

**Special Report: School Meal Program****The different between Japanese and Vietnamese school lunches  
No.4 in a Series**

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As the first generation of dietitians in Vietnam, studying in a graduate program in Japan, we are working hard to study every day in order to improve our country's nutrition situation, especially schools' nutrition. Through one year of working as a dietitian in a primary school in Vietnam, as well as one year of internship in Japanese school kitchens, I have seen the difference in school meals between two countries.

In Japan, lunch is often the most enjoyable time of the day for children. They eagerly await the lunch and eat with delight. Meals are meticulously planned by the dietitian and carefully prepared by the cooking staff. Hence school lunches are very attractive and delicious. Moreover, the menus are different every day in a school year, keeping children from getting bored. For those reasons, almost all the students eat all the food provided, and the amount of food leftover is very small.

In contrast, in Vietnam, children often do not like school meals. They often say that school meals are not tasty, the menu is repetitive. Many children do not eat at school but choose to eat at home. Currently, public schools in Vietnam do not have dietitians. Meals are prepared based on the experiences of the kitchen staff members – who are not fully trained in nutrition. They often make simple, quick-cooking menus. The dishes are very monotonous and not eye-catching. For that

reason, children who eat school lunch often leave a lot of food, mainly vegetables, and rice.

So why there is such a difference in the deliciousness and attractiveness of school meals between the two countries?

During my internship, I discovered that in Japan, they use a lot of materials, more than 10 kinds for each meal. On the first day of my internship, I was really surprised when I walked into the kitchen and saw many types of vegetables with a variety of colors. With such a variety of vegetables, they have created many different food combinations, in all dishes: main dishes, side dishes or even staple food (Photo 1). When combining vegetables together, vegetables with meats/fish/eggs or with rice, it will give children new sensations in both flavor and texture. In addition, when vegetables are part of a tasty mixture, even disliked vegetables might become acceptable. Also, because of these combinations, meals become colorful stimulating children's appetite. On the other hand, in Vietnam, a meal has only about 5-6 materials and is often cooked separately, without any combination (Photo 2). Therefore, the colors are also quite monotonous, not bringing excitement to children. Because of that cooking method, children who already do not like to eat vegetables will only eat meat and leave vegetables behind.



Photo 1: Japanese school meal



Photo 2: Vietnamese school meal

In addition to using a variety of food materials, the cutting method between the two countries is also different. In Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has recommended to choose a cutting method that suits the nature of the ingredients and the cooking method, and decide the thickness and size according to the dish to standardize. They had made the guideline on how to cut the vegetable

for school lunch (photo 3) and also give examples of the characteristics of different cutting methods (Photo 4). Through my internship, I saw that the school really put it into practice. Each material has a different cutting method depending on the combination and is cut very carefully so that the thickness of all pieces is similar. With fish and meat, when delivered, the supplier has already cut it according to the requirements of the dietitian. With vegetables, every morning, the cooking staff cut them according to the instruction which was carefully noted by the dietitian.

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With the same vegetable but two different dishes, the cut is different. For example, carrots in a salad had thin strips cut, but in a soup, they were cut into quarter slices (Photo 1). With that cutting method, the ingredients will be mixed well together, and make the dish look better. In opposition, in Vietnam, the

materials are cut very rough, the size is uneven. As in stir-fried chicken (Photo 2), there were both very large pieces and very small pieces, so when cooking, small pieces might become very tender while large pieces still hard. Vegetables and eggs were also the same. This made the overall dish look less appealing.

