

**Special Topic**

**The History of the nutrition improvement in Japan  
Establishment of the National Institute of Nutrition and the Birth of the Profession of Dietitian:  
No. 2 in a Series**

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1) Background to the establishment of the National Institute of Nutrition

In 1868, Japan began to follow the path of a modern nation as a result of the Meiji Restoration. At that time, nutrition science was introduced from Europe and the United States, and the person who primarily contributed to its development and dissemination was Dr. Tadasu Saeki. In 1905, he studied abroad at Yale University in the United States, and after returning to Japan began researching nutrition while treating patients at a hospital in Tokyo. At that time, many researchers focused on the discovery of new nutrients and showed no interest in the practice of nutrition. However, he thought that nutrition was meaningful in practice and useful for people, and in 1914 he established the "Private Nutrition Research Institute" at his own expense in Tokyo Shiba Shirogane.

Then, in 1920, the national government designated this institute as the "National Institute of Nutrition: NIN" and he became its first president. In other words, this year (2020) is the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the NIN. The reason why the NIN was established in Japan was that nutrition officials led by Dr. Saeki were influencing the government, but also there was the social background at that time.

In Japan, due to modernization, the number of industrial workers increased, agricultural workers left the farms, and rice production became sluggish. In addition, the price of rice was soaring abnormally because farmers withheld rice from market rather than sell at prices set by military policy. People could not get rice. Japan became severely undernourished, and the rebel movement of "Give me rice" sprang up frequently in cities, and it expanded into riots. The government positioned nutrition and food issues as an important national policy, and established the "National Institute of Nutrition" as a center for policy research.

2) Origin and utilization of dietitians

The reason for the success of nutrition improvement in Japan is that the state has actively worked on nutrition policy and that people have been enthusiastic about training and utilizing dietitians. Dr. Saeki, who advocated academic independence in nutrition, said that with the low level of knowledge about nutrition among the people, it was not enough to resolve the serious food situation only by researching nutrition and providing information through the media.

In 1924, he established the first "School for Dietitians" to train nutrition professionals on the site of a private nutrition research institute. He thought, "Since doctors don't have kitchen knives and it is

difficult for cooks to learn medicine, we would create dietitians as nutrition professionals with knowledge of both areas". The school recruited top-notch researchers as professors, and since there was no textbook, lessons were developed in line with practice. The following year, the first 13 graduates were awarded certificates and were called "The Hands of Nutrition", pioneering dietitians. The graduates worked at the forefront of nutrition improvement by finding employment as school nutrition teachers, culinary researchers, nutrition specialists in government agencies, hospitals, school lunch facilities, etc. However, they did not yet have a formal national qualification.

In 1945, the year the war ended, the government enacted the "Dietitian Regulations" in Tokyo, which had been destroyed by US airstrikes. Nutritional deficiency had become a serious social problem due to the war, and active nutritional improvement became indispensable. Not to mention the many deaths by starvation, in the turmoil, suspicious foods and health practices were prevalent, leaving people wondering what to believe and what to eat.

The following goals were established for the "Dietitian Regulations".

(1) To define the status and duties of dietitians nation-wide and to unify and to provide uniform thorough nutritional guidance for the population.

(2) To strengthen nutritional guidance in factories, business establishments, rural areas, etc. based on the actual food situation.

The following year, the National Nutrition Survey began, and the first "Japan Dietetic Association General Assembly" was held at the Takarazuka Grand Theater. In 1947, the "Dietitian Regulations" became the "Dietitian Law" with Law No. 245, and dietitians became subject to national qualifications by law in both name and reality. With the birth of dietitians, improving nutrition in Japan became officially the national policy and rapidly expanded as a national movement. Japan was the first country in the world to demonstrate that the most important and effective way to resolve malnutrition among the people is to educate and train dietitians who are nutrition specialists.

**Reference**

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