

## SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS OF INSTANT RAMEN IN JAPAN DURING THE HIGH-GROWTH ERA, 1958–1973

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### ABSTRACT

*Instant ramen attained national prominence in Japan beginning in 1958 with the release of the first nationally advertised brand, Chikin Ramen, produced and sold by Momofuku Ando's Sanshī Shokuhin, later to be renamed the Nissin Foods Corporation. From the time of its release, instant ramen became one of the most widely advertised products in Japan. The industry, led by Nissin, was exceptionally successful in utilising marketing campaigns to capitalise on social transformations. The advertisements of the Nissin Foods Corporation are particularly useful indicators of shifts in social organisation, reflecting the transformation of norms and sensibilities occurring in Japan during the fifteen years following the introduction of the emblematic food of convenience. Nissin Foods Corporation reinvented its product and shifted advertising emphasis frequently to accommodate the changing milieu with respect to convenience foods. Initially marketed as a healthy meal full of essential vitamins and nutrients that provided an alternative to cooking for busy housewives, instant ramen quickly became a defining product symbolic of postwar youth culture in the 1960s. By tracing the shifts in instant ramen advertising from the earliest ads in newspapers to later spots on television, the essay will examine the evolving form and content of instant noodle advertising in Japan to illuminate the connections between popular food trends and larger social and political changes related to family organisation, nutritional science and projections of national identity.*

**Keywords:** instant food history in Japan

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In 2010, people around the world consumed 95.3 billion units of instant noodles according to the World Instant Noodles Association (WINA) and half of these were consumed by people in China, Japan or Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> In their rapid dispersion throughout the globe, instant noodles have altered dietary habits and ideas about food preparation the world over, but particularly in Asia. This icon of convenience has become, at once, a hallmark of postwar Japanese innovation, a regional top-seller in East Asia and a borderless product found in nearly every country. In addition, the demand for instant noodles in areas struck by war, famine or natural disaster has made evident its utility as an emergency food. Instant noodles can thus be understood as one of the first global convenience foods marking the ever-increasing homogenisation of human dietary practices, and its importance in displacing and transforming inherited knowledge regarding food preparation is now becoming more evident.

Introduced in 1958 by Sanshī Shokuhin of Japan (later renamed the Nissin Foods Corporation), instant noodles quickly became a favourite of the postwar Japanese baby boomer generation. In this essay, I examine the marketing and reception of instant ramen in Japan between 1958 and 1973, the era of rapid national economic growth, when it became an emblematic food of postwar reindustrialisation and technological advancement. This was also a time when food supplies and habits drastically changed across regional and class lines to form a national cuisine. The essay is framed first around the advertisements of the Nissin Foods Corporation, and second, the reaction to the spread of instant ramen and other convenience foods by social critics and contributors to weekly journals. The aim is to analyse the social impact of instant ramen by studying its marketing and reactions to it from consumers over the course of the high growth era, which also happened to be the first fifteen years of the product's existence in Japan.

My reasons for focusing on the advertisements of the Nissin Foods Corporation in the first section of the essay are threefold. First, Nissin Foods was the initial company to mass-market instant noodles in Japan, releasing its Chikin Ramen-brand in 1958. From the beginning, the company relied

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<sup>2</sup> "National Trends in Instant Noodles Demands," World Instant Noodles Association (WINA), (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://instantnoodles.org/noodles/expanding-market.html>. According to the website, the Nissin Foods Corporation launched WINA in 1997 to: 1. Improve safety and quality 2. Collect and distribute data. 3. Promote instant noodle consumption. 4. Hold the World Instant Noodles Summit. 5. Help people in need with noodles. There are now over 50 companies that belong to the group, although at least 11 are Nissin Foods subsidiaries located abroad.

