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DISCOURSE ON FOOD IN WORLD WAR II JAPAN

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Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg. The eggs are the unarmed civilians who are crushed and burned and shot by them... And each of us, to a greater or lesser degree, is confronting a high, solid wall. The wall has a name: It is The System. The System is supposed to protect us, but sometimes it takes on a life of its own and then it begins to kill us and cause us to kill others - coldly, efficiently, systematically. – *Haruki Murakami*

Food consumption during wartime is not only the usual fundamental source of energy, especially for soldiers in combat; it is also “an important home-front weapon essential for preserving order and productivity” of the citizens.¹ This study analyzes the sociopolitical and cultural meaning of food in Japan during World War II by examining social commentary and criticism implied in selected post-war literature about the war by popular writers, when the role of food during wartime in the lives of ordinary citizens could be depicted without censorship. These literary works offer insight into the inner lives and conflicts of ordinary Japanese citizens, including civilians and conscripted soldiers, under the fascist military regime during the war.

The criticism of the military government and social commentary in these works with respect to food can be categorized into political and cultural aspects. Research on the political aspect of food can be summarized in the phrase “plenty versus shortage”; focusing primarily on the control exercised by the state, which has the effect of carrot-and-stick manipulation. The study of the cultural aspect focuses on the Westernization of Japanese food, which appears to have contributed to the ambivalence in particular of the Japanese urban citizen in treating the allies as enemies, an ambiguity that lingered despite the military government’s anti-Western propaganda.

This analysis incorporates food studies to examine the sociocultural aspects of food that permeated Japanese interpersonal relationships and sense

¹ Katarzyna J. Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006), 117.

of identity during the war.² From a sociocultural point of view, attitudes towards food can be discussed as a means of “sociocultural identity” at different levels, i.e. gender, class, ethnicity and nation.³ Membership in the community can occasionally be negotiated or exchanged through “communication” by expressing belonging or “attaining desired states.”⁴

These states can enhance group solidarity among members.⁵ Finally, food can be a “profoundly moral issue” because, at the moral minimum, in David M. Kaplan’s phrasing, “we should neither eat people nor deprive them of food. We probably have an obligation to prevent starvation and to feed the hungry.”⁶ The insights of the studies from which these initial quotations are taken are woven into the following discussion, which analyzes the sociocultural aspects of portions of Japanese post-war literature dealing with World War II.

First, this study analyzes the effect of the government’s manipulation of food on soldiers. Second, the paper discusses urbanite struggles, the crisis management of food shortages under governmental rationing and surveillance, and urbanite conflicts with the military and farmers. Particularly, the extent to which Western food affected the Japanese nation during the war will be studied. All the selected post-war literature is either highly autobiographical or has a documentary component.⁷ Literary works employed in this study include the writings of military personnel on

² Claude Fischler, “Food, Self, and Identity.” *Social Science Information* 27/2 (1998), 275.

³ Peter Scholliers, *Food, Drink and Identity* (New York: Berg 2001), 7–8; David M. Kaplan, *Philosophy of Food* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 9–12.

⁴ Roland Barthes, “Psychology of Contemporary Food Consumption,” in Carol Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader*. (NY: Routledge, 2009), 8.

⁵ Eugene Newton Anderson, *Everyone Eats* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 10.

⁶ Kaplan, *Philosophy of Food*, 10.

⁷ The only exception is Tsuboe Sakai’s *Twenty Four Eyes*, because it was one of the very few works that has explicit criticism of the government through comment on its food policies. The work covers the period from 1928 to 1946.

the frontline, such as *Fires on the Plain*,⁸ *Devil's Gluttony*,⁹ *Soldiers in the Tree*,¹⁰ and *Soldiers in the Jungle*.¹¹ Japanese civilians are treated in *Twenty-Four Eyes*,¹² *Black Rain*,¹³ *Grave of the Fireflies*¹⁴ and "American *Hijiki*."¹⁵

Before moving to the main discussion, it is imperative to provide a brief historical background to World War II Japan. Due to the drastic increase of urban populations, owing to the rapid Western industrialization of the country that began in 1868, Japan had gradually begun to rely more heavily on the import of vital food.¹⁶ This was the major reason for the country's involvement in a series of major global wars, including the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), World War I (1914–1918), and World War II (1941–1945). The aggression of the military government escalated into a rampage when the Imperial Japanese Kwantong army in Manchuria took military action at their discretion to establish the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932. This was followed by the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai by young naval officers, caused by his attempts to block the military action in Manchuria. Subsequently, Japanese aggression in East Asia escalated into the Second Sino-Japanese War of 1937. This

⁸ Shohei Ooka, *Fires on the Plain*, trans. Ivan Morris (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2001).

⁹ Seiichi Morimura, *Akuma no hoshoku* [Devil's Gluttony] (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 2011).

¹⁰ Ryuta Horai, "Ki no ue no guntai" [Soldiers in the Tree] *Subaru*, May (2013). The original draft of this play was the last work of the late popular writer Yasushi Inoue based on an actual story from the interview of the protagonists visiting Okinawa and completed by Horai after his death (NHK Special in May 2013).

¹¹ Ashihei Hino, *Mitsurin to Heitai* [Soldiers in the Jungle] (Tokyo: Shakai Hihyosha, 2013).

¹² Sakae Tsuboi, *Nijyuu shi no hitomi* [Twenty-Four Eyes] (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2010).

¹³ Masuji Ibuse, *Black Rain*, trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1969).

¹⁴ Akiyuki Nosaka, *Hotaru no haka* [Grave of the Fireflies] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1968).

¹⁵ Akiyuki Nosaka, "American *Hijiki*" in *Hotaru no haka* [Grave of the Fireflies] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1968).

