Kansas Meets East Asia: 
Agricultural Connections 
to China, Japan, and Korea

New Interview Series
Authentic Voices: 
Conversations on Food and Agriculture

Tsukuba Homemakers on Rice and Bread: 
Fish and Beef - Japanese and foreign food for the family

Anthropologist Theodore Bestor on Food in Japanese Culture: Sushi and Fish Markets

Creekstone Farms COO Bill Fielding on exporting beef to Japan

Key Topic:
Understanding the News: The Japanese View of "Mad Cow Disease" (BSE)
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### Our Mission
Introduction:

The Kansas/Asia Community Connection was established in 2002 to actively engage Kansans, particularly those involved in agricultural and rural communities, with China, Japan, and Korea. We focus on agriculture because of its economic importance to Kansas and because of the close relationship between rural life and the historic traditions and culture of our society. In recognition of the growing importance of Asian markets for our agricultural and other exports, we believe it will be useful for Kansans to better understand the culture and economics of those markets. We intend to offer Kansans, through our website, printed reports, and other media, opportunities to discover some commonalities with, as well as fascinating differences from, the experiences of rural people in East Asia. We hope the comparative information we offer on Kansas will provide for East Asians a view of agriculture, rural life, and food in the United States. Eventually, we hope the sharing of information and related activities may generate dialogue between Kansans and Asians that leads to greater understanding by all.

In the Kansas-Asia Agricultural Connections section of our website, we aim to offer information on agriculture and rural life in China, Japan, and Korea, as well as comparative background on Kansas. Readers may browse for information via several approaches, including by country or by agricultural product.

To download and read this information in printed form, see our Agricultural Reports page.
Our Mission

The Kansas/Asia Community Connection (KACC) aims to actively engage Kansans with China, Japan, and Korea. Through a variety of timely, high-quality programs, the KACC seeks to increase understanding of Asian culture, contemporary Asian affairs, and U.S. trade with East Asia in rural communities and agricultural constituencies in Kansas and throughout the Great Plains region. The KACC is also committed to encouraging dialogue between agricultural communities in Kansas and in Asia, to providing relevant information on Asia to Kansas businesses, media outlets, and government agencies, and to creating opportunities for rural youth to learn more about the cultural and economic significance of East Asia. The KACC is dedicated to partnering with other public and private organizations to broaden the global awareness of Kansans.

The Kansas/Asia Community Connection is housed in the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Kansas.

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Food and Consumption: How we use agricultural products

“Yuanyang” hot pot dish (one side spicy, one side not), popular in Sichuan, China

Food Safety

- Japan's Reaction to BSE

Beef

- Eating Beef in Japan
- Eating Beef in China
- Eating Beef in Korea
Cowboys, cattle drives, and juicy steaks—these are images long associated with Kansas, even overseas. For many East Asians, cowboy movies set in Dodge City evoke Kansas far more vividly than any of our other accomplishments. More than just a romantic image, however, the beef industry is also a powerful engine in our state’s economy. The beef industry provides employment and economic benefit to thousands of Kansans. The industry supplies a huge domestic market and is also a major exporter.

Where are these East Asian markets and what does Kansas beef represent there? We offer an overview of the current trade relationships and also a glimpse into the history of beef and cattle in Kansas and in Japan, China, and Korea. Our goal is to provide a historical perspective on our current relationships with East Asia and the ways in which these relationships are mutually beneficial.

We focus on beef as a meat product, and not on leather or dairy. Leather is an important export from Kansas, especially to China, but we will touch on it only briefly. The United States exports dairy products to Asia, but not in significant amounts from Kansas.

We have gathered our information from government reports, academic publications, corporate announcements, and interviews. We welcome additional information.
and South Korea is not far behind. Some experts believe that China will also purchase significant quantities of beef from Kansas in the near future. The cattle drives of today send beef all the way to East Asia.

To download and read about the Kansas beef industry and East Asia in printed form, see

**KACC: Agricultural Reports.**

### Beef Pages

- Japan Reacts to BSE
- Kansas Beef Trade with East Asia
- Beef Production in Kansas
- History of Beef in Kansas
- History of beef in China
- Beef production in China
- Eating beef in China
- Beef trade with China
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- Eating Beef in Japan
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- History of Beef in Korea
- Eating Beef in Korea

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http://asiakan.org/ag_products/beef_intro.shtml
KACC Home Kansas China Japan Korea

Agricultural Products
Trade
History
Food
Cultural Expression
Interviews: Authentic Voices
Resources

History Pages

Yellow Cow, Our Bowery Moon, 1966
Robert Clark Indiana (b. 1928)
Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas

History of Beef in China
History of Beef in Korea
History of Beef in Japan
History of Beef in Kansas

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http://asiakan.org/history/history_intro.shtml
Introduction
Kansas Beef Trade with East Asia

Beef Trade with Japan

Beef Trade with China

Beef Trade with Korea
Artistic Expression: Agriculture and Rural Life in Art and Literature

Kansas Pastorale I, sketch for Topeka Murals, 1938-1940
John Steuart Curry (1897-1946)
Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas

Check back soon for information on paintings, poetry, fiction, and other forms of artistic expression that illustrate the relationship between the peoples of Asia and of Kansas with the foods we eat and other agricultural products we use.
Kansas is one of the most important wheat-producing regions in the world. In fact, Kansas has been so successful at growing wheat that the state considers wheat one of its most important export products, going to markets that include East Asia. Though Kansas is known as “the wheat state,” the wheat plant is not native to Kansas: It was first cultivated successfully in this region only in the late 19th century, when European immigrants brought a variety of seed well-suited to growing conditions in Kansas.

By the late 19th century, wheat had long been a major staple in many other parts of the world. From its early origins in the Middle East, wheat spread throughout Europe, into northern Africa, and other parts of the globe, where humans living in climates conducive to wheat production discovered that the high nutritional content of the wheat grain made it an efficient means of providing food to humans. Indeed, some theories maintain that many of the more populous areas of the world were able to develop rapidly in part because of the nutritional base provided by wheat.

Over the centuries, the cultivation of wheat not only spread west but also east, via the Silk Road and other trading routes, across Central Asia, eventually reaching northern China, Korea, and even the islands of Japan.
Japan. Although the staple grain typically associated with the cuisines of these nations is rice, wheat has, in fact, played an important role in the diets of the peoples of China, Korea, and Japan for centuries. In northern China, wheat has traditionally served as a more important staple than rice. Even in areas dominated by rice in China, Japan, and Korea, wheat has been used to supplement and add variety to the diet.

Today, countries in East Asia import wheat to satisfy market needs unmet by domestic wheat production. The United States has been an important source for the wheat needs of those markets. As Asian consumers’ wheat-type preferences shift, however, U.S. wheat exporters may need to adjust to compete with other wheat-producing nations. Wheat producers and exporters in Kansas and elsewhere in the United States may find it helpful to understand more about these Asian markets—their history, culture, consumption patterns, production, and economic trends. Thus, our intent is to offer a brief glimpse of wheat in East Asia—China, Japan, and Korea—and to show the ways that Kansas is working to meet the changing needs of those markets.

Next: Wheat in China: Introduction
Agricultural Products in East Asia and Kansas

**Beef**
*in Kansas and East Asia*

To download and read about agricultural connections in printed form, see

**KACC: Agricultural Reports.**

**Future Topics:**

- Kansas Soybeans and East Asia
- Horticulture Products
- Pork and Poultry
- Organic and "green" foods

**Wheat**
*in Kansas and East Asia*
Authentic Voices: Conversations on Food and Agriculture

Anthropologist Theodore Bestor on Japanese food culture

Creekstone Farms COO Bill Fielding on exporting beef to Japan

Anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney on Food, Art, and Culture in Japan

Homemakers in Tsukuba, Japan on rice and bread; fish and beef, and Japanese and foreign food for the family
In the early 1970s, Hiroko Kajimura and Yasuko Munekata relocated with their scientist husbands and families to Tsukuba Science City, located approximately 30 miles northeast of Tokyo. Before moving to Tsukuba, they both experienced living overseas with their families—Mrs. Kajimura in Westchester County, New York, and Mrs. Munekata in Heidelberg, Germany. Mrs. Kajimura is the mother of two grown children and a longtime volunteer teaching Japanese to foreign researchers and their families at Tsukuba University. Mrs. Munekata is the mother of three grown children, a grandmother, and leader of various Catholic church volunteer groups in Tsukuba.
Tsukuba Science City was planned by the Japanese government to further science and technology after World War II and was intended to be the home of future Nobel Prize winners. Construction of Tsukuba began in the 1960s, and today, the population of Tsukuba is approximately 200,000. City hall is promoting Tsukuba as the eco-model city of the future where science and nature can live in harmony. Tsukuba’s residents are a mixture of the scientists and their families and the original villagers who lived in the area, as well as the recent influx of people from Tokyo. The much-anticipated Jôban Express train line will be a direct link from Tsukuba Center to Akihabara Station in Tokyo, and is scheduled for completion in spring 2005.

1. Thoughts on Natural Foods, Beef, and Food Safety

2. More on Beef

3. Importance of Rice in Everyday Life

4. Generational Differences; Rice and Bread

5. Japanese and Foreign Food

Thoughts on Natural Foods, Beef, and Food Safety

Larzalere:: When we talk about Japanese food, it seems that it is important to have “natural-looking food”—fresh food, for example, like fresh fish—when it is served in a very beautiful restaurant—the fins are still flapping.

Mrs. Kajimura: Freshness is very important to the Japanese. Actually not now, but a few years ago, vegetables that were in the supermarket were in perfect form. That’s because these kind of perfect vegetables had a high selling value—but it is not natural—in a sense it’s very unnatural. For that reason, I go to the farmers market because they have very natural vegetables—sometimes eaten by worms—but that means it is very safe—if there are a lot of chemicals on the vegetables, the worms and insects won’t eat it. So, in that sense, natural food is imperfect merchandise—I prefer natural products.

L: Is it popular now to buy from the local farmers’ markets in the Tsukuba area? Do a lot of housewives buy local products from these markets?
Mrs. Munekata: Yes—in the Kansai area—such as in Kobe and Osaka, we can get very fresh products-- fish, meat, vegetables--good quality--so we can have food products much more naturally, without too many additives. As much as possible, we cook things in the original state.

L: Then, concerning food safety, do you think that these farming cooperatives are popular now because of average consumer’s concern about food safety?

Mrs. M: Right.

Beef

L: Then what do you think about the BSE [bovine spongiform encephalopathy] beef problem now? Are you concerned about what kind of beef you buy--or does it matter to you?

Mrs. K: It does matter.

L: So you agree then with the government ban then on the BSE right now?

Mrs. K: Yes.

