical everyday. Furthermore, whereas the success of a traditional ramen restaurant essentially relies solely on the taste of its ramen, the success of instant ramen as a commercialized product hinges on many of the practices that its producers engage in order to keep its product afloat, one of which is successful marketing and advertising. Advertising is in itself, another universal aspect of modern society, and successful advertising is said to stem from the advertiser's understanding of the needs of its target demographic.<sup>6</sup> In terms of postwar Japan, at the same time that instant ramen was entering the bellies of Japanese, it was also entering their minds, as instant ramen advertisements from various food companies began to proliferate television and newspapers, geared towards women, children, the elderly, the lonely bachelor, and other demographics. These advertisements have the potential to yield great insight into the everyday lives and worries of consumers of instant ramen.

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Tungate, *Ad Land: A Global History of Advertising*, (London: Kogan Page, 2007), 3.

My thesis therefore intends to augment Solt's section on instant ramen by identifying its place in postwar Japanese history with a healthy attention paid to previously unexamined instant ramen advertisements in newspapers as an indicator of its relationship to the everyday lives of Japanese people. In doing so, I hope to highlight the value of instant ramen as its own historical object as opposed to a simple byproduct of the celebrated life of Ando Momofuku or a mere commercial shadow of traditional ramen. This work will proceed thematically, exploring instant ramen's intersection with separate postwar trends in Japan beginning in 1945 to the mid-1980s.

### *Overview*

Chapter 1 considers the conditions during occupation period Japan (1945-52) and how they related and contributed to the invention of instant ramen in 1958. Furthermore, the chapter explores the early success of Nissin Food's *Chikin Ramen* as a health food meant to alleviate the memories of hunger lingering from the Occupation period. This chapter explores how food crisis in Japan resulted in a dietary shift from traditional rice to foreign wheat, and how that encouraged and enabled Ando Momofuku to invent and market instant ramen.

Dietary shifts coincided with shifts in general consumption that resulted from increasing wealth in the latter half of the 1950s through the 1960s in Japanese households. Chapter 2 traces instant ramen in the context of the advent of a mass consumption culture in postwar Japan stemming from rapid economic



recovery. It will examine in depth the effects of the proliferation of household electrical appliances such as television sets on instant ramen's success and rising popularity during the period of high economic growth.

Chapter 3 begins to look at how instant ramen was criticized throughout the 1960s, and will pay particular attention to the perceived role of women in Japanese society. Social critics were upset that instant ramen might affect the way women, who were meant to fulfill the idealized role of "good wife" and "wise mother", who's rightful place was in the home. At the same time, feminist movements began to gain traction and promote a new gendered division of labor that let women work outside of the home. This chapter will evaluate whether instant ramen had any impact on the role of women in postwar Japan.

The final chapter will explore the cupped version of instant ramen, introduced in 1971, and its relation to 1970s youth culture in Japan. It will first look at the interactions between cupped noodles and students, making a distinction between those students mired in their education and those students who engaged judiciously in student activism. It will then explore how instant ramen may have affected the way Japanese maintained traditional dining habits.

The dynamic relationship between food and people in Japan as seen through the history of instant ramen can inform us of parallels or divergences in food and social practices across advanced industrialized capitalist countries. For example, to what extent does the success of "instant" products, such as instant ramen and instant coffee, point to a general loss of inherited "traditional" cooking knowledge between generations across the globe? What does this

success tell us about the values modern capitalist societies place upon eating, and will speed and efficiency ever outdo tradition?

All societies define themselves through food; cultural identity is inexplicably tied to traditions of cooking, eating, and producing food. The British food historian Ben Rogers once proclaimed that, “it is no exaggeration to say that, after language, food is the most important bearer of national identity.”<sup>7</sup> In the case of instant ramen, Ando Momofuku observed, “Noodles are the mirrors that reflect the food cultures of the world.”<sup>8</sup> When history is then considered through the perspective of food the relative significance of overall events shifts towards one focused on how changes and continuity were experienced in the everyday lives of ordinary people. In this way, the history of instant ramen in postwar Japan provides a lens through which we can study the development of the people of a modern society.

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<sup>7</sup> Ben Rogers, *Beef and Liberty: Roast Beef, John Bull, and the English Nation*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 2003), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ando Momofuku Invention Memorial Library, *Don't Stand Up with Empty Hands from your Failure*, (Tokyo, Japan: Chuokoron-sinsha Publishing, 2013), 216.

## Chapter One

### Defeat, Wheat, and Instant Ramen

Their clothes were tattered and dirty. The late November air was cold, and chilled them to the bone. Their hearts were cold too – it was 1949, four years after Japan’s surrender to the United States, and the rubble of buildings surrounding them reminded them of their trauma. Yet still the men stood in that burned out lot in Osaka; for more than the pain of the cold or the pain of defeat, the pain of hunger was unbearable. And so they waited patiently, in a line in front of a street cart vendor to each buy a hot bowl of traditional ramen.

One man entered the line just as it grew over thirty meters in length. His name was Ando Momofuku, and at the age of thirty-nine, he had never had a bowl of ramen before in his life. As he observed the growing mass of people both in front and behind him, he wondered, “Why do Japanese have such a deep love for ramen? What makes these men endure the cold weather just to eat a bowl of noodles?” Ando began to speculate: what would happen if he could make these noodles at home, simply and easily? He knew he could make it a big business, because he was confident there was a desire for a hot bowl of noodles that went beyond the need for a temporary filling for the hungry stomachs of the poor.

Nearly a decade later, his assessment would prove to be correct.

#### *Introduction*

The above anecdote nicely summarizes the general conditions under which instant ramen was born in postwar Japan. Japan’s surrender in 1945

evaporated a half-century of Japanese imperial bravado and left the nation devastated. Mass starvation was rampant across the country, as it had been stripped of its imperial colonies that had once acted as breadbaskets for the empire. Now severely lacking in rice, till then Japan's staple grain, the Japanese population grew desperate as they tried to supplement their daily meals with other ingredients.

Defeat also heralded the emergence of the United States as the most influential outside force in the political, economic and social development of Japan. In particular, politics in postwar Japan became intensely focused on food, as both Japan and the U.S. had to grapple with the mass starvation afflicting the nation, as well as shifting notions of what should constitute the Japanese diet; the results were both external – a massive influx of surplus wheat from the U.S. into Japan – and internal – a Japanese preference for wheat over rice, encouraged by Japanese nutritionists and supported by occupation policies championing bread.

Hunger, excess wheat, and the notion that bread might replace rice in the Japanese diet became the driving factors behind Ando Momofuku's research for an instant food that would preserve Japanese food culture. The result was his invention of *Chikin Ramen* in 1958, and his concurrent founding of his instant foods corporation, Nissin Foods. Instant ramen's supposed position as a buffer for traditional Japanese cuisine against the proliferation of Western dietary habits in everyday Japanese society is then ironic, given that the feat of discovery was made possible by U.S. occupation policies in the first place.

Still, in spite of its position at the intersection of tradition and Westernization in the evolving postwar Japanese diet, instant ramen was an instant success, in part because of Nissin's decision to promote *Chikin Ramen* as a health food, catering to a public sense of urgency with regards to healthy eating in a hungry Japan. Utilizing slogans and images that convinced people that instant ramen was good for their health allowed *Chikin Ramen*, along with future forms of instant ramen, to stand out. However, this image of instant ramen as a food to boost one's health vanished as quickly as it was established, requiring Nissin Foods, and other future instant ramen manufacturers, to find other avenues towards continued success.

#### *Hungry Japan: Food policy during the Occupation period*

Postwar Japan was hungry. During the imperial era, Japan's cities had grown accustomed to living off the land of its colonies; denuded of its colonial supplies and no longer able to plunder, Japan found itself in a quandary – it needed to produce its own food for the first time since 1895. Even before the Americans arrived in Japan in 1945, the food situation had been deteriorating for two years, and domestic food production had dropped by 26 percent since 1943, and at the time of Japan's surrender, its food supply, perilously dependent on rice, reached only sixty percent of its prewar levels. According to U.S.

government surveys, Japan was allocating rations to its military that exceeded what its budget could afford.<sup>1</sup>

To make matters worse, the number of people needing to be fed expanded as a result of the decolonization of the Japanese empire, which produced a massive diaspora of roughly eight million returnees from various parts of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>2</sup> The added number of people drove feeding requirements from 6.55 million metric tons of rice equivalents in fiscal year 1946 to 7.45 million metric tons in 1947. Poor rice harvests in 1944 and 1945 due to weather and war further aggravated the situation.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, food prices for civilians skyrocketed, and starvation and malnutrition became prevalent, particularly in Japan's urban centers. In the first year after the war ended, about twenty people died of starvation per day in Tokyo, and in Osaka, about sixty people a month perished.<sup>4</sup>

A reliance on substitute staples such as sweet potatoes, soybeans, and eventually wheat became necessary for basic survival during the 1940s, particularly towards the middle of the decade. Okumura Ayao, a Japanese food scholar born in 1937, describes his memories of the desperate food situation toward the end of the war as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Barak Kushner, *Slurp! A Social and Culinary History of Ramen – Japan's Favorite Noodle Soup* (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2012), 193.

<sup>2</sup> Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> George Solt, *The Untold History of Ramen: How Political Crisis in Japan Spawned a Global Food Craze* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 78.

<sup>4</sup> Kushner, 193.

From 1944 on, even in the countryside, the athletic grounds of schools were converted into sweet potato fields. And we ate every part of the sweet potato plant, from the leaf to the root...For protein, we ate beetles, beetle larvae, and other insects we found at the roots of the plants we picked, which we roasted or mashed. Even in the countryside, food was scarce.<sup>5</sup>

Conditions continued to decline after the end of the war. Typical diets of desperation included acorns, orange peels, and a kind of steamed bread made from a wheat bran that in normal times was fed to horses and cattle. Many farmers engaged in a barter trade with urban dwellers who flocked to rural areas for food, offering watches, jewelry, and even the clothes off their backs for food.<sup>6</sup>

The centrality of food in managing the population of Japan became apparent to the Truman administration, which assembled the Combined Food Board in February 1946 to discuss how to distribute scarce food resources across the territories under Allied occupation. Japan, however, was only one of many occupied areas on the verge of famine, and initially the U.S. administration did not treat it as a higher priority compared to other areas under its jurisdiction. Cables exchanged between the secretary of war and the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in 1946 indicated that although the U.S. government was well aware of the dire situation in Japan, the onus of feeding the population fell on the Japanese themselves. In fact, the U.S. administration considered the “reported estimate of 1600 – 2100 calories intake per day per

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<sup>5</sup> Okumura Ayao, *Shinka suru menshoku bunka* (Tokyo: Foodeum Communication, 1998), 174.

<sup>6</sup> Katarzyna J. Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd), 134.

urban consumer [in Japan was] high...and that rigid controls of rationing should be exerted...to reduce the rate of consumption.”<sup>7</sup>

Shortage of food in Tokyo became so severe by early May 1946, that hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children began protesting the inadequacy of food rations. Although the protests did not turn into violent uprisings, they signaled to the Americans that hunger had brought urban Japan to its breaking point. The potential that food shortages would lead to violent rebellion against the Allied troops appeared real enough that it warranted an April 1946 top-secret memorandum from General Dwight Eisenhower, at the time the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, to President Truman warning of the need to either increase the amount of troops or the amount of food in Japan.<sup>8</sup>

Fearing that mass starvation would lead to rebellion, the U.S. occupation resorted to importing double the amount of foodstuffs it distributed to the defeated nation from 1946 to 1947. Mass importation of U.S. surplus wheat in particular was initiated by the efforts of a Japanese journalist named Asano in San Francisco, who wrote about the food crises in Japan in November of 1945. Asano quickly formed a group of charitable organizations in the U.S. dedicated to donating foodstuffs to a starving Japan known as the Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia (LARA). In November of 1946, the first donation from LARA arrived in Japan, and consisted of milk, canned foods, and wheat flour, resulting in a total of 340,000 tons of wheat flour imported in 1946.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Solt, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>9</sup> Hayamizu Kenro, *Ramen to aikoku* (Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha Co., Ltd. 2011), 23.



The onset of the Cold War in Asia further led the United States to reverse its punitive approach with respect to food policy in Japan and initiate a massive effort to alleviate starvation. The shift was a result of the Truman administration's policy of containment against Communism from the Soviet Union by means of a Japanese economic revival. In the April 1947 report "Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint of National Security," the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted, "Of all countries in the Pacific area Japan deserves primary consideration for current United States assistance designed to restore her economic and military potential," stressing America's strategic interest in rehabilitating the Japanese economy and military.<sup>10</sup> This shift resulted in an increase in over 500,000 metric tons of rice equivalent sent to Japan between 1946 and 1947.<sup>11</sup> The origins of an aggressive U.S. program of food aid in the containment of Communism are also alluded to in the U.S. Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 (Public Law 480). The act outlined policies in regards to food aid to "friendly nations", which for the purposes of the act, were defined as any nation not in alliance with Communist nations and that could provide potential assistance towards containment.<sup>12</sup> Public Law 480 also stipulated the use of free food, in this case wheat, and low-interest-rate loans with deferred payment options in the form of food as an incentive to convince a reluctant Japan to agree to substantially rebuild its armed forces. Furthermore,

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 90.

<sup>11</sup> Solt, 90.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Congress, *Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954: Public Law 480* (Washington DC: GPO, 1954).

as part of the Ikeda – Robertson talks of 1954, Japan agreed under pressure from U.S. representatives to take on a greater military role in protecting its political and economic interests in the region; one of the incentives for Japan was U.S. food aid, which included 600,000 tons of wheat.<sup>13</sup>

Part of U.S. food aid to Japan was also characterized by an American effort to reorient the Japanese diet. For example, in 1947, with the aim of easing malnutrition among Japanese children, occupation authorities initiated a program of free school lunches based on bread in major urban centers, under the condition that Japan agreed to import U.S. surplus wheat.<sup>14</sup> Public Law 480 stated that the United States would be allowed to direct the food given to other countries for use in efforts to alleviate malnourishment or for school lunch programs, and also reserved the right to use the proceeds from its sale of food to develop the market for American agricultural products in that country; the combination of these conditions indicated that the U.S. had an interest in changing dietary preferences towards U.S. foodstuffs, and by 1951, the school lunch initiative had expanded to encompass children all over Japan.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, U.S. wheat producers sent trade representatives to Japan to expand exports to the Japanese market and persuaded Japanese officials in the Ministry of Health and Welfare to promote U.S. wheat among Japanese housewives. This initiated a program of public cooking seminars in roving “kitchen cars” where nutritionists hired by the Ministry of Health and Welfare drove around and

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<sup>13</sup> Solt, 113.

<sup>14</sup> Hayamizu, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Cwiertka, 157.

demonstrated the preparation of mostly Western dishes from wheat. These activities were funded by the money the U.S. had raised from the sale of wheat exports to Japan, and the U.S. government subsidized Japan's nutritionists to spread the scientific foundation for the widespread consumption of American wheat.<sup>16</sup>

*Wheat over Rice: Nutrition in the Occupation Period*

Public discourse on the health benefits of wheat versus those of rice also began to emerge at this time, and in the mid-1950s, Japan's top nutritionists began to promote the benefits of bread as a nutritious substitute for rice. One such nutritionist was Oiso Toshio, the first director of the Ministry of Health and Welfare's Nutrition Bureau. In his 1959 essay titled "An Essay on Nutrition", Oiso attributed the emergence of "reason" and "progress" in Europe to wheat-based food production, and attributed deep cultural flaws to rice eating, maintaining that rice was the underlying reason for Asian people's lack of competitiveness in industrial productivity compared with Westerners:

The character of rice-eating peoples and the character of wheat-eating peoples are fundamentally different...while the former are resigned and passive, the latter are progressive and active...[Because of the tasty nature of rice], people who eat rice easily become accustomed to that way of living, and they lose their will to be active...[People who consume wheat] find that it alone does not taste good, which makes them desire more than they have, motivating them to become active and providing the initiative for them to achieve progress...The relative ease of the rice-based dietary lifestyle leads people astray from reason and

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<sup>16</sup> Solt, 116.

thought. Scientific experimentation and development do not advance in such a context.<sup>17</sup>

In this manner, Oiso, who was responsible for guiding the dietary habits of the population of Japan at the time, began to change the taste buds of the Japanese consumer and grow the perception that wheat was not just healthier for the body, but was also conducive to a life of progress and scientific advancement.

Similarly, Hayashi Takashi, a professor of medicine at Keio University, argued that excessive eating of rice hindered brain development in his 1958 book, *The Brain (Zuno)*. He notes:

Parents who feed their children solely white rice are dooming them to a life of idiocy...When one eats rice, one's brain gets worse. When one compares Japanese to Westerners, one finds that the former has an approximately twenty percent weaker mind than the latter. This is evident from the fact that few Japanese have received the Nobel Prize...Japan ought to completely abolish its rice paddies and aim for a full bread diet.<sup>18</sup>

In this way, Hayashi used his scientific authority to argue for the benefits of food practices found in the bread-eating cultures of the West, and his study became the basis for a pamphlet printed by a national association of wheat flour food producers titled "Eating Rice Makes You Stupid".<sup>19</sup>

The combination of efforts by the U.S. to send wheat to Japan and by the Japanese to justify the superiority of a wheat-centric diet resulted in the absolute success of U.S. wheat exporters in penetrating the Japanese market. According to

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<sup>17</sup> Suzuki Takeo, *Amerika Komugi Senryaku to Nihonjin no Shokuseikatsu* (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 2003), 64-65.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Solt, 118.

a U.S. Department of Agriculture report from 2009, U.S. wheat exports to Japan increased from 1.28 million tons in 1956 to 3.24 million tons in 1974.

