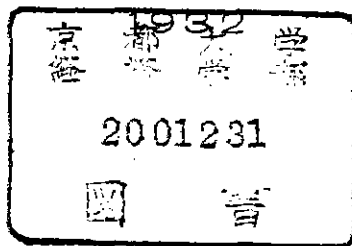


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ON THE FISH-DIET OF THE JAPANESE

1.

The slogan "only for home products" is justifiable not merely on the ground that it is helpful to make favorable the balance of the country's international payments, but may be also justified on more comprehensive grounds covering the peculiarities of our climatic conditions, natural features and national traits. In this connection, let me quote first of all the following paragraph from the 傍廂 *Katahisashi*, a miscellany written by Hikomaro Saito (died 1854 at the age of 87) in the middle of the previous century:—

"Many foreign countries cannot support their inhabitants unless they obtain supplies from other lands, so that their ships make long voyages to other countries for the sake of their requirements. Not so with Japan, however. In this country, what some districts do not produce other districts do. Things which are not to be obtained in plenty in some regions are yielded in abundance in other regions. Thus, all districts can supply each other's needs. This saves the country the necessity of trading with despicable foreign barbarians. The omnipotent gods have supplied the empire with all things, birds and beasts, insects and fishes, grasses and trees, sands and stones, and we are enabled to have our dwellings, utensils, clothing, drugs and foodstuffs. We feel no deficiency whatever. It is a mistake to say that imported drugs only are efficacious for various diseases that have been introduced from abroad. Diseases may come from foreign lands, but our men retain the national characteristics of the Japanese people. In the 大同類聚方 *Daido Ruishuho*,¹⁾ it is rightly asserted:

1) One of our old medical books.

' Medical science has been existent in our country ever since the age of the gods. How can maladies afflicting Japanese people be expected to be cured by foreign medicines? People develop several characteristics peculiar to the land in which they live. They will certainly derive benefit by living after the fashion of their own land. Norisada Sato, who is fully alive to this truth, describes in his writing very judiciously how diseases in South Japan differ from those in North Japan because climatic conditions vary, and how different medicinal herbs grow in districts of different climatic conditions."

It should be, of course, wrong to apply this argument, which was advanced in the days when the closure of the country was maintained as the national policy, to present-day Japan connected by intricate and close economic relations with the outside world. Nor is it likely that anybody who prefers to base his economic or sociological theory on positive grounds, not to mention modern medical scientists, will seriously endorse this theological and teleological fundamental hypothesis. It may, however, be noted that Mr. Tekishu Motoyama, the present-day proprietor of a restaurant in Tokyo, who, like the scholars of a far-off day quoted above, argues, not upon any theoretical grounds but as a practical matter, that people thrive on the produce of their native soil and advocates what he calls "The Yamato (Japanese) spirit in clothing, food and habitation," is by no means alone in the opinion he gives. Many western scholars are also putting forth the same argument on theoretical grounds in recent years. In the present article, I propose at once to study this line of thought and to deal with the Japanese fish-diet with a view to contributing even if scantily to the solution of the food problem of Japan.

2.

The dictum that the progress of civilisation may be

gauged by the extent of the conquest of nature by human power appeals to the contemporaries who are intoxicated with either the urban civilisation or the merits of large industries, but it is as true to-day as of old that the wisest way to help development is to act in conformity with nature and the topographical facilities available, or rather to make good use of them. The following passage appears in an article by 姚可成 Tao Ke-cheng prefixed to the 合刻救荒本草野譜 *Kyukwo Honzo Yafu* (a work on edible herbs in case of famine),¹⁾ which was reprinted (1716) by Joan Matsuo-oka (1668-1746): "Heaven loves life, nature does not make a joke with mankind. What a pity it is that men take delight in abusing nature!" In the 唐陸羽茶經 Lue-yu's the code of tea, edited in the Tang dynasty, we find also a passage: "Heaven's way of nurturing all things is very exquisite. Man however clever, can only achieve something shallow and easy." Both passages represent the fundamental view of the universe which supports the contention mentioned above. The same view of nature has been expressed by many scholars in several essays, but I refrain myself to cite only these paragraphs, as they embody the important fundamental hypothesis of the oriental economic ideas. Take food, for instance. The best way to keep oneself adapted to their circumstances is to take or live on things and foods supplied by the just one of the four seasons. "The doctrine of saving the country based on a complete knowledge of all things therein is infallible." (says a passage in the 易經繫辭上傳 *Yi-King*) With special reference to food, the code of foodstuffs by Yuan Sui-Yuan 袁隨園食譜 says at the outset: "everything has its own inherent nature as everyone has his own natural traits. If one is naturally foolish, one can profit nothing by the teachings of Confucius or Mencius. If things are naturally of bad quality, they will be unpalatable, however skillfully