(5) 野菜の切り方

素材の性質や調理方法に合った切り方を選択し、料理に応じて厚さや大きさを決めて標準化しましょう。

<p><b>小口切り</b></p>  <p>セロリやねぎ等、細長い食品を端から切る。</p>	<p><b>せん切り</b></p>  <p>薄切りにした食品を、端から細長く切る。幅1mm程度に均等に、手本の糸のように細く切るのを干切りと呼んでいる。</p>	<p><b>いちょう切り</b></p>  <p>いちょうの厚の形のように、切り口の丸いものを縦に十文字等に切り、端から直角に一定の厚さで切る。</p>	<p><b>斜め切り</b></p>  <p>細長い形のもの、斜めに切る。斜めが深い味と脂ったれになる。</p>
<p><b>輪切り</b></p>  <p>切り口が丸くなる食品に対して直角に包丁を入れて切る。火の通り、味の染み込みが均一になるよう、同じ厚さで切る。</p>	<p><b>みじん切り</b></p>  <p>細くせん切りにしたものを、さらに小口から細かく切る。粗めに刻むことを「粗みじん切り」という。</p>	<p><b>乱切り</b></p>  <p>細長い形のもの、手で前に押しながら、斜めに切る。形は揃っても大きさを揃えて切る。</p>	<p><b>ささがき</b></p>  <p>丸くて細い形のもの、箸を握るような要領で薄く小さく切り落とす。</p>
<p><b>半月切り</b></p>  <p>食品を縦に二つ切りにし、切り口を下にして厚さを決めて端から切る。輪切りをさらに真二つに切ったような半月の形からこの名がついている。</p>	<p><b>短冊切り</b></p>  <p>だいこん等を5cm程度に輪切りにし、これを縦1cmの厚さに切り、さらに縦に薄切りにしていく。平たい長方形の形になる。</p>	<p><b>拍子木切り</b></p>  <p>長さを揃えてやや厚めに切り、さらにその厚みと同じ幅に切り、拍子木のように四角柱にする。</p>	<p><b>さいの目切り</b></p>  <p>厚さを1-2cmに切り、それを横にしてサイコロのような形になるよう、同じ厚さで切る。大きく切ると角切りとなる。</p>
<p><b>色紙切り</b></p>  <p>緑の野菜を、両側の汁を切り落とすとして両端に切ってから薄く切る。</p>	<p><b>ぶつ切り</b></p>  <p>あまり形にこだわらず、適当な大きさにぶつ切りにする。</p>	<p><b>ざく切り</b></p>  <p>キュウリや南瓜を縦3-4cmくらいに、ざくざく切る。</p>	<p><b>くし形切り</b></p>  <p>トモ 斜めに皮を剥き、半分から半分にかけて切る。</p>
<p><b>料理に合わせた切り方を</b></p>  <p>縦横に直角 縦横に平行</p> <p>縦横に直角に切ったものは、輪切りやすさが特徴。平行に切ったものは、弾力性や歯ごたえが異なる。料理に合わせて切り方を選ぶことが大切である。</p>		<p><b>たまねぎのみじん切り</b></p>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>① 根元を少し残して、縦に細かく切れるように入れる。</li> <li>② 芯下をむき捨て、お尻に芯、芯を切れるように入れる。</li> <li>③ たまねぎの端から縦に細かく切ると、細かいみじん切りができる。</li> </ol>	

Photo 3: Guideline on how to cut the vegetable for school lunch

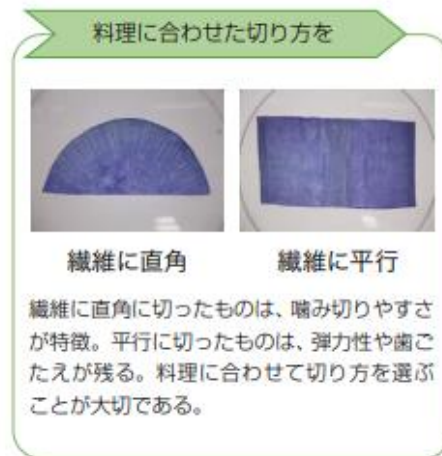


Photo 4: Characteristics of different cutting methods.  
[Those cut at right angles to the fibers (left) are characterized by their ease of chewing.  
Those cut in parallel (right) retain elasticity and chewy texture]

While these findings may sound small, simply increasing the number of food materials to make more food combinations and more colorful meals and changing the way of cutting can have a huge impact on the palatability and appeal of a meal. In my opinion, if Vietnamese school meals can improve those points, it

will make children able to eat with interest and the leftover will be reduced. In addition, I think that it might work not only at school meals but also at home meals. And not only Vietnam, but all countries can also try the above points to improve children's meals.