Additionally, the report notes:

The U.S. wheat industry's market development in Japan from the mid-1950s through the early 1970s was nothing short of amazing. Through creative market development, they changed the taste buds of the Japanese consumer and helped to introduce a wide variety of wheat foods to Japan.<sup>20</sup>

The saturation of U.S. wheat flour into Japan's postwar food ways and the growing perception that wheat foods were healthier than the engrained Japanese diet predicated a drastic shift in the Japanese diet, consisting of a rise in wheat and meat consumption that was mirrored by a decline in the demand for rice, the traditional staple food of Japan. According to Japanese government statistics, in 1955 the average Japanese during the year ate 3.3 kilograms of meat and 110.7 kilograms of rice per year. By 1978, the Japanese were averaging 8.7 kilograms of just pork, and 81 kilograms of rice per year.<sup>21</sup> It is evident therefore that wheat supplemented a shortfall in rice production and consumption during Japan's postwar period.

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Conlon, "The History of U.S. Wheat Exports to Japan," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, Global Agricultural Information Network, June 29, 2009, <http://www.usdajapan.org/en/reports/History%20of%20US%20Exports%20Wheat%20to%20Japan.pdf> (accessed December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Kushner, 216.

### *The Invention of Instant Ramen*

It was within this context of an abundance of wheat flour in the Japanese market and changing Japanese dietary preferences favoring wheat in which instant ramen was born. As a novelty food introduced in 1958, instant ramen was as much the brainchild of its creator Ando Momofuku as it was a child of the times; the lingering memories of hunger and loss associated with the Occupation period left a deep impact on Ando that inspired him to create a commercialized food that would help revitalize Japan. Additionally, the dietary legacy from Occupation-period Japan that manifested itself in the form of excess wheat flour allowed for the perfect opportunity to create a processed food made from the stuff. Ando's success in marketing instant ramen points to the opportunities created by the joint U.S. and Japanese effort to change Japanese dietary habits.

In his autobiography, Ando Momofuku claimed that his mission to create an instant form of ramen stemmed from many of his experiences witnessing hunger and the proliferation of wheat during the early postwar period. Ando was a business leader involved with many companies he created himself during the war and early postwar period, with experiences ranging from textiles to charcoal to aircraft parts, before settling on the food-processing in 1948.<sup>22</sup> Initially in the business of producing *furikake*, a condiment made from fish flakes, Ando changed course in November 1949 when he observed the scene described at the beginning of this chapter. The view of a long line of men clamoring for a bowl of traditional ramen from a street vendor sparked Ando's

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<sup>22</sup> Ando Momofuku, *Rising to the Challenge: Living in an Age of Turbulent Change* (Tokyo, Japan: Foodeum Communication, 1992), 51.

interest in creating an instant form of ramen that could be widely available in people's homes.<sup>23</sup>

The food aid that arrived from the United States created an opportunity for business leaders like Ando to tap into their strong government ties and market mass-produced goods through well established distribution channels, assuring high rates of return. Ando stated that his mission to create instant ramen resulted in part from his meetings with government officials from the Ministry of Health and Welfare who were looking for ways to make use of the U.S.-imported wheat for foods other than bread. He writes:

During the occupation, the Japanese had to eat wheat, corn – anything to stay alive. One of the Ministry [of Health and Welfare]'s jobs was to encourage the consumption of American wheat. The Ministry sent out several trucks out to roam the streets, encouraging everyone to eat bread.

Every time I saw one of these trucks, a thought ran through my mind. I was dissatisfied with the idea that flour should be used solely for bread. At the time, bread was also a staple in school lunches.

I have already stated my belief that food forms the basis for culture. This means that if you change your diet, you are throwing away your traditions and cultural heritage. I believed to adapt to a bread diet was tantamount to adapting Western culture. I confronted a Ministry representative with this argument.

'Why aren't you also encouraging the consumption of traditional Asian noodles?' I asked. The Ministry representative nodded as he heard this...He recommended that if I was so keen on the idea, I should do research myself. This suggestion was to later become one of my incentives.<sup>24</sup>

Ando's interest in creating an instant form of ramen, then, was driven by this abundance of American wheat flour and a desire to preserve Japanese food culture. In his autobiography, Ando asserts that the invention of instant ramen

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<sup>23</sup> Hayamizu, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Ando, 35.

contributed to the preservation of Japanese food culture by redirecting the usage of wheat flour imports to noodles rather than bread. He repeats this argument throughout his autobiography, and the point is also emphasized in permanent exhibits at the Nissin Foods Corporation Library in Tokyo as well as the Nissin Foods Instant Ramen Museum in Yokohama. The framing of the invention of instant ramen as a form of resistance to Western authority for the purpose of maintaining Japanese cultural autonomy is striking considering that the main ingredient in instant ramen at the time was American wheat flour. The irony is further accentuated when considering the fact that large-scale imports of American agricultural goods contributed to a decline of Japan's own agricultural sector.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, if Ando was so eager to protect Japanese culture from American influence, why didn't he pursue udon, a traditional Japanese wheat noodle dish, as opposed to ramen, which is Chinese in origin? Media scholar and ramen expert Hayamizu Kenro points out in his book, *Ramen to Aikoku (Ramen and Nationalism)* that Ando was actually born in Taiwan while it was occupied by Japan. After Japan's surrender in 1945, he and other Japanese born in Taiwan had to choose between adopting either a Japanese or Taiwanese nationality. Hayamizu surmises that Ando's decision to hold on to his Taiwanese nationality, while certainly advantageous from the perspective of a business-minded person looking to avoid taxation in Japan, was a symbol of his dual identities as a Taiwanese-born Japanese, which probably gave him ideas not confined within

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<sup>25</sup> Solt, 116.



the Japanese market but expanded over Asian borders.<sup>26</sup> As such, the claim that instant ramen effectively preserved Japanese food culture is somewhat incongruous given that its very existence was predicated by foreign influence such as U.S. wheat flour and the original Chinese noodle soup.

Regardless of how he was inspired to settle on ramen as opposed to any other traditional Japanese dish, it was not until nearly a decade after his first bout of inspiration with the ramen food stall in 1949 before Ando successfully introduced his first instant ramen product, *Chikin Ramen*. Using inexpensive wheat flour sourced through his ties with the government, Ando experimented endlessly in a small wooden shack in his backyard before stumbling upon a method of deep-frying ramen noodles to turn them into dry blocks that could be preserved and “cooked” with hot water. In June of 1958, Ando put on a sample tasting of *Chikin Ramen* to shoppers at the Hankyu Department Store in Osaka, and he quickly ran out of his initial stock of five hundred servings; soon afterwards, vendors who had heard of his product from word of mouth quickly began to flood him with requests and orders for *Chikin Ramen*, and demand soon outmatched supply.<sup>27</sup> By 1960, annual consumption had exceeded 100 million servings of instant ramen. However, although the novelty of instant ramen lay in its instantaneity, the successful introduction of *Chikin Ramen* through Ando’s new company, Nissin Foods, in 1958 did not stem solely from its convenience,

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<sup>26</sup> Hayamizu, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Katsunori Morita, “The Product Development and Sales Promotion Plan of ‘Chicken Ramen’ and ‘Cup Noodle’ in Nissin Food Products,” *Review of administration and informatics* 19 (2007), 37, <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/naid/110006391914> (accessed November 12th, 2014).

but from the additional efforts in mastering the marketing of his products in the context of postwar Japanese hunger.

*Lysine and Vitamin B: Instant Ramen and Health*

Nissin Foods' initial marketing strategy capitalized on postwar memories of hunger and starvation by emphasizing instant ramen's supposed nutritious qualities over its convenience. *Chikin Ramen's* original packaging boldly asserted, "Builds strength" and "A full meal boasting the highest nutrition and great taste."<sup>28</sup> This was clearly an appeal towards nutritionists such as Oiso Taisho who were touting the fortifying qualities of wheat flour and meat as the reason for the supposed physical strength and mental capabilities of Americans relative to the Japanese.

The words of nutritionists celebrating wheat over rice altered not only the packaging, but also the actual product. Ando Momofuku used his government ties to help boost the nutritional image of *Chikin Ramen* so that in April 1960, Nissin received permission to market instant ramen as a government-certified "special health food" after agreeing to enrich the noodles with vitamin B additives. Furthermore, in August 1967, the company began adding the protein supplement lysine to its products in order to improve nutritional value. This protein supplement in particular was added because popular opinion shaped by the efforts of Japanese nutritionists to spread the gospel of the superiority of wheat leaned towards the idea that the Japanese diet was too heavily weighted

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<sup>28</sup> Solt, 141.

towards plant matter and lacked the protein so readily available in the standard American diet.<sup>29</sup>

In 1960, Nissin Foods took full advantage of the new opportunities provided by the increase of television sets in Japanese homes (see Chapter 2) by entering the television market with its sponsorship of two youth-oriented programs, *Igaguri-kun* and *Bi'iba-chan*. The first set of advertisements made for these programs used the slogans, "How convenient life would be with *Chikin Ramen*," as well as "Healthfulness, hygienic quality, novelty, and vitality."<sup>30</sup> Another of the company's first television advertisements, aired in 1963, featured a young boy and his mother giggling together while they held a package of instant ramen. The ad also prominently displayed the word "lysine" across the screen along with the name of the product, the implication being that mothers should feed their children protein-enriched instant noodles to keep them healthy.<sup>31</sup>

Nissin's efforts in designing an original trademark character associated with *Chikin Ramen* in 1965 also highlight its marketing stance as a health food. Although the company's initial plans were to use animal motifs, after diligent market research, Nissin settled upon the image of a healthy child as the symbol of the company. Company planners drew the character, known as Chibikko ("small child" in Japanese), with a wheat-flour-colored complexion, a round nose, large eyes, freckles, light blond hair, and a baseball cap. Freckles and blond hair

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 157.

are rare in the Japanese gene pool, and Chibikko's physical characteristics all suggest that the character was drawn as an idealized image of a white American child, the epitome of healthy children in the Japanese psyche.<sup>32</sup>

Early public reaction generally received the nutritious image displayed by *Chikin Ramen* well. One 1961 editorial in the magazine *Chijo*, which targeted agricultural workers, noted the nutritional benefits of instant ramen, bolstering the claims made by Nissin Foods in its advertising. After describing instant ramen and how it is prepared, the author exclaims, "It is full of healthy nutrients such as protein, fat, vitamin B<sub>1</sub>, vitamin B<sub>2</sub>, and calcium, and contains 512 calories per 100 grams. The price is 85 yen for a pack of two servings, which is actually cheaper than the 50 yen bowl charged at [ramen] shops...or stands."<sup>33</sup>

The success of *Chikin Ramen's* image as a health food for Nissin's subsequent success as a company is accentuated by the failure of other producers of instant ramen at the time. In particular, the story of the small snack company Matsuda Sangyo reveals how strongly the memories of hunger and malnutrition from the Occupation period haunted the Japanese. While Ando Momofuku's achievement in popularizing instant ramen during his time as the head of Nissin Foods is undeniable, his status as the actual inventor of instant ramen is subject to some doubt. Matsuda Sangyo had already released a nearly identical product in 1955 called *Aji Tsuke Chuka Men* ("Flavored Chinese Noodles"), three years before the release of *Chikin Ramen*. This product was actually the early iteration of the product now known as Baby Star Ramen

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>33</sup> "Insutanto shokuhin," *Chijō*, February 1961, 130.

produced by the same company renamed as the Oyatsu Company (“Snack” Company).<sup>34</sup> The key difference between this product and *Chikin Ramen* is that the former is consumed in its dried form, without the addition of hot water to make the noodles soft. This placed the product outside the realm of actual meals, and it was most likely considered a snack. At a time when trauma of starvation still lingered in the minds of many Japanese, this aspect of the product proved to be fatal. In an interview with Minami Tomihiro, born in 1933, the Japanese veteran of World War II notes:

[During the Occupation period], most Japanese were hungry as there was not enough food. It was rationed for many years, and buying food from the black market was too expensive. I have a strong sentiment attached to *Chikin Ramen*, because I remember it as a meal for survival. I was hungry, and instant ramen was a meal full of calories.<sup>35</sup>

This attachment with the idea of a full meal indicates that at this time, what Japan wanted was not a snack, but a healthy, filling meal. Matsuda Sangyo’s product was forced to halt production after a few months due to weak sales.

As early as the mid-1960s however, the illusion of the nutritious qualities of *Chikin Ramen*, and instant foods in general, had mostly faded away. In a March 1961 article in the Japanese national *Asahi* newspaper titled “An Investigation in Instant Food Companies: Popular Opinion still Rules that Instant Ramen is Expensive and Tastes Bad,” the author describes how people surveyed for their thoughts on instant ramen stated that they were not fond of the greasy flavor of the products that were also high in salt, and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>35</sup> Minami Tomihiro, Interview by Philip Lee, New York, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

some even mentioned getting headaches from eating instant ramen in excess.<sup>36</sup> Much of this discontent with the product stemmed from a growing distrust of additives in processed foods; during the 1970s, a consumer organization known as the Committee for Safe Foods, organized public crusades for the banning of AF-2, a food preservative.<sup>37</sup> Okada Naoki, born in 1958, stated that when he was a young child growing up in Osaka in the late 1960s, “many people had the conviction that it wasn’t good for our health, but we succumbed to its cheapness and easiness.”<sup>38</sup> Yanagisawa Yuriko, born in 1966, from Hyogo prefecture also remembered being told by her parents when she was younger that “it was not good for our health, and that we should eat it sparingly.”<sup>39</sup>

The success of another major instant ramen producer, Myojo Foods, in the early 1960s, also highlights the wavering of Nissin’s health image. Myojo Foods began to change how it produced instant ramen by adding a soup-flavoring packet into its packaging. This decision was made after it revealed the results of a business survey geared towards housewives, in which the results stated that over 50% of housewives ate and served instant ramen mixed with vegetables in order to boost the nutritious quality of the meal. Myojo’s decision to add the flavoring packet allowed for consumers to essentially control the amount of sodium they were adding to their instant

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<sup>36</sup> “An Investigation in Instant Food Companies: Popular Opinion still Rules that Instant Ramen is Expensive and Tastes Bad,” *Asahi Shinbun*, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1961.

<sup>37</sup> Kathleen S. Uno, “The Death of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’?,” in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 308.

<sup>38</sup> Okada Naoki, Interview by Philip Lee, New York, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Yanagisawa Yuriko, Interview by Philip Lee, New York, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

ramen. Additionally, Myojo also began to add dried vegetables to their instant ramen packages. This form of instant ramen with soup quickly gained support from consumers, and enabled Myojo Foods to take the initiative in the Kanto market. It also caused a split in the instant ramen market, divided between flavored instant ramen, in the style of *Chikin Ramen*, and instant ramen with soup, in the style of Myojo's products. By the end of the 1960s, popularity for the latter group increased substantially, resulting in a drop in annual sales of *Chikin Ramen* of nearly 40 million servings between 1967 and 1968, representing a 30% decrease.<sup>40</sup>

The shifting preferences towards a form of instant ramen where the amount of sodium consumed could be controlled indicate that people were becoming more health conscious, or at least wary of instant ramen as a supposed health food. In response, after 1966, Nissin removed the slogans promoting the nutritious benefits of *Chikin Ramen* from its packaging, and in 1975, stopped putting in additives into its products all together.<sup>41</sup> More recently, since 2010, nearly all major instant ramen manufacturers in Japan have been releasing new forms of instant ramen featuring "dried noodles". The noodles in these product lines, such as Nissin Foods' "Ra-King" and Myojo Foods' "Kiwa Noodle", are not flash-fried in oil, but instead air-dried using industrial machinery. The omission of oils in the production process of

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<sup>40</sup> Morita, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Solt, 155.

these brands result in an overall healthier version of instant ramen.<sup>42</sup> As such, it was clear that by the mid-1970s, the hunger and malnutrition that prevailed during the Occupation period was nothing more than a distant memory for the Japanese, and Nissin Foods, as well as other instant ramen producers, would need a new strategy to promote its products to ensure continued success going forward.

### *Conclusion*

Instant ramen was a byproduct born from the interaction between the creative efforts of Ando Momofuku and the transformation of Japanese food ways following Japan's defeat in war. As starvation and hunger took the lives of many in the immediate years after 1945, the United States began to adopt food aid policies geared towards the containment of Communist threats. These policies involved feeding the Japanese population by saturating the country with excess American wheat flour, and using outlets such as a school lunch system to shift the Japanese diet towards one favoring bread. Concurrently, the Japanese government also made efforts to promote wheat consumption. This promotion of wheat was most prevalent in the works of nutritionists and health advocates, who expounded the nutritional qualities of wheat over the traditional Japanese staple grain, rice. The immediate result was an increase in wheat consumption and a decrease in rice consumption in the average Japanese diet.

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<sup>42</sup> Ando Koki, *I Won't Stop till I Win! The Equation for Victory* (Tokyo, Japan: Chuokouron shin sha, 2014), 28.



In order to channel the excess of wheat flour into a food product that would protect Japanese food culture against Western dietary norms, such as the eating of bread, Ando Momofuku invented instant ramen in 1958. The notion that instant ramen was a solution to the problem of an encroaching Western influence on Japanese culinary habits is ironic given the fact that its very existence relied on foreign influences in Japan. In this way, instant ramen found itself at a strange intersection between tradition and Westernization in the context of postwar Japanese food culture.

The aftereffects of U.S. food aid for Japan during the Occupation period lingered in the minds of many Japanese through the early 1960s, and in order to drive sales, Ando Momofuku decided to market his first product on the basis of health and nutrition. Though initially successful, this image quickly crumbled by the late-1960s, as the memory of hunger and starvation during the Occupation period seemed to fade away, necessitating new ways to market instant ramen into the 1970s. In this way, instant ramen is representative of postwar trends in Japanese food culture, as it tells the story of the trauma of starvation in a devastated nation as well as the struggle between maintaining and shifting away from traditional roots in food.

## Chapter Two

### The Mass Consumption of Instant Ramen

#### *Introduction*

By the mid-1960s, the jig was up; instant ramen was no longer the health food it originally claimed to be, and its novelty image as a nutritional meal that built strength was lost behind concerns over deep-frying and additives. The price of a single package of instant ramen also raised some eyebrows. At the time, instant ramen sold for 35 yen a package, which was nearly the same as a bowl of traditional ramen at a Chinese restaurant (35 to 50 yen), twice the price of a bus ticket in Tokyo (15 yen), and over three times the price of a bowl of traditional udon (10 yen).<sup>1</sup> Newspaper and magazine articles detailing concerns over the nutritional content and price of instant ramen began to emerge, deconstructing the wholesome image of instant ramen.