heavily on radio, print and television advertising to appeal to young consumers, as it does today. Second, the company is by far the largest manufacturer of instant noodles in Japan, with a market share of 40 percent, making its advertisements more ubiquitous than other instant noodle makers and a good indicator of changing trends in marketing. Third, due to its long history and dominant position in the market, its advertisements are more accessible for research, both at the Nissin Foods library at the company's Tokyo headquarters, and the Tokyo Ad Museum, an excellent resource for those seeking to research Japanese television advertising.<sup>3</sup>

The explosion of instant foods was a significant change in dietary patterns that accompanied the rapid transformations in the everyday life of people in Japan during the period of high growth. As the first instant food invented and popularised in Japan, the Nissin Foods Corporation's Chikin Ramen was a central part of the sweeping changes in food technologies, marketing strategies and consumption practices that marked the era. Nissin Foods depended heavily on the transformations that were taking place in housing (mass tenement projects), vending (supermarkets) and the rationalisation of everyday life in general for its popularisation.

Nissin Foods' sales of Chikin Ramen greatly benefited from the expansion of mass media marketing audiences through the surge in weekly magazine readers and television viewers in the era of high growth. The segmentation of the mass media market into various consumer groups greatly aided Nissin's ability to focus on its core target audience of young housewives, unmarried men and children. Nissin Foods' effective use of newspaper, magazine, radio and most importantly, television advertising through the use of popular young celebrities, original theme songs, quiz shows, cash giveaways, travel prizes to Europe and a host of other promotional campaign goods made it a nationally recognised innovator in the sphere of youth-targeted marketing.

After focusing its advertising energies on nationwide newspapers for the first two years, Nissin Foods moved into the television market in 1960 with its sponsorship of the youth-oriented programs, *Igaguri-kun* and *Biibaa-chan*. According to the company history, the first set of advertisements aimed

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<sup>3</sup> The food advertisements I describe in the first half of the essay were researched at these two sites.

to drive home to consumers "how convenient life could be with Chikin Ramen," as well as its "healthfulness, hygienic quality, novelty and vitality."<sup>4</sup>

In 1962, Nissin Foods launched its own independently-sponsored television program—a quiz show titled, "World's Greatest Quiz"—in which one hundred contestants competed for one million yen (roughly US\$ 2800). The program replicated the format of the popular American quiz program, "\$64,000 Question," which ran on CBS (CBS Broadcasting Inc.) between 1955 and 1958. The Japanese version of the quiz show quickly became one of the highest-rated programs nationwide, and continued as such until its termination in May 1965. Before its cancellation, the Osaka Housewives' Association recognised the show as the "Best Youth-Oriented Program" on television, highlighting Nissin Foods' ability to gain approval as a good corporate citizen from its most important consumer base, young urban mothers.<sup>5</sup>

Another pioneering step in marketing by Nissin Foods was the composition of an original musical tune for the purpose of radio advertising. Sung by the minor celebrity, Shibakura Mariko, "The Chikin Ramen Song" 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 considerably.<sup>6</sup> A 1967 article from the tabloid magazine *Sunday Mainichi* concerning the ten-year anniversary of the product release of instant ramen notes the fluency with which young people had become able to recite lines and songs from instant ramen commercials:

This year marks the tenth year since the birth of instant ramen. Sales have grown twenty-fold since its introduction in Osaka in 1958. Even the Japanese economy has not matched such high economic growth. "My Name is Ramen Tarō."<sup>7</sup> "This is what I like." "I have eaten a whole range of them, but after all...this is what I like." When hearing these lines pop out so effortlessly from the mouths of children...one understands that the twenty-fold

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<sup>4</sup> Nissin Foods Corporation. *Shoku tarite yo wa tairaka: Nisshin shokuhin shashi* (Osaka: Nissin Foods Corporation, 1992), 72.

<sup>5</sup> Nissin, *Shoku tarite*, 74.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Tarō is a common name in Japan with symbolic connotations of the everyman, similar to a name such as Jim in the U.S.

growth figures apply not only to instant ramen but also to the dissemination of television waves as well.<sup>8</sup>

Nissin Foods' use of catchy advertising jingles promoting instant foods was such a success that these tunes became absorbed in a generation of children who came of age in that era, and ultimately established a place for Nissin Foods advertisements as part of the national popular cultural milieu. In this manner, Nissin Foods effectively exploited new media forms to associate itself with, and at times even define, the burgeoning youth consumer culture of the high growth period.