Mrs. M: I buy my beef from the local butcher. It’s Japanese-raised beef.

L: And Mrs. Kajimura, where do you buy your beef? Do you also buy it from the local butcher?

Mrs. K.: For beef, I buy it there.

L: It’s different for pork?

Mrs. K: At the butcher’s. I can buy both beef and pork—but if I’m buying only pork, and sometimes chicken, I go to other stores.

L: Do you eat a lot of beef in your household? What kind of meat do you eat the most, beef, pork, or chicken?


Mrs. M: My husband likes beef.

L: As much as fish? Do you eat very much fish?

Mrs. M: My husband doesn’t like fish.

Mrs. K: My husband likes fish very much. When he was younger, he loved beef but now he does not love it so much; he likes fish very much. In a week, I will usually have pork and chicken twice a week and fish, once or twice a week, and the other times I’ll serve beef.

L: Did you eat more beef when your children were home?

Mrs. K: Yes.

Mrs. M: When my children come home to visit we eat more beef--at least twice a week.
L: What kinds of cuts do you buy?

Mrs. K: We usually buy thin cuts.

L: So you usually make it sukiyaki style?

Mrs. K: Sukiyaki, fried, or fried with a vegetable--Chinese stir-fry style.

L: What about foods like gyûdon [beef rice bowl with thin strips of grilled beef and onion on rice]? Do you eat gyûdon at home?

Mrs. K: It’s actually not for a main dinner.

L: Is it considered a snack?

Mrs. K: Not a snack, but served for lunch—or as a very light meal.

L: Do you make it at home?

Mrs. K: If I make it, it's only for lunch. I only need one pan and one bowl so it's easy and simple to prepare.

Next: More on Beef
1. Background

Theodore C. Bestor is Professor of Anthropology and Japanese Studies at Harvard University, and is past president of the American Anthropological Association’s East Asian Studies Section and the Society for Urban Anthropology. His many publications include: “Neighborhood Tokyo” (1989), ”Doing Fieldwork in Japan” (co-editor, 2003), and his most recent, “Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World” (2004). His current research looks at the development of Japanese food culture and his ongoing project on “Global Sushi” examines the “global reach” of Japanese seafood markets, their impact on markets and fish industries, and the popularity of sushi and other types of Japanese foods.
2. Neighborhood Tokyo: Miyamoto-cho

3. Tokyo's Tsukiji: The Fish Market and the Center of the World

4. Japanese Food Culture: Looking at Sushi as a Japanese Food and Icon

5. Issues of Food Safety and Hygiene

6. Lessons to be Learned from the Field: Linking Kansas with Japan

7. Concluding Thoughts

Background

LARZALER: First, how did you discover Japan?

Bestor: Well, I get asked that question a lot. In a way, it was all by accident—certainly not intentional on my part. As a teenager, I lived in Seattle. And so in Seattle, there is a certain consciousness of Japan and there is a Japanese-American community and Japanese-American kids in my school—so it wasn't as if I didn't know anything about Japan. And, of course, Seattle is the closest port city in North America to Japan so there are all kinds of historical connections. But I didn't have any connection to Japan as an individual.

And when I was fifteen, my father who taught American history at the University of Washington, was invited to go to Japan as a Fulbright American Studies lecturer. And he came home one day and said, "Guess what, we're all going to Japan in spring." And my reaction was completely, "Why would I want to do that. That's terrible." I was just a fifteen-year-old kid. I just wanted to hang out with my friends.

So I begged and pleaded with my parents—"Please don't make me go to Japan. I'll be good and do my homework. I won't cause any trouble. Just let me stay home." And of course, my father said, "Don't be ridiculous, it's a chance of a lifetime." So, anyway, at the age of fifteen, I arrived in Tokyo, with almost no real knowledge of Japan. I sort of vaguely knew about Mount Fuji, geishas, cherry blossoms, [and that] Commodore Perry opened Japan to the United States.

I was completely unprepared for Tokyo--this vast, modern, industrialized city. I knew it was a big city, but I had no frame of reference. And I still remember my nose pressed to the glass in the back of the cab, coming from Haneda airport into central Tokyo. Looking at all these lights and neon signs. That, of course, I couldn't read a word of--I didn't know what they were saying. And the first few days, walking around with my father, and feeling there was a lot of familiarity. I recognized the things of a modern city. But I didn't know what anybody was saying--I didn't know if this was a bank or was this a school or was this a hospital?

L: Of course, not understanding the language.

B: Not understanding the language, not being able to read anything. But we were in Japan for six months and my father had a chance to travel around and give lectures at various places. I traveled a fair amount around parts of Japan. We spent a few weeks in Kyoto, some time in Kyushu. And just the experience, as a fifteen-year-old suddenly being exposed to this big new world that I knew nothing about, was intriguing. So, I
hesitate to say I discovered Japan but Japan was there to hit me in the face. It was that experience.

L: When did you realize your calling as an anthropologist?

B: At the age of fifteen, I doubt that I had ever heard the word "anthropologist." Although I do remember a friend of my father's gave him a copy of "Chrysanthemum and the Sword" [Benedict 1946]. I didn't read the whole book but I read parts of it. And what intrigued me was there was a way to think about other societies. It wasn't just these impressions flooding over me. It was systematic way to think about another society.

So, when I got to college I knew I wanted to take more courses on Japan. I didn't know what I wanted to do but I knew I wanted to learn more about Japan. And I had formed this vague impression that anthropology was one way of understanding other places. So I took a couple of freshman anthropology 101 kinds of classes. They weren't about Japan at all--they were about New Guinea tribes people and peasants in the Andes, and so forth. But still they kind of clicked because I realized those courses were also talking about people's daily lives, and how they made sense, and how you could make sense of other countries, of other countries at the ground level.

So, it was a combination of the experience of being in Japan, sparking an interest in trying to figure out how understand other places. And then, just clicking with an anthropology class when I took one.

L: So you were a freshman majoring in anthropology?

B: Well, sort of--I can't remember when I said, Yes, this is what I'm going to study!" But it was during my freshman year that I started taking some anthropology classes and proceeded from there.
1. Developing the market for U.S. beef in Japan

2. Products for the Japanese market

3. The Japanese requirement for BSE testing

4. Thoughts on the future: beef in Asian markets, the U.S. beef industry

Developing the market for U.S. beef in Japan

**Willis:** We think that there is a real lack of awareness around Kansas about how important Asian markets are, and we understand that you have made quite a contribution to developing that market, particularly in Japan, for American beef. I would love to hear just how that came about. How did you first become aware of the interest in Japan in American beef?

**Fielding:** Well, I’ve been going to Japan for 25 years. I worked for Cargill for a long time, back when we were first, as an industry, building the market in Japan, getting our product over there. I think that the Meat Export Federation has done a very good job over the years. [The representative] speaks fluent Japanese, has lived in Japan and, for the whole industry, that organization has performed a very good service. But back when people were first starting,
it was really small companies that started the business in Japan. Then the bigger companies started to realize how lucrative [the market] was and how it could grow. IBP was probably the leader, as they were in the U.S. [They were] quick to see that opportunity and to develop products specifically for Japan.

The Japanese customer would come over. This was pretty hard for the big packers especially. They needed to accept that [the Japanese buyers] would come in to your plant and be there on the line. You could learn a lot of lessons from their attention to detail and the importance to them of fitting with their requirements. And if you did, you were able to profit from that. So, it was worth while.

And the loyalty—the thing that is great, specifically to Japan, is that their loyalty is just tremendous. I know that from when I was with Excel, fighting that competitively, because IBP was one of the first ones and even though we knew and could show that our product was every bit as good. For [products] like outside skirts or hanging tenders, IBP could get five or 10 cents a pound more than what we could at Excel for years. But it was because that customer liked the consistency and [after] [a Japanese buyer] initially says "great, we'll buy this," then it takes [a competitor] a long time to get that business away from someone who has established that [relationship]. So, when you understand that and deal with it, you just learn the lesson that, you've got to respond to the customer and, if you do, they will be a great customer for a long, long time.

W: What have you learned about how to engender that kind of loyalty with Japanese customers? What techniques have you used to develop those relationships?

F: Well, it's really pretty simple, in that it takes a lot of time, but it's worthwhile. You have got to establish the trust. You can't just do something one time. You have to repeat it and repeat it and repeat it. Whatever you agree to, that's what you've got to do. The personal relationship is very important. You build that trust level, but then the product has to perform. You can't just get it by strictly personal relationships. You've got to combine [those relationships] with great product, in the way that they've asked for it, over a long period of time. You've always got to be fair. That may mean that say, there [is] a shortage of a product, where you could charge a lot more money, but you develop a fair market premium for what you're doing. That, too, is part of this. They will pay a premium but they also, like anyone, would not want to feel that they were being taken advantage of. So, even right now, if the borders opened up right away, we could probably charge a lot more than where we would price the product, but we'd price the product at a very fair price, probably at an even lower price than what they might be paying.

It gets involved too, in things like animal handling. And that's becoming more important to the U.S. as well but, [they want to know] that we're handling animals properly, putting less stress on the animals, which goes into the quality of the product. We are the only plant in the country that I know of that has indoor pens. We're certainly the only plant that only handles one breed of cattle. [The cattle] can be crossbred, but [they are] at least 50 percent or more Angus. So, to have the quality of the product, every item, even our offal items, are all consistently coming from the same basic genetics. That's a plus—being able to trace cattle back. In Japan you will see, [in retail markets] they will show pictures sometimes of the ranchers, of the farmers, so that [the shoppers] know that their meat is coming from certain producers. You can also see in this picture [taken in a retail grocery store] the sign showing that the beef [for sale] is BSE-tested. And here's what just kills me. They are giving away free samples of Australian beef, so they can get the consumer really liking Australian beef, so that when we go back, it will take a really long time to get our market share back.
In almost all cases, the Japanese ask for something that they care about. They're very smart business people. They know that doing extra things cost money and that a processor has to get a return on that, but they know that it's important to their consumers and their customers. That's how they built their systems, [with] attention to detail.

**W:** Do you have some long-term friends in Japan, whom you have visited over there?

**F:** Yes, I do. I've had some to my home, and in some cases I've been to their homes. But I play golf with them, have a few beers with them. Fortunately, drinking is not quite as predominant as it used to be, but, yes, I have a lot of friends over there, and I think very highly of them.