Yet the growth of the instant ramen industry continued to boom in Japan, and annual sales steadily increased, and even skyrocketed between certain years. Between 1960 and 1963, instant ramen consumption increased from a meager 100 million to nearly 2 billion packages per year, and by 1971 annual consumption was over 3.5 billion servings.<sup>2</sup> Despite initially adopting the angle of a health food, how did instant ramen manage to drastically increase in popularity with the stomachs of the Japanese?

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<sup>1</sup> *Shūkan Asahi*, ed., *Nedan no Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa, Fūzoku shi, jōkan* (Tokyo, Japan: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1987), 41.

<sup>2</sup> Nippon Ramen Research Institute, *Ramen* (Tokyo, Japan: Tokyo Keizai News, 1985), 54.

The Japanese economy, which had previously been in shambles following the destruction of Japan's infrastructure during the Second World War, experienced a series of booms between 1950 and 1970 that drastically improved the level of Japan's standard of living and accentuated Japan's place as a developed economy on the world stage. In spring 1956, Yoshio Nakano, a leading literary critic, announced that, "the immediate postwar period is over," and called on Japanese intellectuals to free themselves from the illusion that they could cling forever to the ideals of the Occupation period. His sentiments were echoed in the Economic White Paper of 1956: "It is no longer postwar. We now confront a completely different situation. The period of economic growth through reconstruction is over. Future economic growth must be supported by modernization."<sup>3</sup>

The Japanese began to abandon the prevailing sentiments of starvation associated with the immediate postwar period, and instead, thanks to rising household incomes, were acquiring a taste for travel, leisure, and fashion. During the 1960s, the idea of a normative, middle-class lifestyle defined largely by the mass consumption of specific household goods took hold in Japan, a trend that emulated a similar pattern in the United States. Greater uniformity in consumption resulted largely from the gains in purchasing power of working households, and shopping at supermarkets produced an increasingly homogenized set of food options in the cities and the growing suburb. Economist

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<sup>3</sup> Tatsuro Uchino, *Japan's Postwar Economy: An Insider's View of Its History and Its Future*, trans. Mark A. Harbison (Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha International Ltd, 1978), 83.

Nakamarua Takafusa argues, “The equalization of income distribution produced among 95 percent of the people a sense that they were members of the middle class. As consumption patterns abruptly changed in favor of Westernization, they produced the lifestyle of contemporary Japan: people eat bread and meat, acquire household electrical appliances, own automobiles, enjoy their leisure, have a taste for travel, and are very fashion conscious.”<sup>4</sup>

So while instant ramen lost its appeal as a health supplement to people who were no longer concerned over starvation, the emergence of a modern mass consumption culture allowed the product to become a household staple throughout both urban and rural parts of Japan. Within the context of economic prosperity, a developing Japanese middle class, focused on emulating “Western” middle class lifestyles, began to buy up high demand electrical appliances. As refrigerators, rice cookers and water boilers became commonplace in Japanese households, instant foods, which often involved the usage of electrical appliances to prepare, were able to make their way into the diets of the general populace. An increase in the demand for instant ramen coincided with the explosion of the instant ramen industry in the early 1960s, as hundreds of manufacturers began to enter the instant noodle market in order to gain their share of profits.

These instant ramen manufacturers were as much in the marketing business as they were in the production of instant foods. Producers embraced the advent of a mass consumption culture in Japan, and proved to be skilled at whetting the Japanese’ newfound appetites for leisure, travel, and fashion.

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<sup>4</sup> Takafusa Nakamura, *The Postwar Japanese Economy: Its Development and Structure, 1937–1994* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1995), 121.

Advertisements in newspapers and on television, as well as promotional campaigns, consistently targeted new trends in the general patterns of consumption during the high-growth period. In particular, towards the end of the 1960s, instant ramen began to cater to a sense of Japanese identity, evoking tradition and nostalgia in its branding, as a response to growing discourse on what it meant to be Japanese. In this way, despite having been a significant part of the Westernization of the Japanese middle class, instant ramen attempted to maintain a position within the concept of a unique Japanese identity.

In the end however, what seemed to attract people to instant ramen the most was not any sense of Japanese-ness or any promotional campaigns offering tours of Europe, but the simple convenience the food offered. As the general pace of society quickened, so did people's focus on time, and the efficiency of a food that could be prepared within three minutes with little to no clean up afterwards proved not only to be novel, but to some, irresistible.

#### *An unexpected shot in the arm*

With the radio broadcast by Emperor Hirohito announcing the end of World War II and acknowledging Japan's defeat on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the way was open for launching a modern economy without war in Japan. However, by the time defeat came, in August 1945, the country had been almost totally devastated. Its vast colonial empire was lost, its economic infrastructure was in a state of ruin, and its population was barely able to survive from day to day.

Alongside the aforementioned critical situation of food supply (see Chapter 1), prices of daily necessities began to rise from the day of Japan's defeat, and inflation accelerated at a furious rate. An extensive black market sprouted throughout the country in order to provide basic necessities. Open-air markets flourished on bombed-out lots around train and streetcar stations or near busy streets, where people were able to obtain products that had not been available during the war years. Everything from foodstuffs to clothing and other essentials could be obtained at these markets, and it is estimated that the total number of open-air markets involved in black market operations reached over 60,000 during the immediate postwar period. As inflation worsened at an alarming rate, even the salaries of the lucky few with steady employment could not keep pace, with many less fortunate having lost their jobs with defeat. Early attempts to alleviate hyperinflation from the Japanese government proved relatively ineffective, and U.S. Occupation authorities initially had little interest in reconstruction and were more invested in the total disarming of Japan and the complete destruction of the economic structure that had made it possible for Japan to wage war.

However, when war broke out in Korea on June 25, 1950, the situation changed completely. The Korean War triggered immense changes in the economic situation of Japan, and the economic boom resulting from the Korean War was the largest and the most important in Japan's postwar economic history. It was triggered by the special procurements income that derived from

U.S. army expenditures and by the sudden rise in exports that accompanied the expansion of world trade after June 1950.

Since Japan was the industrialized country nearest the war zone, and therefore the best source of emergency supplies, UN forces in Korea placed enormous orders for goods and services from Japan, and in the period of 1950 to 1955, special procurements are estimated to have reached \$3.6 billion, more than the total amount of U.S. relief aid to Japan up till June 1951. Temporary foreign currency income from special procurements accounted for 60 to 70 percent of exports, and raised the balance of payments ceiling in a single stroke.<sup>5</sup>

This special procurements boom was accompanied by a remarkable increase in exports. With the outbreak of war, international trade was freed from a worldwide recession in 1949, showing a 34 percent increase between 1950 and 1951. In 1950 alone, the value of Japanese exports clearing customs increased 55 percent, with total volume increasing by 35 percent. All surplus inventories were wiped out in a one-year period, and industrial production level shot up at unprecedented rates. By October 1950, the mining and manufacturing index had surpassed prewar levels, and real gross national product reached prewar levels by 1951, thereby achieving complete economic recovery.<sup>6</sup>

While the Korean War boom raised Japan back to its prewar economic health, the ten years from 1955 to 1965 remain in the memory of the Japanese people as the period during which modernization and rapid economic growth transformed their society. The Jimmu boom was the name given to the thirty-one

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<sup>5</sup> Uchino, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 58.

month period of economic prosperity beginning in 1956, unprecedented since the reign of the legendary Emperor Jimmu, who, according to Japanese myth ascended the throne in 660 B.C. The following Iwato boom beginning in 1960 was named for an even more ancient period in Japanese mythology when the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, was lured from seclusion in a cave (*iwato*) by the music of a festival of ancient gods.

The Jimmu boom was fueled by domestic price increases strengthened heavily by the Suez War, which caused the destruction of the Suez oil pipeline and resulted in a rapid inflation of foreign trade prices and a sharp rise in domestic wholesale prices in Japan. Increased private plant and equipment investment, driven by expectations of a sustained boom, also acted as a driving force behind the boom. Corporate profits were the highest in postwar history after the Korean War boom, and the Dow Jones average on the Tokyo Stock Exchange rose 63 percent from January 1955 to February 1957. The atmosphere of the Jimmu boom created favorable conditions for labor, and it sparked the largest expansion in permanent employees in the history of the postwar economy. The Jimmu boom eventually led into a recession lasting from 1957 to 1959 caused by deterioration in the international balance of payments.<sup>7</sup>

The economic expansion that began after recovery from this recession developed into a boom that surpassed even the Jimmu boom, and by summer 1960, it was being referred to as the Iwato boom. In comparison to the Jimmu boom – which recorded real GNP increases of 6.2 percent in 1956 and 7.8

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 97.



percent in 1957 – the Iwato boom attained increases in real GNP reaching double digits between 1959 and 1961.<sup>8</sup> The amazing economic performance during this period can be attributed to the announcement of the Ikeda cabinet's National Income-Doubling Plan; rapid increases in plant and equipment investment in response to the promotion of trade liberalization; and expectations for a tremendous growth in the construction industry accompanying the decision to hold the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo.

The impact of the Olympics in particular was astounding. The decision to hold the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo was announced in 1959, and total expenditures for Olympics-related construction reached 1,019 trillion yen by the time the games were held, a figure which includes enormous outlays designed to transform the entire city before the games took place, principally in transportation facilities and luxury hotels.<sup>9</sup> The Tokaido Shinkansen was constructed at a cost of 38 billion yen, the Tokyo subway system was expanded, and a new system of freeways completed. In addition to these quantitative indications, the prospect of holding the games in Tokyo provided a psychological boost to business and consumers that combined with Ikeda's National Income-Doubling Plan to encourage optimism concerning Japan's future in the global economy.

*The "three sacred treasures": Japanese trends in mass consumption*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

One of the special features of the 1950s and 1960s in Japan was the consumer revolution, and it was during this period that the unique traits of Japan's mass consumption society began to take shape. Real personal consumer expenditure as part of GNP showed average yearly increases of 6 percent during the Jimmu boom and 9 percent during the Iwato boom.<sup>10</sup> The most important factor in this rapid increase was the rise in personal income in the face of improvements in labor productivity that resulted from heavy investments in plant and equipment during the Iwato boom. Annual wage increases for all industries increased from 5.6 percent in 1955-60 to 10.3 percent in 1960-65. Moreover, the trend toward higher wage increases followed a progressive pattern during this period, from 6.6 percent in 1959, 8 percent in 1960, 9 percent in 1961, and 11 percent in 1962 and 1963.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning with the Jimmu boom, a wave of modernization had spread to the lives of consumers, and revolution in technology brought sweeping changes to the lifestyles of Japanese people. Symbolic of this was the popularization of electric household appliances, which had been sparked by the Jimmu boom and continued onwards, playing the leading role in the modernization and Westernization of lifestyles. Until 1955, washing machines and televisions could be seen only in the homes of the very wealthy or in restaurants, bars, and coffee shops. Less than 1 percent of Japanese families owned televisions or refrigerators, and less than 5 percent owned washing machines.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 105.

However, the situation began to change dramatically in 1956. For example, black-and-white television sets were obtained at an amazing pace, particularly after the announcement of live coverage of Crown Prince Akihito's wedding in April 1959. Domestic production of television sets increased from 310,000 in 1956 to 3.6 million in 1960, representing an increase in their popularization rate from less than 1 percent of Japanese families to nearly 50 percent. Similar phenomena occurred with radios, washing machines, and refrigerators. Domestic production of radios increased from 3 million to 13 million, refrigerators from 80,000 to 900,000, and washing machines from 750,000 to 1.5 million. By 1965, the rate of popularization of black-and-white television sets reached 90.3 percent, and was vying with Japan's mass-circulation newspapers as the major mass medium. Television also outstripped movies as the prime source of entertainment for Japanese; 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics, was a turning point in Japanese media history, when it became clear that television had overtaken film in popularity.<sup>13</sup>

An important aspect of television at this stage was its broadcasting of entertainment, particularly American serials such as "I Love Lucy" and "Father Knows Best." These depictions of "typical" American families surrounded by consumer luxuries and electric appliances such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines – and with the family car parked in the driveway – had a powerful impact on the Japanese psyche. The middle-class "American way of life" became the utopian goal and the dream of many Japanese

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<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Ivy, "Formations of Mass Culture," in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 249.

in the 1950s, a goal tied to unflagging hard work as the basis of commodity acquisition. American television shows became the basis for the new middle-class image – particularly what objects, what possessions constituted the middle class – portrayed in Japanese television serials and in movies as well.<sup>14</sup> During this period Japanese came to equate the middle class with a lifestyle that included “the housewife’s three sacred treasures”: a black-and-white television set, a washing machine, and a refrigerator; those people who had acquired those things were, purely and simply, the middle class. And television quickly became the primary means for the codification and dissemination of this conception of the middle class as a consumption category. Eventually, as incomes kept swelling, families began to acquire these articles, and newer, more expensive products became the objects of consumers’ aspirations.

As the fundamental duties of household maintenance became simplified through the mass proliferation of electric consumer goods such as rice cookers, refrigerators, gas ovens, stoves, and washing machines, the popularity of such appliances revolutionized Japanese attitudes. These new labor saving appliances reduced the hours housewives devoted to housework (see Chapter 3), and the time available for leisure activities previously reserved for the elite, such as flower arrangement, tea ceremony, calligraphy, dining in restaurants, and cooking lessons, expanded for the less affluent as well. Such phrases as “free time” became popular as expressions of a new consciousness that at once

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 249.

symbolized the rise of a new middle class and created a huge new market for consumer goods and the leisure industry.

By 1961 the percentage of household budgets devoted to leisure spending had already reached 22 percent, surpassing the West German average. With the popularity of sightseeing trips, excursions to beaches, mountain climbing, hiking, skiing, and golf, came a boom in hotels, traditional Japanese inns, hostels, restaurants, and large enterprises in the leisure industry. Beaches became overcrowded, trains on the Japan National Railways routes between urban centers and popular resort and ski areas were packed on weekends, and the highways were packed bumper to bumper.<sup>15</sup>

#### *The High-Growth Era of Instant Ramen Production*

The Japanese emulation of Western middle-class ideals was also observed in foods. Daily consumption of rice, the prewar staple food of Japan, reached a peak of 130 grams in 1962, only about 70 percent of the highest prewar levels, rising very little or even declining thereafter. On the other hand, the consumption of wheat and meat was steadily increasing.<sup>16</sup> However, the oft-cited point concerning “Westernization” in regards to the Japanese diet often overlooks the fact that the Japanese consumed a great deal of their wheat flour and meat in the form of “Chinese food” such as ramen and *gyoza*, or as nontraditional Japanese food such as *yakisoba* and *okonomiyaki*. Bread and steaks were available, but noodles and dumplings were more common. (See

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<sup>15</sup> Uchino, 124.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 123.

Chapter 1) Japan's postwar "Westernization" in terms of food, therefore, is better understood as a standardization of practices identified as modern and amenable to rationalized middle-class living, such as eating ramen on Saturdays for lunch after a half day of school, rather than a whole-hearted cultural embrace of an idealized America.

Still, vinyl packaging and processed foods enabled consumers to buy a wide variety of foods regardless of the season, and new food products such as ham and sausage became popular alternatives to the traditional Japanese diet. The rapid rise in income and the new urban lifestyle brought about changes not only in daily diet but also in attitudes to cooking, ushering in a new era of instant foods. Instant coffee, packaged sauces, and instant ramen became symbolic of the new consumer society. While traditional ramen fueled the labor that built the housing projects and roads of the postwar high growth period, instant ramen was a convenience food associated with the new middle-class families living in the suburbs, and in particular became associated with middle-class children.<sup>17</sup>

The affordability of foods previously considered luxury items such as bananas and shrimp, the availability of new electronic kitchen technologies such as rice cookers, and the increased opportunities for dining out were all signs of major improvements in the quality of life that touched upon most households.<sup>18</sup> Food was a concrete means of reminding all workers of the direct and beneficial impact the rapid growth of the national economy was having on them. According

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<sup>17</sup> George Solt, *The Untold History of Ramen: How Political Crisis in Japan Spawned a Global Food Craze* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 131.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

to Marilyn Ivy, “Electric appliances standardized the image of the average household and what the average housewife should possess. Not only did they become the standard for middle-class status, but their presence and placement within Japanese dwellings also homogenized Japanese domestic space.”<sup>19</sup> Electric kitchen appliances therefore allowed for instant and frozen foods to be preserved and prepared on a previously unimaginable scale.

Particularly in Japan, instant ramen, curry cubes, instant coffee, and frozen foods fundamentally altered eating habits during the period of high growth and beyond. Between 1965 and 1976, for example, instant ramen consumption increased from 2.5 billion servings to 4.55 billion servings per year, instant curry consumption jumped from 32,800 tons to 70,000 tons, and instant coffee consumption grew from 5,000 tons to 21,000 tons.<sup>20</sup> The rapid incorporation of instant and frozen foods into the Japanese diet accompanied the diffusion of household kitchen machinery, including electric refrigerators and freezers (owned by 97.9 percent of the population by 1976), gas water heaters (81.3 percent), electric rice cookers (68.7 percent), and ovens (47.7 percent).<sup>21</sup>

Accordingly, the high-growth period witnessed the birth of several instant ramen producers interested in taking some market share from Ando Momofuku’s Nissin Foods. As early as 1960, Ace Cook began circulating its advertisements in newspapers for its own instant ramen product, Ace Cook’s

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<sup>19</sup> Ivy, 249.

<sup>20</sup> Solt, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Japan External Trade Organization, *Changing Dietary Lifestyles in Japan: JETRO Marketing Series 17* (Tokyo: Japan External Trade Organization, 1978), 10.

