

Food Culture of the 21st Century

Shosaburo Kimura

Professor Emeritus, University of Tokyo



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President, Shizuoka University of Art and Culture

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Professor Shosaburo Kimura was born in Tokyo in 1930. He graduated from the Faculty of Literature of Tokyo University, having majored in Western history. He was appointed professor of the Faculty of Liberal Arts of Tokyo University in 1976, and was named professor emeritus of the university in 1990. Prof. Kimura assumes a unique historical perspective and is interdisciplinary in his views as a historian. He sits on various influential councils in the Ministry of Finance, the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Health and Welfare. Prof. Kimura is also director of the Kagoshima Prefectural Kirishima International Music Hall and director-general of the Toyota Foundation. In recent years, Prof. Kimura has served as chairman of the Council for Basic Investigation into Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, an advisory body to the Prime Minister. He compiled the guidelines for the New Basic Agricultural Law promulgated in July 1999, and he speaks and writes actively on agriculture and food culture. His published works include: *Discovery of History, Image of Western Civilization, The Age of Tilling Culture, The Age of Beautiful 'Agriculture' and The Age of the Family*. Prof. Kimura supervised production of all five parts of the motion picture, *Food Culture of Europe*.

This age faces the largest transformations of the past 100 years, and food culture may be expected to undergo equally dramatic changes in the 21st century. The enormous movement and interaction of people on a global scale will serve to intricately link the enjoyment of dining to locale, making this the standard for Japanese as well as everyone around the world.

According to statistics announced by the World Tourist Organization (WTO; headquarters: Madrid), the number of international tourists in 1998 reached 625 million, more than 10% of the world's population. The WTO further estimates that this figure can be expected to increase to 700 million in 2000, 1 billion in 2010 and 1.6 billion in 2020, making tourism the largest industry of the 21st century.

Our technology-based civilization has matured for the most part, and radically innovative industrial products and technologies that produce "surprise and joy" or which impart vigorous benefits are uncommon. While innovations in information technology and electronics technologies may bring joy to the intellect, those technologies that bestow an enhanced vitality are no longer so clearly evident.

Accordingly, the sense of time as one moves toward the future recedes and in its place, a sense of space has emerged—and thus do people travel. An age of mobility has begun, and those products that move together with people sell well; for example, mobile phones and notebook computers.

With respect to food, dining out will become even more common. The trend will change from full-course dinners that involve sitting quietly in a chair for hours on end, and move toward single-dish or down-to-earth meals that allow one to move on quickly to the next activity. Other best-sellers will include food in motion, such as *kaitenzushi* (conveyor-belt sushi) and other foods served via revolving carousel; also box lunches and beverages in cans or PET bottles. The sales point for sleeping accommodations will be timely box lunches provided upon departure, rather than luxurious dinners.

If we consider this to be primarily an age of mobility, we can further characterize it as an age of food culture in which the enjoyment of eating is emphasized. As confidence in the future declines and the lack of a sense of progress pervades, the desire grows to live each moment of each day in the most meaningful manner possible. Being alone is disheartening and insecure, thus enjoyment is sought

in groups and group meals. The 21st century may also be termed the age of group dining, and opportunities to attend parties and eat out will increase in the future.

An age will arise in which the Japanese concept of *ninjo* (human feelings) attains world acceptance. Even in France, where the concept of eating with the family is a strong precept, the notion of the business lunch and dinner is gaining ground. Still, in these cases, no business is discussed until the main dish arrives; the emphasis is on building personal intimacy and enjoying the meal. This is an attempt to survive in the 21st century through mutual support with the public self and the private self—with society and the individual intricately entwined.

To this end, the idea of pleasant company, good food and good conversation will become indispensable in the food culture of the future. Eating like an ascetic is not enjoyable—and that which is not enjoyable is not culture. In the past, it has been said that, whereas Japanese go to restaurants to eat delicious food and Americans go to avoid having to cook at home, the French go to restaurants to enjoy close mutual relationships. However, in the 21st century, restaurant dining can be expected to take on a French nuance throughout the world.

The food of the 21st century will exist to give full meaning to the concept "living and life," and to achieve a mutual linking of the spirit—this could be considered a Latin, or Catholic point of view. In this sense, food in the new century will embody a major transformation, away from the Protestant, or Germanic point of view wherein food is regarded merely as a means to life. In the U.K., good restaurants are beginning to emerge; and Americans are becoming aware that the French custom of leisurely meals accompanied by red wine is a healthier alternative that reduces the risk of heart disease.

The country that attracts the greatest number of tourists worldwide is France. In 1998, the number of tourists to France reached 70 million. This exceeds by far the population of France (58 million). Taking into consideration the fact that tourists visiting both the second-placed U.S. and third-placed Spain numbered about 47 million each, the overwhelming appeal of France is apparent. The secret to this appeal is nothing more than the delicious food and wine of France, which allow one to experience enjoyment and friendship. In any town of any province there are inexpensive traditional restaurants that offer the delicious agricultural produce of the region served with smiles and humanity.

Finding enjoyment in eating the produce of the region while in that region—herein lies the essence of a

food culture that gives confidence in life, pride to the people of the region and ultimately, enjoyment and security. Further, it imparts meaning to the act of travel and bestows happiness upon the traveler. In this sense, food culture is definitely regional in character and is intricately linked to the ingredients of that region, its land, air and water, its mountainous or lowland features, its dryness or humidity, its chilliness or temperateness.

Against the backdrop of global migration and human interface, together with collective insights in food-related techniques, great progress has been noted in the use of soy sauce in French cuisine and French spices in Japanese food. The presentation, the positioning of tableware, the design of restaurants—there is no doubt that various initiatives will be seen in these areas as well.

Yet it is also a fact that food culture will clarify its true nature, as the character of regionalism is manifested globally. There will be further pursuit of flavors specific to one area that can be enjoyed by the world. This "regionalization," then, will be the third and greatest characteristic of food culture in the 21st century.

With respect to Japan's food culture, one significant issue is the revival of Japanese cuisine that can be appreciated around the world. This involves utilizing food ingredients found in various regions in a manner appropriate to the land, and diversifying the new provincial cuisines of Japan. In addition to the use of meat and spices, there is a need to incorporate a sophisticated sense appropriate to the local culture.

What is important in such an endeavor is how Japanese sake, Japanese green tea and chopsticks can be Westernized, and how the culture of rice and soy sauce (as seen in rice-bowl dishes and rice balls) may be presented in a more appealing manner.

What would the reaction be if hotels were to serve quality Japanese green tea with a small baked rice ball rather than coffee, tea and cakes? Or if a mini-beef bowl or mini-tempura bowl were to be included in French cuisine, together with Japanese sake and Japanese green tea? If this "regional uniqueness" were to progress further, think of the pleasure, the lively conversation and lasting insight that would be enjoyed both by Japanese and non-Japanese.

The courage and vitality it takes to live under a recession and the confidence and security of living in a specific land begin with the creation of a Japanese-style cuisine that is both unique to its region and filled with variety. I personally believe that the food culture of the 21st century is one in which people from throughout the world will enjoy such regional foods and encounter friendships in that satisfaction.