

Special Topic: The history of the nutrition improvement in Japan

**Japanese Nutrition Changed Food Policy into Nutrition Policy:
No. 3 in a series**

Teiji Nakamura

The President of Japanese Dietetics/ President of Kanagawa University of Human Service

Like other Asian countries, Japan was suffering from malnutrition due to poor food conditions before and after World War II. Because of the rice-dependent diet, carbohydrate intake was high, protein food intake was low due to poverty, and vitamins and minerals were lost through advances in grain processing technology. As a result of malnutrition, newborns and children had poor growth and development, were small in body size, were liable to various diseases related to malnutrition and there was a high incidence of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, and the average lifespan was short.

Nutrition was introduced from Europe and the United States after the Meiji era helped to solve these problems. In particular, the nutrition improvement carried out after World War II achieved remarkable results. At that time, there was no food in our country because of the war, and we had to rely on food assistance from international institutions and charities. The main food supply was under government control and the country provided food, but it was not sufficient to provide the required nutrition. Many people, knowing that it was illegal, got food on the black market.

On the other hand, in the victorious United States, advances in agricultural technology had led to an excess of crops. The US government considered selling this excess food to foreign countries, and the target was Japan, which was suffering from food shortages. In 1954, a meeting was held between Japan and the United States on "the use of market development costs associated with the acceptance of surplus agricultural products in the United States." However, there was no money in Japan to buy these products, and it was difficult for Japanese people who ate rice as their staple food to accept wheat bread and dairy products.

After discussions, the decision was made on the condition that the US government could take over the money that Japan purchases from American farmers for a while and use part of the money to promote and spread imported food. In recent years, some have argued that this was a long-term strategy to westernize the Japanese diet and make it dependent on American agricultural products. However, the only way to survive the severe hunger of the time was to rely on imported food from abroad. In particular, nutritionally inadequate Japanese food with highly nutritious Western food was an effective means of resolving malnutrition. Furthermore, the important point is that advertising funds were provided to promote unfamiliar imported food among the Japanese. Japan actually provided nutritional education to resolve malnutrition, although it was said that this was advertising expense for the United States.

In other words, the Japanese government with the money for advertising expenses, bought a "Kitchen Car" in which the rear part was converted

into a kitchen for cooking demonstration, and dietitians boarded and provided nutrition education to every corner of Japan. This kitchen car is not a Food Truck that provides meals that can be seen in the United States, but a special car that can provide nutrition education that also serves as a cooking demonstration (photo).



Kitchen Car in Japan



Food Truck in American

“The Kitchen Car” is a nutrition education car that also serves as a cooking demonstration, and is different from the “Food Truck”, which is an American mobile restaurant. Nutrition improvement in Japan is characterized by the fact that it is based on nutrition education.