Sokuseki Ramen (Ace Cook's Instant Ramen), using catchphrases such as "A hot meal, OK in 2 minutes!"<sup>22</sup> In 1962, Myojo Foods and Toyo Suisan released their flagship products Myojo Ramen and High Ramen, respectively.<sup>23</sup> Myojo Ramen featured a separate packet within the wrapping specifically for controlling the flavor of the ramen soup as an answer to growing health concerns over the amount of sodium in Nissin Foods' Chikin Ramen (see Chapter 1). Advertisements for High Ramen in newspapers utilized the phrase "The flavor of home", catering to instant ramen's new entrenched position in many household kitchens.<sup>24</sup> By 1964, approximately three hundred sixty food companies, large and small, had tried to jump into the instant ramen business.<sup>25</sup>

The advent of competition in the landscape for instant ramen production was troubling for Nissin Foods, and Ando Momofuku was insistent on controlling competition through patent litigation and other legal maneuvering in order to maintain a dominant position in the market. Nissin Foods filed its first patent infringement lawsuit in February 1960, suing a major rival noodle business, Star Macaroni, over its use of the name "Chikin Ramen." The Osaka District Court sided with Nissin in its verdict on March 5, 1960, and soon afterwards Nissin obtained sole rights to the name "Chikin Ramen," which thirteen other companies had been using.<sup>26</sup> The potential threat of copycat products towards

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<sup>22</sup> "[Koukoku] Ace Cook no sokuseki ramen," *Asahi Shinbun*, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

<sup>23</sup> Nippon Ramen Research Institute, 55.

<sup>24</sup> "[Koukoku] High Ramen / Toyo Suisan," *Asahi Shinbun*, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1963.

<sup>25</sup> Ando Koki, *I Won't Stop till I Win! The Equation for Victory* (Tokyo, Japan: Chuokouron shin sha, 2014), 35.

<sup>26</sup> Solt, 148.



brand image still remained prevalent through the mid-1960s; Sanyo Foods' launch advertisement for its flagship Nagasaki Tanmen in 1964 emphasized the phrase "Beware imposters!"<sup>27</sup>

Much more important, however, was Nissin Foods' securing of patent rights over the instant ramen manufacturing process as a means of controlling competition within the industry. On May 8 and June 12, 1962, Nissin Foods acquired full patent rights over "flavored dry noodle production" and "instant ramen production" respectively. In explaining the company's intentions behind securing these patents, Ando explained, "I am not thinking about monopolizing the instant ramen business. I want to authorize the use of the patent by companies with excellent facilities and technology. If it can be used to prevent surplus production and sharp price drops, I believe the industry can be stabilized."<sup>28</sup> His beliefs at this time would manifest later into one of his famous proverbs: "A company shouldn't stay as a single cedar tree, but grow like a forest."<sup>29</sup> The notion that the industry would regulate itself through managed competition in order to prevent both monopolies and price warfare was representative of how competition between large companies was managed in Japan during the high-growth era.<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, on June 1, 1962, Nissin began notifying all other instant noodle manufacturers in Japan of their need to receive explicit written

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<sup>27</sup> "[Koukoku] Nagasaki Tanmen / Sanyo Shokuhin," *Asahi Shinbun*, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Solt, 148.

<sup>29</sup> Ando Koki, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Solt, 149.

authorization from Nissin Foods to continue operating or else face patent violation lawsuits. While Nissin Foods reached agreements with twenty large producers over the sharing of patent rights, which involved the relinquishing of a portion each company's revenues to Nissin Foods, rival company Ace Cook and six of its smaller allies challenged the patent in court. Although the Osaka District Court sided with Nissin Foods in a decision reached on June 25, 1962, the Patent Office in Tokyo released its own opinion on the matter soon after, stating that Ace Cook was not in violation of patent law. A drawn-out public relations battle between the two firms and their respective allies ensued for two years, ending only after bureaucrats from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries prompted conciliation between the two of them.<sup>31</sup>

The government's involvement in preventing Nissin from dictating the terms of entry into the instant ramen market by itself as well as its intervention in creating harmony between Nissin Foods and Ace Cook were again representative of its approach in guiding inter-firm competition in Japan to prevent monopolistic control and price wars. The result was a type of state-supported cartelism for which Japan became famous, where a handful of large companies restricted market entry and exit by smaller firms and competed with each other for market share through quality, innovation, and marketing rather than price. Eventually, in 1965, state bureaucrats managed to convince the remaining fifty-six instant ramen makers to unify as one national group, creating the Instant Ramen Manufacturer's Association, now known as the World Instant

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Noodles Association.<sup>32</sup> Since then, five instant ramen producers, Nissin Foods, Ace Cook, Myojo Foods, Toyo Suisan, and Sanyo Foods have dominated production of instant ramen, collectively maintaining 90% market share in Japan as of 2005.<sup>33</sup>

### *Instant Ramen on TV*

Instant ramen producers were well aware of the changes in attitudes derived from the advent of the mass consumption society in Japan, and capitalized on the opportunity to present instant ramen in a way that would appeal to the new middle class. Nissin Foods along with several of the other major producers took full advantage of the new advertising opportunities opened up by the increase of radio and television sets in Japanese homes. The effective use of newspaper, magazine, radio, and, most importantly, television advertising through the use of popular young celebrities, original theme songs, quiz shows, and other promotional campaigns by instant ramen manufacturers made them nationally recognized innovators of youth-targeted marketing.

After focusing its national advertising energies on national newspapers for the first two years, Nissin Foods moved into the television market in 1960 with its sponsorship of the two youth-oriented programs *Igaguri-kun* and *Bi'ibachan*.<sup>34</sup> In 1962, Nissin Foods sponsored its own television program, the *World's Greatest Quiz*, in which one hundred contestants competed for one million yen.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>33</sup> "Share Survey: Instant Noodles," *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, August 7, 2005, [www.nni.nikkei.co.jp/AC/TNKS/Search/Nni20040807D06MS301.htm](http://www.nni.nikkei.co.jp/AC/TNKS/Search/Nni20040807D06MS301.htm).

<sup>34</sup> Solt, 152.

The quiz show quickly became one of the highest-rated programs nationwide, and it continued to receive high ratings until its termination in May 1965. Before its cancellation, the Osaka Housewives' Association recognized the show as the "Best Youth-Oriented Program" on television, highlighting Nissin Foods' ability to gain approval as a good corporate citizen from an important consumer base, young urban mothers.<sup>35</sup> Newspaper advertisements indicate that in 1964, Ace Cook also sponsored its own television shows on major channels, two dramas titled *The Rowdy Brigade* and *The Life of Lawless Matsu*.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, in 1968 Myojo Foods sponsored the love drama *You at All Times*.<sup>37</sup> These shows' focus on young people indicates the desire to target instant ramen advertising towards the burgeoning youth culture of the 1960s in Japan.

Television advertisements for instant ramen also began to run frequently, and successfully normalized the use of instant ramen amongst different types of people. One commercial from the early 1960s featured a young man wearing a white tank top sitting alone in a small apartment getting ready to enjoy his instant noodles. The ad, titled "Dokushinsha" (The bachelor), straightforwardly reveals a main target group for instant ramen after children – unmarried men. An increasing number of young men moved by themselves to urban centers for white-collar work during the high-growth period, which gave instant ramen producers a lucrative outlet for their products. The 1966 commercial "My

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>36</sup> "[Koukoku] *Mumou Matsu no Isshou* / Fuji Terebi 8, Ace Cook," *Asahi Shinbun*, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1964; "[Koukoku] Fuji Terebi Wanpaku Doumei, Ace Cook no Wantanmen," *Asahi Shinbun*, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

<sup>37</sup> "[Koukoku] *Itsudemo kimiwa Tokyo 12 Chaneru* / Myojo Shokuhin," *Asahi Shinbun*, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1968.

Grandchild Loves It” reveals the elderly as another prime target for instant ramen manufacturers. The commercial shows a grandmother with her son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren all enjoying instant ramen together. As the average Japanese family structure became increasingly nuclear, this advertisement may be understood as an attempt to capitalize on the detachment of the elderly from their children’s families, associating instant ramen with everyday nourishment as well as images of their extended family.<sup>38</sup> In this way, instant ramen advertising recognized various social trends resulting from high economic growth in order to most efficiently segment their target consumers.

A pioneering step in marketing by Nissin Foods was the composition of an original musical tune for the purpose of radio advertising. “The Chikin Ramen Song,” sung by the minor celebrity Shibakura Mariko, began running on the popular radio program *Let’s Sing Tonight* in 1962 and continued unabated for five years. During that time the song gained wide currency among students and young people, elevating Shibakura’s career along the way.<sup>39</sup> A 1967 article from the tabloid magazine *Sunday Mainichi* concerning the ten-year anniversary of the release of instant ramen notes the fluency with which young people recited lines and songs from such commercials:

This year marks the tenth year since the birth of instant ramen. Sales have grown by an average of twenty percent annually since its introduction in Osaka in 1958. Even the Japanese economy has not matched such a high rate of economic growth. “My Name is Ramen Taro.” “This is what I like.” “I have eaten a whole range of them, but after all...” When hearing these lines pop out so effortlessly from the mouths of children...Yes, the annualized

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<sup>38</sup> Solt, 158.

<sup>39</sup> Solt, 153.

twenty percent growth figures apply not only to instant ramen but also to the dissemination of television waves as well.<sup>40</sup>

Advertisers successfully produced catchy advertising jingles promoting instant foods to children. In turn, advertisements became a definitive part of popular culture for the children of the baby-boom generation. In this manner, instant ramen producers effectively made use of radio and television to identify their products with, and at times even define, the burgeoning youth consumer culture of the 1960s.

Outside of television and radio advertising efforts, promotional campaigns also operated as definitive elements of instant ramen's ongoing growth and success. As early as 1961, Ace Cook began a raffle lasting several months offering winners personal tours with their families of the Tokyo skies in an airplane.<sup>41</sup> In 1965, Nissin began a campaign in which they handed out thousand-yen notes to five hundred people daily for three months between February and May. The promotion was wildly successful, drawing over 1.6 million entries and acquainting households across Japan with the Nissin Foods brand name. Nissin Foods provided a straightforward explanation of its purpose on the campaign posters, which read, "In the highly competitive instant foods market of today, we at Nissin Foods are engaged in every effort to win greater market share. In keeping with that effort, we would like to offer our valued customers a gift of 1,000 yen as a way of expressing our appreciation, and also of

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<sup>40</sup> "Insutanto rāmen kigen jūnen," *Sunday Mainichi*, March 12, 1967, 44.

<sup>41</sup> "[Koukoku] Tokyo Jyoukuu yuuranhikou, Ace Cook no sokuseki ramen," *Asahi Shinbun*, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1961.

increasing our share of the instant foods market.”<sup>42</sup> Following the success of the cash giveaway promotion, Nissin Foods began organizing sweepstakes in which it gave away family trips to Europe. These campaigns highlighted the newfound interests in travel and leisure time spent on family trips within the Japanese middle-class.

### *Discovering Japan through Instant Ramen*

In 1970, Japan’s hosting of Expo ’70, the first grand international world fair held in Asia, symbolized Japan’s powerful position in the world economic community, and spurred a retrenchment and retrospective movement in Japan. Japan’s national railways, compelled to stimulate consumer demand after the exposition, hired Dentsu, Japan’s largest advertising agency, to create an ad campaign to lure new consumers into the travel market. The result was “Discover Japan,” the largest and longest-running ad campaign in Japanese history, which reorganized the entire cultural topography of Japan according to a continuum of “tradition” and “modernity.” “Discover Japan” targeted Japanese desires for a simpler rural past, and urged the Japanese people to rediscover authentic origins through tourism. Self-reflection on the nature of Japanese identity intensified, turning into a genre in itself.<sup>43</sup> This new genre coincided with a broad turn towards the study of Japan’s strengths in industry and entrepreneurship by journalists and academics in the 1970s. Much of this writing focused on the root causes for Japan’s successful development as a

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<sup>42</sup> Solt, 156.

<sup>43</sup> Ivy, 251.

modern, non-European, non-Christian, democratic, capitalist nation, and often attempted to identify the essential and unique elements of Japanese culture, in contrast to Western culture, that made the nation capable of achieving such development.<sup>44</sup>

Shifts in the names and type of products released by instant ramen producers over the course of the high-growth period reveal these concerns over the Japanese identity in the context of rapid socioeconomic change. For example, Nissin Foods stopped using roman letters on the packaging and describing the nutritious benefits of most of its products after 1966. These modifications not only suggest a general recognition by consumers that instant ramen was not a healthy food, but also a slight decline in the appeal of American-themed marketing imagery. In addition, the company released “Japanese-style Chikin Ramen” in 1966 and “Demae Itcho” (literally “delivery, one order”) in 1968. Both products emphasized the Japanese character of its soy sauce-based soups, and for the latter Nissin Foods used its original trademark character Chibikko dressed in worker’s clothing from the Edo period of Japan (1603 – 1868) in its packaging.<sup>45</sup> Myojo Foods also released “Charumera Ramen” in 1966, which featured the Myojo brand’s new animated character Charumera Ojisan, who was drawn as an archetypal pushcart (*yatai*) operator from the prewar era (*charumera* referred to a type of flute that was the signature call of all roaming ramen pushcart vendors during the prewar era).<sup>46</sup> These names and marketing

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<sup>44</sup> Solt, 160.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 215.



themes are indicative of a growing trend toward the marketing of goods and services as distinctly Japanese in the late 1960s.

Television advertisements for these products typically catered to the nature of the Japanese identity as well. Nissin Foods' television advertisements for its Demae Itcho line usually portrayed young kimono-clad men discussing the dish in relation to the uniqueness of Japanese culture. Commercials such as "Nihon no joshiki" (Japanese common sense) from 1972 and "Shoyu Nihonjin, Shoyu Se'eru" (Soy sauce-Japanese people, Soy sauce-sale) from 1975 demonstrate the newfound marketability of "Japanese culture" as a commodity marker. Furthermore, in 1970, Nissin Foods released "Inaka soba" (country-side style buckwheat noodle soup) and "Ramen kazoku" (ramen family), both of which can be understood as testaments to the depopulation of the countryside and the decline of extended kinship ties in Japan during the same period.<sup>47</sup> The release of the new lines coincided with the new interest in domestic tourism to rural destinations, spurred by the "Discover Japan" campaign, where vaguely construed national tradition could be nostalgically consumed in packaged units at various tiers of luxury.<sup>48</sup>

The introduction of these various product lines represented a new emphasis on Japanese-themed marketing, which drew heavily upon Edo imagery of merchant culture, as well as ancient myths and legends. The emergent association between the consumption of instant ramen and the condition of being Japanese was emphasized not only by advertisers, but also by writers of

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<sup>47</sup> Solt, 156.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

popular tabloid magazines. The salarymen-targeted weekly *Shukan Gendai*, for example, interviewed twenty of the most prominent lovers of instant ramen about their favorite recipes and the significance of instant ramen to them. The piece begins with a quote from the foreign minister, Fukuda Takeo, who would later become prime minister: “It is one of my favorite foods. I eat it all the time. The best part is that it is simple, but if you add vegetables or meat, it tastes even better.”<sup>49</sup> The foreign minister’s claim that he regularly ate instant ramen was a clear signal that he wanted to be viewed as a man of the masses, but it also served as a strong endorsement for instant ramen by one of the most powerful politicians in the country.

Next in the article, the well-known essayist Kita Morio admits, “I’m addicted to instant ramen...These days I eat it only twice per day at 1 and 3 a.m., but for a while I was eating it as if I was mad.”<sup>50</sup> The most noteworthy quote, however, is from a celebrity medical doctor and mountain climber Imai Michiko, who expounds on the virtues of instant ramen and its role in reminding her of her own Japanese identity: “When I go to the mountains, instant ramen is indispensable. No other food impresses everyone as much as this. Ultimately, it makes me feel more strongly that instant ramen is a Japanese food, and I am Japanese.”<sup>51</sup> Imai’s assertion about the connection between her pride in being Japanese and her enjoyment of instant noodles would gain wide circulation in

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<sup>49</sup> “Shokutsū meishi no sokuseki rāmen mikaku shinsa,” *Shūkan Gendai*, October 28, 1971, 42.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

the coming decade and a half, just as instant ramen was beginning to be produced and circulated abroad.

The ability of instant ramen producers to associate entirely different images with its product lines based on the continual regeneration of marketing themes (despite the fact that the products were all composed of the same basic ingredients – wheat flour, oil, and salt – with slight variations in the flavoring) illustrates the industry’s sensitivity to the issues of concern to the public at the time, whether it was poor nutrition or a loss of tradition. In the case of discovering a Japanese identity, instant ramen advertising succeeded because it promoted the idea that instant noodles somehow preserved Japanese identity, despite the fact that it played a significant role in the emulation of Western lifestyles by the middle class.