Another important component of the effort to promote instant ramen to children was the introduction of an original trademark character for consumers to associate with Chikin Ramen. The story behind Nissin Foods' development of the character, "Chibikko" (a term for small child in Japanese), is instructive of the growing importance of marketing, particularly to young people, and the vast resources spent researching their picky preferences in the period of high growth. The company history notes the heavy investment in market research made before the character's official introduction in 1965.

Nissin Foods had already created two original trademark characters named "Chii-chan" and "Kin-bō" soon after its founding (which combined to form the word "Chikin"), but decided to scrap them in 1964 as the heightened need for attention to youth-oriented mass marketing became clear. Although the company's initial plans were to use "a chicken motif," one of its rivals outpaced Nissin Foods and released a chicken character in its advertising, forcing its marketing team back to the drawing board. Planners then began discussing the possibility of an elephant or a giraffe, but upon conducting more diligent market research, settled upon "a healthy, happy and mischievous child" as the symbol of the company.<sup>9</sup>

The intensified attention paid to children as an abstract category, seen in the construction of the first National Children's hospital in Tokyo and the "Children's Country" theme park in Yokohama, both in 1965, strongly influenced the company's choice of an animated child to represent it. The company history explains that the character of Chibikko was drawn with "wheat-flour colored complexion, a round nose, large eyes and freckles,

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<sup>8</sup> "Insutanto ramen kigen jūnen," *Sunday Mainichi*, 12 March 1967, 44.

<sup>9</sup> Nissin, *Shoku tarite*, 129.

representing the image of health itself."<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, this "image of health itself" appears with light blonde hair, freckles and a baseball cap turned sideways, and behaves as a "healthy, happy and mischievous child." The blonde hair, freckles and baseball cap on Chibikko all suggest that the character was drawn as an idealised popular image of the white American child, who epitomised health, wealth and mischievous happiness.

Nissin Foods then began a cash giveaway promotional campaign in 1965, handing out 1,000-yen notes to 500 people daily for three months between February and May. The promotion was wildly successful, drawing over 1.6 million entries and (re)acquainting households across Japan with the Nissin Foods brand name. Nissin Foods' explanation of its purpose in launching the campaign was indicated on its posters, which stated, "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 consumers a gift of 1,000 yen as a way of expressing our appreciation, and also of increasing our share of the instant foods market."<sup>11</sup> Following the success of the cash giveaway promotion, Nissin Foods began holding sweepstakes for travel tours to Europe and colour televisions.<sup>12</sup>

The shifts in Nissin Foods' product names and marketing themes over the course of the high growth period are a valuable source for studying the concerns of consumers in the context of rapid social-economic change. For example, Nissin Foods terminated the use of Roman letters on its packaging and stopped describing the nutritious benefits of most of its products after 1966. These modifications suggest a slight decline in the general appeal of American-themed marketing imagery, as well as a general recognition among consumers that instant ramen was not a healthy food, notwithstanding all of the adamant advertisements to the contrary. In addition, the company released "Japanese-style Chikin Ramen" in 1966, and "Demae Itcho" in 1968, both emphasising the Japanese qualities of the soy sauce-based soups and the latter using the Chibikko character dressed in Edo period worker's clothing. These names and marketing themes are indicative of a growing trend towards the marketing of goods and services as distinctly *Japanese* in the late 1960s.