¹⁶ Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 2.

military expansionism eventually collided with an international economy as dominated by Britain and the United States.¹⁷ Within two years of Pearl Harbor, Japan was suffering a full-scale American blockade, preventing imports from the Asian market it had come to rely so heavily on.¹⁸ Eventually, the vulnerability of the military government's food policies would result in military losses from starvation, malnutrition and associated diseases amounting to 60% of military deaths in the war and severe starvation among Japanese citizens in the homeland.¹⁹

It should not be overlooked, however, that early in the Pacific War there was no food shortage in the military. The navy and air force were relatively better off than the army was in general and food was even at times plentiful in limited sectors of the army. In the Japanese homeland, many farmers in particular enjoyed entitlement rights to food,²⁰ especially to rice, owing to government protections that ensured agricultural productivity during the war. In view of the poverty and starvation during the Great Depression, which affected Japan from 1929 until 1935, afflicting farmers much more than their urban counterparts, the wartime protections may have been deserved. However, the special protection during the war invited conflict with the urban population, which previously had 25 percent more rice than farmers living in rural areas.²¹

In addition to the consideration of the food issue during the war in terms of "plenty versus shortage," it is also important to note that for the Japanese the Pacific War was in fact a cultural conflict between conservative Japanese culture and liberal American consumer culture: At the political level, governmental anti-Anglo-American propaganda, commonly known as *kichiku beiei* (Anglo-American Demon Beast) permeated Japanese society, and government prohibitions went into effect that banned many aspects of American consumer culture which had permeated the cities before the war and which the government itself had previously promoted.²² Most prominent

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 229–230.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1–10.; Akira Fujiwara, *Uejinshita Eiyuutachi* [War Heroes Starved to Death] (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 2011), 138.

²⁰ Cwieretka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine*, 131.

²¹ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 52.

²² Right up into 1941 large posters accompanied by the text of brief articles reporting various aspects of pro-American news and popular culture were

among these was the prohibition of English loanwords, English being designated an enemy language, which extended to can labels, food manufacturer's company names, names of cafes and restaurants, and menu items.²³

At the civilian level, there was a conflict between a liberal urban population immersed in pre-war American consumerism and popular culture, including American-style casual dining, jazz and Hollywood movies.²⁴ Yet, on the other hand, there was a rural population that adhered to a Japanese conservative culture compatible with ultra-nationalism and with anti-Anglo American propaganda, as promoted by a military government that considered "Western liberalism to be un-Japanese and unworthy."²⁵ Therefore, the conflict between urban Japan and rural Japan derived not only from the unequal distribution of food, but also from differences in cultural and political orientation.

Finally, the unique social structure in which ordinary Japanese people lived will be explored here. Under the reinforced military regime during the war,²⁶ the entire nation was controlled by the National General Mobilization Law implemented in 1938,²⁷ which included severe censorship and surveillance. In particular, the military government rigidly exercised a top-down thought control of the nation. The *Kempeitai*,²⁸ the elite police of

still being posted nationwide by *Domei tsushinsha*, the government-affiliated press association; see Juichi Inoue, *Senzen Showa no Sekai, 1926–1945* [Showa Period Before the War] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2011), 209).

²³ Itsuo Ooishi, *Eigo o Kinshi seyo – Shirarezaru senjika no Nihon to America* [Forbid English – Unknown Facts of Japan and U.S. during the War] (Tokyo: Goma Shobo, 2007), 52–84.

²⁴ Junichi Inoue *Senzen Showa no Sekai*, 207–211. United States was the most important trade partner as well for Japan in the pre-war period.

²⁵ Collingham, *Taste of War*, 57.

²⁶ Raymond Lamont-Brown points out that Tokyo's involvement with the *Kempeitai* since early days "had a great influence in and on Japanese politics throughout the 1930s" and enhanced "the military cadres in Japanese government." Lamont-Brown, *Kempeitai – Japan's Dreaded Military Police*. Gloucestershire (UK: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 25–26.

²⁷ *Nihon Daihyakka Zensho* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1986), 383.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35–44. The total number of *Kempeitai* in China at the height of hostilities was estimated to be 16,408. In Japan, the total was 10,679 and

the Japanese military forces, exercised extraordinary autocratic authority, frightening military personnel and civilians alike,²⁹ even more than Japan's enemies. They were "the visible arm and the guardians of the law, the public censors and overseers of private morals and thought as well as arbiters of decorum," and anyone could be "presumed guilty on arrest."³⁰

By 1939, units of approximately ten households, called *tonarigumi*, were ordered into various larger-sized neighborhood associations called *chonaikai*, an organization that emerged spontaneously in major cities.³¹ From 1940 onward, the government's policy of bottom-up control made the participation of every household in these neighborhood associations obligatory. Members were trained to serve as defense forces in case of an enemy attack on the homeland, performing such functions as firefighting in air raids, and were instructed in the proper distribution of rations under government supervision.³²

These associations were placed under control of local governments, and nearly half of their leaders served concurrently as city officials. These officials exerted enormous authority over members of the group, being privy to the private information, including incomes and assets, of their members, and members could even be deprived of their food rations unless they remained in compliance with the leaders.³³ Furthermore, associations were scrutinized and supervised by the *Kempeitai* via the *Tokkō*, a special unit of police who carried out mutual surveillance among their members.³⁴ Thus, top-down and bottom-up controls were tightly linked.

followed by 1,927 in Korea. The work of these personnel also included gathering intelligence although they were mainly responsible for torturing of POWs. *Kempeitai* prisoners were also sent to Unit 731, the "human experiment" unit. They also took charge of women from captive populations who were forced into prostitution from threat of starvation.

²⁹ Lamont-Brown, *Kempeitai*, 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vii.

³¹ Yokichi Watanabe, *Senjika no nihonjin to tonarigumi kaihō* [Japanese and the Neighborhood Associations during the War] (Tokyo: Gentosha, 2013), 17.

³² Michael Wright, "In Search of 'Silver Rice': Starvation and Deprivation in World War II-Era Japan," *Studies on Asia* 1/1 (2010): 57–85.