### *Life is Convenient*

On the consumer side of things, by the late 1960s instant ramen had spread into households all over Japan. By 1968, the earlier concerns over the price, taste, and nutrition of instant ramen were all but reversed; a January 1968 article in the national *Yomiuri* newspaper stated that instant ramen was “cheap, tasty, and deserving of perfect marks for calories provided.”<sup>52</sup> The article, titled “Long Live Ramen! Traditional and Instant Ramen Businesses are Roaring,” begins by definitively stating, “We are in a ramen boom.”<sup>53</sup> The article continues

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<sup>52</sup> “Ramen banzai! Mise mo ‘insutanto’ mo daiseikyou,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

by discussing the different kinds of ramen, including traditional *shoyu* or *miso* ramen, and then comments on how instant ramen in particular has made its way into the towns and homes of this “ramen era”:

From salary men and office ladies (abbreviated as OL, a common term used in Japan for young women hired typically for clerical work within a company), from housewives preparing lunch at home to night owls in search of a late night meal, ramen in all of its forms has entered the lives of not only those in cities, but also those in the countryside as well.<sup>54</sup>

The ubiquity of instant ramen can be seen in its prevalence in many weekly newsmagazines targeting different segments of the population, many of which cite the convenience provided by the relatively new invention. Women’s magazines, for example, generally celebrated the convenience as a manifestation of scientific progress and suggested recipes that would improve on instant ramen, usually through the addition of ingredients. An issue of *Young Lady*, a weekly magazine targeting working women, notes twenty different ways to make use of instant ramen, such as by adding ketchup, canned tomato soup, garlic, hamburger meat, spaghetti sauce, bacon, or frozen fried rice. After listing the wide range of instant and frozen foods available on the market at the time, the article’s anonymous writer jovially observes, “The world sure has become a lot more convenient.”<sup>55</sup> An editorial in a magazine targeting agricultural workers suggests instant foods, such as instant ramen and instant coffee, to farmers as a

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> “Kore wa ikeru: shin sokuseki yashoku 20,” *Young Lady*, December 4, 1972, 130–33.

way for them to quickly regain their energy necessary to work the fields without wasting time preparing anything in the kitchen.<sup>56</sup>

Masaki Kato, a former manager at the Department of Intellectual Property of Nissin Foods, attributes this attraction to the convenience of instant ramen to a paradigm shift, or a fundamental change in the common values of Japanese society towards saving time. During the high-growth period, he writes, “The key word those days was ‘Time’. It was the marketing and selling of ‘time’ that was the driving force for the high growth of the Japanese economy. People believed in the phrase, ‘Time is money.’...Society needed a new simple way of cooking to meet the change in their lifestyles. The catchphrase that said “After pouring hot water, in 2 minutes its OK” completely overturned common sense about food.”<sup>57</sup> Towards the end of his article, he cites a 1985 survey featured in the national Yomiuri newspaper that asked for people’s first impression of instant ramen. Of the nearly three hundred people surveyed, over 60% of respondents answered that they were pleased instant ramen was capable of cooking so quickly.<sup>58</sup>

Minami Tomihiro, 81, from Nagano Prefecture stated that for him, time was also a key factor in his consumption of instant ramen. During his interview, he established that he remembers eating instant ramen nearly every day for lunch while he was working as an architect in the 1960s, and that he was particularly fond of not having to spend time washing dishes afterwards. Furthermore, he asserted,

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<sup>56</sup> “Insutanto shokuhin,” *Chijō*, February 1961, 130.

<sup>57</sup> Masaki Kato, “Nihon ga unda sekai shoku insutanto ramen,” *Ashita no Shokuhin Sangyou*, June 2014, 30.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

Everything was starting to move faster. Tokyo was expanding its railway system, and the Shinkansen (bullet train) connecting Tokyo to Osaka was opened in 1964. People could travel long distances in incredibly short amounts of time. Even news was travelling faster, thanks to television and radios. People wanted food that could keep up with their fast lifestyles, and instant ramen was perfect. I could eat it while waiting at the subway platform, or even while riding in the train car, without wasting any time.<sup>59</sup>

The desire for speed in everyday life is reflected in a 1966 piece from *Ushio*, a Buddhist magazine, by social critic and historian Murashima Kenichi, in which he delves into the sweeping social changes related to instant foods. The initial part of the article discusses the fad of adding the word “instant” to other words in Japanese to create new terms. He lists the terms he has recently encountered in conversations, such as “*insutanto miai*” (instant matchmaking) and “*insutanto mane’e biru*” (instant money bill, or money from pawned goods). He then mentions that even dictionaries provided by major publishers had begun treating the word “instant” as standard Japanese. He attributes this transformation of linguistic norms to incorporate a foreign term such as *insutanto* to the strong impact instant foods such as instant ramen had on the Japanese people’s perception of time; life in Japan was simply getting faster.<sup>60</sup> As such, the key factor in instant ramen’s appeal during the high-growth period was its convenience and efficiency that enhanced people’s ability to operate in a faster society.

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<sup>59</sup> Minami Tomihiro, Interview by Philip Lee, New York, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Murashima Kenichi, “*Insutanto shokuhin sōmakuri*,” *Ushio*, November 1966, 286.

## *Conclusion*

Murashima notes, “During the cold months, between October and March, Japanese households consume two servings of instant ramen every five days on average, which amounts to ten million servings per day.”<sup>61</sup> Notwithstanding his acknowledgement of the already high rate of consumption in 1966, instant ramen consumption in Japan grew even further, reaching a rate of forty-five servings annually per person over the next decade, where it has remained since.

The growth in popularity of instant ramen in 1960s Japan is directly related to its position within the context of the advent of mass consumption culture. Economic prosperity brought on by a mix of serendipity and careful economic planning allowed for the growth of a new middle class, concerned with meeting “Western” standards of living. The resulting proliferation of new kitchen technologies common in the American households seen on television programs permanently opened millions of doors of Japanese homes to not just instant ramen, but a whole range of instant foods.

Instant ramen producers scrambled to meet high demand, and eventually conformed to an industry under managed competition, similar to many governmentally controlled industries seen in Japan. Seeing that the Japanese people, now able to afford more luxuries than ever before, had acquired tastes for leisure, instant ramen began to market itself in different shapes and forms in order to attain popularity within the market. Towards the end of the high-growth era, instant ramen began to advertise itself as something distinctly

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Japanese in order to capitalize on notion of identity growing within the Japanese consciousness. Its success in doing so is ironic given that instant ramen had become popular due to a collective emulation of Western ideals (and even more so given that its very invention would have been made very difficult without wheat imports from the United States). Still, what kept consumers eating more and more instant ramen every day ultimately lay in the so called nature of the beast: its pure convenience, now accentuated by rapid socioeconomic change. Sasahara Ken, director of the international division of Nissin Foods, states simply, "Instant ramen has provided people...with more leisure and free time."<sup>62</sup>

However, convenience and efficiency would prove to be a double-edged sword for instant ramen in its attempts to preserve Japanese identity. While celebrity doctor Imai Michiko may have found a pack of instant ramen to remind her of her unique Japanese self, some might have criticized her statements to be ironic; for many, Imai Michiko, and other women enjoying instant ramen, were already surrendering to "Western" ideals.

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<sup>62</sup> Barak Kushner, *Slurp! A Social and Culinary History of Ramen – Japan's Favorite Noodle* (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2012),



## Chapter 3

### Instant Ramen, the Good Wife, and the Wise Mother

#### *Introduction*

The praise bestowed upon instant ramen for its convenience during the high growth period was parried by criticism concerning the social changes marked by the explosion of instant and frozen foods. For critics, the problem with instant ramen lay less with its convenience, but more with the people for whom it was convenient. In particular, instant ramen became the focus of a greater debate on the “Westernization” and oversimplification of domestic labor for women that accompanied economic prosperity.

The modernization of Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century involved the creation of new gender roles. Accordingly, the education of women focused on practical knowledge in household management in order to produce “good wives and wise mothers” (*ryosai kenbo*), idealized paragons able to maintain a harmonious household. From the late 1890s until the end of World War II, *ryosai kenbo* increasingly pervaded mass media and came to constitute the official discourse on women in Japan. The adoption of the new constitution in 1947, which guaranteed gender equality, marked a turning point for women’s rights in Japan.

However, the influence of *ryosai kenbo* did not immediately evaporate in the postwar era. Although overt attempts by the state to dictate womanhood decreased in intensity, the perception of a woman’s role in everyday Japanese society continued to operate under the *ryosai kenbo* ideology through the 1980s. The conservative ruling party and private companies continued to formulate

policies that assumed that wifehood and motherhood came first for women. Nonetheless, in the postwar era conservatives could no longer silence women by locking them away in the home. Activated by their own new interpretations of *ryosai kenbo*, women on countless occasions organized at the local, regional, and national levels to express their views on womanhood, eventually culminating in a call for the rejection of *ryosai kenbo*.

With regard to instant ramen, notions of *ryosai kenbo* were apparent in advertising in both newspapers and television. Instant ramen producers continuously attempted to target young urban mothers by catering to their perceived duty to provide for the family within the domestic sphere. Critics of the ascendance of instant ramen during the high growth era also betrayed the prewar notions of *ryosai kenbo*. Both men and women alike, alarmed by the social impact of instant foods, faulted women for relying on instant ramen, and denounced the supposed emulation of “Western” practices in the sphere of domestic labor as well as the resulting “liberation” of women from their place in the home.

Despite the conflict sparked by instant ramen between maintaining Japanese traditions of womanhood and succumbing to foreign standards of domestic labor, *ryosai kenbo* prevailed in defining acceptable kitchen etiquette for women; while it was wildly popular among housewives, instant ramen was not capable of explicitly jettisoning the strong tradition of “good wife, wise mother” out of the Japanese mass consciousness. Instead, instant ramen contributed to awareness among some women for the potentials of a

womanhood that existed outside of the home by reducing the time spent by women on daily household maintenance. This notion of women operating outside of the home in Japanese society coincided with the rise of the feminist in the 1970s towards personally rejecting *ryosai kenbo*. As such, instant ramen continued to both uphold and uproot traditional prewar Japanese values.

### *Ryosai kenbo in prewar Japanese society*

*Ryosai kenbo* defined women's contribution to the good of the nation to be their labor as "good wives" and "wise mothers" in the private world of the home. Ideally the "good wife" carefully managed the affairs of the household and advanced the well-being of its adult members, while the "wise mother" devoted herself to rearing her children to become loyal and obedient imperial subjects. According to a former education minister, the domestic tasks of the *ryosai kenbo* complemented those of her husband. Each worked in different ways for the sake of the nation:

The man goes outside to work to earn his living, to fulfill his duties to the State; it is the wife's part to help him, for the common interests of the house, and as her share of duty to the State, by sympathy and encouragement, by relieving him of his anxieties at home, managing household affairs, and above all, tending the old people and bringing up the children in a fit and proper manner.<sup>1</sup>

In the decades after 1899 the state made *ryosai kenbo* the cornerstone of women's education, first in the public higher girls' schools, then in the coeducational elementary schools and private mission schools for girls. In 1906

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<sup>1</sup> Dairoku Kikuchi, *Japanese Education: Lectures Delivered in the University of London* (London: John Murray, 1909), 266.

Education Minister Makino Nobuaki considered the creation of good wives and wise mothers to be the fundamental purpose of education, grounding his arguments for distinct goals and subject matter in girls' higher education in conceptions of women's difference:

As the male and female sexes differ, so too do their duties differ. The purpose of girls' education is to make *ryosai kenbo*. Recently some girls have received specialized education and wish to engage in vocations, but they are exceptional. In the end, a girl's duty is to become someone's wife and someone's mother; to manage the household; and to educate children.<sup>2</sup>

Both sexes were to be dutiful, patriotic subjects; however, the Education Ministry stressed additional traits for women – submissiveness to parents, husband, and in-laws, modesty, and chastity. Instilling of these virtues rather than academic training prepared young women to contribute to society and state through household management and child rearing rather than political, artistic, or economic activity in the public world.<sup>3</sup>

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century laws also hampered women's full participation in the world outside the home. Sever restrictions on women's political participation, including denial of the right to vote, predated the institutionalization of *ryosai kenbo* and reinforced the domestic destiny of women. Furthermore, the 1898 Civil Code placed nearly all women under the authority of a male head of household who chose the family domicile, controlled the family assets, and managed his wife's property. *Ryosai kenbo* also influenced company policies

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<sup>2</sup> Kathleen S. Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?", in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 299.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

regarding the residence, wages, and education of female factory workers; female workers were often exploited in factory dormitories, earned less than a living wage, and were constantly reminded that they were slated for the home rather than the factory.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding the sustained efforts of the state to shape female attitudes and behavior, resistance to *ryosai kenbo* emerged in prewar Japan. Women responded to conceptions of *ryosai kenbo* by fashioning their own distinctive visions of womanhood, which included representations of the *modan garu* (modern girl), the epitome of assertive young women who rejected chaste, submissive domesticity. Women also challenged the state's formulation of domestic activities in the form of a prewar suffrage movement, and various social reform, labor, and proletarian organizations dissented from the state's ideology of womanhood in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>5</sup>

However, in the great surge of nationalist sentiment following the Manchurian Incident (September 1931), feminism, including women's suffrage, was redefined as unpatriotic. In this inhospitable intellectual climate women's suffrage organizations abandoned their quest for equality of political rights with men, and instead sought to demonstrate women's capacity for political participation by championing passage of legislation to protect motherhood. As the imperial state became preoccupied with reproduction of the nation's labor supply in the late 1930s and 1940s, female activists employed appeals to motherhood to raise public awareness of women's concerns and to increase

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 301.

their public authority. While these appeals produced the greatest gains for women in the prewar period, independent women's associations became a casualty of the war when they dissolved in 1941.<sup>6</sup>

*Ryosai kenbo in the postwar state*

The early American occupation nurtured democracy in Japan to prevent a resurgence of militarism. Japanese and non-Japanese often cite the 1947 constitution, drafted by the staff of Douglas MacArthur, as the turning point for women's rights in Japan. Paragraph one of Article 14 guarantees that "All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin."<sup>7</sup> The newly drafted constitution also targeted the patrilineal household system of the prewar era and guaranteed "essential equality of the sexes" with regards to property rights, inheritance, and other matters pertaining to marriage and the family.<sup>8</sup>

These sudden, drastic postwar changes did not relegate *ryosai kenbo* to the corners of prewar memory, and gender-based discrimination operated across all levels of society throughout the postwar period. State employment policies demonstrated the postwar persistence of *ryosai kenbo*, at least until the implementation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986. To cope

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 302 – 303.

<sup>7</sup> Sandra Buckley, "Altered States: The Body Politics of 'Being-Woman'," in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 347.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

with a growing shortage of workers in the mid-1960s, state labor policies promoted full-time work for unmarried women and part-time work for married women because of their “family responsibilities”, especially their childrearing responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Education also did not completely abandon its prewar mission, and emphasized the notion that a woman’s place was in the home. By the late 1980s, though more women received postsecondary education than men did, the majority of women were enrolled in two-year junior colleges as opposed to four-universities. Furthermore, while nearly 75 percent of men were enrolled in social sciences and engineering, 29 percent of female students majored in home economics, 25 percent in humanities, and 20 percent in education.<sup>10</sup> Concerns over the reduced level of the nation’s birthrate, which created fears of a long-term decline in the available labor pool, prompted an ill-fated public appeal by Prime Minister Sato Eisaku, who soon after his election in 1964, asked that Japanese women bear more children.<sup>11</sup>

This echo of wartime eugenic policies created an immediate and heated reaction from women’s groups, and the organized response to Sato’s statement presented a new level of willingness to mobilize among women in the postwar period. The 1970s in particular was a watershed for the evolution of women’s movements, and members of the many national women’s organizations questioned the inevitability of women’s domestic destiny and sought to

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<sup>9</sup> Uno, 305.

<sup>10</sup> Buckley, 360.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 351.

contribute actively to the death of prewar *ryosai kenbo*.<sup>12</sup> In October 1970, two hundred helmeted women marched in an October 1970 peace demonstration under banners reading “What is femininity?” and “Mother, is marriage really bliss?” heralding the emergence of a woman’s movement explicitly rejecting domesticity as a woman’s inevitable destiny. As early as 1946, the founding statement of the Women’s Democratic Club advocated,

Every woman must bury her oppressive past and rise up with courage and prudence with the wisdom befitting a woman who devotes herself to the building of a bright and healthy Japan...We must come to a realization of the life-potential that rests in women and of its importance in the building of a happy society...We Japanese women who earnestly seek a guarantee of peace and happiness from society will endeavor to develop our abilities...by giving frank utterance to our true feelings about our aspirations...We are about to sail forth on the ocean of goodwill of the millions of Japanese women whose future knows no limit.<sup>13</sup>

Many of the newer organizations similarly sought to open new avenues of participation outside the home, and their efforts ranged from maintaining access to abortion to pushing for greater equity in the workplace.

### *Ryosai kenbo in instant ramen – representations and reactions*

The influence of *ryosai kenbo* in postwar Japan is clear when examining the ways in which instant ramen was marketed by producers and received by consumers. Advertisements on television and in newspapers often targeted urban young mothers and did so by glorifying the ideal of a woman who dutifully provided domestic labor for her husband and children. While instant ramen

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<sup>12</sup> Uno, 307.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 313.



presented itself as a product that was capable of preserving, and even enhancing the Japanese ideal of *ryosai kenbo*, both men and women were very wary of its social impact and feared the eventual “Westernization” of domestic labor and the “liberation” of women from the home.

The theme of a mother observing her duty by preparing a bowl of instant ramen for her hungry child was prominent in both newspaper and television advertisements, and instant ramen producers were skillful in justifying the use of instant ramen by mothers. In 1961, Ace Cook released a series of newspaper ads for its first line of instant ramen featuring a smiling mother pouring boiling hot water into a bowl of instant ramen for her equally ecstatic son.<sup>14</sup> Later in 1967, Nissin Foods advertised for its “Traditional Chikin Ramen” line using photographs of women in a super market happily shopping for bags of instant ramen, presumably for their families.<sup>15</sup> On television, the aforementioned 1963 Nissin Foods’ advertisement featuring a young boy and his mother who is dressed in a high-quality kimono and appears refined. They giggle together while holding a package of instant ramen.<sup>16</sup> None of the advertisements feature women personally eating the advertised product. The implication was that instant noodles were not meant to make mothers happy from consuming them directly; they were meant to make their children happy, and a happy child was the sign of their success as “wise mothers”.

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<sup>14</sup> George Solt, *The Untold History of Ramen: How Political Crisis in Japan Spawned a Global Food Craze* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 157.

<sup>15</sup> “[Koukoku] Wafu Chikin Ramen / Nissin Shokuhin,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1967.

<sup>16</sup> Solt, 157.

In response to these ads and others like it, some reactionary social critics began writing magazine editorials disparaging the widespread reliance on instant foods by young mothers as a sign of their laziness and excessive Americanization. Although there was no disagreement that the proliferation of household kitchen technologies and scientifically preserved foods in working households was a sign of national economic achievement – an indication that the Japanese were catching up with the oft-touted “American” standard of living – the reduction in time required to cook became a matter of controversy, and fears that an “American” approach to domestic labor had been imported to Japan began to proliferate.

An early 1955 article from the literary journal *Shoetsu Koen* nicely illustrates this tension by addressing the advent of frozen food and its impact on gender relations. The anonymous author begins by mentioning that the largest news story of the year was the record sales of washing machines, refrigerators, and televisions. Rather than being a cause of celebration, however, the writer views this situation only as evidence of how relatively poor and inconvenient everyday life in Japan had been until that point. He argues, “In America, ownership of dishwashers (let alone washing machines) is so common that it does not even generate any interest. Now on top of that we have ‘frozen food.’ After being liberated from the duties of cleaning and laundering, housewives are now freed from even the duty of cooking.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Reitō shokuji,” *Shōsetsu Kōen*, December 1955, 84.