Furthermore, Nissin Foods released "Inaka soba" (Country-style buckwheat noodle-soup) and "Ramen Kazoku" (Ramen Family), both in 1970,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 131.

which can both be understood as testaments to the depopulation of the countryside and the decline of extended kinship ties in Japan during the same period. Nissin Foods' ability to create entirely different images around its product lines based on the continual regeneration of marketing themes (despite the fact that they were all essentially composed of the same ingredients—wheat flour, oil, and salt—with a slight degree of variation in the flavouring), illustrates the company's sensitivity to the issues of concern to the public at each time, such as poor nutrition, envy towards American youth consumer culture, loss of tradition, decline of country life and weakening family ties. Like other successful marketing campaigns, the company's advertising genius lay in its ability to promote the idea that the consumption of instant noodles healed rather than exasperated each of these problems.

Nissin Foods' television advertisements are another useful source for examining the rapidly changing social trends in high-growth era in Japan. Television broadcast in Japan began in 1953, but the mass consumption of television sets did not occur until 1959, when the crown prince's wedding to Shōda Michiko of the Nisshin Flour Milling Company, unrelated to the instant noodle maker, set off a buying frenzy for television sets. One of Nissin Foods Corporation's first television advertisements, aired in 1963, features a young boy and his mother, who is dressed in a high-quality kimono and appears refined by all indications, giggling together while holding a package of instant ramen. The ad also displays the word "Lysine" prominently across the screen along with the name of the product. The implication is that well-to-do mothers feed their children protein-enriched instant noodles to keep them happy and healthy.<sup>13</sup> The commercial's core message is thus the healthful nature of instant ramen consumption.

The company's next major commercial featured a young man wearing a white tank top sitting in a small apartment by himself, getting ready to enjoy his instant noodles. It is titled, "Living Single" (*Dokushinsha*) and straightforwardly reveals the second main target group for Nissin Foods' products besides children—unmarried men.<sup>14</sup> This commercial and others like it (such as a 1973 ad for Nissin's Yakisoba titled, "Bachelor's Dorm" or literally, "Man's Room" [*Otoko no heya*]) reinforced the strong notion of instant ramen as men's food in Japan. Advertisements such as "The Bachelor"

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

that targeted young males tended to emphasise the convenience rather than the nutritious qualities of the food.

A 1966 commercial titled, "My Grandchildren Love It," reveals another important target group for instant ramen manufacturers—the elderly. The commercial shows an old grandmother with her son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren all enjoying instant ramen together. The ad clearly illustrates the Nissin Foods Corporation's targeting of grandparents to buy and serve instant noodles to their grandchildren, who by this time had become thoroughly accustomed to the taste of it. However, the spot may also be understood as an attempt to provide an excuse for elderly urban consumers (who were becoming increasingly detached from the urban nuclear families of their children) to buy instant foods without having to admit to eating them. Therefore, "My Grandchildren Love It" may have been just the line that elderly consumers, who were growing more dependent upon instant foods for everyday nourishment, needed to maintain a sense of dignity when buying Chikin Ramen for themselves.

Nissin Foods' advertisements for its Demae Itcho line, which began in 1968, usually portrayed young kimono-clad men discussing the dish in relation to the uniqueness of Japanese culture, representing a turn in the company's marketing emphasis. Commercials such as "Japanese Common Sense" (*Nihon no jōshiki*) from 1972, or "Soy Sauce—Japanese people, Soy Sauce—Sale" (*Shōyu Nihonjin, Shōyu seeru*) from 1975, illustrate the newfound marketability of "Japanese culture" as a commodity marker.

The introduction of Japanese-style (Wafū) Chikin Ramen and the Demae Itcho line in 1966 and 1968, respectively, represented a new emphasis on Japanese-themed brand marketing, which drew heavily upon pre-Western influence Japanese imagery of Edo 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 put forward not only by advertisers, but also by writers of popular tabloid magazines with mass circulation. One of the earliest mentions of such an association can be found in the 28 October 1971 issue of the male company-worker-targeted weekly, *Shūkan Gendai*, which interviewed twenty of the most prominent instant ramen lovers of Japan on their favourite add-on recipes, and the significance of instant ramen for them. The piece begins with a quote from then Foreign Minister (and later Prime Minister) Fukuda Takeo, "It is one of my favourite 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>15</sup> The Foreign Minister's claim to regularly eat instant ramen was a clear signal that he wanted to be viewed as a man of the masses, but also served as a strong endorsement for instant ramen from one of the most elite politicians in the country.