³³ *Ibid.*, 17–21.

³⁴ Lamont-Brown, *Kempeitai*, 14–16.

At the core of this thought control was the *kokutai*,³⁵ the national political framework that incorporated faith in State Shinto, thus promoting Japanese patriotism through loyalty to the emperor, the legendary successor of a Shinto god, and in turn promoting an acceptance of the war as a kind of spiritual endeavor. This allegiance was ultimately carried out through *bushido* (the ethical code of samurai),³⁶ which advocated a spirit of fighting “without surrender” and the choice of “death for honor”; thus, self-sacrifice for the group was emphasized.³⁷ The allegiance was also endorsed and upheld through legal sanctions, since Japanese POWs who repatriated were brought to trial and punished in the home country.³⁸ The same stoic spiritualism, described by Ruth Benedict as the anticipation of a “victory of spirit over matter,”³⁹ was advocated during severe food shortages through the slogan “the more shortage of food there is, the more we must raise our physical strength by other means.”⁴⁰ In effect, this political indoctrination was enforced by the nation’s educational system, whose core teaching encouraged the worship of the emperor, and by the relatively new mass medium of radio.

It is most obvious that food is essential for the survival of military forces, since it provides the energy that fuels combatants. In fact, the Japanese military was “one of the best-fed armed forces in the world” with 4,000 calories per person a day in 1929. Based on the research of the Army Medical School reported in 1942, the average for the army military ration for the Kanto area, the vicinity of Tokyo, dropped to 3,350 calories, slightly

³⁵ Joseph. M. Kitagawa, “The Japanese *Kokutai*,” *History of Religions* 13/3 (1974), 204.

³⁶ Lamont-Brown pointed out that the *bushido* code adopted by *Kempeitai* was particularly corrupt in the way the POWs were harshly treated since the original *bushido* code is based on “the five main tenets of righteousness, courage, humanity, propriety and sincerity” and did not include “cruelty.” (Lamont-Brown, *Kempeitai*, 9).

³⁷ Kaplan, *Philosophy of Food*, 572–579.

³⁸ Fujiwara, *Uejinshita Eiyuutachi*, 226.

³⁹ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

lower than the required 3,500 calories a day, yet they could still afford to sell leftover military rations to the dealer.⁴¹

During the 1930s, the promise of better food in the military attracted underage volunteers from poorer families who, owing to a shortage of food in the homeland, enjoyed an improved diet in the military. These volunteers regarded military meals as “food in paradise,”⁴² often recalling it as the “most memorable experience of their time in the military.”⁴³ One boy volunteer for the navy commented, “I was always starving... [It] was my first time eating minced meat cutlets and curry with rice.”⁴⁴

In general, men in the navy and air force were relatively well fed, with Unit 731 in Manchuria the best-nourished unit in the army until the very end of the Pacific War.⁴⁵ In the navy, the ships, which were stocked with ammunition for a minimum of thirteen weeks, were also stocked with sufficient provisions, such as rice and wheat. Therefore, sailors and marines rarely starved.⁴⁶ Naval officers were the most privileged elite, enjoying Western-style dishes and live music.⁴⁷ The navy normally provided between 3,377 and 3,563 calories per day in 1942. Its air force division enjoyed an even higher daily ration of 4,542–5,000 calories.⁴⁸

In *Twenty-Four Eyes*, Ms. Ooishi, a young female teacher from the city teaching at a rural school, laments the way some of her students from poor families have volunteered to join the air force, motivated by food:

These boys could not stand to eat bitter bread made with acorns they picked in the mountain... Some boys volunteered to join the air force simply because they

⁴¹ Shunya Ichinose, *Kogun Heishi no Nichijyo Seikatu* [Daily Lives of Imperial Soldiers] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2009), 176.

⁴² Kenji Sato, et al., *Nihon rikugun to nihon kaigun no nazo* [The Enigma of the Japanese Army and Navy] (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyusua, 2013), 89.

⁴³ Cwierka, *Moderen Japanese Cuisine*, 840.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁵ Morimura, *Akuma no hoshoku*, 202.

⁴⁶ Nao Kumagaya, *Teikoku Rikugun no Kisochishiki* [Basic Knowledge of the Imperial Army] (Tokyo: Kojinsha NF Bunko, 2014), 262.

⁴⁷ Sato, et al., *Nihon rikugun to nihon kaigun no nazo*, 174–175.

⁴⁸ Masao Fujita, *Kaigun Ryoshokushi* [History of Navy Food] (Tokyo: Shioshobo Kojinsha, 2014), 182.

thought they could savor sweet bean soup. Some of them were from poor families who were manipulated by the fantasy of eating to their heart's content by joining the air force. Whatever their motivation was, they were still treated as wartime heroes.⁴⁹

In 1935, Unit 731, located in the Manchurian city of Harbin, was “the Japanese army’s principal bacteriological-warfare research and experimental organization.” It was “demolished at the approach of Soviet troops in August 1945.”⁵⁰ *Devil's Gluttony*, a work of literary nonfiction based on interviews with more than thirty former military personnel of Unit 731, provides a horrifying view of the testing of the effects of biological weapons on human subjects. The human subjects were prisoners of war (called *maruta*, literally *lumber*), who received abundant food and healthy diets, their health being necessary for their usefulness as test subjects, since “bacteria grew better in the rich protein and carbohydrate intake.”⁵¹ Most of the *maruta* eventually suffered “either death or excruciating pain, as if in Hell.”⁵² The experiments on the *maruta* tested the effects of bacteria causing diseases such as cholera and typhoid. The “most abundant luxury of food” used to fatten *maruta* was available to the military personnel of this unit, who were among the most well-fed members of the Imperial Japanese Army.⁵³

Japanese boy volunteers in Unit 731, like other recruits from poor families, were attracted to the unit through the abundance of food. They themselves were unwitting victims of these cruel experiments, although to a lesser degree than the *maruta*.⁵⁴ These boys were employed in experiments

⁴⁹ Tsuboi, *Nijyuyon no hitomi*, 97. This passage is set between 1932–1934, during the period in which poverty and starvation hit the rural area. The work seems significant in showing the sympathy of an urbanite for the rural victims.