After describing for unfamiliar readers what frozen food is and how it is prepared, he continues, "People's first thought may be that such an item cannot possibly taste good, but that is because they are thinking of the frozen foods they already know, such as *hokke* or *tara* (two varieties of cod). But the frozen foods being sold today in America have been developed and improved significantly over the last ten years. It is not an exaggeration to say that they are significantly better than the foods that Japanese people are accustomed to eating on a daily basis."<sup>18</sup>

The author predicts robust growth in the sale of frozen foods in Japan as long as price continues to decrease. He concludes, "The result of these trends will be the complete liberation of women from the kitchen, leaving them with only the task of giving birth. One would expect that such a situation would lead men to complain about the unequal division of labor, but in America they do not complain. This is what makes Americans who they are. If it were a Japanese man, he would probably have to make at least one complaint."<sup>19</sup> The article makes clear that changing practices of domestic labor were producing anxiety for social critics such as the author. Specifically, the decreased amount of time that female household managers required to prepare food was seen as a turn away from the very duties that defined femininity in Japan.

The type of apprehension voiced by such critics became a common theme in magazine editorials as instant ramen became increasingly popular in Japan. Another article in the November 13, 1960 issue of the popular newsmagazine

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

*Shukan Asahi*, which discusses the trade off in improved convenience of instant foods against increased atomization of eating, inadvertently captures the dilemma of increased reliance on instant ramen by housewives. Titled “It is the Instant Era: Food, Clothing, and Shelter, Everything Instant,” the article explores the novel dietary lifestyle associated with young bachelors dependent on instant food. By 1960, it was possible to substitute a day’s worth of meals and drinks with instant foods, giving rise to the notion of “the instant man” who lived solely off these products. The article depicts the instant man as an unmarried twenty-five-year-old salary man living in Tokyo. It highlights the abundance of new technologies, particularly with respect to food, that urban workers were enjoying, but also points out some older practices that were being lost:

The instant man’s day begins with a bowl of instant soup, some instant ramen, and a cup of instant coffee. After eating lunch at a self-service cafeteria at work, he buys his ingredients for dinner. These include instant “alpha rice” and some powdered “flavoring for fried rice mix.” He comes across a new line of canned goods at the store as well, which includes eel, lamb, and even *chawanmushi* (a savory steamed custard), and decides to buy them all, as he will surely consume them at some unknown time in the future. As he eats his dinner of instant fried rice mix and canned meat and prepares a dessert of instant red bean soup, he thinks to himself,

What has become of this world? Back when I was a student, on winter nights, I would hold my hungry stomach patiently waiting for the sound of the *charumera* flute played by the ramen *yatai*. Otherwise, I would spend an hour boiling rice in an enormous pot, which I would eat with miso soup and salted cucumbers that I made myself every week. Remembering those days, I take a look at the cupboard, but there are no knives, pots, or cutting boards. All I have are a can opener and a frying pan. When people ask, “What about the taste of food?” I must admit, it is not that good. But it is something I

should be able to put up with until I get married at least.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to describing the atomization generated by a dependency on instant foods, the article also reinforces the notion of a socially appropriate class of consumer for instant foods: a young, unmarried man. The expectation that the instant man would no longer need to “put up with” such foods once he was married points to the taboo of the overreliance on instant foods by housewives. In this way, critical editorial writers for salarymen-oriented newsmagazines discouraged the use of instant foods by those other than young bachelors.

The idea that there were appropriate and inappropriate gender contexts for eating instant ramen is further illustrated in the previously mentioned 1966 piece by Murashima Kenichi in the Buddhist magazine *Ushio*. After discussing the inclusion of foreign terms like *insutanto* into colloquial Japanese as an indication of the decline of Japan’s indigenous culture, Murashima attributes such disruptions primarily to shifting dietary habits, specifically to the mass consumption of instant ramen. Murashima examines the reasoning behind the popularization of what he calls “emergency foods” despite the lack of an emergency. He states that the two key reasons for the success of instant foods are their ability to be preserved for an extended period of time after production and the short period of time needed to reconstitute them when eating. He then raises the poignant question of what makes these two conditions, which are

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<sup>20</sup> “Insutanto jidai desu: ishokujū nandemo ‘sokuseki,’” *Shūkan Asahi*, November 13, 1960, 6.

usually associated with military readiness, so desirable to Japanese society at a time of peace. He writes,

On the war front, it is always difficult to know when one will be resupplied with basic goods. Raw foodstuffs are hard to obtain. Especially when conflict does break out, there is no time to cook. In this situation, it is necessary to have foods than can be preserved and prepared quickly.

Yet current conditions in society are completely different. There are no inconveniences in everyday life. There is more than enough time, and there are more than enough goods. What, then, is the reason behind the high value attached to foods that can be lengthily preserved and shortly reconstituted?<sup>21</sup>

For Murashima, the psychology of the consumer who eats emergency foods despite an absence of scarcity is puzzling and illustrates the pathology associated with the way in which Japanese society developed in order to achieve national economic prosperity.

Next Murashima differentiates between appropriate and inappropriate uses (or users) of instant foods, for which he provides explicit examples based on a gendered division of labor. Describing the appropriate uses and users of instant ramen, he notes:

I know three people who are close to me and are avid consumers of instant ramen. One is a college student. He lives in a dorm without a board. When he is up late at night studying, he fills his stomach with it.

Another one is a lawyer. Again, late at night, he is often facing his desk. Since his family is already sleeping, he eats it for a late-night snack.

The last is an entertainer. He is busy. Even in the morning, he has no time to sit down and eat. He makes [his food] quickly

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<sup>21</sup> Murashima Kenichi, "Insutanto shokuhin sōmakuri," *Ushio*, November 1966, 288.

and finishes it in a jiff...I believe these are the examples of the normal use of instant ramen.<sup>22</sup>

Each of his examples of acceptable use involves a man working during unusual hours. The independent, self-sacrificing, ambitious young man requiring irregular infusions of calories is the correct instant ramen consumer for Murashima. In other words, instant ramen may be used as a practical and effective way to boost men's productivity. The trouble with instant ramen, however, is its use as a means to reduce labor for housewives:

What could be the case [for such high sales of instant ramen]? It can be no reason other than that it is a staple meal for households.

The [instant ramen manufacturer's] industry has claimed to be "a product of the rationalization of life" or "an accompaniment to the innovative lifestyle," but that may be going too far.

An important part of a housewife's job is to provide nutritious foods to her husband and child. Am I so old-fashioned? I refuse to consider the shirking of duties by housewives to be a sign of rationalization or innovation.<sup>23</sup>

He finally addresses what he considers to be the problematic outcome of extra time afforded to housewives via the "rationalized lifestyle," namely, their intent focus upon their children's educational activities.

What are housewives doing with all the extra time and labor? Are they cultivating themselves? I hear nothing of the sort. Are they becoming engrossed in leisure pursuits? If so, I would be happy for them. But the reality is far from that...

Could television viewing really account for all the extra time housewives now have? My friend, who is a doctor, told me, "Not necessarily. Many of them are simply becoming obsessed over their children's education."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 290.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 292.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 293.

Murashima concludes by criticizing young fathers in Japan for allowing their wives to become education-obsessed mothers who cook instant foods instead of more nutritious, slow-cooked meals. His ire is not directed at manufacturers of instant ramen, nor its unmarried male consumers, but only at housewives who were focusing on the education of their children. His bewilderment at the changing practices of domestic labor resulting from advances in food-preservation technology illustrates how central the issue of gender was to debates about the social impact of instant foods in the postwar era.

Even some women writers – often with backgrounds in home economics – also bemoaned the decline of cooking and the advent of “too much time for leisure” resulting from the use of instant foods. For example, the same *Shukan Asahi* article from above quotes travel writer and food expert Tostuka Fumiko on the loss of culture entailed in the wholesale adoption of instant foods. “If the instant [lifestyle] goes to the extreme, humans become psychologically mechanized too, which brings about the destruction of the mental structure...[To counterbalance this trend], many American men have taken to Eastern philosophy and Zen Buddhism.”<sup>25</sup> In Totsuka’s opinion, the American interest in so-called Eastern thought was a reaction to the excessive pursuit of practical and scientific advancement that defined Western thought. She then notes how “Europeans are more balanced” and discourages Japanese from excessively embracing the “instant lifestyle” afforded by household technologies, here

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<sup>25</sup> “Insutanto jidai desu: ishokujū nandemo ‘sokuseki,’” 11.



equated to the standard American way of life.<sup>26</sup> The advent of the mother who was reliant on instant foods was troubling to those who preferred established household practices based on a clear gendering of domestic labor defined by prewar ideals of *ryosai kenbo*. Ultimately, therefore, advertisers and social critics of instant ramen frequently found themselves working towards opposing ends. While those producing instant ramen directly targeted young housewives in advertisements and encouraged the convenience afforded by their products as an enhancement of *ryosai kenbo*, critical editorial writers often condemned the use of instant ramen by young mothers as an inappropriate shirking of their kitchen chores.

*Instant ramen and the liberation of women – a correlation*

The alarm conveyed in voices critical of the use of instant ramen by housewives indicates the degree to which *ryosai kenbo* was entrenched in the Japanese mindset; the image of the Japanese housewife who fed her children instant ramen as opposed to preparing a full, nutritious meal was clearly upsetting to both men and women. However, the reality of the situation, that is whether instant ramen actually contributed to the total “liberation of women from the kitchen,” is much more difficult to decipher. There are no absolute metrics for a sense of “liberation” tied to the usage of instant ramen, or even instant foods in general.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

What is clear is that the majority of urban housewives relied on instant ramen quite a bit. Starting in the mid 1960s through the early 1970s, the *Asahi* national newspaper featured a series of instant ramen embellishment recipes in its housewife advice corner, “*Shufu Techo*” (Housewife’s Memo). The inclusion of ideas to make instant ramen tastier, such as through the addition of ingredients such as milk, radishes, or spices, in a newspaper with national readership suggests the popularity of instant ramen in the average Japanese housewife’s culinary repertoire at the time.<sup>27</sup> Even more explicitly, a 1985 survey conducted by the *Asahi* newspaper asked housewives in Tokyo ranging from their twenties to their forties of their thoughts and usage of instant ramen. Of the seven hundred housewives surveyed, over 90% of the respondents said they bought instant ramen at least once a week. When divided into age groups, 96.2% of housewives in their twenties, 93.1% of housewives in their thirties, and 86.6% of housewives in their forties bought instant ramen once a week, revealing that instant ramen, as feared, was favored by the younger generations of women. Furthermore, when asked for instant ramen’s most appealing factor, 89.5% of the housewives answered, “It eases the burden of cooking.”<sup>28</sup> For these women, instant ramen must have had some impact on their everyday lives by affording them at least a little more time for other activities.

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<sup>27</sup> “[Shufu Techo] Sokuseki ramen ni gyūnyū wo ireru,” *Asahi Shinbun*, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1965; “[Shufu Techo] Ramen no supaisu ryōhō,” *Asahi Shinbun*, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1968; “[Shufu Techo] Sokuseki ramen ni daikon oroshi,” *Asahi Shinbun*, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1969.

<sup>28</sup> “Insutanto ramen shufu anketo,” *Asahi Shinbun*, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1985.

Kathleen S. Uno offers the argument that instant foods contributed to a postwar ascendance of motherhood in the Japanese feminist consciousness during the 1960s, or a shift in the ideal of “good wife, wise mother” towards one emphasizing the mother. She asserts, “[The] diffusion of vacuum cleaners, washers, refrigerators, gas ranges, indoor plumbing, and prepackaged foods eased somewhat a wife’s burden of household chores, allowing her to devote more time to childrearing...[As] wives’ work in...maintaining the household and assisting in the family enterprise diminished, their nurturing activities as mothers became more apparent.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the mass consumption of instant foods allowed for housewives to spend less time on daily household chores and focus more on the development of their children. This is somewhat implied in the above article by Murashima, in which he lamented that more mothers were becoming “obsessed” over their children’s education as they spent less time cooking thanks to instant ramen.

While some observers have argued that more married women were able to enter the work force during the high-growth period because of the free time at their disposal from the spread of high-tech timesaving domestic appliances and instant foods, Sandra Buckley contends that these changes did little to alleviate the overall burden of *ryosai kenbo* in postwar Japan, as the majority of these women were working to support household income, and had to balance their jobs with six to seven hours of unpaid labor each day as a homemaker,

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<sup>29</sup> Uno, 304.

essentially reinforcing women's positions as a pillar of support within the home.<sup>30</sup>

The persistence of *ryosai kenbo* in the postwar period can perhaps be best observed through another culinary phenomenon unique to Japan: the *obento*. *Obentos* are boxed lunches Japanese mothers traditionally make for their children around nursery age, and its practice dates back as far as the Meiji era (1868 – 1912). The postwar history of *obento* is marked by a societal stress on the aesthetics of the lunch, and Japan in the 1970s in particular began to place emphasis on the balance of color and its visualization of the nutrients within the lunch. If one sought to achieve both nutrition and color harmony in lunch boxes every day, making *bento* soon became an arduous chore.<sup>31</sup> The anthropologist

Anne Allison says about *bento* preparation:

[The] key element is appearance. Food must be organized, reorganized, arranged, rearranged, stylized, and re-stylized to appear in a design that is visually attractive. Presentation is critical: not to the extent that taste and nutrition are displaced...but to the degree that how food looks is at least as important as how it tastes and how good and sustaining it is for one's body.<sup>32</sup>

Allison argues that mothers of young children, who were principally responsible for creating such fancy *bento*, faced a number of additional psychological pressures, as both they and their children would be judged on the quality of their

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<sup>30</sup> Buckley, 356.

<sup>31</sup> Tomoko Onabe, "Bento: Boxed Love, Eaten by the Eye," in *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*, ed. James Watson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 207.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

*bentos* within the institution of the Japanese nursery school system.<sup>33</sup> Responsible for creating a daily *bento* that would be both palatable and pleasant for the child as well as the nursery school, women of postwar Japan faced immense pressure to live up to the role of “wise mother”.

Still, to completely deny the influence of instant ramen on the lives of women in postwar Japan would seem wrong given its ubiquity among urban housewives, and it may be possible to assign a correlation between the spread of instant ramen and the changes in the feminist ideals of *ryosai kenbo* that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. For one, Iwao Sumiko found that over a twenty-year period between 1953 and 1973, Japanese women’s attitudes toward the position of women have become more positive. In 1953, some 64 percent of women interviewed preferred to be born as men versus 27 percent preferred to be born as women. In 1973 this proportion changed to 43 percent preferring to be men as opposed to 50 percent preferring to be women. In 1953, moreover, 39 percent of women respondents felt that men faced more difficulties than women whereas 42 percent thought the opposite. In 1973 there was a more favorable view of women’s position: 47 percent of women respondents said men’s life was more difficult versus 34 percent who said women’s life.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, perhaps in contrast to Buckley’s statement that the ease afforded by the introduction of electrical household appliances and instant foods was trivial compared to the burden of womanhood, women in Japan became more positive when comparing

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<sup>33</sup> Anne Allison, “Japanese Mothers and Obentos: The Lunch-Box as Ideological State Apparatus,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 64 (1991): 195.

<sup>34</sup> Anne E. Imamura, *Urban Japanese Housewives: At Home and in the Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 17.

their lifestyles to men's lifestyles during the high growth period when high-tech appliances and foods were becoming widespread.

Even more so, perhaps the most direct connection between instant ramen and women's feeling of independence from the home during the postwar period can be found in a 1977 article written by feminist writer Kano Mikiyo, boldly titled "Instant Ramen, a Mother's Taste, and the Liberation of Women". The author begins by revealing a glimpse of her everyday experiences balancing her part-time job with her responsibility to feed her children:

Muko is my daughter and Gen is my son in the fourth and second grades, respectively.

"Welcome home dear children; your father will be late again tonight, so you two should prepare your own dinner.

- 1) Use the rice cooker to prepare one cup of rice
- 2) Hamburgers and vegetables are in the freezer; you can fry them on the stove with butter
- 3) There are cooked tomatoes, cucumbers, and potatoes in the refrigerator; heat them in the microwave
- 4) Make your miso soup with the canned soybean curd"

Leaving this memo I rushed out of the house to my part-time job that I work at twice a week. As I walk briskly, I brush off the feeling of guilt and mumble to myself, "They have it easier than when I was a child."<sup>35</sup>

The introduction alludes to a household capable of functioning smoothly thanks to the abundance of electrical kitchen technologies and canned foods; the

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<sup>35</sup> Kano Mikiyo, "Instant Ramen, a Mother's Taste, and the Liberation of Women," *Shisou no Kagaku*, May 1977, 75.

elementary school children are able to feed themselves while the author is given time to work her part-time job, presumably to supplement the total household income.

The author continues by reminiscing about her childhood when she would be similarly responsible for feeding herself while her mother worked. In the absence of rice cookers, Mikiyo details the meticulousness required to properly cook rice in a pot placed over an electric heater; accurately timing when to manually turn on and off the electric coils of the heater was critical to a successful batch of cooked rice. She recounts an incident where she forgot to unplug the heater and only had a burned pot of rice prepared for her mother when she returned home from work. Instead of being “struck by Mother’s thunder,” as the author was expecting, the author’s mother apologizes to her, and promises to stay home more often to feed her.<sup>36</sup>

Mikiyo then comments about her situation regarding her own children:

Muko and Gen will never feel guilty about burning rice the way I did. Making dinner is far easier for them now. All they need to do is wash some rice and place it in an electric rice cooker. All the side dishes are frozen foods; just place them in the microwave. In the meantime they can watch television...

Nowadays the family does not need a woman known as the housewife. Just open the door to the kitchen and we can eat anything by simply cutting or heating it up. There are shelves full of instant ramen, instant curry, instant coffee, canned foods, etc. The fire and water needed to cook can now be found in one-touch systems around the kitchen, like rice cookers, microwaves, water boilers, and toasters.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 76.