Next, the well-known essayist Kita Morio admits, "I am addicted to instant ramen...These days I eat it only twice per day at one and three a.m., but for a while I was eating it as if I was mad."<sup>16</sup> The most noteworthy quote, however, is from the famous 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-ness. "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 and more strongly that instant ramen is purely a Japanese food, and that I am Japanese."<sup>17</sup> Imai's assertion concerning the connection between her pride in being Japanese and her enjoyment of instant noodles, would gain wide circulation in the coming decade and a half, just as instant ramen was becoming more of a global product in terms of production and circulation.

The turn toward Japanese-themed advertising and a reckoning of instant-ramen eating as a distinctly Japanese cultural habit coincided with a broad turn toward the study of Japanese uniqueness among journalists and academics within and outside of Japan, focusing on the root causes for Japan's successful development as a modern, non-European, non-Christian, non-Communist nation. The theories and debates concerning the essential parts of Japanese culture that made the nation capable of American-style economic development (unlike all other non-European nations) tended to discuss Japan in terms of homogeneity and uniqueness in relation to a normative, progressive "West" as represented by the U.S. Although writers debated which part of Japanese culture was responsible for the country's economic success, the framework for the debate often ignored issues such as Japan's highly advantageous position as America's most valuable strategic ally outside of Europe due to the Cold War, the bifurcated labour market structure underpinning the national economic growth, or the regional and socio-economic class variations within Japan itself. "Japanese culture" was therefore depicted as a timeless, unified essence, and the analysis avoided

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<sup>15</sup> "Shokutsū meishi no sokuseki ramen mikaku shinsa," *Shūkan Gendai*, 8 October 1971, 42–45.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

consideration of the historicity of the category itself, the ethnic and class divisions that its abstract unity masked, or its relation to more global forces of historical change.

A defining part of the mass culture that flourished in the high-growth era was the explosion of weekly newsmagazines targeting different segments of the population such as young women, young men, housewives and adult men. Women's magazines generally celebrated the convenience and supposed nutrition of instant foods as a manifestation of scientific progress and suggested improvements on recipes with possible add-ons. One example can be found in a 1972 issue of *Young Lady*, which notes 20 different ways to make use of instant ramen, such as 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 jovially observes, "The world sure has become a lot more convenient."<sup>18</sup> The article also provides a recipe for *suiton*<sup>19</sup> stew, suggesting how one of the other most widely consumed postwar emergency foods besides *Shina soba* (an older term for ramen) was becoming popular among young people in its instant form, to the surprise of those with personal memories of surviving on it.<sup>20</sup>

Editorials in male company-worker-targeted magazines, on the other hand, often expressed concerns about the social changes entailed by the explosion of such foods, particularly the perceived oversimplification of domestic labour. While there was no disagreement over the idea that the proliferation of household kitchen technologies and scientifically-preserved foods among working households was a sign of national economic achievement (i.e., "catching up" with the oft-touted "American" standard of living), the reduction in time required to cook became a matter of controversy for male-targeted magazine writers, who stoked fears that the "American" model of the housewife, with its implications of laziness, had also been imported into Japan. An article from a 1955 edition of the literary journal *Shōsetsu Kōen* nicely illustrates this tension by addressing the advent of frozen food, its impact on gender relations and the differences between the use of household durables in Japan and the U.S.

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<sup>18</sup> "Kore wa ikeru: shin sokuseki yashoku 20," *Young Lady*, 4 December 1972, 130–133.

<sup>19</sup> *Suiton* are flour-based dumplings with no taste that are consumed in a stew with vegetables, and along with *udon*, *Shina soba* and bread, formed one of the staple foods consumed during the Occupation making use of U.S. wheat flour in lieu of rice, which was short in supply.

<sup>20</sup> "Kore wa ikeru," *Young Lady*, 130.

