

Social Media, Its Impact on Food Culture in the World

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Abstract

We can not live without eating. To eat is the basis for our life and activities. The problem is what to eat and how to eat. Japan is located in the monsoon area in the East Asia; rice has been the staple food of Japan. The traditional menu has been “*ichi-ju, san-sai*”, that is, “one soup and three dishes”. However, in the present-day Japan, this tradition is quickly lost: Japanese people are now eating in the Westernized way. One of the factors for this change is social media. When we decide on our menu, when we shop and when we cook, we use free social media through the Internet. Since the Internet is a tool for global information exchange, Japanese food culture is influenced by the whole world, and the influence is vice versa: the whole world is influenced by the Japanese food culture. We can say “Social media changes our food culture in the world.”

Key Words : social media, food culture, global change

1. Introduction

We can not live without eating. To eat is the basis for our life and activities. Everybody eats; the problem becomes what to eat and how to eat.

Japan is located in the monsoon area in the East Asia. Rice is an easy crop to cultivate in this climate. Rice has been the staple food of Japan and Japanese people have been rice eating people. The traditional menu in the Japanese cuisine has been “*ichi-ju, san-sai*”, that is, “one soup and three dishes”. This menu style was established in the Muromachi Period in the 14th Century. For one meal, rice is served without being mentioned. With a bowl of rice, one bowl of miso-soup is served together with three dishes: one is the main dish, the second is a side dish and the third is often a small plate of “*tsukemono* pickles”.

2. Present Situation

In the present-day Japan, however, who are eating this traditional menu every day? After the end of World War II, Japan has been under the strong influence of the United States. U.S. influence is on our politics, diplomacy and economy. Its influence is also on our eating habits: Japanese people are now eating in the Americanized way.

One example of Americanization of Japanese eating habits is fast food. Below is a table showing the number of shops of major fast food companies.

Table 1. Number of Shops of Major Fast Food Companies

McDonald: 33,510 shops in 119 countries	(Mar. 2013)
No.1 USA: 14,097 shops, No.2 Japan: 3,298 shops, No.3 China: 1,468 shops	
KFC: 17,000 shops in 120 countries	(Dec. 2011)
No.1 USA: 4,786 shops, No.2 China: 3,819 shops, No.3 Japan: 1,158 shops	
Subway: 37,945 shops in 98 countries	(Oct. 2012)
No.1 USA: 25,496 shops, No.2 Canada: 2,840 shops, No.3 UK: 1,467 shops	

(from *The World Data Atlas 2013*, Seibido Publications)

It is clear that the United States is the fast food kingdom and Japan is much under its influence. In China, there are also many fast food shops. However, China has a big population; when we think of the difference of the population, we can say “Fast food shop density is high in Japan.”

Japanese people are now eating Americanized way, which also means we are eating in the Westernized way. Many Japanese people, especially children, feel that American/Western food is more tasty than the traditional Japanese food.

Eating habits have changed, and now, we have problems. According to the NPO Japan Shokukoku Instructor Association, the problems are:

1. Westernization: fast food, fatty food, high calorie food.
2. We just buy ready-made food or we eat out without cooking at home. We use canned food, bottled food, frozen food, or we buy deli food. To buy, stock, microwave, and then eat: this is getting more and more common in Japan. When we are too tired or too busy, we eat out of home. Meals at restaurants, diners and shops are generally expensive: so the total national expenditure for eating-out is 36 % of the total food expenditure of the nation.
3. In the traditional “one soup and three dishes”, nutrition balance was good. Many vegetables were used and calorie was low. However, eating in the Westernized way, Japan now has a high percentage of obesity.
4. The 4th problem is “No Breakfast”. In the present-day Japan, everyone is busy. Even children are busy. As a result, we skip our breakfast. Of the children of 15-19 years old, 16% of boys don’t eat breakfast and 10 % of girls don’t. Adults in their 30’s, 29% of men don’t eat breakfast and 18% of women don’t.

(based on the textbook Vol.1 for the Dietary Education Instructor Training Course)

We know it is better to avoid fatty fast food. We know it is better to cook and eat together at home with family members, but all are busy and we don’t have time to cook. Moreover, we don’t know how to cook. We don’t have enough experiences of real cooking. Living in nuclear families, there is no “Grandma” living together and teach and help cooking. But still, in order to do the minimum of cooking in some way by ourselves, we have to know recipes and how to cook them. With the advancement of information technology, the easiest way to get information about cooking is the Internet.