**W:** Do they visit here frequently?

**F:** Oh yes, what normally will happen is that they will send in some of their representatives to just take a look at the plant and what we're doing, and then they'll go up another level. The first level says this is a great product and we should follow up on this. Then, they'll send one higher level that will come in. They'll take a look at it and then usually a third trip will take place, and then they will start to buy product. They first get a sample, then a little bigger sample. And in some cases they'll take frozen product, then go to fresh product and just keep taking those steps till it gets to just exactly where they had in mind. And so, we started out [that way] at Creekstone. It's been around four or five years. We were having other plants process the product. And we were processing at this plant right before [the plant was] closed [and then purchased by Creekstone]…but it was just a small fraction of what we are now selling. So, we virtually started out from almost zero and built it up to where we were doing thirty percent of our total business in exporting, and almost half of that was to Japan. So, in a matter of about eight or nine months, we built up a tremendous business. You can only do that if all the products are great and all the things we talked about are done very, very well. So, we were feeling great about it until December 23rd.

**W:** In addition to the processing side of things, are the Japanese [buyers] also interested in looking at production? Do they want you to take them to ranches?

**F:** Yes, we have a nice advantage with our farm in Kentucky that John Stewart started. We have one of the best genetic experts in the country. We've got a staff of people there who are doing the best work in combining the best traits in the animal, not just for the finished product, but for the cow-calf side, the feedlot side of it, and the processing side of it, so that we end up having an animal that's going to work for the whole system and come up with a very high quality, consistent product. That's where we take them and show them how we work on that and what those judging factors are. They can see the bulls; they can see the offspring; they can see how we are working with feedlots and backgrounders and how we get those animals. We either sell bulls or we sell semen. Not all of the cattle we put through are coming from that [breeding program]. That's our long-term dream down the road, but our experts there will work with other producers that have large operations and help them. Or, [when] we identify a producer that has cattle that similar to what we think are the best, we try to track those cattle and place them in feedyards that are closer [to us]. We take our Japanese customers to farms, to feedlots, just trace the cattle all the way through. Usually when they come over here, they do a combination trip. They enjoy seeing it.

Next: Products for the Japanese market
Japan Reacts to BSE

As of January 20, 2006, Japan once again banned the import of U.S. beef, after Japanese inspectors found bone material, a banned product, in a U.S. beef shipment to Japan. The Japanese government had issued a ruling permitting the import of U.S. beef from cattle under the age of 21 months in early December, 2005, after protracted negotiations.

The list of events and resources below trace some of the background of this ongoing discussion between the United States and Japan on beef. It is not intended to serve as an exhaustive treatment of this subject but, rather, as an introduction to some of the key issues. For additional background on beef exports to Japan and on Japanese views of beef and other foods, see our section on Interviews: Authentic Voices.
### Events

After a cow slaughtered in the state of Washington tested positive for BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in **December 2003**, Japan immediately announced a ban on the import of U.S. beef and most other products derived from cattle, sheep, goats from the United States.

The Japanese beef industry had already been hit by BSE after the disease was diagnosed in a Japanese cow in 2001. In response, Japan adopted a law in **June 2003** requiring the traceability of beef from the farm to retail sale and set up a voluntary program for exporters of beef to Japan to certify the traceability of beef from other countries.

Customers of beef restaurants in Japan expressed great disappointment after the supply of U.S. beef was cut off. Several popular fast-food chain restaurants, known for their *gyudon* ("beef bowl") dishes faced unhappy customers when they were forced to stop offering this quick meal. The restaurants have tried alternative dishes but with only limited success.

During the past two years, the United

### Resources

For USG publications on the USDA page on events related to the discovery of BSE in the United States and resulting trade issues, see the [USDA Foreign Agricultural Service page on BSE](http://www.asiakan.org/consumption/japan_bse.shtml) and list of updates.

(Access to Japan Times articles requires registration.)

Japanese consumer reaction was calm:  

[BSE Trade Ban Status](http://www.asiakan.org/consumption/japan_bse.shtml) - a continuously updated list of BSE-triggered bans, listed alphabetically by country, of U.S. products.

[KSU opens BSE testing Center](http://www.asiakan.org/consumption/japan_bse.shtml)

[Meat Traceability in Japan](http://www.asiakan.org/consumption/japan_bse.shtml) by Roxane Clemens, Center for Agricultural and Rural Development, Iowa State University, November 2003. *Explains how "farm to fork" traceability has become a marketing tool used by Japanese companies to attract consumer confidence in their products. Some companies have developed elaborate systems to offer consumers detailed assurance on the origins of each beef purchase.*

[Customers of beef restaurants in Japan expressed great disappointment after the supply of U.S. beef was cut off.](http://www.asiakan.org/consumption/japan_bse.shtml) Several popular fast-food chain restaurants, known for their *gyudon* ("beef bowl") dishes faced unhappy customers when they were forced to stop offering this quick meal. The restaurants have tried alternative dishes but with only limited success.

See the Japan Times online for the unfolding of this story (Access to Japan Times articles requires registration.):
- [McDonald's, Yoshinoya diversify fare](http://www.asiakan.org/consumption/japan_bse.shtml) (March 2, 2004)  
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For an Asian perspective on the status of
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Beef Production in Kansas

History of Beef in Kansas
China: Feeding a Huge Population

With approximately 1.3 billion people, China has the world’s largest population. Although over 68 percent of China’s population is rural, the rural population density in China is extremely high, nearly twenty times that of the United States. The land area of China is similar to that of the United States, but extensive mountain ranges and deserts, as well as urban encroachment, leave only about 10 percent of China’s landmass suitable for cultivation (U.S. Department of State 2003a).

Agriculture—Despite extreme population pressures and limited natural resources, China is nearly self-sufficient in food production and even exports some agricultural products, primarily to neighboring countries. Due to the reforms initiated in 1979, China has achieved dramatic improvements in agricultural production levels during the past twenty years.

Economy—In the late 1970s, China’s communist government launched a series of economic reforms aimed at transforming China into a relatively advanced, industrialized nation by the year 2000. The sectors targeted by these reforms, labeled the Four Modernizations, included agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense. To stimulate economic growth, Chinese economic policies emphasized export manufacturing, foreign trade, and foreign investment. To support this growth and maintain access to foreign markets, the Chinese government has gradually improved the physical, legal, and economic infrastructure. These reforms have shaped a gradual shift away from the centrally planned economic model toward what Chinese leaders term a “socialist market economy with Chinese
These reforms have included agricultural policy reversals that dismantled the communes and allowed individual farm households to manage family farms. An average farming household in China now cultivates about one hectare (approximately 2.5 acres), often divided into several, non-contiguous small plots. The farmers do not own the land but are allocated usage rights based on family size and other factors. The extensive use of fertilizer and, in some regions, double- and triple-cropping, have helped maintain high yields. Rural per capita income has increased dramatically since the early 1980s, but, with about three farm workers per hectare of farmland, rural per capita income remains less than 40 percent of that of urban workers. (Gale 2002).

Taiwan—Much of Taiwan is mountainous and only about one-quarter of the island’s 14,000 sq. mile land area is cultivable. Intensive cultivation and double- and triple-cropping allow Taiwan to maintain self-sufficiency in rice and achieve high yields in sugarcane, fruit, and vegetables. Taiwan’s farmers also raise pork and poultry. With a per capita GDP of US$12,876 (2001), the island’s 22.5 million (2002) people enjoy an increasingly high standard of living by regional standards. Demand for a variety of foods, including meat, is rising (U.S. Department of State 2003f).

Hong Kong (SAR)—The 6.8 million (2002) residents of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) live on only 1,100 sq. km. (approx. 440 sq. miles), much of which is mountainous. The US$24,750 (2002) per capita GNP supports a high standard of living, and Hong Kong residents demand a varied diet (World Bank 2003a). With very little land devoted to agriculture, Hong Kong imports much of its food supply from mainland China, primarily from nearby Guangdong Province (U.S Department of State 2003b).

Additional Information—For more general descriptions of China, as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan, see the Department of State Country Background Notes (U.S. Department of State 2003a,b,f).
Japan is an island nation slightly smaller than California. The population of Japan in 2002 was approximately 127 million, less than half that of the United States (Japan Information Network 2003). The four main islands and thousands of smaller islands are dominated by mountains, many of which are dormant volcanoes, including Mt. Fuji, Japan’s highest mountain. Only about 12 percent of the land is arable. The climate ranges from the cold and snowy winters of the north in Hokkaido to the hot and moist tropical seasons of the far south in Okinawa. Japan has about 1,500 earthquakes each year. Most are minor tremors, but a major earthquake in January 1995 killed approximately 6,000 persons and wreaked extensive damage, particularly in Kobe.

Agriculture—Despite a shortage of cultivable land, Japan maintains about 50 percent self-sufficiency in food (U.S. Department of State 2003c). Intensive farming on small farms produces very high yields. Traditionally, rice has been the main cereal crop in Japan. The need for irrigation water for rice production in wet paddies has reinforced the role of the community in rural areas, as "no farmer could own or control all of the essential means of production himself" (Waswo and Nishida 2003:5). Since the Meiji period (1868-1912), farmers in Japan have played an essential role in the modernization of the country. The farmers must now adjust to the rapid change and globalization of agriculture and
Economy—Japan is the second largest economy in the world, surpassed only by the United States. Residents of Japan maintain a high standard of living, with both per capita GNP and average life expectancy among the highest in the world.

After rapid economic growth in the 1980s, the Japanese economy has been in a prolonged recession since the 1990s. Despite current economic difficulties, Japan remains a technological and economic power.

### Agricultural Policies in Japan

Although Japan's agriculture sector has been highly subsidized and protected, farmers have faced increasing economic pressures. Part-time farmers have become common, and off-farm work has become the primary source of income for many rural households. The agricultural labor population is aging, as is the rest of Japan. In recent years, the farm household population and labor force have decreased steadily.

### Additional Information

For more general information on Japan’s geography, population, government, economy, and trade, see the U.S. Department of State Country Note on Japan (U.S. Department of State 2003c), the World Factbook on Japan (World Factbook 2003), the Library of Congress Country Study on Japan (Library of Congress n.d. Japan), or Japan Access (Japan Information Network 2003). Information is also available at the Japanese Consulate in Kansas City (http://www.kansascity.us.emb-japan.go.jp/).
Korea: Limited Farmland, Expanded Industrialization

Extending south from northeast China on the mainland of Asia, the Korean Peninsula covers over 220,000 square kilometers, an area about the same size as Minnesota. North and South Korea are separated by a demilitarized zone (DMZ) at the 38th parallel. The Peninsula is traversed by a series of mountain ranges. Extensive forest harvesting has resulted in widespread deforestation of Korea’s mountains and substantial erosion, although reforestation programs in South Korea have replaced much of the vegetation on mountain slopes (Library of Congress: South Korea).

With nearly 48 million people in an area roughly the size of Indiana, South Korea has one of the highest population densities in the world. A large fraction of this population is concentrated either in the temperate climate of South Korea’s northwestern hills and mountains or in the fertile land south of Seoul.