The anonymous author begins by mentioning that the largest news story of the year was the record number of sales of washing machines, refrigerators and televisions, but rather than being a cause of celebration, it only revealed 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 being freed from even the duty of cooking."<sup>21</sup>

After describing 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<sup>22</sup> fish. But the frozen foods being sold today 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>23</sup>

The author then projects frozen food sales in Japan over the next decade, and predicts robust growth for the industry as long as prices continue 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 labour, but in America they do not complain. This is what makes Americans who they are. If it was a Japanese man, he would probably have to make at least one complaint."<sup>24</sup> The article makes clear that changing practices of domestic labour were producing much anxiety for social critics such as the author. Specifically, the decreased amount of time spent on food preparation by female household managers became viewed as a turn away from the very duties that defined motherhood and femininity. Thus, the type of apprehension voiced by such critics became a common theme in newspapers and magazine editorials in Japan as instant food became increasingly popular.

An article that captures the problematic of improved convenience at the cost of greater atomisation can be found in an issue of *Shūkan Asahi* from 1960 exploring the novel dietary lifestyle associated with instant-food-

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<sup>21</sup> "Reitō shokuji," *Shōsetsu Kōen*, December 1955, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Both are varieties of codfish.

<sup>23</sup> "Reitō shokuhin," *Shōsetsu Kōen*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

dependent bachelors.<sup>25</sup> By that year, it had become 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 the Yūrakuchō district of Tokyo. It then highlights the plethora of new technologies, particularly with respect to food, that urban company workers were enjoying while also pointing out some older everyday practices that were being lost in the process.

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 "flavouring 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 [steamed egg custard], and decides to buy them all as he will surely consume them at some unknown time in the future. As he consumes his dinner of instant fried rice mix and canned meat, and he 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 [pushcart] operator. 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 bottle opener and a frying pan. When people ask, 'what about the taste of the food?' I must admit, it is not that good. But it is something that I should be able to put up with until I get married at least."<sup>26</sup>

In addition to relating the atomisation generated by instant-food dependency, the article also reinforces the notion that the socially appropriate consumer group for instant foods is young unmarried men. The expectation that the instant man would no longer need to "put up with" such foods so regularly once married again points to the taboo on over-reliance on instant

<sup>25</sup> "Insutanto jidai desu: ishokujū nandemo 'sokuseki,'" *Shūkan Asahi*, 13 November 1960, 5–11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

foods by housewives. Thus, while instant food makers and kitchen technology producers directly targeted young housewives in advertisements and encouraged the rationalisation of everyday life through the use of their products, critical editorial writers for salary-man-oriented newsmagazines discouraged their use as unfeminine and not motherly.

Some women writers—often with home economics backgrounds—also bemoaned the decline of home cooking and the advent of "too much time for leisure" as a result of the lifestyle afforded by instant foods. For example, the same *Shūkan Asahi* article also quotes travel writer and food expert Totsuka Fumiko on the degeneration of culture entailed in the wholesale adoption of instant foods.

If the instant [lifestyle] goes to the extreme, humans become psychologically mechanised too, which brings about the destruction of the mental structure....There is a trend among American housewives to knit or take dogs for walks....This is the very sight of humans overcome by the instant lifestyle. Many [American] men have even taken to Eastern philosophy and Zen Buddhism.<sup>27</sup>

Totsuka's evidence for the decadence of American culture is none other than a growing curiosity in Eastern philosophy. In her rendering, therefore, the American interest in the category of knowledge understood as Oriental 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 espousing the instant lifestyle (i.e., American way of life) afforded by household technologies.<sup>28</sup>

Less critical, more celebratory editorials on instant foods from magazines targeting agricultural workers can also be found, which usually noted the nutritional benefits of instant food consumption, bolstering advertising claims by Nissin Foods and other producers. One example is an editorial in the magazine *Chijō*, an agricultural journal, which provides a glimpse into the popularity of instant ramen given its novelty and scientific