1) cf. M. Shirai, A brief history of Botany in old Japan. Scientific Japan, past & present, 1926. p. 224).

they may be cooked." The same conception has prompted many researches such as we find in the several agricultural and social calendars 授時考 the *Jujiko*, 月令 the *Getsurei* and 歲時記 the *Saijiki*. In the West, too, they are not lacking in researches of the same kind, as we witness an example in A. Young's *Farmer's Calendar* (6. ed. 1805), but it cannot hold a candle to the East, where many works of the kind were written in all ages. Inasmuch, however, as these books are not devoted to the study of food exclusively, I will refrain from any copious quotations out of them. I must, nevertheless, briefly mention that in a *Guide to the foodstuffs appropriate to the four seasons*, the 時節須知 by Sui-Yuan, to whom reference was made before, we find a simple but yet infinitely significant suggestion: "For the sake of adapting the subsidiary foodstuffs to the different seasons mustard should be used in summer, and pepper in winter." Also in the very interesting book entitled the 饌書 *Sensho*, the code of the feast, by Kando Hakura (ed. 1844), the author classifies food according to the four seasons, in the full sense of entertaining guests with fresh and seasonable foods. One of Japan's prominent features of her climatic condition is that it is subjected to the gradual change of seasons, accompanying a very signal contrast between the hot and the cold weather. Setting aside the question whether these climatic changes are favourable or not, from the point of view of nutrition, the author's classification deserves close attention. Indeed it is usual for Japanese books on cookery to classify food by seasons or even by months. The climate is so different also in North and South Japan that when salted herring roes from the Hokkaido waters begin to appear in the market, the fishing of the yellow-tail commences in the southern or western seas.

3.

"Europe is smaller than Asia, its area to that of Asia being in the proportion of 2 to 9. It became

civilised much later than Asia too. The language spoken there is clumsy, and the letters in use there are written sideways. Its manners and customs, government and religion, clothing and food appear merely barbarous in the eyes of the people of Japan. In astronomy and natural philosophy, in the study of mountains and oceans, and in medical science and gunnery, however, Europeans are frequently superior to Japanese. This is because they have not only habitually followed navigation but with their characteristic acumen and intelligence they are naturally fond of inquiring into serious reasoning. The Japanese are a gentle and simple-minded people; they are not cultured in these matters. It is wrong to despise what excels in the Europeans and to stick to our crude life."

This is a passage contained in the preface to the 地學正宗 *Chigaku Seiso*, a monumental book on universal geography, by Gentan Sugita (ed. 1850-'51) Similar arguments were put forth by a group of men of learning in the closing days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and it is a well-known fact that due to the diffusion of this view, Japanese civilisation has made great strides since the beginning of the Meiji era. On the other hand, it seems hardly possible to say that efforts to make full use of the advantages which Japan's peculiar topography gives to the people and to give full scope to the peculiarities of the Japanese have resulted in the study of economics in this country. As for the matter of diet, for instance, while it is urged that any modern epicure should make a boast of tasting fillet steak, much appreciated by Westerners, too little attention has been paid by Japanese scholars to the economics of consumption to estimate the native delicacy of the caviare made of mullet-roe, especially the Nagasaki produce, which appears in the market regularly in the late autumn. The question of whether man is carnivorous, or herbivorous, or granivorous especially, or frugivorous like monkeys, or whether climatic conditions discriminate such habits, ought to be studied in

the light of the principles of anthropology or ethnology, by anybody who wishes to trace the truth fundamentally. This is a very interesting subject for study for the Japanese who are as really fond of a vegetable diet as of a fish-diet. In the present article, however, I will confine my attention to the fish-diet.