⁵⁰ Cook, Haruko, and Theodore F. Cook. *Japan at War* (New York: The New Press, 1992), 158.

⁵¹ Morimura, *Akuma no Hoshoku*, 204.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 236–237.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 128–131. While advocating Japanese acceptance of responsibility for their aggression in invading other countries, which included the commissions of atrocities, as in Unit 731, Morimura also criticized Japanese fascist military government for victimizing its own people.

in which their hands were put in freezing water to determine how much cold their skin could tolerate until the pain became intolerable. After the experiments, they were rewarded with their favorite confections such as *manju* and *yokan*, traditional Japanese sweets made with bean jam.⁵⁵ The boys were also used for experiments with a vaccination for typhoid fever, which required them to be infected through the ingestion of tainted *manju*.⁵⁶ The craving for sweets, a factor in the enlistment of many poor boys deprived of sugar at home, provided those enlisted in Unit 731 with a consolation for extreme acts of forced painful degradation.

The Imperial Japanese Army in the Pacific and Southeast Asia was afflicted by serious shortages of field rations after the Battle of Midway in 1942, when the tide of the war turned against Japan. More than three-fourths of war deaths occurred in 1944 and 1945.⁵⁷ Yet, even after the Japanese navy lost much of its aircraft carriers and control of the air, the army continued to deploy infantrymen to the Pacific Islands, where the problem of replenishing food supplies was extremely challenging because of the distance from the mainland and American control of the seas.⁵⁸ For example, in the Philippine campaign, including Leyte Island, 80% of the 500,000 Japanese troops died of starvation. In the Burma campaign, including Imphal in India, almost 80% of 164,500 troops perished in this way.⁵⁹

Lizzie Collingham reports that, in addition to “full scale American blockade,” starvation was largely caused by the Japanese imperial government’s weakness in logistics,⁶⁰ such as their building more warships rather than the cargo ships needed for transporting food supplies. Additional factors were “misguided agricultural policies,” the “ruthless requisitioning of rice” in invaded Asian countries, and an unrealistically limited food supply for foot soldiers on the Asian front lines, where battles over food were waged between Japanese soldiers and local populations.⁶¹ The battles in the Philippines involved many local residents, including those who waged

⁵⁵ Ibid., 235.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 236–237.

⁵⁷ Ichinose, *Kogun Heishi no Nichijyo Seikatu*, 238.

⁵⁸ Fujiwara. *Uejinishita Eiyuutachi*, 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 136–138.

⁶⁰ Collingham, *Taste of War*, 229–282.

⁶¹ Ibid., 242, 240.

guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. Starving Japanese soldiers often murdered Filipinos in order to plunder their food.⁶²

One of the most dreadful shortages on the frontlines was a deficiency in salt, which is essential for survival. In *Soldiers in the Jungle*, Ashihei Hino depicts the terrible salt deficiency at the Battle of Imphal of 1944 in India, under an unbearable scorching sun and with starvation. Seeing debilitated horses licking each other's tails that contain salty sweat, the starving soldiers, many of whom were sick with malaria, were told to lick their sweaty forearms for salt.⁶³ Viewing Corporal Itoshima desperately licking his arms, his fellow soldiers "exchanged glances, guffawing and continually licking their forearms." However, their laughter "included the feeling of commiseration," which "only those who share the military life at the battle fields could understand."⁶⁴

In a passage from Shohei Ooka's *Fires on the Plain*, Tamura, an abandoned ailing soldier, is told to kill himself with a hand grenade if the overcrowded hospital refused him for treatment.⁶⁵ Sick and starving he wanders around in the jungle of Leyte, eventually shooting and killing a Filipino woman while looking for food in her dwelling and finding salt. Later, he meets fellow soldiers in the jungle, and they let him join them in exchange for sharing the salt that he has stolen. Tamura thinks, "a few handfuls of salt would constitute a bond of comradeship."⁶⁶

The sharing of salt or food, a sign of camaraderie, had a special significance in the Japanese military. The saying, "*onaji kama no meshi*," or "the fellowship of sharing the same meal," reflected the army's principle of serving all soldiers on the battlefield, regardless of rank, identical food in identical aluminum containers to enhance solidarity and to illustrate a shared destiny.⁶⁷

Another passage illustrates an extreme situation involving the sharing of food. There is nothing left to eat and "even the salt finally gives out."⁶⁸ Tamura encounters a fellow Japanese soldier who is dying. The

⁶² Fujiwara, *Uejinishita Eiyuutachi*, 111–113.

⁶³ Hino, *Mitsurin to Heitai*, 15.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁷ Sato, *Nihon rikugun to nihon kaigun no nazo*, 89.

⁶⁸ Ooka, *Fires on the Plain*, 176.

soldier, pointing to his arm, says to Tamura: “You poor fellow! When I’m dead, you may eat this.”⁶⁹ Tamura realizes that “for some reason, these words, intended as an invitation, acted instead as a ban.”⁷⁰ In this instance, the desperate hunger ultimately brings to the forefront the moral prohibition against cannibalism, as the dying soldier even within this ostensibly sordid situation shows an element of nobility in his gesture of self-sacrifice, the ultimate form of camaraderie, in terms of sharing food.⁷¹

It is appropriate now to turn to civilian life and food management in the Japanese homeland during the war. The average per capita calorie consumption rationed by the government in Tokyo was 1,405 in 1945⁷² and in Nagoya, it was 1,364 in 1944.⁷³ However, the actual number of calories consumed could have been lower. Consequently, it is reported that “100 % of urban Japanese dwellers had suffered weight loss.”⁷⁴

Official rationing was first implemented in 1938 and “expanded incrementally to include almost every basic necessity by 1942.”⁷⁵ Rationing took place under the slogans, “Luxury is the enemy” and “Do not desire until victory is achieved.” Food rations were systematically controlled, monitored, and distributed in a limited amount to each household through the neighborhood associations that were in each community nationwide.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 183.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 184.