Economy—Over the past three decades, South Korea has experienced remarkable economic growth. Manufacturing has developed rapidly, initially in light industry and later in heavy industry, with a strong emphasis on exports. Rebounding from the 1997-1999 Asian financial crisis, South Korea implemented reforms to encourage market-oriented economic development. In 2002, South Korea achieved an economic

North Korea—About 80 percent of North Korea is mountainous, and only about 14 percent of the land is arable (World Bank 2003a). To improve agricultural production and rural living standards after the Korean War, North Korea expanded irrigation, rural electrification, mechanization, and the use of chemical fertilizers. Due to structural economic decline in the 1980s and other factors, North Korea lacked the resources to withstand a series of natural disasters in the early 1990s. Major floods in 1995 destroyed substantial grain reserves and led to severe food shortages.
growth rate of six percent, a remarkable exception in the recent global economic recession. South Korea is now the 12th largest economy in the world, and Koreans enjoy a relatively high standard of living. (U.S. Department of State 2003e). Per capita GNP in 2002 was more than US$9,930, approximately ten times that of China and about half that of Hong Kong (World Bank 2003a).

Agriculture—Only 17 percent of the land in South Korea is considered arable (World Bank 2003a). Most farms in South Korea are small, on the average about one hectare (approx. 2.5 acres). In 2001, farm households typically earned more than 50 percent of their income from non-farm sources (USDA/ERS 2003b). Population growth and increasing urbanization have encroached upon farmland and increased demand for agricultural products. Although the Korean government has sought food self-sufficiency, over half of South Korea’s food is imported (USDA/ERS 2002). In the late 1980s, South Korea experienced an agricultural crisis as farm households struggled to maintain adequate income to cover rising debt burdens for modern farm machinery, consumer goods, and other expenses. The Korean government implemented a series of programs to improve rural living conditions and narrow the income gap between rural and urban residents. These measures included maintaining restrictions against the import of beef, rice, and other agricultural products that would compete against the products of South Korea’s debt-burdened farmers. Farmers’ associations and other groups pressured the government to maintain these import barriers, but negotiations related to Korea’s continued access to world markets under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and other agreements eventually led to the liberalization of most agricultural imports (Library of Congress n.d.: South Korea).

“Lack of fertilizer, natural disasters, and poor storage and transportation practices have left the country more than a million tons short of grain self-sufficiency each year” (U.S. Department of State 2003d). Accurate statistics for deaths due to starvation are unavailable, but estimates start at over 200,000 (Smith 2002). The United Nations and other international organizations have responded with food aid and technical assistance. The United States contributed 1.8 million (approx. US. tons) (approx. 1.98 million U.S. tons) of food aid to North Korea from 1995 through mid-2002, including 40 percent of the total food aid to North Korea in 2001 (Smith 2002). In addition to food aid, contributions such as fertilizer from South Korea have assisted in agricultural recovery. Technical assistance has supported the improvement of agricultural production through double-cropping and a shift to more diversified crops, including the production of potatoes as a staple.
Eating Beef in Japan

Consumers—According to the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery, prior to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) outbreak in Japan, the average Japanese ate only one-third as much meat as in an average American diet (Peterson 2002:1-2). The USMEF Strategic Market Profile of Japan (2002g:4) notes that the per capita consumption of beef was 8.7 kg in 2000. This amount decreased in 2001 and 2002, but USMEF estimates that the per capita consumption could return to levels of 2000 by 2004, although “food safety has become a very important consideration for Japanese consumers, especially in light of the BSE situation” (2002g:4).

Cuisine—Beef dishes can be divided into two seasonal categories: nabemono and yakiniku. Nabemono are often winter dishes served in a pot, like sukiyaki and shabu-shabu, which involve boiling or broiling near the table. These cooking methods require wafer-thin, well-marbled beef that does not easily become tough. For these midwinter table dishes, American grain-fed beef is tender and cooks faster. Yakiniku (grilled meat on a stick) is a popular summer dish, a barbecue-style beef grilled in small portions indoors and served with heavy sauces. It uses less fatty, domestic dairy and imported chilled beef, as well as offal (Longworth 1983: 12-13).

Japanese and American consumers have different preferences. “It is a mistake to imagine that Japan represents an enormous

About one third percent of beef marketed in Japan is consumed through the food service industry (Bremer 2001: 12). “Frozen beef” from the United States is often used in beef-bowl restaurants in which broiled beef is served over rice. These beef bowls, known as gyuudon, are a Japanese version of fast food.” Beef bowls are typically prepared from stable supplies of uniform quality short-plate cuts. “Variety meats,” including tongue, tripe, intestines, hearts, and kidneys, are also imported from the United States, to be sold at retail markets or served in dishes such as yakiniku. A more recent report by the USMEF (2002f) confirms that a large percentage of beef exports to Japan are variety meats. Hamburgers and steaks have been successfully marketed through foreign
potential market for T-bone steaks . . . most Japanese still enjoy beef best when it is prepared as very thin slices, cooked in a traditional manner and eaten with ‘hashi’ [chopsticks]” (Longworth 1983:xxiv). In recent years, however, Japanese eating habits have undergone a “diversification” as a result of growth in disposable income, urbanization, and changes in demographics, including the predominance of the nuclear family. The growing prevalence of housewives working outside the home has also led to increased beef consumption and eating outside the home (Longworth 1983: 8-12). There is still a preference, however, for traditional Japanese cuisine. “The overall changes in food consumption reflect a Japanization of Western food habits,” with changes in relative proportions rather than in the preparation and presentation (Longworth 1983:14).

Japanese consumers, both retail shoppers and commercial businesses, demand uniformity and exacting measurement of beef, with fat appearing in comparable amounts in each package. “Steaks served at family restaurants are fitted into a mold for uniform volume and appearance” (Peterson 2002: 3).

“Seasonality” is also a factor in consumer demand in Japan. Demand increases at times of traditional Japanese gift-giving, such as Ochūgen in July and Osēibo and Bōnenkai in December. Geographic and historical considerations play a role in consumption and preferences for beef in different parts of Japan (Bremer 2001: 13-14). Historical regional differences in beef eating between eastern and western Japan also persist (Longworth 1983: 2).
Eating Beef in China: Consumer Preferences

Consumer preferences—Consumers tend to view beef as a special occasion food, to be eaten in restaurants or served at special meals at home. Household shoppers look for beef that appears and smells fresh. Most consumers, except for the sophisticated urban elite, do not have much awareness of different cuts of beef, marbling, and other characteristics. Chinese households, even urban residents with high incomes, spend a large portion of disposable income on food. Consumers are price-sensitive, even higher income consumers, but urban consumers with higher incomes are beginning to show a willingness to pay more for beef that is government certified as hygienic. Many shoppers, especially urban residents, are also increasingly interested in buying convenience foods. Beef that is pre-sliced and ready-to-cook (in traditional Chinese dishes) appeals to many consumers.

Chinese families tend to perceive beef as a healthy food, a meat that is lower in fat than pork and one that will contribute to bigger, stronger children. Chinese also traditionally categorize beef as a “hot” food, that is, a food that warms the body. Hence, the demand for beef, including tripe and other types of beef offal, is higher in the winter.

Most household consumers cook beef at home in stewed dishes. Restaurants serve beef in stewed dishes, as a cold, sliced appetizer, sliced and stir-fried with selected vegetables, and in other dishes. Some restaurants serve beef as an ingredient in “hot pot,” a fondue-type meal especially popular during the winter. Diners “swish” thinly sliced meats and vegetables in a pot of boiling broth at the table. This dish is best prepared with tender, marbled beef and is, therefore, one of the main dishes prepared with imported beef from the United States.
Consumer Preferences—In 2002, Korean households spent 26.3 percent of their consumption expenditures on food and beverages. The largest portion (12.2 percent) was spent on cereals and bread, followed by meat (9.3 percent), vegetables and seaweeds (7.5 percent), and fish (7.1 percent). Most food-purchasing decisions are made by women. Korean shoppers prefer fresh produce and low-calorie food without additives, as well as products essential to traditional Korean dishes, including beef and pork products. Beef is often purchased to make beef soups or bulgogi, a traditional, spicy beef dish (USMEF 2003i).

Dietary preferences in Korea are slowly changing, and younger consumers are buying more imported, Western-style foods and tastes. Coupled with the increasing prosperity of the average Korean household, these changing preferences have contributed to a boom in the food service sector. Although 55 percent of the beef consumed in Korea is eaten at home, beef is also a popular component of restaurant meals. More Koreans are eating out at family-style restaurants, including those that serve American-style beef, such as Outback Steakhouse and TGIF. Through these restaurants, diners are often exposed to foods previously unfamiliar to Korean consumers. (USMEF 2003j).
Kansas-Asia Community Connection: Agricultural Reports

In addition to the online information on agriculture and rural life in East Asia offered in this website, the Kansas Asia Community Connection has launched a series of printed reports, aimed at providing information for general readers on existing agricultural relationships between Kansas and East Asia. Each report will offer a glimpse of the history, current production, trade trends, and cultural context of a specific agricultural sector in East Asia, in a comparative context with Kansas.

We welcome comments and corrections from our readers.

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Introduction to KACC Agricultural Reports

Agriculture Report No. 1: The Kansas Beef Industry and East Asia

For an updated copy of Agriculture Report No.2: Kansas Wheat and East Asia, see this page on August 1, 2006

Future Topics:

Kansas Soybeans and East Asia
Horticulture Products
Pork and Poultry
Beef production provides jobs and income to many Kansans, and beef exports play an important role in that industry. Japan is the top foreign export market for Kansas beef. South Korea is not far behind, and China is expected to purchase more U.S. beef in the future. U.S. beef enriches the selection of food products in China, Japan, and Korea and supplies the hotel and restaurant industries in these countries with an important menu ingredient.

In East Asia, as in Kansas, most cattle have traditionally been raised by farming households. Farm families in Asia value their traditional ways of life, just as Kansas farm families do. Some of the husbandry techniques of East Asian cattle farmers, however, are quite different from those used by Kansas ranchers. Examination of the similarities and differences between cattle raising in Kansas and in Asia reveals some of

Kansas beef exports to East Asia have been increasing in recent years and are expected to continue rising. Expanding economies, a rising standard of living in China and Korea, and a recovering economy in Japan are expected to increase consumption of meat and of imported foods. Production of beef in East Asia may also increase, particularly in China, but limitations on grazing land and growing consumption levels are expected to continue to provide opportunities for U.S. beef. Maintaining the appeal of U.S. beef in those markets, however, will require careful attention to the economics of beef production, marketing and consumption in these societies, as well as the cultural context in which beef is raised and consumed. The Kansas/Asia Community Connection will continue to explore these issues and will offer a broad range of information to those interested in agriculture and rural issues in Kansas and in Asia. We welcome comments and suggestions.
the economic, environmental, and technical challenges faced by cattle farmers on both sides of the Pacific.