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

claims to superior nutrition in the early 1960s.<sup>29</sup> After explaining what instant ramen is and how it is prepared, the author exclaims, "it is full of healthy nutrients such as protein, fat, vitamin B1, vitamin B2 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 per-bowl charged at Chūka soba (Chinese noodle-soup) shops or at yatai stands."<sup>30</sup> The same article also touts the merits of instant shiruko (sweet red bean soup), noting that it too contains vitamin B1 additives and can be purchased for about one-third the cost of the store-served version. In addition, the anonymous author suggests instant coffee to farmers as a way for them to quickly regain the energy to work hard in the field without wasting time actually brewing the drink. The author's argument that the instant versions of ramen, shiruko and coffee were actually superior to the handmade ones served in eateries due to their price and nourishing ingredients conveys how the belief in better nutrition through chemical additives was spread to both urban and rural labourers not only through company advertising, but also by enthusiastic editorial writers who did so on a voluntary basis. Such articles point to a more general faith in the promise of scientific improvements in everyday life materials and processes.

Two other themes common to many editorials critiquing the explosion of instant foods were the poor flavour and safety records of some of the products. One article from *Shūkan Shinchō*, one of Japan's two leading weekly newsmagazines, raises both of these concerns.<sup>31</sup> The subheading to the article notes, "Too many products taste 'just good enough.'" According to one Japanese food scientist quoted in the article, "The main concern for the industry at this point is to improve taste...Once the most essential aspects of the product—taste and aroma—are improved, and once lifestyles are rationalised more in Japan, we will see the industry truly takeoff."<sup>32</sup> The rationalisation of lifestyles to which the scientist refers specifically entailed a greater reliance on convenience foods purchased from supermarkets and prepared using electric cooking appliances.

The next issue with respect to instant ramen in the article is that of safety, which became a widespread concern as reports of people falling seriously ill after consuming Chikin Ramen and other brands began appearing

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<sup>29</sup> "Insutanto shokuhin," *Chijō*, February 1961, 130.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> "Insutanto shokuhin no saiten: ōsuguru 'aji sae gaman sureba,'" *Shūkan Shinchō*, 13 March 1961, 22–23.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

in the news in March 1961. The author notes, "The Ministry of Health and Welfare released a statement on February 20 stating that with respect to instant foods, some have been found to be flawed on sanitary grounds, and that it has informed the country's governors of the need to closely monitor the situation...In any case, there are many issues that need to be resolved in the instant foods industry."<sup>33</sup> Investigations revealed that production on poorly maintained equipment, as well as a lack of clear information regarding expiration dates for consumers, were to blame for the outbreak of food-borne illnesses. The introduction of expiration dates on products and the establishment of a unified trade association at the government's urging were both outcomes of the safety problems raised in this article and many others.

By the second half of the 1960s, more editorial writers began criticising the explosion of instant foods as concerns with the social changes entailed in their popularisation became more apparent. One particularly critical article can be found in *Ushio*, a magazine published by the lay Buddhist organisation, Sōkagakkai.<sup>34</sup> Penned by the social critic and sake historian, Murashima Kenichi, the article delves into a wide range of the sweeping social changes related to the popularisation of instant foods.

Murashima begins the piece by discussing the fad of adding the word "instant" to other words in Japanese to create new terms and how much it bothers his linguistic sensibilities. He lists terms he has recently encountered in conversations, such as "insutanto miai" (arranged introduction for possible marriage), "insutanto manee biru" (money for pawned goods) or "insutanto ka" (referring to an expedited educational certification program) and bemoans that even the major publishers' dictionaries (Iwanami Shoten, Shinchōsha and Ōbunsha) treat the word "instant" as part of standard Japanese.<sup>35</sup> The rapid transformation of linguistic norms is thus taken as an indication of cultural degradation through excessive incorporation of the foreign and the novel.