⁷¹ Cannibalism among Japanese soldiers in New Guinea was reported in American army documents. See Collingham, *Taste of War*, 297.

⁷² Ohara Institute for Social Research at Hosei University, *Taiheiyo sensoo ka no roodoo jyotai* [Labor Conditions under the Pacific War] 1964, (accessed December 26, 2014, <http://oohara.mt.tama.hosei.ac.jp/rn/senji1/rn-senji1-148.html>).

⁷³ Akiko Kumazawa and Masako Tanahashi, *Senjika ni okeru Nagoya shimin no eiyo sesshu jyotai* [Nutrition Intake of Citizens in Nagoya during the War], *Eiyogaku Zasshi* 5 (1968): 255–260.

⁷⁴ Secretary of War, “The Effects of Bombing on Health and Medical Services in Japan,” *United States Strategic Bombing Survey* (Neuilly sur Seine, France: Ulan Press, 1947), 90.

⁷⁵ George Solt, “Ramen and U.S. Occupation Policy.” in Eric C. Rath, eds., *Japanese Foodways, Present and Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 188.

Additional food could be purchased only on the black market⁷⁶ or obtained through barter with farmers.

The novel *Black Rain*, based on the diaries of the *hibakusha* in Hiroshima, whose main concern was also dealing with a food shortage,⁷⁷ contains an anecdote about the government altering a detail in a famous classical poem in order to make the work of art conform in a documentary manner to current government policy. The poem, by Kenji Miyazawa, printed in a school textbook, shows respect for the frugality of the Japanese farmer, admiring the hardship endured by the farmer for his limiting himself to four *go* of brown rice per day.⁷⁸ The figure given in the poem exceeds by one third the actual daily brown rice ration at the time and so the authorities had the poem altered, changing four *go* to three *go*.⁷⁹ Critical of the distortion of the poem, Mrs. Miyaji, one of the protagonist's neighbors, casually speaks of the government's alteration as an "insult to learning."⁸⁰ Shortly afterward, she is warned by a state authority that "Irresponsible talk in wartime is a matter that's too serious for the ordinary civil or criminal code." The narrator comments: "By that time, everybody was taking care of what they said in front of others."⁸¹

Thus, members of the neighborhood associations appear to have been extremely conscious of mutual surveillance. For example, the character Mr. Nojima who, having studied in the U.S. is rumored by neighbors to be friendly with a leftist scholar who was corresponding with Americans, must be extremely cautious, keeping a low profile and showing kindness to everybody in the district so that his neighbors do not grow suspicious and report him to the police.⁸² Likewise, Nojima's wife and her father entertain

⁷⁶ While buying food on the black market was illegal and subject to imprisonment, this activity was a necessity for survival. See Wright, "In Search of 'Silver Rice,'" 65.

⁷⁷ The title "Black Rain" refers to the rain that includes radiation after the atomic bomb was dropped. Anti-war sentiment seems implied by several descriptions of radiation-contaminated food.

⁷⁸ The name of the poem, not mentioned by Ibuse, is *Ame ni mo makaezu* ("Be not Defeated by the Rain").

⁷⁹ Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 64. Four *go* is about 600 grams, three *go*, about 450.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸² Barthes, "Psychology of Contemporary Food Consumption," 29.

the neighbors with their limited supply of homegrown peaches from their yard. Gifting food, included among the “rites of hospitality,”⁸³ facilitates group membership and communication. However, the excessive hospitality here can be interpreted as a way to deflate criticism and reduce the scrutiny of neighbors. Moreover, the awareness of mutual surveillance can be extended to cooking, especially when the food is obtained from the black market: “The only fish we felt free to broil as we pleased was what we got on the ration. We didn’t like to broil fish we had bought on the black market in case the smell got to the neighbors, so we boiled it or made soup with it instead.”⁸⁴

It should also be noted that ingenuity in cooking was strongly encouraged and initiated by the government, and special recipes and cooking methods using “relatively unknown foodstuffs” were disseminated through the associations by official dieticians.⁸⁵ Some instructional cookbooks were customized for home use based on a version originally published by the military, which included instructions on eating wild plants and insects.⁸⁶

The ingenuity of housewives is seen when mothers cooked wild plants for their children’s snacks: “In every home, parched beans made up to ninety percent of such snacks for the children, and the wild plants made [for] a kind of change.” Grubs, “the young of the long-horned beetle,” were broiled in soy sauce and given to undernourished children.⁸⁷

To supplement the food supply during the severe food shortage, any available urban spaces including schoolyards were turned into vegetable gardens. In 1943 and 1944, every urban household grew its own vegetables, using pots or boxes when there was no garden space available.⁸⁸ Pumpkins were commonly cultivated because they are nutritious and every part is edible, and were believed easy to grow and store. This was promoted in a campaign of “one pumpkin stock per household.”⁸⁹ However, Shigeiko, in *Black Rain*, complains that she can harvest only “a bare dozen” pumpkins a year, and is

⁸³ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁴ Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 68.

⁸⁵ Collingham, *Taste of War*, 132.