As a result of distinctive cultural traditions, consumers in different East Asian countries shop for and eat beef very differently. In China, beef has traditionally been a special occasion or restaurant dish. U.S. beef is a premium, luxury item served in restaurants and hotels. Grocery shoppers in China, especially those outside of major urban centers, are less knowledgeable about different cuts or quality indicators of beef. Beef consumption, however, is growing rapidly and many consumers may begin looking for a higher quality product. In Korea, beef has been an important ingredient in many traditional dishes. While Koreans have traditionally preferred Korean beef, they are increasingly willing to buy U.S. beef, in part due to its competitive price. U.S. beef is now marketed alongside Korean beef and competes well. In Japan, shoppers look for high-quality, attractively packaged, consistent products. Kansas beef has become identified as a brand, a symbol of the robust, cowboy tradition of the United States. U.S. beef is also an important ingredient in modestly priced, standardized restaurant food, such as rice bowl dishes. In all three East Asian countries, U.S. beef offal is also a popular product, used for example in soup in Korea and China and in yakiniku (grilled meat on a stick) in Japan. Understanding the preferences and customs of East Asian consumers and the ways Kansas beef is perceived in these societies will allow for more effective and targeted marketing of Kansas beef in China, Japan, and Korea.

As the United States continues to market beef in Asia, there will of course be concerns to be addressed through discussion and negotiation, both at the commercial and governmental levels. Tariff and non-tariff issues, such as country of origin labeling (COOL) and other questions will continue to require discussion, as all countries involved look for mutually acceptable approaches to protecting livelihoods of domestic producers, preventing spread of disease, and supporting a diverse and robust food supply system.
Beef Production in Kansas

A living heritage—the farmer-rancher at the trailhead—Today, the beef trail to Asia still begins with cow-calf producers, in Kansas and in surrounding states. Ranchers “remain practitioners of the most romantic and most American of all occupations—it is not a job, but a way of life.” (Stull and Broadway 2004:27). Describing a roundup and branding in 1992, Stull and Broadway say, “branding was little different from those of a century earlier” (Stull and Broadway 2004:xx). The “[round up] is, in fact, a ritual of both renewal and passage, one that brings neighbors together each spring, after a long winter of cold and isolation, to help one another; to share tools and labor; to visit and retell tales over good food and drink; to demonstrate their common bond and community—to reaffirm a living heritage” (Stull and Broadway 2004:27).

The new cow towns of Kansas—Communities like Garden City, Dodge City,
Liberal, and Emporia have been most affected by changes in the beef industry in the last two decades. They are home to large-capacity beef processing plants, constructed or expanded since 1980. Over the last 25 years, Garden City, for example, has been one of the fastest growing and most diverse cities in Kansas, with a large influx of Hispanic and Southeast Asian laborers. The influx of population has brought many challenges to the local community but has also created “a vibrant multicultural community. Its emerging Latino and Asian business communities have enriched the economy and society of southwest Kansas” (Stull and Broadway 2004:114).

Economics of beef in Kansas—Data through 1997 show that for Kansas “the overall economic impact associated with agriculture was about US$30 billion, supporting 243,000 jobs in 1997” (Leatherman and Howard 2000:8). In the agricultural production industry, which did not include meatpacking, the “combined sectors of cattle feedlots and other cattle generated nearly half of all agricultural production industry sales with over US$4.3 billion in 1997. These sectors also accounted for about 16,800 jobs and US$900 million in all types of income” (Leathermen and Howard 2000:2). Considered separately, meatpacking was found to be “the largest food processing sector [and] accounted for nearly US$5.3 billion in sales, about 15,000 jobs and nearly US$600 million in total income in 1997” (Leatherman and Howard 2000:2).

Southwest Kansas “contains the largest concentration of beef packing plants in the United States, with a daily slaughter capacity of 23,500 head and employment of over 10,000 persons” (Broadway 2000:22). While the meatpacking industry has grown

Wagyu in Kansas—In the early and mid-1990s, several Kansas ranchers experimented with raising beef cattle crossbred with Japanese Wagyu, the breeds that produce the highly valued Kobe beef. Some of these ranchers experienced remarkable success by crossbreeding Wagyu with Simmental, Holsteins, and other breeds. Ranchers report that the Wagyu-cross beef had the desired characteristics prized in Wagyu beef—tenderness and heavy marbling. Most Wagyu producers discovered, however, that although local restaurants might purchase the product, there was no outlet for marketing Wagyu on a scale that would justify the input by the producers. Most of the Wagyu producers in Kansas are no longer raising Wagyu but still speak highly of the breeds.
significantly, shifted geographically and consolidated to take advantage of nearby feedlots and the economies of scale, the number of cow-calf producers statewide has dropped from 51,846 to 36,244 since 1978 (Broadway 2000:22-23). “Beef packing has brought a measure of prosperity to southwest Kansas but it is essential that the industry’s environmental impact be addressed so as to ensure the region’s long-term economic future and avoid the familiar western phenomenon of boom followed by bust” (Broadway 2000:29).

A journalist’s account of the life of a steer illustrated the economic pressures faced by today’s ranchers. The writer invested in a calf on a South Dakota ranch and followed the animal’s progress through weaning, grazing, transition feeding, and, finally, “finishing” with intensive grain and protein rations on a feedlot in Finney County, Kansas. The steer was expected to reach 1,200 pounds at time of sale to a local packing house for slaughter and processing. After investing a total of US$917 for the purchase price of the calf ($598), feed, antibiotics, and other expenses on the ranch ($61), and 160 days boarding costs at the feedlot, including hormone implants ($258), the journalist expected to earn a profit of US$27 (Pollan 2002).
The “Long Drive” to Asia began much as it did in the 1860s—on ranches, large and small, many still family-owned cow-calf operations. Trails still lead to Kansas, though now with the names of U.S. and Interstate highways from all directions throughout the Great Plains. Each year millions of cattle from other states are shipped to feedlots located primarily in the southwestern part of Kansas, where they are fattened for slaughter. The cattle are finished on corn and sorghum grown in Kansas and then slaughtered and processed at large meatpacking plants in Garden City, Dodge City, Liberal, Emporia, and Arkansas City. From these modern Kansas cow towns, boxed beef follows the trail to markets in Asia. Kansas is known for its cowboy culture and cow towns. Texas Longhorns were driven north across a sea of grass until they reached the railheads and cattle pens of cow towns like Abilene. The cattle were then sold and shipped by rail to urban centers, in particular to Chicago, to be slaughtered at plants owned by large meatpacking companies.

The cow towns of Kansas past were perhaps not as wild and dangerous as portrayed on television and in the movies, but the cattle industry was extremely important to early Kansas. The number of cattle multiplied.

The dramatic expansion of feedlots was accompanied by rapid growth in the number of beef cattle and the amount of red meat packed in Kansas. Beef cattle numbers rose from 4 million in 1960 to 6.8 million by 1974, and beef production went from a billion pounds valued at US$432.8 million in 1961 to 2 billion pounds valued at US$1.5 billion in 1974.

The growth in feedlots near the productive grain fields of western Kansas, as well as other factors, led to a shift in the geographic distribution of cattle from the eastern half of Kansas to the southwest, as feedlots and packing houses moved to small towns in that region, though not without environmental and water usage problems (Wood 1980:288-289).
from only 93,000 in 1860 to 1.5 million in 
1880. This first cattle boom in Kansas started 
with the cow towns and lasted until the 
1880s, only to dampen in the early 1890s 
under changing natural and economic 
conditions (Wood 1980: xi,xii).

After World War II, a dramatic expansion 
in irrigation was accompanied by rapid 
development of large-scale cattle feedlots 
near irrigated grain fields, especially in 
southwestern Kansas. According to Kansas 
Board of Agriculture statistics, the 
percentage of cattle on feed in large Kansas 
feedlots (1,000 head capacity or more) went 
from 26.7 percent in 1960 to 87.6 percent in 
1975. The number of large-capacity feedlots 
grew from seven in 1952 to 140 by 1974, 
and grain-fed cattle increased from less than 
half a million in 1955 to around two million 
by the 1970s (Wood 1980: 286). These 
developments created a beef “revolution” 

By 1980, conditions were in place for Iowa 
Beef Packers (IBP) to open its state-of-the-art 
meat processing plant in Holcomb, outside of 
Garden City, Kansas. IBP led a new breed of 
packers that built their plants near feedlots and 
took advantage of the interstate trucking system 
(Skaggs 1986:187-190). By 1987, there were 
five large-capacity meatpacking plants (more 
than 3,000 head of cattle a day), each 
employing over 1,000 workers, in Emporia, 
Liberal, Dodge City, Holcomb, and Garden 
City, the new cow towns of Kansas. The 
meatpacking industry had been effectively 
restructured and was tied to large-capacity 
plants mostly located in the southwestern part 
of the state. A new cattle boom was on.
History of Cattle and Beef in China

Cattle Origins—The land mass encompassed by China today has historically been home to a rich diversity of bovine animals, including common cattle (Bos taurus), Zebu cattle (Bos indicus, sometimes called humped cattle), water buffalo (Bubalus bubalis), and yak (Bos grunniens). The Chinese cattle industry today groups domestic bovines into yellow cattle, dairy cattle, water buffalo, and yak. In 1986, these groups included 34 officially recognized native bovine breeds, four developed breeds, and seven major introduced bovine breeds (Longworth 2001:44).

Early History—Cattle have played an important role in China for over three thousand years. The domestication of cattle began in China near the Yellow River about 8,000 to 10,000 BC (Longworth 2001:45). The earliest written form of the Chinese language included a word for cow, or bovine animal. Many of the early written references to cattle were records of ritual animal sacrifices. Early Chinese historians described elaborate sacrifices of cattle and other animals. Some Chinese

Imperial China—Although cattle were slaughtered for meat, the primary role of domesticated bovine animals in China for many centuries was to pull carts and farm implements. Chinese experts believe that, although oxen were used to pull crude plows of bone or wood in early China, the use of bovine draft animals to pull plows probably became more widespread after the development of iron plows during the Eastern Chou Dynasty 770 BC-221 BC (Xie 1985:44). In recognition of the importance of these draft animals to food production, most of the dynastic regimes issued edicts forbidding the slaughtering of bovine draught animals. This did not mean, however, that no beef was consumed. Non-draft cattle were often raised for imperial rituals and also for the imperial banquet hall. The common people had some access to beef through loopholes in the law, such as the exceptions for old or crippled draft cattle and for animals that had been accidentally injured or killed (Xie...
scholars believe that, in addition to serving religious purposes, these sacrificial rituals also provided rare opportunities to butcher and consume meat (Xie 1985:38).