Murashima attributes the linguistic changes primarily to shifting dietary habits and specifically, to the mass consumption of instant ramen. He 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 10 million servings per day."<sup>36</sup> Despite Murashima's alarm at the high rate of consumption in 1966, instant ramen

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Murashima, K., "Insutanto shokuhin sōmakuri," *Ushio*, November 1966, 286–293.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 286.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

consumption grew even further to reach a rate of 45 servings annually per person over the next decade.

Murashima then examines the reasoning behind the popularisation of what he calls "emergency foods" (instant foods) despite the lack of an emergency. He states that the two key aspects to 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 usually associated with military readiness, so desirable to Japanese society at a time of supposed peace. He states,

On the war front, it is always difficult to know when one will be re-supplied 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 becomes necessary to have foods that 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>37</sup>

Murashima's salient observation regarding the application of advancements in military technology to everyday life practices in times of so-called peace calls attention to the continuities between wartime and postwar Japan in terms of the rationalisation of everyday life practices. He thus traces the social transformations of the high growth period to processes rooted in the logic of total war mobilisation, which economist Nakamura Takafusa contends as well. For Murashima, however, the psychology of the consumer who eats emergency foods despite an absence of scarcity is most puzzling, and for him, provides an apt illustration of 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,

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 288.



based on a normatively construed gendering of labour. Like the author of the *Shōsetsu Kōen* article mentioned above, one of Murashima's main qualms with the advent of instant foods is the reduction in cooking time it affords to housewives. In first clarifying who *is* capable of eating instant ramen without offending his sense of propriety, he states:

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 board. When he is up late at night studying, he fills his empty 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 and finishes it in a jiff...I believe that these are examples of the legitimate (*matomo*) use of instant ramen.<sup>38</sup>

Each of his examples of acceptable use consists of a man working hard during unusual hours. The independent, self-sacrificing, ambitious young man requiring irregular infusions of calories is thus the only acceptable type of ramen consumer for Murashima. In other words, instant ramen may be used practically and effectively as a way to boost male productivity. The trouble with instant ramen for him, however, is its use as a means to reduce labour for housewives. He writes:

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

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

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 290.

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 rationalisation or innovation.<sup>39</sup>

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

What are housewives doing with all the extra time and labour? Are they cultivating [kyōyō] 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 had? My friend, who is a doctor, told me, "Not necessarily. There are also a lot of 'education mothers' [kyōiku mama]."<sup>40</sup>

Murashima concludes by criticising young fathers in Japan for allowing their wives to become education-obsessed mothers who cook instant food instead of more nutritious, slower-cooked foods.<sup>41</sup> Murashima's resentment is not directed at the manufacturers of instant ramen, nor its unmarried male consumers, but at urban housewives and their indulgent husbands who were focusing obsessively on the education of their children. His bewilderment at the changing practices of domestic labour resulting from advances in food preservation technology illustrates how central the issue of gender was to the debates about instant foods in this era.<sup>42</sup> The advent of the instant-foods-reliant mother was thus a menacing social disruption for established household labor practices based on gender, as indicated by the author's tone. The piece neatly ties together many of the disparate themes arising from the foregoing consideration of changes in food, labour and everyday life in high growth-era Japan through the vantage point of instant ramen.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 292.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 293.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> See also Ueno, C., *Shufu ronsō o yomu*, Keisō Shobō, 1982.

## **CONCLUSION**

As one can infer from the articles mentioned above, the success of instant ramen in Japan during the high economic growth era generated a mix of reactions. While the technological progress and convenience represented by this novelty food were understandably touted by some in the press, the social repercussions in terms of increasing atomisation, changing expectations and practices of domestic labour, diminution of cooking skills and even stimulation of nationalism were all readily observed and criticised by others. The considerable social impact of ramen in displacing established practices of daily life (or accommodating alterations in household structure owing to more general shifts in labor) in Japan can presumably be applied to other countries as well, where the food is quickly becoming a favourite among the young and overworked. It is one of the single most important contributions to our rapidly changing global food culture and continues to reshape dietary habits across all national borders in ways that have yet to be studied with due seriousness.