⁸⁶ Sato, *Nihon rikugun to nihon kaigun no nazo*, 150.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 138.

therefore impelled to cook even the stalks of the pumpkins she has.⁹⁰ Shigeo concludes a summary of the food shortage with a sharp condemnation of war: “I realized, too, that war’s a sadistic killer of human beings, young and old, men and women alike.”⁹¹

Due to a lack of entitlement rights to food and suffering from food shortage, city dwellers objected to and reacted against military personnel and farmers who were more privileged recipients of food. Toward the end of the war, in the homeland, the demoralization of military personnel grew out of control. *Black Rain* documents the theft by the army of provisions such as rice, corn beef and wine. The narrator states, “It was outrageous for soldiers on active service...when food shortage was at its height... [to] cheat civilians out of army reserve stores that have been left in their charge.”⁹²

In the spirit of “an eye for an eye,” it seems that covert revenge of civilians against corrupt military authorities and rapacious soldiers was exacted through food. A collective practical joke played on an arrogant army lieutenant, who “took his boots off and was sprawled out over a whole seat” on a very crowded train, is reported in *Black Rain*.⁹³ When he started to take a nap, one passenger “tipped half a cooked rice-ball into each of the officer’s boots,” and another passenger, trying to ensure “the very maximum effect” of the joke, carefully shook “each boot in turn, to make sure the rice had gone right down to the toes.”⁹⁴ Because of the scarcity of food, the narrator comments on the rice ball as a “noble sacrifice.”⁹⁵ Inasmuch as “self-sacrifice” is an encouraged social value during war, this humor can also function as sarcasm. While the direct criticism of authority was severely censored and punished, this practical joke seems to have solidified a group of civilians in their misery. Under a new government policy, farmers benefited from a higher official price for rice and the encouragement of peasant landowning, both of which were designed to increase agricultural productivity and prevent rural depopulation during the war.⁹⁶ Even during the years immediately

⁹⁰ Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 67.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹⁶ Ohara Institute for Social Research at Hosei University, *Taiheiyo sensoo ka no roodoo jyotai* [Labor Conditions under the Pacific War], 1964

preceding the worst rice shortage of 1945, daily allocation of rice for farmers for each member of the family was around 600 grams, which was higher than the army's ration of approximately 464, and considerably higher than the starving urbanites' ration of 234.⁹⁷

Consequently, the farmers' newfound privileges of food and power, along with their aforementioned cultural and nationalistic orientation, led to conflicts with urban dwellers. This urban versus rural conflict was manifested in the mutual bullying by rural children and urban children after approximately 450,000 children were evacuated from cities to rural areas by April 1945. One anecdote depicts the conflict of an urban child who has mixed feelings of superiority and inferiority in his wearing sophisticated Western clothing while eating from his fancy metal lunch box only "barley and other rice substitutes." He stands in ambivalent contrast to his rural classmates in their kimonos or shoddy Western clothes, who are enjoying pure white rice in their cheap wooden lunch boxes.⁹⁸

Both *Black Rain* and *Graveyard of Fireflies* portray farmers as vicious. Shizuko in *Black Rain* and the war orphan narrator of *Graves of Fire Flies* complain that farmers near the cities where they live are cunning and demand the barter of vegetables for clothing because of the falling value of currency. The war orphan, after giving his dead mother's expensive kimono in a trade with farmers, exhausts all his belongings for barter, and has no choice but to steal farm produce. One day he is caught by a farmer when stealing potatoes:

"Please forgive me." I apologized to the farmer as I knelt on the ground. [My little sister] Setsuko was behind me, shivering in fear. When the farmer refused to accept my apology, [I further explained]: "My little sister is sick. She cannot live without me." "Give me a break," replied the farmer. "Don't you know farm theft is fraud?" He tripped me, and after I had fallen, he grabbed me by the collar, telling me, "Hey, walk fast. I will put you into jail." [He took me to the policeman], who commented in a

(accessed December 26, 2014, <http://oohara.mt.tama.hosei.ac.jp/rn/senji1/rn/senji1-148.html>).

⁹⁷ Collingham, *Taste of War*, 234.

⁹⁸ Cook and Cook, *Japan at War*, 231–234.

leisurely manner: “It seems like there was an air raid in Fukui tonight.” [A little later], the policeman calmed the farmer’s anger, and soon after he let me go with a warning.⁹⁹

Although the police officer would censor any hint of criticism about the authorities’ food policy, as shown earlier, he demonstrates a leniency and nonchalance toward the orphan that stands in sharp contrast to the harsh reprimand the orphan has received from the farmers. It seems that the rising social status of farmers during the war was not taken seriously, in part because of their unprecedented food privileges.

Finally, to be examined is the impact of the popularization of Western style dining before, during, and after the war among the Japanese populace. While formal French menus were limited to elites, such as diplomats or naval officers earlier in the Meiji era,¹⁰⁰ Western-style dishes prepared with Japanese influence, called *yoshoku*, became popular in the 1930s. These were promoted as a part of American culture and life style. The popularization of *yoshoku* was made possible through military diets and its dissemination in department stores, cafeterias, and cafes in the large cities, which introduced these dishes of home cooking.

The Westernization of the military diet, which affected other private sectors, including home cooking, played a pivotal role. The Japanese military initially modeled itself on the German army, and later, on the American army and the British navy, including their diets, under Imperial Japan’s *fukoku kyohei* (rich country with strong soldiers) policy, which had been in place since 1871.¹⁰¹ The advantages of these diets over traditional Japanese fare included high calorie protein, with the inclusion of meat and deep-fried foods,¹⁰² cost-effectiveness, and the homogenization of the military diet, which overcame “regional differences” of traditional Japanese food.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Nosaka, *American Hijiki*, 36.

¹⁰⁰ Collingham, *Taste of War*, 42; Fujita, *Kaigun Ryoshokushi*, 94.

¹⁰¹ Jun Aizawa, “Senshi kenkyuu hoo,” *Research on the History of War* 4/20 December 2014 (accessed July 14, 2017, <http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/publication/senshi/pdf/200103/06.pdf>).

¹⁰² Meat especially was considered the symbol of *bunmeikaika* (civilization and enlightenment) and Westernization, which was welcomed by the Meiji intellectuals. See Collingham, *Taste of War*, 33.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 82–83.