3. The Influence of the Internet

The Internet information is quick, wide and free; the Internet is the most handy information source when we try to know about cooking. In Japan, there are many cooking sites.

“Cookpad” is the biggest recipe site in Japan. It was established in 1998 by Cookpad Corporation. With a member registration, everyone can load up his/her recipe. On September 1st in 2013, the number of recipes submitted was 1,560,000. Anyone, without becoming a member, can make use of this site. Monthly users are 15,000. Recipes are categorized into, for example, “Health”, “Beauty”, “Soup”, “Rice”, “Cooking for Men”, “Party Menu”, etc.

The biggest recipe site in the United States is Foodily. Google created this recipe site in January, 2011 and it made a great expansion. There is no necessity of registration: anyone can load up recipes and anyone can make use of the recipes. The recipes stocked on this site is said to be more than 2 million. One big feature about Foodily is that it is tied up with Facebook; Foodily site users share not only the recipes but also their comments. Social media about recipes is contributing to promote food community in the world.

4. Private Corporation Recipe Sites

As we saw above, the influence of social media on cooking is big. Generally, recipes uploaded are accompanied by charming photos; the whole computer screen attracts the site users. Recipe sites are useful and attractive. In this context, it is natural that private food companies open their own Internet site, show recipes and pretty photos, and advertise their products. This advertising policy is nowadays getting common in the world as Japan External Trade Organization points out in its report about recipe sites in the U.S. (See its report on food marketing and social media published in 2012.)

We will see one recipe site: Kikkoman Soy Sauce Company site. We take one recipe example: “Natto Spaghetti”. The ingredients are: boiled spaghetti, “natto” fermented soy-beans, egg yolk, soy sauce, olive oil, chopped green onion and “nori” seaweed. This recipe is a little surprising, because spaghetti is Italian; “Natto”, soy sauce and “nori” seaweed are Japanese; and olive oil is Mediterranean. This recipe is a combination of Japan and South Europe.

We will take another example from Kewpie Mayonnaise Company site: “Colorful Cucumber Boat”. The ingredients are: cucumber (maybe this is Japanese produce), can of tuna (tuna fish is caught in the Pacific Ocean far away from Japan), black pepper (this grows only in hot countries, not in Japan), chili pepper (this is cultivated in Japan), curry powder (curry was common in the areas around India), and mayonnaise (of course, this is French origin). We are again surprised at the interaction and combination of the food materials from all over the world.

5. Impact of Social Media on Globalization of Recipes

We go back to non-commercial social media and take a look at a third recipe example on Foodily: “BBQ ‘Tofu’”. How to cook this dish is:

- (1) Coat cubes of extra firm “tofu” in whole wheat flour.
- (2) Dip them in abundant BBQ sauce.

- (3) Bake on a baking sheet for 35-40 minutes at 375°F.
- (4) Serve them on cooked rice.

“Tofu” is soy-bean curd; this is a typical Japanese food item. With this Japanese food is combined BBQ sauce, an American favorite. Cooking method is oven baking. Ovens began in Roman days; oven cooking spread with the expansion of the Roman Empire, and in the later ages, with the worldwide immigration. The serving of the baked “tofu” is on cooked rice; rice is Oriental. Here again we see the interaction and combination of the materials and cooking methods in a global context.

The best example of combination of food information, culture and materials is “sushi”. “Sushi” is now popular anywhere in the world. Many kinds of local “sushi” are created at many places in the world. One example is “California Roll”. This “sushi” is a combination of “sushi-rice”, “wasabi” paste, crab meat, smoked salmon, avocado, sesame seeds and local vegetables. “Sushi” was exported to California and this recipe was created. This recipe was re-exported to Japan, and now it is popular in Japan and all over the world with many local variations.

6. Conclusion

We are now living in the borderless world and we are now eating borderless. With the development of information technology, we can easily exchange information on food through the Internet. With the development of transportation, we can easily travel abroad and actually eat foreign dishes, and the import/export of food is thriving. With the mixture of information, experiences and materials, cooking is now a global process of new creations. Through cooking, we can enjoy ourselves by creating new recipes or trying to cook new recipes from abroad. Social media is working as the common forum for creative cooking. One new recipe is hatched through a hint on social media; that new recipe is uploaded onto social media and broadcast to an endless number of people in the world. There are problems with the globalization, but we can say surely that social media is changing our food culture of the world.

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