“In China pork and chicken, including eggs, may claim, with river fish, to be staple foods for the rich; sea fowls (solan geese) were formerly the main food in the Hebrides lying to the west of Scotland; river fish, fresh in summer, dried in winter, is the staff of life on the river Tarim in Central Asia, and sea fish side by side with rice for many of the Malays and Japanese, and without a rival among many fishing villages of Europe.”

This is the statement which was uttered by a certain economist in England about fifty years ago. By way of generalisation, he further says:

“Meat and game, fish and shell-fish, poultry and eggs, are delicacies, of which up to certain point a man will be likely to consume more the larger his revenue.”¹⁾

While refraining from considering the degree of importance in connection with the characteristic food of Japan, to which the above quotation refers, in the actual condition of the present-day Japan, I will aim in the present article to study why such a peculiar habit of life came into existence, making inquiries into natural conditions and various historical facts and occasionally quoting the recorded views of scholars of a far-off day.

Ya Hitsudai (whose real name is given as Motonori Hitomi in the chronological table of the natural history of Japan, by Prof. Shirai, the same botanist above-mentioned), in his famous work 本朝食鑑 *Honcho Shokukan* (Japanese Foods), written in 1695, has remarked as his own independent view:

1) Cf. Devas, *Groundwork of Economics*, 1883. p. 292.

"In China, oxen are regarded as sublime religious offerings and very delicious food for daily consumption, and even the sternest law cannot prevent people from eating their meat. In Japan, however, cattle are looked upon as sacrilegious and detrimental. Their meat has been forbidden in shrines since ancient times. Even if so ordered by law, the Japanese cannot bring themselves to eat it. China is situated in the main part of a continent, and its people are strong and sturdy by nature. Unless they take fatty meat, they cannot have sufficient nourishment, so they eat the meat of the ox, sheep and pig. Japan, on the other hand, lies in a corner of the eastern seas, and its people are candid by nature. Their constitution requires light food. They, therefore, live on cereals, fish and fowl."

While recognising exceptions to the rule, which, of course, regards the people looked at in the mass, he takes the line that, generally speaking, a fish-diet is suitable for the candid nature embodied by the Japanese people owing to climatic and other natural circumstances. This diagnosis recommends itself. Professor L. Brentano, a late renowned German economist, in the course of his lecture on political economy at Munich University, discoursed on the influence which topography exerts upon human nature, and said that as a matter of course as well in a country as in the world at large, civilisation begins in the south and proceeds northwards, as can be proved by historical facts. In proportion as climatic conditions are favourable or as districts are favoured by nature, their inhabitants are gradually influenced toward a lessening of the energy for work, the very property of utmost importance at an advanced stage of civilisation. The more man as a factor becomes a decisive element in the economic struggle as civilisation advances, the district plentifully favoured by nature loses in competition with northern districts which are less favoured by nature. In the professor's opinion, this is an incontrovertible historical fact. Setting aside the question

of how the competition of the strong and sturdy nature with the candid nature should be finally decided in the light of this usual course of history, it seems fairly true to attribute the candid nature of the Japanese people and their contentment with plain living partly to the fact that although Japan is rich in natural products, it has had frequent visitations of elemental calamities i.e. rain, flood, fire, earthquake, volcanic eruptions, epidemics, etc.,¹⁾ that the climatic changes in the four seasons of the year are remarkable and that summer heat with much moisture is very uncomfortable. Nor do I doubt that the fact that a fish-diet accords well with the constitution and average temperament of the Japanese people will be endorsed in time by specialists in the light of the principles of medicine and hygiene.