The contrast between the author's childhood experiences and the experience of her own children reveal that electrical appliances and instant foods were capable of easing the minds of women who had children to take care of while working. Furthermore, while her own mother eventually stopped working, the author seemingly continues to work outside of the home thanks to the new accessibility of the kitchen.

Mikiyo further espouses the virtues of instant foods through its contributions to the feminist cause:

The rationalization of the kitchen brought by instant foods and electrical appliances has resulted in a great reduction of need for domestic labor. Some estimate that the housewife's time and energy in the kitchen has been reduced to a hundredth of the prewar amount. This might seem overestimated, but if you consider that housewives had to do things such as carry water from very far away from their home or collect firewood from the mountains, these figures might be correct.

Last year I was too busy writing my book, so I had no time to cook for my children and relied a lot on instant ramen to feed them...Women should abandon the useless position of housewife; stop clinging onto useless house chores in order to prove your existence, and become a real human being!<sup>38</sup>

Mikiyo therefore equates embracing the usage of instant ramen in the kitchen with the liberation of women from the confining traditions of *ryosai kenbo* in Japan. However, she does recognize the disadvantages to an overreliance on instant foods. She admits that while she felt liberated from the kitchen, she regrets her loss of traditional cooking ability, and hopes women retain their knowledge of cooking even while freed from the home. She writes towards the end of the article:

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



The consciousness of Japanese women these days follows the changes in our kitchens. The liberation of women therefore has started in the kitchen. But it is a somewhat cold liberation.<sup>39</sup>

As such, for women such as Mikiyo, instant ramen presented an opportunity to rethink what it meant to be a woman in postwar Japanese society. Though the apprehension over the loss of cooking skills indicates that women still felt the need to be able to cook with a certain level of finesse, instant foods and electrical appliances opened opportunities for women outside of the home, and encouraged a feeling of desire for liberation from the confining roles of *ryosai kenbo*. In this way, instant ramen contributed to the growing number of women's rights movements advocating the death of traditional *ryosai kenbo*.

This evolution in Japanese postwar feminist thought from one supporting *ryosai kenbo* in order to secure rights for women towards an outright rejection of it is best observed in reactions to another instant ramen related incident. In the late 1970s, Nissin Foods released a new television advertisement for one of its instant ramen product lines. The ad opens with a young woman preparing a serving of Nissin instant ramen in a kitchen laden with electrical appliances symbolic of the time. Her boyfriend enters the kitchen, presumably coming home from work, and readies himself for a nice, hearty meal of instant ramen. The woman then states, "*Watashi wa tsukuru hito*," ("I am the one who cooks.") while the man exclaims, "*Boku wa taberu hito!*" ("I am the one who eats!") The advertisement clearly reinforced the prevailing notions of engendered domestic

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 77.

labor; for men, the appropriate space for labor was outside the home, while for women, the home was where their energies were to be expended. This advertisement raised voices from several individual women's movements, which protested the message that women belonged at home placating men. The fact that this advertisement generated controversy in the 1970s whereas others supporting similar sentiments of "good wife, wise mother" in the 1960s received no criticism reflects the changes in Japanese feminism towards a complete rejection of *ryosai kenbo*, and for the first time in Nissin Foods history, the company had to remove an ad from television.<sup>40</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The 1947 Japanese constitution guaranteeing equal rights between men and women and the advent of instant foods like instant ramen in the 1960s did not cause a jettison of the ideal of *ryosai kenbo* from Japanese society. Disparity in wages, differences in education, and perceptions in advertising that clearly operated on a gendered basis relegating women to the home persisted throughout the postwar period. Instant ramen worked within the boundaries of *ryosai kenbo* and marketed itself to women as a friend of the young urban housewife, meant for consumption by her children and husband rather than herself.

Still, men and women alike feared that the spread of instant ramen amongst housewives would result in an eventual liberation of women from

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<sup>40</sup> Okada Naoki, Interview by Philip Lee, New York, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

perceived obligatory household duties, and that womanhood in Japan would converge towards a Western format. Many social critics believed instant ramen had appropriate and inappropriate contexts for usage, and that the housewife who relied on instant foods, or the “American” way of life, fell into the latter. Despite the efforts of instant ramen to present itself as a potential retainer of prewar traditions in womanhood, consumers were afraid of its potential to overthrow *ryosai kenbo* and Westernize Japanese women. As such, instant ramen once again found itself as both the cause and solution towards a problem of Westernization in Japanese society.

The reality of instant ramen’s effects on *ryosai kenbo* and the lives of women in postwar Japan are hard to measure, but it is safe to say that instant ramen was popular amongst urban housewives. Its popularity cannot be equated automatically to a death of *ryosai kenbo* and the nebulous “liberation” of women from the kitchen; practices such as *obento*-making, which is common in present day Japan, require immense work from mothers for their children, and apply enormous social pressure for women to succeed as mothers.

Instead, the popularity of instant ramen implies that for a certain group of women, instant ramen alleviated some of the burdens of household chores, and in doing so, urged women to reject *ryosai kenbo* from defining their womanhood. The case of Kano Mikiyo suggests that instant ramen allowed her to work outside the home while easily feeding her children, and also convinced her that in an age of high-tech kitchen appliances and foods, women were capable of finding their place outside of the kitchen. This burgeoning concept coincides

within the greater trend of Japanese feminism in the 1970s towards an outright refusal to uphold the traditional image of good wives and wise mothers, resulting in the successful protests against the antiquated ideal woman serving instant ramen in the late 1970s Nissin Foods advertisement.

The lives of mothers were not the only ones changing from the diffusion of instant ramen; Mikiyo states in her article that instant ramen became a staple of her children's diet while she worked on writing her book. Japan in the 1970s therefore observed an emergence of youths who were accustomed to foods like instant ramen. In particular, Japanese youth culture came to display a shift in eating mannerisms that revolved around the evolution of instant ramen introduced in 1971: cupped noodles had arrived.

## Chapter Four

### Instant Ramen and Youth Culture

Karuizawa is a resort town located in Nagano prefecture in the central highlands area of mainland Japan. It is home to mountainous slopes covered in heavy snowfall during the winter months, and has become a popular tourist spot for people in Tokyo looking to getaway from the city to engage in outdoor activities.

However, the 3,000 men in town on February 19, 1972 were not there to ski or ice skate. Donning full riot gear and armed with heavy mallets and chainsaws, the policemen surrounded the small Asama Mountain Villa, a small vacation lodge located on the outskirts of town. The five students inside the lodge also left their skis at home, instead electing to bring with them rifles to keep the police at a distance during an ensuing ten-day standoff. The situation was grim for the police; the lodge was a natural fortress, solidly constructed of thick concrete on a steep hillside with only one entrance, and the lodge manager's wife had been taken hostage by the young terrorists.

It was also very cold, with temperatures consistently below freezing in the mountains of Karuizawa. The subzero conditions completely froze the *bento* (lunchboxes) and *onigiri* (rice balls) provided for the police force in crisis situations. Lacking viable means of sustenance, hunger began to set in and accompany the bitter cold, reducing morale amongst the police.

In 1949, Ando Momofuku received inspiration from a scene of cold, hungry and defeated men. In 1972, such a scene would inspire him once again.

## *Introduction*

The scene in 1949 and the scene described above bear similarities to each other yet are also fundamentally different. The atmosphere in 1949 was one of defeat and depression. The conflict in 1972 reveals an anxious Japan, one that is wrought with tension.

Tension is an underlying theme in this chapter, as it describes many of the movements and changes in instant ramen and youth culture in 1970s Japan. It begins with instant ramen and the desire to introduce instant noodles to the rest of the world. The resulting invention of Cup Noodles by Ando Momofuku and the Nissin Foods Company reflects the tension between promoting Cup Noodles as a sign of Japan's scientific advancement since the end of the war and the influence of the United States in perfecting the construction of Cup Noodles.

Within Japan, Nissin Foods decided to market new Cup Noodles to a new youth culture, one that had grown up with instant ramen in the 1960s and was uneasy and tense. Young students relied on Cup Noodles to relieve stress from their high-pressure lifestyles characterized by endless studying and entrance examinations into guaranteed stability in the future. Students at the university level were engaging in forms of activism that grew more and more discontent with the status quo in Japan, and accordingly grew more and more violent. The intersection of Cup Noodles and violence in student activism would culminate in the conflict described at the beginning of this chapter.

As Cup Noodles grew in popularity, it began to affect the eating habits of the young people it attracted. Following the pattern of change brought about by

McDonald's and other foreign fast food restaurants in Japan, Cup Noodles both walked a fine line between tradition and Westernization in the way people approached the consumption of food in postwar Japan,

Finally, Cup Noodles drew significant attention abroad, becoming immensely popular in countries across the world. This popularity became a source of pride for Japanese people, who believed that Ando Momofuku's dream of creating a product that would herald Japan's culture to the world had come true. This contrasted with the aforementioned Westernization of dining etiquette, and while the rest of the world began to embrace Cup Noodles as a unique and powerful facet of Japanese culture, Cup Noodles contributed to the adoption of an increasingly Western style of life in Japan.

#### *Cup Noodles: International Instant Ramen*

The prominent evolution of instant ramen from a block of dried noodles in sealed, thin plastic wrapping to a block of dried noodles in a Styrofoam cup is representative of the Western, and in particular American, influences in the history of instant ramen in postwar Japan. As the average Japanese family gained in disposable income and acquired a taste for leisure activities such as expensive vacations abroad (see Chapter 2), Ando Momofuku whetted his own appetite for travel when he decided to fly to the United States to promote instant ramen as a new foodstuff to Americans that would spread the word of Japanese scientific advancements in food. In 1966 he travelled to Los Angeles to meet with the

Holiday Magic Company, a major marketing firm at the time, in hopes of forming a partnership that would expand Nissin Foods operations into the U.S. market.

Ando came to realize that the biggest barrier for instant ramen's entry into the stomachs of Americans was the drastic difference in utensils used between U.S. and Japanese consumers. At the time, while deep bowls used for single servings of rice or noodles were staples of the average Japanese kitchen, most American homes only had shallow soup bowls incapable of holding a full serving of instant ramen in them. So when Ando shared packs of *Chikin Ramen* with the representatives from Holiday Magic, he observed the Americans break apart the blocks of dried noodles in two, place them in Styrofoam cups, pour hot water over them, and eat them while standing, holding the cups in one hand and forks in the other.<sup>1</sup>

The American preference for Styrofoam cups perplexed Ando. According to a video exhibit at the Instant Ramen Museum in Yokohama, on his return flight home, Ando was sitting in the back of the plane eating macadamia nuts from a can with a plastic, re-sealable lid. Popping the lid on and off the container to pass the time, he suddenly realized that he had found the solution: he had to invent the container for instant noodles. He recognized that he would not be able to sell instant ramen in individual packets like he had in Japan up till that point, because general dining behavior was too different between the U.S. and Japan. If

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<sup>1</sup> Katsunori Morita, "The Product Development and Sales Promotion Plan of 'Chicken Ramen' and 'Cup Noodle' in Nissin Food Products," *Review of administration and informatics* 19 (2007): 37, <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/naid/110006391914> (accessed November 12th, 2014).



Nissin Foods wanted to successfully debut on the international dinner plate, the company needed to devise a its own delivery system, a container that one could cook the noodles in and eat the noodles out of. In this way, the idea for Cup Noodles originated from a desire to both champion Japanese food culture internationally and conform instant ramen to American standards of dining.<sup>2</sup>

Cup Noodle as a concept seems fairly obvious but the construction of a container that can serve as both packing mechanism and heat retention unit is tricky. Ando quickly settled on Styrofoam as the material for the container, but it took five years after Ando's visit to Los Angeles for the design to be perfected. In December 1966, Ando tested his first attempt at a cupped noodle product by selling "Cupped Chicken" in supermarkets around the Kansai area, but received complaints that the overall product was too big, too heavy, and too expensive. Further research and development into the elusive containment method for noodles in a Styrofoam cup were complicated in 1969 when there was a shortage in Japan of chemical ingredients required to manufacture Styrofoam. As a result, Nissin Foods created a joint venture with Dart Industries, a U.S. manufacturer of chemicals, plastics, and packaging, in order to source the polystyrene used in Styrofoam.<sup>3</sup> As such, Western influences were not only prominent in the original idea of Cup Noodles, but also in the physical realization of the product itself.

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<sup>2</sup> Ando Momofuku, *Maho no ramen, hatsumei monogatari* (Tokyo, Japan: Nihon Keizai Shinbusha, 2002), 95 – 96.

<sup>3</sup> Morita, 42.

The major difficulties with designing a suitable container for instant ramen were three-fold. The first problem involved the distribution of heat and moisture in a contained cup and its effects on the reconstitution of the dried noodles; an even distribution of noodles throughout the cup would result in the noodles being unevenly cooked due to the rising steam from when boiling water is added. Researchers and Nissin Foods found that an increased concentration of noodles towards the top of the cup would allow the noodles to be cooked evenly.

The second problem was the issue of keeping the fragile dried noodles safe inside the container during transport, but ready for boiling water once the container was opened. It was possible that without necessary precautions, the dried noodles would shake around inside the cup and break apart into smaller bits, making it harder to eat when reconstituted. A cross section of Cup Noodles reveals the solution: the noodles hang onto the middle of the cup and are suspended inside, with ample empty space below. This prevents the noodles from moving around too much if the container is shaken before it is opened, and also provides adequate space for the noodles to expand when boiling water is added.

The final hurdle involved the deceptively simple question of how to put the noodles in the cup during the production process. The root of the problem lay in the quality of manufacturing equipment at the time. These machines were clumsy, and incapable of dropping blocks of noodles neatly into the Styrofoam cups so that they would suspend in the manner described above. Ando Momofuku managed to turn this problem quite literally on its head: he made

simply design rearrangements to the machines so that they would drop the cups upside down over the blocks of noodles, then flip the cup right-side-up in order to have the noodles hang in the middle of the cup. Finally, after five years of trial and error, Cup Noodles, born from a mixture of Japanese ingenuity and the demands of the American consumer, was ready for its debut.

### *Cup Noodles, Students, and Terrorism*

As somewhat of a departure from previous instant ramen marketing efforts, Nissin Foods decided that their main target demographic for Cup Noodles would be teenagers and young adults. This is evidenced by the chosen location of the first sale of Cup Noodle to the public. Whereas *Chikin Ramen* was introduced in a department store in Osaka catering towards an older generation of shoppers, on September 18, 1971, Nissin Foods held their promotion for Cup Noodle in the fashionable Ginza district in Tokyo, where roadways were blocked to auto traffic on Sundays to create a weekly pedestrian's paradise. Promoters offered samples to young teenagers and adults strolling by as advertisers recorded their image on film, capturing their sense of wonder about the product and the ability to eat the noodle soup while walking. Nissin Foods ended the day having sold more than 20,000 cups of Cup Noodle.<sup>4</sup>

Advertising efforts for Cup Noodles certainly indicate that teenagers mired in their education were high priority targets for the new product. A 1973 newspaper advertisement for Cup Noodle features a picture of a teenager,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

presumably in high school, fending off sleep by consuming a cup of noodles while studying late into the night.<sup>5</sup> A late 1970s television ad accentuates this use of Cup Noodles even further; it features a senior in high school studying well into the night for his college entrance exams. Finding that he has become quite hungry, he realizes that his mother is asleep and that it would be unwise to wake her to ask her to feed him. Thankfully, with a cup of Nissin's Cup Noodles and some boiling hot water, the student is able to satiate his stomach and continue studying into the early morning.<sup>6</sup>

These advertisements were representative of the social pressure Japanese students felt with regards to success in school. During the high-growth period in Japan, the rise in personal income was matched by increases in expenditure for education as new middle class parents were determined to give their children better educations than they had received during the war. The Ministry of Education made it a national mission to accelerate its education program, and the number of high school, junior college, and university students nearly doubled between 1955 and 1965, with the number of high school students increasing from 2.6 million to 5.07 million, and college and university students rising from 600,000 to 1.09 million. The expenditure on education paved the way for the transformation of Japanese society in which educational background became the fundamental prerequisite for social status.<sup>7</sup> Students

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<sup>5</sup> Yanagisawa Yuriko, Interview by Philip Lee, New York, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Okada Naoki, Interview by Philip Lee, New York, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Tatsuro Uchino, *Japan's Postwar Economy: An Insider's View of Its History and Its Future*, trans. Mark A. Harbison (Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha International Ltd, 1978), 124.

had to distinguish themselves at an early age if they hoped to enter a top university, a feat that generally guaranteed a good, stable job in the future. Entrance exams could begin as early as the kindergarten level, and exam scores were common determinants for the quality of a child's middle school, high school, and university education. By the mid-1970s, pressure to achieve in children created the need for specialty schools, and 70% of students had enrolled in *juku*, or "cram schools", continuing their long school day preparing for entrance exams after regular school hours had ended.<sup>8</sup> In this context, instant ramen was already somewhat popular among students; a 1968 *Yomiuri* newspaper article states that, "For *kyukensei* (test-taking students) preparing for entrance exams, instant ramen is the frequent choice of fuel for their late night endeavors."<sup>9</sup> The message from the advertisements above therefore reinforced the notion that Cup Noodles could enhance studying for entrance exams, eventually leading to a stable future.

However, Cup Noodles would be the subject of a much more sensational form of advertisement through its connection with a slightly older demographic: college student activists. Student activism amongst university students in Japan gained traction beginning in 1960 as a means to contest the signing of the Japanese-American Security Treaty between Japan and the United States, which ensured the continued presence of U.S. military bases in Japan as well as an

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Nathan, *Japan Unbound: A Volatile Nation's Quest for Pride and Purpose* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 38.