Especially after the devastating epidemic of beriberi, believed to have been caused by the exclusive consumption of polished white rice, which lacks vitamin B, the military adopted a more nutritious Western diet and bread. With the advocacy of bread by a former admiral, the Japan Bread Manufacturers Association was established in 1941.¹⁰⁴ Concurrently, the value of the production of bread almost doubled, from 24,000,000 yen in 1939 to 48,440,000 yen in 1940.¹⁰⁵

Many of the Western-style cafeterias in department stores and small cafes emerged in cities after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. They advertised *yoshoku*, an expression that refers to “American style, casual dining,” affordable a la carte Western cuisine for the populace.¹⁰⁶ This cuisine became increasingly popular, as is evident in the dishes sold daily at the Hankyu Department Store cafeteria in 1936: 15,000 Western-style combo dishes (fried shrimp, meatballs, rice, and coffee), 13,000 portions of rice and curry with coffee, and 9,000 pork cutlet meals.¹⁰⁷ In 1935, a newly published woman’s magazine published the comment of a young girl stating her preference for Western food over Japanese food, this inclination being fashionable, like the preference for Western-style clothing and American films.¹⁰⁸ In view of the general understanding of the Americanization of Japanese urban society after the war, it is worth noting recent findings about the influence of pre-war Americanization on the image of *yoshoku* as a fashion trend. Other popular women’s magazines, such as *Fujin kurabu* (Lady’s Club), and its inclusion in home economics courses, added to the popularity of *yoshoku* cooking in the urban home.¹⁰⁹ Katarzyna Cwiertka

¹⁰⁴ Eiichi Kimura, et al. *Pan no meiji hyakunenshi* [A Hundred years of history of the bread since Meiji period] (Tokyo: Pan no hyakunenshi kanko kai, 1970), 420.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁰⁶ Ikuhiro Fukuda. “Gaishoku Taishuuka to inshoku kuukan no gender ka” (Popularization of Eating Out Across Gender), *Waseda University Gakujyutsu Kenkyu* 62 (2014): 289–306.

¹⁰⁷ Keiko Kosuga, *Curry Rice no Tanjyo* [The Birth of Curry and Rice], (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2013), 182.

¹⁰⁸ Ichinose, *Kogun Heishi no Nichijyo Seikatu*, 147–149.

¹⁰⁹ Tetsu Okada, *Meiji Yoshoku Kotohajime* [Initial influence of Western Food during Meiji Period] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2012), 215; Sato, *Nihon rikugun to nihon kaigun no nazo*, 19–20.

postulates that some of the popularity of Anglo-Saxon dishes may be attributable to the ease of preparation and the availability of inexpensive ingredients such as milk, butter and corn beef, and condiments such as ketchup and mayonnaise, particularly for city dwellers during the prewar periods.¹¹⁰

Shigeo, who in *Black Rain* claims lower middle-class origins in Hiroshima, recalls, “We toasted [bread] and ate it with bean paste on it, or spread it with bean paste before toasting. Whenever we had bread, we missed the taste of butter and corned beef dreadfully.”¹¹¹ Conversely, however, Western food such as butter, chocolates, and canned beef, were still available to families with fathers who were high-ranking officers until the very end of the war. In *Grave of the Fireflies*, when a woman discovers that her orphaned niece and nephew, whose father was a navy lieutenant, have special military food privileges, she remarks sarcastically, “I envy the military family who could afford such a luxury.”¹¹²

Another important factor to consider is “the food stores and boxes of rations [that] the Allies left behind them,” which were known as Churchill rations¹¹³ or Roosevelt rations in the case of the American counterpart.¹¹⁴ An example of the attitude towards eating Roosevelt rations can be observed in the drama *Soldiers in the Tree*, based on factual accounts of the final battle of Okinawa in 1945. It tells the story of an older, high-ranking officer from mainland Japan and a young soldier from Okinawa who hide themselves in a tree above the American camp, even after the war, being unaware that the war has ended. They survive by scavenging food scraps from a dumpster in the American camp underneath their tree. The older officer at first refuses to eat this scavenged food, saying, “If you are Japanese, you should feel like dying just by imagining that their food is in your stomach.”¹¹⁵ The young soldier justifies his devouring the enemy’s food as merely a practical matter of survival, saying, “I think they and their food are separate issues.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Collingham, *Taste of War*, 48–49.

¹¹¹ Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 66.

¹¹² Nosaka, *Hotaru no haka*, 24.

¹¹³ Collingham, *Taste of War*, 283.

¹¹⁴ Ichinose, *Kogun Heishi no Nichijyo Seikatu*, 194.

¹¹⁵ Horai, 103.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In other situations, the imperial army's troops suffered from desperate hunger throughout the Pacific and Southeast. In Ooka's *Fires on the Plain*, a starving soldier expresses a wish that he could surrender to the Americans, knowing that surrender to any enemy would violate the Japanese military code of honor. Inspiring immediate contempt from one of his comrades, he says, "They'll give us so much corned beef to eat, we won't know what to do with it!"¹¹⁷ In *Taken Captive*, another autobiographical novel about his experience as a POW in Mindoro, the Philippines, Ooka describes the food at the American camp: "We were first-class POWs who enjoyed clean quarters and clothing, a ration of 2,700 calories a day... the men still refer to the camp as 'paradise.'¹¹⁸

During the Imphal campaign, Hino tells of starving Japanese soldiers hearing alluring radio announcements in foreign-accented Japanese:

Dear soldiers... You all are fools to be fighting in such an awful war to die of starvation. I know that you have nothing left to eat and are eating even snakes, lizards, and insects. Why don't you come over here? We have hot coffee, milk, bread, and canned food – anything you want. If you wish, we can even feed you beefsteak and sashimi. Leave your guns, and come over here right away!¹¹⁹

This is the sort of temptation to which Ooka's starving soldier, previously quoted, seems to be vulnerable. In "American *Hijiki*," the protagonist surprisingly finds himself feeling close to the Americans as he entertains Mr. Higgins, a former American soldier, after the war. Although he suspects the Americans may simply have been dumping a surfeit of agricultural supplies, he nonetheless realizes how much he appreciated their aid during the occupation, and now he feels grateful to them "for their kindly helping us when we were starving, by providing relief products by parachute and rationing soybean meals to us."¹²⁰

Discussing illustrations by Japanese cartoonist Etsuro Kato, including one depicting relief supplies on parachutes falling like manna from

¹¹⁷ Ooka, *Fires on the Plain*, 39.