An instance of the attempts to explain the Japanese custom of eating fish on topographical grounds may be found in Gentaku Otsuki's 禁水夜話 *Bansui Yawa*, a collection of dialogues noted down by one of his disciples and published in 1788 with the editor's preface. From a dialogue on food, the following may be quoted:

"Question: What kind of food do the Dutch take? The men who prefer improper food are regarded as similar to aliens."

"Answer: That may be perhaps because foreigners live on beef or pork. Such a custom is not, however, confined to Holland and China. In all foreign countries, the meat of cattle or of swine is used as ordinary food. Japan being a sea-girt country, it has an ample supply of fishery and marine products to live upon, and consequently the people have had since ancient times, no need of roaming over hill and dale to seek for food. Foreign countries are, on the other hand, mostly inland. Some districts lie 100 ri (250 miles) or even 300 ri (750 miles)

1) Cf. W. E. Griffis. *The Japanese Nation in Evolution*, 1907 pp. 266, 384.

away from the sea-shore. It seems that in such circumstances they have been unable to obtain sufficient food from the sea, with the natural result that they have had to take animal products on land for food. It is conceivable that the Creator intended live-stock like pigs to be in existence to be fit for human consumption. Even in Japan, the inhabitants in some mountainous districts of Kiso are said to eat the meat of wild boar and deer, besides salted fish, because they live very far from the sea. Sometime I asked how things were cooked and what kinds of food were taken in China and Holland, and learned that the popular report that natives of those countries live on improper food is mistaken. They take for their daily food such birds and beasts as hens, wild duck, beef and pork, whose meat is indeed nourishing. I was further told that they cook these meats quite enough before eating; they never eat them either half-cooked or raw (This recalls the fact that sliced raw fish, specially fresh one, is the favourite diet of the Japanese,) to avoid indigestion. Dutchmen, however humble, do not venture to eat animals or fish of grotesque forms, which their forefathers abstained from tasting, I hear. They do not, for instance, eat the devil-fish, the octopus or the cuttlefish. They eat only such aquatic products as the sea-bream, the flat-fish, the trout and the carp. As regards birds, they rarely eat the pheasant or the lapwing, of which the flesh is too fatty and injurious. Much less do they eat the flesh of the dog and horse. They are temperate and never overeat nor overdrink themselves."

Whether the description be true or not, it is significant as a view of one of the pioneers who endeavoured to introduce knowledge of European matters to Japan. While western agriculture has been fostered on the dual basis of farming and stock-breeding, promoting properly the object of the maintaining the productivity of the soil by the same system of farming, Japan has developed an extraordinary intensive

agriculture accompanied by scanty stock-breeding. Moreover, the highly mountainous configuration of the country has, in a sense, driven inhabitants radially to the surrounding coasts forming its natural boundaries to find whatever space they could to live in and to supply bait for fish from the residue of dwelling-places. Thus circumstanced as Japan is, the view quoted above implies that the best policy for the country to pursue is to feed its people as much on marine products and fish as on the produce of the land. Moreover, it should not be blamed as an exaggeration, if I held that the same principle of maintaining the productive powers of man and of soil is partly attained by the custom of fish-diet and the ample use of fish-manure.

In this respect, I cannot help recalling a description of Japan by Prof. Ellsworth Huntington in his *Business Geography* collaborated with Frank E. Williams, 1922, who evinced much interest in forming a category of fishing communities, which depend for their livelihood on sea products, unlike various other communities in civilised countries which depend on animals and plants on land. Huntington wrote previously another excellent book, *Civilisation and Climate* (1915), and became famous as an American climatologist. In his book referred to before, he points out as characteristic of Japan's climatic features the intense summer heat synchronising with the greatest amount of humidity, as can be realised in the rainy season and frequent showers experienced afterwards, and maintains that on account of this special feature the climate of Japan is not good for the health of cattle and sheep. He regards this also as a contributory cause of the Japanese custom of fish-eating. He goes on so far as to declare that a large fishing population in Japan due to this cause illustrates a certain definite geographical principle, which is not so pronouncedly displayed in Newfoundland which furnishes another good example of another fishing community of the world. Moreover, as Japan has fortunately a long coast-line and many bays, which are partly washed by the cold water