<sup>9</sup> "Ramen banzai! Mise mo 'insutanto' mo daiseikyou," *Yomiuri Shinbun*, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

agreement that in the case of any attack against Japan or the U.S. within Japanese territorial administration, both countries would act to meet the common danger. Student activists were driven by the trauma of Japan's defeat in 1945 and a sense of having been betrayed by the older generation, most of whom suddenly switched with Japan's defeat from the extreme of supporting Japanese militarism and hatred of the Americans to the totally contradictory extreme of supporting democracy and love of yesterday's enemies. Dismayed that the National Diet had made the decision to pass the Japanese-American Security Treaty, students in universities across the nation banded together in peaceful demonstrations during the months of May and June 1960, in hopes to reverse the Diet's decision.<sup>10</sup>

After failing in their professed aim of nullifying the security treaty, for some time after, these student activists felt oppressed, and depressed by an overwhelming sense of frustration. Their attribution of the primary use of nonviolent democratic methods to their failure resulted in the evolution of a new radical and violent form of student activism by the late 1960s, driven by dissatisfaction with the postwar university system as well as U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. In the fall of 1967, a student protest against Prime Minister Eisaku Sato's supposed commitment to the American side of the Vietnam War ended with students openly attacking the police forces marshaled to obstruct them, resulting in the death of a Kyoto University student. In 1968, an ordinary

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<sup>10</sup> Kazuko Tsurumi, "Student Movements in 1960 and 1969: Continuity and Change," in *Postwar Trends in Japan: Studies in Commemoration of Rev. Aloysius Miller, S.J.* ed. Shunichi Takayangi and Kimitada Miwa (Tokyo, Japan: University of Tokyo Press, 1975), 199.

Japanese citizen was killed during a violent demonstration against the construction of a U.S. Army field hospital in Tokyo. The number of casualties short of death began to rise as well, as policemen began to use gas shells, tear gas, and water cannons against students engaging in violent protests.<sup>11</sup>

The trend of violence in student activism meant to contest the status quo continued through the 1970s, and eventually coincided with Cup Noodles in the most Forrest Gump-like fashion in the history of instant ramen. On February 19, 1972, members of a radical leftist student group known as the United Red Army killed fourteen of their own group's members and a bystander in a deadly purge. In order to evade the police, they then stormed the Asama Mountain Villa in Karuizawa and took the lodge manager's wife hostage, setting the scene described at the beginning of this chapter. Armed with rifles, the students held off the policemen for ten days and killed two police officers before being captured in a morning raid on February 28. Six television stations covered the incident live, which marked the first time a hostage crisis unfolded on television in Japan, and at one point was witnessed by 89.7 percent of all television viewers.<sup>12</sup>

During the standoff, reporters showed police eating Cup Noodles to fight off both the cold and hunger, as the traditional means of sustenance were frozen and impractical for consumption in the freezing temperatures. Ando Momofuku had recognized Cup Noodles' potential in this situation, and began selling the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>12</sup> Hayamizu Kenro, *Ramen to aikoku* (Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha Co., Ltd. 2011), 125.

product in bulk to the police force for half the retail cost. According to popular myth, the footage of the standoff, which ended with a bold raid of the villa, the freeing of the hostage, and the arrest of all five students, provided Cup Noodle with nationwide product recognition only five months after its launch. Years later, the students revealed that they, too, survived on instant ramen for most of the standoff after the police cut off heat and electricity to the lodge. The story goes that Nissin Foods was flooded by orders for Cup Noodles soon after the broadcast, and Cup Noodles began to sell like wildfire.<sup>13</sup>

While the Asama Mountain Villa Incident provides an interesting, albeit slightly surreal glimpse at the intersection between instant ramen and postwar trends in student activism in Japan, the claim that it was the spark that launched Cup Noodles into popularity is a little questionable. Minami Tomihiro, born in Nagano prefecture, stated that while he watched most of the broadcast of the incident, he only found out of Cup Noodles' role over a year later when he saw pictures of a policeman at the standoff eating Cup Noodles.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Okada Naoki and Yanagisawa Yuriko each remembered watching the incident on television, but both expressed confusion as to why it was brought up in the first place in an interview about instant ramen.<sup>15</sup> These responses indicate in a somewhat limited manner that the effect of the live broadcast of the Asama Mountain Villa Incident on the sales of Cup Noodles in Japan was not as impactful as popular opinion suggests.

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<sup>13</sup> Morita, 46.

<sup>14</sup> Minami Tomihiro, Interview by Philip Lee, New York, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Naoki; Yanagisawa.



This discrepancy is further accentuated through an evaluation of the sales numbers of Cup Noodles in 1972 against the total population of Japan at the time. Between the release of Cup Noodles in September 1971 and December 1972, estimates for the total sales of the product range between 110 million and 180 million servings.<sup>16</sup> In 1972, the total population of Japan was approximately 107 million people, with a little under an average of 4 people per Japanese household.<sup>17</sup> This yields a total of 26.8 million approximate households. As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, by 1965, 90% of all households owned a black-and-white television set, meaning that about 24 million households had the potential to watch the Asama Mountain Villa Incident live on television.<sup>18</sup> Since the incident attained nearly 90% viewership at its peak moments, a total of 21.6 million households could have seen Cup Noodles fending off the cold and hunger amongst the policemen who were at the standoff. Even when taking the upper estimate of 180 million servings of Cup Noodles consumed, each household consumed a little over 8 servings of Cup Noodles since the product's release. Since each household has an average of 4 members, that comes down to 2 servings per person over a sixteen month period in Japan. These calculations indicate that it would be difficult to attribute the popularity of Cup Noodles to the live broadcast; the Asama Mountain Villa Incident should therefore be taken

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<sup>16</sup> Nippon Ramen Research Institute, *Ramen* (Tokyo, Japan: Nihon Keizai Shinbusha, 1985), 54.

<sup>17</sup> Sandra Buckley, "Altered States: The Body Politics of 'Being-Woman'," in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 348.

<sup>18</sup> Marilyn Ivy, "Formations of Mass Culture," in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 249.

as another instance of instant ramen standing witness to postwar trends in Japan.

*Eating While Standing: Cup Noodles and Japanese Table Manners*

Ultimately, Cup Noodles did achieve popularity in Japan; by 1977, over one billion servings of Cup Noodles were being consumed annually.<sup>19</sup> The fact, then, that Cup Noodles had been developed with the American consumer in mind begs the question: did this popularity lead to changes in the way Japanese eat food? This question is perhaps best explored by examining the advent of American fast foods, in particular McDonald's, in Japan and its effect on Japanese eating habits.

Like Cup Noodles, McDonald's was introduced in Japan in 1971, by Den Fujita, then student at Tokyo University. He began with five restaurants and a \$1.3 million investment during the period of economic prosperity in Japan. While McDonald's in the U.S. adopts a "suburban" approach to picking the location of its restaurants, like Cup Noodles, McDonald's in Japan opened its first restaurant on the trendy streets of Ginza. Also like Cup Noodles, McDonald's in Japan grew to be incredibly popular; by 1986 McDonald's was ranked as the number one in total sales among Japan's service companies, and had expanded to 556 restaurants, amounting to a \$766.5 million empire.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Nippon Ramen Institute, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, "McDonald's in Japan: Changing Manners and Etiquette," in *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*, ed. James Watson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 162.

One of the most striking elements of McDonald's introduction to Japan is that it encouraged the Japanese to eat differently, resulting in a slight shift in general table manners. In her paper "McDonald's in Japan," anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney explains that while some common Japanese habits and practices, such as breastfeeding or urinating in public, were eradicated by Western influence, table manners, as an extremely significant concept to Japanese civility, have been much more resistant to change.<sup>21</sup> She then discusses the two traditional rules that McDonald's challenged in Japan: one must not touch food with one's hand when eating, and one must not eat while standing.

With regards to the first rule, she states:

[Hands] are, by definition, dirty, even after washing. Hands touch all sorts of things and thus are always contaminated. Symbolically, hands stand for a liminal space demarcating the clean inside – the body, the self – from the dirty outside...Many Japanese find it difficult to eat sandwiches with their bare hands. To accommodate these sensibilities, sandwiches are often served cut into small pieces, with toothpicks for handling.<sup>22</sup>

Other than culturally prescribed foods that Japanese must eat with their hands, such as *onigiri* (rice balls), the hands are never to touch the food when eating.

According to Ohnuki-Tierney, McDonald's did not have much impact on this first rule of dining etiquette in Japan. Many Japanese she observed for the purpose of her article kept the paper wrapping around the burger in order to avoid touching the food with their bare hands. Additionally, she failed to see any substantial increase in the use of hands when eating other foods, and concludes

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 176 – 177.

that the first rule of Japanese table etiquette received little impact from the introduction of McDonald's.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, McDonald's has certainly affected the second rule prohibiting eating while standing. On this rule, Ohnuki-Tierney writes:

“Eating while standing,” called *tachigui*, had had negative connotations in Japanese culture for centuries. It derives from the notion that one of the main distinctions between humans and animals is that the latter eat while standing...Nagai Kafu, [a] famous novelist, characterized Chicago as “the place where people grab food while standing” in his *Amerika Monogatari* (Stories about America), published in 1908. Kafu's observation clearly indicates how the custom of *tachigui* is seen as a marker of foreigners...in contrast to the Japanese. Proper Japanese table manners include sitting on one's legs on the floor and eating at a low table.<sup>24</sup>

McDonald's contributed to the spread of table manners that were the polar opposite of traditional Japanese etiquette. Hamburgers and French fries required no plates or tables, and the first McDonald's in Japan didn't even have seats, forcing people to eat while standing. Furthermore, the fact that McDonald's opened in fashionable locations helped convince young people that eating while standing was somehow chic.<sup>25</sup> This trend in eating while standing is accentuated by a *Yomiuri* newspaper article in 1972 titled, “At Ginza, *Tachigui* is Cool and Hip,” which describes the loss of traditional Japanese dining etiquette at the hands of “finger foods” restaurants such as McDonald's and KFC.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 177 – 178.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>26</sup> “Kaigai demo daikouhyou,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1979.

In the context of these two rules of appropriate Japanese table manners, Cup Noodles also contributed to the increasing popularity of *tachigui*. Cup Noodles advertisements often emphasized the sense of freedom offered by the ability to eat while on the move. One of the earliest newspaper advertisements for Cup Noodles featured a young man holding a cup of Cup Noodles in one hand while vaulting over a fence with the other next to the sea. The slogan for the advertisement reads, “With a cup and a fork, the you who can do anything. Truly, truly a good time,” further emphasizing the pure sense of free will that came with Cup Noodles.<sup>27</sup> In this way, Cup Noodles overturned traditional Japanese table manners towards an American format.

However, unlike McDonald’s, Cup Noodles reinforced the first rule of no contact between hand and food. Ando intentionally designed the product so that it could be enjoyed with a fork or chopsticks, with no need for the American consumer to break apart the dried noodles with their hands before adding hot water, just as the people from the Happy Magic Company did. Therefore, Cup Noodles operated within the boundaries of the first rule of Japanese dining etiquette, and therefore also preserved tradition in table manners.

### *Cup Noodles Abroad*

At the same time it was simultaneously preserving tradition and promoting Americanization in Japan, Cup Noodles was fulfilling Ando Momofuku’s original intent to champion Japanese food products abroad. A 1979

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

article in the *Yomiuri* newspaper, simply titled “Huge Popularity Overseas,” nicely summarizes the product’s footprint outside of Japan.

The article, which features a picture of a young couple eating Cup Noodles by the Avenue des Champs-Elysees in Paris, begins by stating, “Overseas, they have opened their eyes. Instant ramen, born in Japan, is now taking countries all over the world by storm.”<sup>28</sup> The article continues by exploring the breadth of countries, now under the irresistible influence of instant ramen:

From Pennsylvania to Los Angeles, all of America knows the name Nissin. In Europe, France and England can’t stop eating Cup Noodles. In Brazil, instant ramen’s popularity is number one.<sup>29</sup>

The popularity of Cup Noodles and instant ramen abroad caused a reaction in foreign frozen and instant food industries, as companies struggled to compete against Nissin Foods’ overseas operations. The article describes a “Brazilian ramen” made to compete against Japanese instant ramen:

This Brazilian ramen, compared to our instant ramen, has half the flavor, half the noodles, and double the oil, and the feeling of greasiness is strong. It is full of additives and tastes poor... The world is years behind Japan in making delicious instant ramen.<sup>30</sup>

The article ends by definitively stating, “In this era of instant and frozen foods, instant ramen, and Japan, is king.”<sup>31</sup> As such, Cup Noodles, and instant ramen found popularity abroad as well as at home, and its proliferation around the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

world became a source of pride for some Japanese, even if it sometimes eroded tradition within the boundaries of Japan itself.

### *Conclusion*

The development of Cup Noodles by Ando Momofuku paralleled the invention of *Chikin Ramen* in terms of contradictions between its intended purpose and the terms of its origination. In 1958, Ando sought to preserve Japanese food culture through instant ramen, but was only able to do so by utilizing U.S. wheat. In 1966, Ando wished to create a food that would promote Japanese food on an international level, but did so by aiming to placate the desires of American consumers to ensure a smooth entry into foreign markets. By 1971, he had succeeded in creating Cup Noodles, but did so with the help of a U.S. company for the purposes of sourcing materials.

Cup Noodles' entry into Japanese society was characterized by a preference for targeting teenagers and young adults as opposed to children and parents in terms of marketing. Conscious of instant ramen's popularity among students, Cupped Noodles managed to cater to the needs and desires of students feeling pressured by society to succeed in school. At the same time, the product found itself playing an integral role in a conflict between radical student activists and the police in the Asama Mountain Villa Incident. In this way, Cupped Noodles directly experienced the social changes defining the experiences of students in postwar Japan.

Having grown in popularity, Cup Noodles also continued to walk the fine line between tradition and Westernization by both protecting and eroding Japanese table manners. Following the lead of fast food restaurants such as McDonald's, Cupped Noodles contributed to the loosening of social stigma over the practice of eating while standing. However, unlike McDonald's, Cupped Noodles epitomized the rule that hands should not touch food while eating, as it was designed to be enjoyed with a fork or chopsticks.

Finally, while Cup Noodles in Japan contested traditional table manners, on the international stage it made headway into the stomachs of people of all nationalities, gaining popularity and competitors in countries across the globe. In this way, Cup Noodles served as the paragon of Japanese culture in the manner Ando Momofuku wanted it to be, becoming a source of pride for some Japanese.



## Conclusion

In 1979, the national *Yomiuri* newspaper published a half-page article titled, “Twenty Years Strong! Instant Ramen’s Footprint in History” in celebration of the passing of instant noodles’ twentieth anniversary. The author begins with a brief history of instant ramen; in 1958, Ando Momofuku invented *Chikin Ramen*, the first instant ramen brand, and in 1971, he invented Cup Noodles, the biggest pioneering step in instant ramen history. He proved skillful in the ways of marketing, and Nissin’s television advertisements captured the essence of postwar trends in Japan. After citing facts supporting the level of popularity instant ramen had achieved so far, the author state, “Today, it is a national food (*kokuminshoku*) of Japan.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Is Instant Ramen Japanese?*

The preceding chapters illustrate that this assertion is not an incredibly obvious one to make. Instant ramen is a food of endless contradictions and incongruities; it was based off a dish Chinese in origin, conceived by a Taiwanese-Japanese entrepreneur, made from American wheat flour, and perceived as the solution to a problem of Westernization in the Japanese diet. During the high-growth period, it contributed to the emulation of Western middle class values that involved the usage of instant foods, but also acted as a vehicle for Japanese to retain their Japanese identities. Women were simultaneously encouraged by it to pursue Western ideals of domestic labor, and

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<sup>1</sup> “Mou niyju nen! Sokuseki men no sokuseki,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1979.

stifled by it through its presentation of traditional perceptions of Japanese womanhood in advertisements. Finally, traditional Japanese table manners were both reinforced and ignored by instant ramen in favor of Western styles of eating.

Instant ramen is therefore a useful proxy for understanding important aspects of social change in everyday life revolving around the tension between the acceptance of and apprehension towards modernity in the postwar state. Whether it was the Occupation period struggle between wheat and rice, the high growth era's emergence of the new middle class, the supposed death of *ryosai kenbo*, or the dining etiquette of Japan's youth in the 1970s, instant ramen was there to witness and participate in the many transformations that pushed and pulled postwar Japan between tradition and foreign influences. It is the contradictions in instant ramen's existence, its history as both a symbol of tradition and a symbol of foreign influence in everyday Japan that, interestingly enough, make it *kokuminshoku*.

### *Instant Ramen Goes Around the Globe*

In more recent years, the influence of instant ramen has continued to grow worldwide. Nissin gained global stature as a critical supplier of instant and cupped ramen in times of crisis following natural disasters. The Kobe earthquake of 1995, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011 reinforced the usefulness of instant ramen following calamities.

Not all instances of instant ramen around the world have been entirely positive. The 1996 Japanese embassy hostage crisis in Peru bore similarities to the Asama Mountain Villa Incident of 1972, in the sense that the militants holding hostages in the embassy were able to sustain themselves easily for 126 days thanks to a large holding of Cup Noodles located in the embassy kitchen. The crisis ended in a raid by Peruvian Armed Forces commandos, during which all the insurgents were killed.<sup>2</sup>

In the mean time, Ando Momofuku's love for labor continued to tirelessly drive him to improve his instant ramen. In 2005, at the age of 90, he debuted Space Ram, the first instant noodle edible in space, which was carried aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery to take a literal trip around the globe. Ando passed away two years later, attributing his health at his old age to a healthy diet of instant ramen.

In celebration of his 105<sup>th</sup> birthday, on March 5, 2015, the homepage for Google featured animations of Ando Momofuku researching the science behind instant ramen, creating instant ramen in the shed in 1958, and floating in space with a packet of Space Ram. Clicking on any of these animations would redirect you to Google's Doodle website, which shared the story of his invention of instant ramen nearly half a century ago. The webpage also shared the countries

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<sup>2</sup> Hayamizu Kenro, *Ramen to aikoku* (Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha Co., Ltd. 2011), 268.

in which these doodles were available, showing that Ando Momofuku's instant ramen was being celebrated worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

Technology may rule the world, but for the day of March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, it all started with food.

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<sup>3</sup> "Momofuku Ando's 105<sup>th</sup> Birthday," Google Doodles Archive, <http://www.google.com/doodles/momofuku-andos-105th-birthday>, accessed March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

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