¹¹⁸ Shohei Ooka, *Taken Captive*, trans. Wayne P. Lammers (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996), 149.

¹¹⁹ Hino, *Mitsurin to Heitai*, 54.

¹²⁰ Nosaka, "American *Hijiki*," 93.

heaven, John Dower writes of “godlike hands extended from on high [providing] food for the near-starving people,” noting also the theocratic iconography of “a democratic revolution from above,” as also dominant in American cartoons dealing with occupied Japan.¹²¹ The desperate need for, and consumption of such supplies is vividly described when relief goods are dropped in “American *Hijiki*”:

[P]eople gathered like ants around an oil drum and desperately tried to open it with hammers and trowels... Contents: cheese, cans of beans... chewing gum, chocolates... jam, marmalade... They filled boxes, such as a kid’s lunch boxes. We all received two boxes per household. When I opened the round can, it was filled with cheese, bacon and ham, in addition to beans and sugar.¹²²

Although English loan words were eliminated from the labels of cans or menus of restaurants during the war,¹²³ the continued consumption of Western foods by the military and civilians, and its growing familiarity, including that of bread as a supplement to rice, appear to have had a significant impact on the culinary tastes of the starving Japanese nation during the war and the early post-war period. The enormous popularity of *yoshoku* as American casual dining and its subsequent association with American fashion during the prewar days cannot be underestimated.

This study has discussed how the military government’s food policies, supplemented by police surveillance and the mutual surveillance among citizens themselves, served to control the Japanese population during the war. When the currency lost its value towards the end of the war to purchase food, the military officers were able to enhance their power, and farmers acquired an advantage that was for them unprecedented, while the urbanites and the soldiers deployed overseas suffered from the food shortage all the more. It has argued that the military government can be criticized for manipulating the citizenry according the paradigm of “the carrot and the stick.”

¹²¹ John Dower, *Embracing Defeat* (New York: Norton, 1999), 69.

¹²² Nosaka, *Hotaru no haka*, 74.

¹²³ Ooishi, *Eigo o Kinshi seyo*, 122.

Large quantities of food and sweets were used as “carrots” to attract volunteers to the military, especially from poor families. Conversely, extremely austere *bushido* notions were imposed on the nation as “sticks.” These included legal pressure that encouraged people to endure severe food shortages without surrender, which precipitated additional deaths by starvation. Writers such as Morimura, Ibuse and Sakai directly criticized the militaristic government, while others, in documenting citizen complaints about the food shortage, can be read as indirect criticism of the government. It should be noted, however, that any complaints about the food shortage and the suffering it entailed were subject to censorship. On the verge of death by starvation near the end of the war, some overseas soldiers confronted the grim option of cannibalism. Depictions in fiction of cannibalism can also be considered indirect criticism of the military, the government, and the war.

Social commentary illustrates how the disequilibrium of the food supply created by Japan’s militaristic government caused social discord and conflict. Conversely, however, it also fostered solidarity among the less privileged groups at the interpersonal level. Solidarity was formed when people shared limited food resources—both on the battlefield and among neighbors in the homeland. Housewives in the neighborhood association worked together to exchange information and collaborated to maximize limited food resources, though their solidarity would occasionally be tainted by their mutual surveillance of each other.

Owing to the farmers now having, with their privileged access to food, higher status than the urbanites and possibly owing to the farmers’ political and cultural orientations, the urbanites were critical of the farmers, although they could have welcomed the unprecedented improvement of the farmers’ nutrition and health.

This study also has shown that the Westernization of military food and direct contact with Western food during the war and in its immediate aftermath, as well as the popularity of *yoshoku* advertised as American casual dining during the pre-war period, may have affected the minds of the starving people. Akira Irie comments that the “Japanese were willing to accept American influence after World War II, not just because Japan lost the war but because American influence had already taken place before the war.”¹²⁴ Similarly, Junichi Inoue also contends that the “pro-American” sentiment

¹²⁴ Akira Irie, “Taiheiyo senso to wa nandattano ka.” [What Did the Pacific War Mean to Us?] *Senshi Kenkyu Nenpo* 2 (1999), 5–7.

formed during the pre-war period may have continued as an undercurrent in Japanese society during the war. The popularization of *yoshoku*, associated with American consumerism and culture in the urban Japan, seems especially to have impeded the government's attempts to form a nationalistic Japanese identity.

The Potsdam Declaration of American, British and Chinese leaders on July 26, 1945 stated the conditions of Japanese surrender, declaring that "a new order of peace, security and justice will be impossible until irresponsible militarism is driven from the world."¹²⁵ The neighborhood associations were abolished as part of a centralized militaristic government in 1947 by the Potsdam ordinance.¹²⁶ The new Japanese Constitution was drafted with the objective of abolishing militarism to ensure a peaceful country. In this regard, it is not surprising that the militaristic wartime government became the object of both overt and covert criticism and commentary in post-war literature. This criticism and commentary was imbedded in portions of the text involving discourse on food. It seems that never so much in Japanese history as during World War II has the complex sociopolitical and cultural meaning of food been so thoroughly entwined with the abiding fact of its biological necessity.

¹²⁵ National Diet Library, "Birth of Constitution of Japan," March 2, 2016 (accessed July 17, 2017, <http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution>).

¹²⁶ Watanabe, *Senjika no nihonjin to tonarigumi kaiho*, 20.