current, its people go to the seas for fish, thereby procuring the protein which is necessary in their daily food, as to all other races. Side by side with this supply they take straight beans and various other kinds of leguminous plants so as to obtain sufficient nourishment. On the other hand, cattle is scarce, and one belief has gradually developed in Japan that ordinary meat should not be used as food. This belief he explains is interwoven with the Buddhist doctrines. He further remarks that Japan's principal fishing community is to be found in Hokkaido. This notion cannot be dismissed as entirely false, for we find in one of the many useful diaries left by Takeshiro Matsuura, who explored several times many districts of Hokkaido in the old days, the following statement, as recorded while he was in East Ezo (Hokkaido) in 1863:—

“Even the inhabitants of mountain cottages or remote villages know the taste of the grey mullet, the cod, the salmon and the herring, which the seas surrounding Hokkaido and the Kuriles produce. Herring roes dried or salted and the Japanese tangle and edible seaweed, which are popularly regarded as symbolical of longevity and something auspicious for the family prosperity, are prized by all classes of people, high and low.”

At any rate, let me further quote from Huntington's work. He says that although people in Hokkaido, like the inhabitants of Newfoundland, fish the cod, the herring and the salmon, they seldom have a surplus of their catches available for export to other countries, for they distribute them to other districts of their own country. In spite of this state of affair, the Japanese being a clever and active people, have succeeded in promoting the trade in marine products without losing any of the protein which is supplied by fish. This aim they have achieved by manufacturing and selling shellbuttos, fish-oil, isinglass, and iodine extracted from sea-weeds, he asserts. At present many Japanese talk of the encouragement of home production, and at that the sole object they have in view is the prevention of imports to

render Japan selfsupporting in every field, the improvement of the balance of international exchange or the increase of national revenue. All this smacks of the old mercantilists. But the encouragement of home production or so to say the autonomy of national economy, which may be said to be inspired by higher motives, has been partly achieved consciously or unconsciously through the efforts of a section of the nation into the very fact that has been pointed out by the foreign scholar above quoted. In the sense Huntington's reference to this fact deserves specially careful attention.

According to the census taken in 1930, Hokkaido had a population of over 2,800,000 (in 1920 its population was a little less than 2,360 thousands, or about eight times as large as that of Newfoundland. It is to be noted that the main island of Newfoundland alone covers an area of 42,734 square miles, while the area of Hokkaido is given as 88,454 square kilometres in the 49th Statistical Year-Book of Japan.) The total fishing population of Hokkaido was over 180,000 at the end of 1923, according to the same statistical work. According to the General Report of the Census 1920, the more reliable source, in the same year the men and women engaged in the marine production proper totalled 79,262 and 10,427 respectively. Besides, there were 13,063 men and 6,345 women who followed fishing as a subsidiary occupation. These put together aggregated 109,097. The number is exclusive of those who were in various lines of work concerned with the manufacture of articles of bone, shell, etc. and those engaged in the manufacture of tinned food, salted and dried fish, and in the preparation of seaweed as foodstuff and other marine products. Yet we may conclude at ease that the number of inhabitants who depend upon marine production in the island is far below 10 per cent of its total population. Even if we add to the class those fishermen from other parts of Japan, who, in the fishing season, come across and operate in the seas near Hokkaido, the percentage of those who are engaged in the fishery in that island is much smaller than that in New-

foundland, where about 90 per cent of the total population are reported to be engaged in such industry, In fact, the mining, forestry and agricultural industries are equally prosperous in Hokkaido. Such being the case, Huntington's view requires modification in so far as it concerns Japan. If a good example of the fishing community is to be sought in Japan, one must go to fishing villages, pure and simple, to many smaller islands in particular. If his conclusion that Japan's climate is not fit for raising sheep may be let pass, his description of it as not good for the health of cattle is also evidently too sweeping.

—(To be continued)—

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