Husbandry—Putting cattle out to forage on pasture during the warm months and sheltering them in pens or barns during the winter months was common throughout the history of China. Penned cattle were often fed bran, legumes, straw, or alfalfa hay (Xie 1985:77-78).

Taxation of Cattle—During several periods in the history of China, troops were stationed in unexploited regions, to open up new areas for cultivation. Draught cattle were often used to break new ground. The farmers who then cultivated those areas were often required to submit a tax in return for the draught animals, usually in the form of a calf each year. Taxing cattle as property was a common form of taxation throughout the history of China. Farmers who were unable to submit a calf were required to pay in cash. During times of war, cattle were often seized by the government to serve or feed troops (Xie 1885:58-60).
Beef Production in China

**Beef Breeds**—Most beef cattle in China belong to one of the breeds commonly referred to as "yellow cattle." (See [history of beef in China](http://www.asiakan.org/ag_products/beef_production_china.shtml).) Yellow cattle in China today are generally divided into three major groups, including northern, central plains, and southern. All yellow cattle breeds exhibit body conformation traits typical of draught animals. Northern yellow cattle breeds tend to be of medium size and build; the central plains breeds are usually larger and heavier; and the southern breeds are typically small-bodied and lighter. Most yellow cattle are not well-suited to beef or dairy farming. Five breeds (Qinchuan, Nanyang, Luxi, Jinnan, and Yanbian), however, are considered appropriate for beef production (Longworth 2001:50).

**Breeding**—Through cross-breeding programs with imported breeding stock, China has developed several new strains of cattle, including four breeds now officially recognized as "improved" breeds. These

**Beef Industry Policies**—The government also implemented specific programs to strengthen the beef industry. In addition to cattle breeding centers, in 1992 the national government endorsed a program initially known as "Straw for Beef." The goal of the "Straw for Ruminants" program, as it is now called, is to convert China's extensive surplus of crop residue to cattle feed by ammoniating the residue (straw), usually in treatment pits. Under this program, the government provides farmers with technical training and initial funding for straw treatment pits, urea, etc. Ammoniated straw is seen as an inexpensive source of cattle feed, a means of saving grain, and also a way to prevent pollution, as the straw is no longer burned or used as pulp in small, highly polluting paper mills. Although some experts have questioned whether ammoniated straw can provide enough nutrition for cattle, the Straw for Ruminants program is widespread (Longworth 2001: 30-32).
include three dual-purpose breeds—Shanhe, Xinjiang Brown, and Caoyuan Red, and one dairy breed, the Chinese Fresian. The Chinese Black and White, now known as Chinese Fresian, was developed over many decades through cross-breeding between yellow cattle and imported Holstein-Fresian or Fresian cattle and is now the main dairy cow in China (see photos at Oklahoma State University 2002). The dual-purpose breeds include Shanhe, developed from crossing native yellow cattle with Simmentals in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang Brown, bred in Northern Xinjiang from crosses with Brown Swiss (see photos at Oklahoma State University 2002), and Caoyuan Red (Inner Mongolia and western Jilin). The new dual-purpose breeds are raised in relatively small numbers but are well-adapted to their home areas and very productive (Longworth 2001:50-54). (For additional information on the improved breeds, see Qiu n.d.)

The most popular foreign breeds imported for crossbreeding have been Simmental, Shorthorn, Hereford, Limousin, and Charolais. Overall the most popular exotic breed is Simmental, considered a dual-purpose cattle breed in China where it is appreciated for its ability to perform under poorer quality feeding conditions (Longworth 2001:55).

In the early 1990s, the Chinese government developed a network of dairy and beef cattle centers. Most of the bulls kept for semen collection at these centers are foreign breeds. Artificial insemination (AI) is more widely used in dairy cattle but is also becoming more widespread in the breeding of beef cattle. Although Chinese regulations ban the use of village bulls for natural mating within 10km of a breeding center, natural mating is still the most common method, and only a small percentage of cattle in China are bred through AI (Longworth 2001:60).

**Beef Production in China Today**—Meat production in China has grown rapidly during the last twenty years, from 14 million tons in 1983 to over four times that amount in 1999. Beef was the fastest growing segment of that increase. From 321,000 tons in 1983, beef production in China expanded to exceed 5 million tons by 1999 (Tuan et. al 2001:39). As China’s beef production has also been expanded through internationally funded programs. The World Bank Smallholder Cattle Development Project plans to invest US$93.5 million, plus matching funds from the Chinese government, into the cattle and beef industry in four Central Plains provinces (Henan, Hebei, Anhui, and Shanxi). This project aims to diversify and increase income for about 140,000 farmers in some of the poorest areas of China by enabling farm households to raise two to three cattle each to supplement earnings from crops. The project plans to establish new cattle markets, feedlots, and processing enterprises that will also absorb some excess rural labor. (World Bank 2003b). An Asian Development Bank (ADB) project approved in 2000 aims to alleviate poverty in western Henan, a densely populated and mountainous area, partly through the development of the livestock industry there (Asian Development Bank 2000).

**Types of Producers**—Government programs designed to enhance smallholder cattle production are consistent with the distribution of types of cattle-producing units in China. Unlike in most other countries with large-scale beef industries, most cattle in China are raised by unspecialized cow-calf households. These smallholders derive most of their income from crops and other activities and may also raise other livestock for sale or personal consumption. These families typically sell one or two calves each year to local, low-grade abattoirs for slaughter. Some unspecialized households also buy a few feeders for short-term fattening with grain before slaughter. Only a very small percentage of cattle are "finished" by commercial feedlots.
Beef Production in China

a percentage of total meat production, beef rose from 2.5 percent in 1985 to over 8.5 percent in 1999. (Note: although the figures for beef production in China include meat from all bovine species, the increase in beef production has been almost exclusively in beef from cattle (Longworth 2001:18)).

Economic Reform and Beef — This "beef revolution," as Australian researcher John Longworth terms it, is a dramatic example of the transformation of agriculture arising from the economic reforms initiated in the early 1980s.

After 1949, farming was gradually collectivized. Draught animals and other livestock were held in group ownership by the communes, and farmers worked for the commune. When the Chinese government initiated reforms in the early 1980s to modernize China, agriculture underwent major changes. To stimulate production, the Chinese government gradually dismantled the commune system and implemented the Household Production Responsibility System (HPRS), under which farming households were allocated individual family plots and given ownership of livestock and other items. Under the new system, farming households benefited directly from their labor and investment. For most commodities, farmers were required to sell a quota of their output to the government at official procurement rates, but they were allowed to sell any surplus at local, agricultural "free" markets. Quota systems and government procurement rates were gradually liberalized. By 1985, the marketing and pricing of livestock and livestock products, with the exception of pork, were completely liberalized. As a result of these changes, many farm households diversified their farming activities to include livestock raising.

Fiscal reforms also gave local governments greater control over local revenues and provided strong incentives to develop local industry, including the beef industry. These reforms, as well as other policies that stimulated the growth of new enterprises, led to rapid development of the beef industry. In many cases, the incentives to generate local economic activity resulted in more local

Most of the cattle raised by unspecialized households are local breeds. Commercial feedlots, as well as the larger specialized households, are more likely to raise crossbred cattle. Hence, premium beef tends to be produced by commercial feedlots and larger, specialized households. Most beef produced in China, however, comes from draught breed animals raised primarily on low-quality feed. The vast majority of beef marketed in China, therefore, is relatively low-grade.

 Households that specialize in raising cattle, either as cow-calf operations or as specialized fattening units, raise a relatively small percentage of the beef produced in China. Only in the pastoral areas of northwest and southwest China are as many as half of the cattle raised by specialized households. In these pastoral regions, many cattle are still raised by Kazakhs, Uyghurs, Tibetans, and other ethnic groups with historical traditions of herding livestock. Much of the grassland traditionally used as pasture in these areas has been degraded in recent years by overgrazing, conversion to cropland, and migration from elsewhere in China. These factors have contributed to a slower rate of increase in cattle production in these areas.

Central Plains Beef Belt — There has been a remarkable shift in beef production in China from the traditional cattle-raising grasslands of China's western pastoral areas in Xinjiang, Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Tibet to the agricultural regions in the central plains. In 1980, the western pastoral region accounted for 44 percent of beef production and 25 percent of beef animals. By 1999, the western pastoral region was home to only 16 percent of China's bovine herd and produced only 12 percent of the nation's beef. Increases in that region have been outstripped by dramatic increases in production in the central plains and the northeast, to the extent that 70 percent of China's beef production now takes place in these regions. Cattle production is now so concentrated in five provinces of the central plains that some call this area the Central Plains Beef Belt (Longworth 2001:20-21, 50-51).

**Livestock Ownership**—Restrictions on the slaughtering of livestock were also liberalized. Prior to 1980, only culled draught animals were harvested for beef. Under the new system, farmers not only took ownership of draught animals but also exercised some decision-making over the disposition of those animals, although local government officials still exerted a strong influence over those decisions (Longworth 2001:27).

One of the reasons for the dramatic increase in the Central Plains Beef Belt and in the northeast is that these areas are home to the native breeds of yellow cattle most suitable for beef production (see above section on breeds), such as the Qinchuan yellow cattle traditionally bred in Shaanx. (Longworth 2001:50). An additional factor is that cattle in these areas are primarily raised in pens, so that quality of grazing lands is not a barrier.

**Leather**—As in the United States, hides and other byproducts of cattle slaughtering are an important source of income for cattle producers and processors. Leather processing has become a major industry in China. Because many of the hides generated by China's slaughtering industry are of poor quality, a large percentage of hides processed in China are imported. In 1998, China exported US$9.7 billion dollars in leather products; 26 million of the 36 million hides processed in China that year were imported, primarily from the United States.
U.S.-China Bilateral Trade—Bilateral trade in beef between the United States and China is one facet of a complex trading relationship of great importance to both countries. The United States is currently China’s second-largest trading partner, exceeded only by Japan. China, in turn, is the fourth-largest trading partner of the U.S. (China Internet Information Center 2003; CCPIT 2003).

Although much has been written about the U.S. trade deficit with China, what is not often mentioned is the rapid growth in U.S. exports to China. In the ranking of export markets for the United States, China rose from 21st in 1983 to 9th in 2001. Exports to China have increased nearly 12 percent each year since 1990. According to U.S. Customs Data, U.S. exports to China totaled US$19 billion in 2001 (US&FCS 2002). (For an explanation of China’s customs data see U.S.-China Business Council 2003)

The Chinese economy has averaged over 7 percent annual growth in the last decade and continues to hold the lead in growth rate among the world’s expanding economies. Although China faces many economic and social challenges, a rising standard of living, especially among urban residents, and increasingly liberalized trading policies, including those stipulated by the WTO, are expected to increase

U.S.-China Beef Trade Trends, Current Issues—As part of China’s accession to the WTO, China has committed to reducing tariffs on beef each year, from 45 percent in 2001 to 12 percent for beef and beef variety meats by 2004. The USDA/ERS predicts that this reduction, as well as the stabilization of agricultural trade expected to result from WTO-related policy changes, and a rising standard of living, will lead to rising consumption of imported meat in China (Gale et.al 2002). Although China is currently ranked among the top five producers of beef in the world, beef consumption by China’s huge population also ranks among the top five. Increases in consumption as well as demand for higher quality are expected to gradually increase imports. The U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) predicts that Chinese beef imports will nearly double by 2010. The USMEF notes, however, that a 13 percent VAT will remain in effect and anticipates this will “continue to constrain legal importation” (USMEF 2003h). Smuggling and mislabeling of beef are expected to be continuing problems. Non-tariff barriers, such as unclear sanitation requirements and cumbersome documentation procedures may also continue to arise as items of negotiation between the U.S. and China. In addition to animal diseases such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and foot and mouth disease (FMD), world events such as war or the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak could also dampen economic activity and lead to temporary periods of weakened demand for imported beef in China.
demand for imported products (US&FCS 2002).

**US–China Agricultural Trade**—During the last two decades, the United States has generally been a net exporter of bulk commodities, primarily soybeans, to China (USDA/ERS 2003a: Trade). Commodity exports to China, however, have not been steady. “Since the late 1970s, U.S. agricultural exports to China have followed a roller coaster pattern as China periodically buffeted grain and oilseed markets with unexpected purchases or sales. Wide year-to-year swings in China’s agricultural imports add considerable uncertainty to commodity markets. With its new membership in WTO, however, China may become a larger and steadier trading partner in markets for food and agricultural products” (Gale 2002:1). The U.S. Embassy in Beijing reports that U.S. agricultural exports to China in 2001 totaled US$2.0 billion. China’s exports few agricultural products to the United States, exporting only US$0.8 billion in agricultural products to the United States in 2001 (China Country Commercial Guide 2002; Gale 2002).

**Kansas-China Trade, including Beef**—China has ranked among the top ten export markets for Kansas products for several years. In 2002, China slipped from fifth to eighth place but still received a significant number of exports from Kansas. Although in some years, manufactured products, particularly transportation equipment, have dominated Kansas exports to China, food products have generally played an important role. In 1998, for example, food products accounted for nearly 53 percent of Kansas exports to China (USDOC 2000).

The total value of Kansas beef exported directly to China has been increasing steadily. Kansas beef exports to China in 2002 reached only about US$3.16 million. About two-thirds of the Kansas beef shipped to China in 2002 was frozen offal. The remainder was primarily frozen meat, followed by fresh or chilled meat. Statistics for the first half of 2003 showed a sharp increase of over 200 percent from 2002 (MISER 2003). After the outbreak of SARS in China in the spring of 2003, beef imports to China reportedly dropped, as business plummeted at restaurants and hotels, the major customers for imported beef. Current news reports from China indicate that the hotel and restaurant industry in China is now recovering, and it is expected that beef imports will resume and continue to grow.

**China’s Beef Trade**—China is a net exporter of beef, although in very small quantities in comparison with the United States. Although China’s beef production expanded rapidly during the 1990s, beef consumption also increased dramatically during the same period. As a result, beef exports from China declined by over 75 percent. In 1999, China’s beef and beef product exports represented only about 1 percent of the country’s total production (Brown 2002). About half of China’s beef exports are to Hong Kong. China also exports beef to Russia, Kuwait, Egypt, and other countries. In 2001, China exported a total of 21,423 mt (approx. 23,563 U.S. tons) of fresh, chilled and frozen beef (USDA/FAS 2002b).

**US-China Beef Trade**—Beef-related Kansas beef exports to Hong Kong, some of which are reshipped to mainland China, are currently more significant. In 2002, Kansas shipped over US$11 million in beef exports to Hong Kong. The largest category of that quantity, at over US$8 million, was frozen beef, followed by frozen offal, at over US$2 million. Kansas beef exports to Hong Kong decreased by small percentages in 2001 and 2002, possibly a reflection of an increase in direct shipments to mainland China. In the first half of 2003, shipments of Kansas beef to Hong Kong fell by over 45 percent, probably a result of the SARS outbreak, which hit Hong Kong earlier than mainland China and had a devastating impact upon the Hong Kong economy, particularly the retail and restaurant industries (MISER 2003).

As in China, however, the current news indicates that customers have returned and these industries are now recovering.
products play a major role in U.S. agricultural exports to China. The top ten U.S. agricultural exports to China in 2000 included hides and skins, red meats-fresh/chilled/frozen; and dairy products. China currently imports a growing quantity of beef from the United States. According to U.S. customs data reported by the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), the United States exported 3,539 metric tons (approx. 3,892 U.S. tons), of beef and 3,372 metric tons (approx. US. tons) of beef offal to China in 2001 (USDA/FAS 2002b). In 2002, U.S. beef muscle meat exports to China and Hong Kong rose 78 percent in the first eight months of the year (Angus Beef Bulletin). Due to the devastating impact of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak on the hotel and restaurant industry in China in the spring of 2003, beef exports to China dropped off. As the retail economy in China recovers, U.S. beef exports to China are expected to rise again.

U.S. beef figures prominently in China’s total imports of beef. According to China Customs data, in 2001 China imported a total of 3,768 (approx. 4,149 U.S. tons) of beef, including 1,848 metric tons (approx. 2,039 U.S. tons) from the U.S., the top source of imported beef that year (USDA/FAS 2002b). China Customs reports a much larger total for beef and beef variety meats (offal) from the United States. FAS explains the huge discrepancy with U.S. government data as a reflection of the practice of representing imported offal in China as a U.S. product to avoid quarantine restrictions on European and South American countries. Domestic meat is now sometimes also represented as a U.S. import, due to the higher quality reputation of U.S. meat (USDA/FAS 2002b).

The United States government tracks trade statistics for Hong Kong and Taiwan separately.

**U.S.–Hong Kong Beef Trade**—Hong Kong beef imports include meat for local consumption by Hong Kong’s 6.8 million people and supplies for re-export, Taiwan is also a significant customer for Kansas beef. In 2002, Kansas exported over US$7.8 million in beef to Taiwan, most of which was frozen beef, in addition to smaller amounts of fresh or chilled meat and frozen offal. Kansas beef exports to Taiwan for the first half of 2003 had increased over 80 percent (MISER 2003). Although the hotel and restaurant industry in Taiwan also suffered from the SARS outbreak, as in other similarly afflicted areas, the industry currently appears to be recovering.
particularly to mainland China (about 18 percent of beef and 74 percent of beef variety meats in the first 8 months of 2002). In 2001, Hong Kong imported 32,368 metric tons (approx. US. tons) of beef (USMEF 2003h) and 26,898 metric tons (approx. 29,587 U.S. tons) of beef variety meats (USMEF 2003h). Of these imports, 12,206 metric tons (approx. 13,426 U.S. tons) of beef and 8,863 metric tons (approx. 97,493 U.S. tons) of beef offal were imported from the United States (USDA/FAS 2002b). It is worth noting here that the USMEF reports only 8,164 metric tons (approx. 8,980 U.S. tons) of beef and 619 metric tons (approx. 680 U.S. tons) of beef variety meats imported from the U.S. during that period. Reliable trade statistics on re-exports to China have been difficult to obtain, due to the prevalence of smuggling and the mislabeling of country of origin on beef products to avoid quarantines. This is expected to diminish somewhat as WTO rules and greater efforts to control smuggling allow for more direct meat imports into China (USMEF 2003h). It is hoped also that more direct exports to China will allow consumers and importers in China to develop greater ability to distinguish authentic U.S. beef products (USDA/FAS 2002b).

**U.S.–Taiwan Beef Trade**—Taiwan’s beef supply is primarily imported. Beef imports to Taiwan in 2001 totaled 56,904 metric tons (approx. US. tons). In that year, the U.S. exported 10,854 metric tons (approx. US. tons) of beef and 1,043 metric tons (approx. US. tons) of beef offal to Taiwan and was Taiwan’s third highest source of beef. Taiwan’s accession to the WTO in January 2002 liberalized imports of variety meats, and imports in this category are expected to grow. Australia may remain the top exporter of beef to Taiwan, however, due to lower shipping costs (USMEF 2003k).
Beef Production in Japan

Mixed herd - wagyu and dairy cattle grazing in Iwate Prefecture, northeastern Japan

There are three major types of beef in Japan: Wagyu, dairy, and imported beef.

**Wagyu breeds**—Wagyu are beef cattle breeds native to Japan. The current Wagyu breeds were established in the mid 1900s "after they were developed in the late 19th century by crossing foreign cattle with original native cattle" (Peterson 2002:2). Four breeds, Japanese black, Japanese red, Japanese shorthorn, and Japanese hornless, are recognized as Wagyu. The majority of the Wagyu in Japan are Japanese black (Peterson 2002:2). The “extremely highly marbled ‘Kobe’ and ‘Matsusaka’ beef” are Wagyu raised under an “ideal” fattening system. They draw their names from regions of Japan and produce “choicest-of-choice” cuts that account for a very small percentage of the total Japanese beef market (Peterson 2002:18-19).

Marketing—Market institutions in Japan are divided into livestock markets, slaughterhouse facilities, and wholesale markets. There are about 220 livestock markets, where anyone can register as a buyer. At these markets, Wagyu cattle typically sell at high prices. For example, in 2000, the average price of a Wagyu feeder was US$3,400. The price for a Wagyu steer can reach up to US$10,000 when bid upon by exclusive Japanese restaurants and retailers who specialize in high quality meat. Producers come to the auction and stand behind the buyers to watch the pricing and may offer bonuses to the buyers such as local rice wine and Japanese pickles (Peterson 2002:12).

Slaughtering facilities are typically associated with wholesale markets or regional meat centers or operated by local governments. The facilities slaughter both cattle and hogs. At

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Wagyu calves are raised until eight to ten months old, then sold to feeders at around 640 pounds. They are then fed for another 20 months until they reach 1,500 pounds. The average size of a Wagyu feeding operation is 37.4 head. Wagyu breeding for meat quality is relatively new, beginning only in the last two decades. Artificial insemination is used in 98 percent of the beef cattle breeding in Japan. A significant concern of Wagyu producers is whether they will be able to compete if Wagyu is raised in large quantities in the United States (Peterson 2002: 7-9).

Holstein Beef Production—In contrast with Wagyu, most male dairy cattle calves are sold a week after birth to specialized operators, raised until weaned, and then sold at five or six months, when they weigh about 620 pounds. The average feeding time for Holstein steers to reach a finished weight of 1,650 pounds is about 16 months. Holstein feeding operations are larger than Wagyu herds, typically about 120 head. (Peterson 2002:4).

Producers—Unlike their American counterparts, most cattle operators in Japan are first generation. Similar to American ranchers, however, many Japanese farmers are older, with 52 percent over 60 years old. This has significant social implications (Peterson 2002:6).
Beef Trade with Japan

Read about Japan's Reaction to BSE

U.S.–Japan Bilateral Trade—Japan exports motor vehicles, semiconductors, office equipment, and chemicals and imports machinery and equipment, fuels, foodstuffs, and other products. As Japan’s largest trading partner, the United States absorbs over 30 percent of Japan’s exports and provides over 19 percent of Japan’s imports. Japan is the largest market for U.S. agricultural exports, importing feed and feedgrains, beef, wheat and flour, fruit, processed foods, and other agricultural products (World Factbook 2003).

U.S.–Japan Beef Trade—Japan is the top importer of U.S. beef. In 2001, Japan absorbed 40 percent of total U.S. beef and beef variety meat exports on a volume basis and 48 percent on a value basis. Following the discovery of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in Japan in September 2001, beef consumption plummeted and U.S. beef exports to Japan dropped. U.S. total beef exports to Japan fell more than 6 percent in volume from 2000 to 2001. In 2002, only 27 percent of U.S. beef exports by volume went to Japan, and Mexico became the largest importer of U.S. beef by volume, although Japan remained the top importer by value. Consumption of beef and demand for imports are expected to recover in 2003 as concerns over the safety of beef are alleviated. USMEF statistics for the first five months of 2003 indicated a 9 percent increase in volume and a 30 percent increase in value.

Kansas–Japan Agricultural Trade—Agricultural products figure prominently in Kansas exports to Japan. The combined totals of food manufacturing ($582 million) and agricultural crops ($297 million) amount to almost 81 percent of the exports from Kansas to Japan (KDOC 2002a). In 1999, Japan’s share of Kansas’ total exports of crops and processed foods was about 39 percent. In 2002, this percentage had remained steady, at about 40 percent. Thus, while exports from Kansas to Japan declined slightly from 2001 to 2002, the importance of Japan as an export market for Kansas agricultural products has not diminished since 1999.

Kansas Exports to Japan—Kansas Export
of U.S. beef exports to Japan and once again listed Japan as the leading market for U.S. beef. A recovery in import levels, however, may trigger higher import tariffs (see trade policy issues below), slowing growth by raising prices of imported beef (USMEF 2003g).

Market Share—In 2002, the United States was one of two major exporters of beef to Japan, competing primarily with Australia. Prior to the incidence of BSE in Japanese cattle in 2001, imports of fresh/chilled, frozen, and processed beef in 2000 totaled 740,592 metric tons (approx. 814,651 U.S. tons). These levels declined to 495,660 metric tons (approx. 545,232 U.S. tons) in 2002. The primary beef export from the United States was frozen beef at 137,020 metric tons (approx. 150,722 U.S. tons). The United States was the top exporter in that category, followed by Australia at 92,115 metric tons (approx. 101,326 U.S. tons). The ranking of the two countries was reversed in the export of fresh/chilled beef, with Australia leading at 138,385 metric tons (approx. 152,223 U.S. tons) and the United States in second at 89,480 metric tons (approx. 98,942 U.S. tons). The United States and Australia also accounted for about three-quarters of the relatively small amount of processed beef imported by Japan in 2002. From 1995 through 2002, the overall U.S. market share in Japan of fresh/chilled, frozen and processed imports has been steady, fluctuating between 46 and 49 per cent (USDA/FAS 2002g).

"Desire Beef" Campaign—In March 2002, the U.S. Meat Export Federation (2002a) launched a campaign in Japan to “deliver messages of safety, taste and nutrition directly to the Japanese consumers,” with three American wives and mothers as spokespersons. The campaign followed the discovery of BSE in Japanese cattle in September 2001, and the subsequent drop in Japanese consumption of “30 to 50 percent at both retail and restaurant levels.” Sales of U.S. exporters in the first quarter were down as well by 30 to 35 percent from a year earlier. The full-scale campaign was to run in newspapers in March and April 2002, in women’s magazines from April through June, and on television from April through


Kansas–Japan Beef Trade—Kansas beef exports to Japan during the past few years have been consistent with the pattern of beef exports to Japan from the United States as a whole. Kansas beef exports to Japan peaked in 2000 at over US$412 million. After the BSE scare in late 2001, Kansas beef shipments to Japan dropped by over 17 percent in 2001 and by another nearly 30 percent in 2002. Year-to-date figures for 2003, however, show an increase of over 22 percent (MISER).

Chilled and frozen boneless beef were the two largest commodity groups exported to Japan in 1999, accounting for nearly 82 percent by value of all Kansas beef exports to Japan that year. Muscle meat, both chilled and frozen, has continued to dominate Kansas beef exports to Japan, but variety meats, particularly frozen tongue and frozen offal, are also exported from Kansas to Japan in significant amounts. Frozen tongue shipments in 2001, for example, totaled over US$49 million (MISER).

Several companies process beef in Kansas for export to Japan. Excel's plant in Dodge City, for example, tailors products for Japan with specific cuts and packaging. The boxed beef is loaded into refrigerated containers and trucked to the west coast for shipment to Japan. In Japan, Excel markets beef via Daiei Inc., a large meat importer. According to Excel, doing business in Japan “means special cuts of beef and pork that meet the exact requirements of the Japanese market. Our plants in Colorado and Kansas package sirloin steaks, chuck roll and tenderloin under the ‘Kansas beef’ label for Daiei supermarkets, Japan’s largest retailer. ‘Spencer 86’ and Excel’s premium brand, ‘Sterling Silver,’ are other favorites in Japan” (Excel 11-12).

In addition to the marketing activities of
September. The targeted group was “moms and children living at home.” The campaign was called “Aisareru beef” [desire beef] (USMEF 2002a).

In August 2002 (USMEF 2002b), Yu Hayami, a wife, mother and celebrity, became the spokesperson in Japan for the campaign to carry the message “woman-to-woman.” Part of the campaign also included the publication of 98-page color cookbook, “American Beef Cooking: Yu Hayami’s Party Recipes and Daily Menu,” which sold for about US$7.50 and was available at more than 3,000 bookstores in Japan. The “aisareru” campaign was expected to continue beyond September 2002 into 2003, but at lower budget levels, and with more focus on public relations, in-store promotions and special events (USMEF 2002c).

Trade Policy Issues—Beef trade policies have at times been the subject of disagreement between Japan and the United States. Prior to 1978, when the USMEF opened an office in Tokyo, only about 10,000 metric tons (approx. 11,000 U.S. tons) of beef per year were being shipped from the United States to Japan, due to quota limits (Longworth 1983:48-49). In 1988, the United States and Japan signed a trade agreement in which Japan agreed to eliminate quotas and reduce tariffs on beef beginning in 1991. By 2000, U.S. beef exports to Japan peaked at approximately 360,000 metric tons (approx. 396,000 U.S. tons) before dropping in 2001 after the discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in Japan.

To protect Japanese domestic producers, the 1988 trade agreement included a safeguard “snapback” provision. If imports increase more than 17 percent over the same period in the previous year, the tariff on beef imported to Japan will increase from 38.5 percent to 50 percent for the remainder of the year. Due to the dramatic decrease in beef imports during 2002, import levels in 2003 may trigger this “snapback.” The Japanese government has already implemented the safeguard tariff measures for chilled beef as of August 1, 2003 (FAS 2003). Tariffs for frozen beef have remained at the normal level. Both beef industry representatives from the United States and the hotel and restaurant industry in Japan private corporations, as well as the efforts of the federal government and national trade organizations such as USMEF, the Kansas Department of Commerce (KDOC) has been active in developing connections between the state’s beef industry and Japan. On a 2002 trip to Japan, Governor Bill Graves met with Japanese restaurant and store owners and, assisted by the KDOC, hosted thirteen Japanese beef industry representatives at a Tokyo steakhouse that features Kansas beef. The KDOC representatives were joined by the CEO of U.S. Premium Beef and the president of Farmland National Beef Japan, Inc. to discuss issues of beef safety and quality (KDOC 2002b:3).

Nancy Kassebaum Baker, former Senator from Kansas, has also promoted Kansas beef in Japan as wife of the American Ambassador to Japan, Howard Baker. Earlier this year, she promoted beef in Tokyo by preparing American-style tables that held roasts and pot pies. She acknowledged that having a ranch in Kansas with 300 head of cattle made her “a little partial” to beef (Associated Press 2003a).
have protested against this policy, arguing that the current situation is exceptional and should not be handled as the type of import surge the snapback provisions were designed to address. The protocol does not include offal, which constitutes a large part of the U.S. export market of beef to Japan and would not be affected by the increase in tariff (FAS 2003b; National Cattlemen’s Beef Association: March/April 2003:20).

A current issue of concern between the United States and Japan is the worldwide discussion on the traceability of livestock from origin to sale. In the United States, the 2002 farm bill (Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002) established mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) on beef, pork, lamb, fish, peanuts, and other products, to be implemented nationwide on September 20, 2004. Under COOL requirements, only beef from cattle born, raised, and processed in the United States can be labeled "Product of USA." The COOL requirement in the 2002 Farm Bill excluded beef exports, as well as food service establishments, small retailers, and processed meat products (Rosson and Adcock 2003).

While the benefits and costs of implementing COOL for domestic sales continue to be debated in the United States, labeling the origin of beef products for export acquired intensified urgency after the discovery of a case of BSE in a cow in Alberta, Canada, in May 2003. Japan immediately banned the import of beef and cattle from Canada, and the United States and other countries quickly followed. Due to the significant number of cattle from Canada already in the United States, the Japanese expressed great concern that beef imported from the United States might include Canadian beef. While Japan had already implemented a place-of-origin labeling requirement for retail beef in 2000, the requirement included exceptions such as sales in the food service industry (Peterson 2002:1,16). Subsequent to the ban on Canadian beef, the Japanese government ruled that, as of September 1, 2003, all beef imported to Japan must include country-of-origin certification. In response, the USDA established the Beef Verification Program (BEV), which was formally accepted by Japan
for the certification of fresh meat products. The program entails strict audits of U.S. beef exporters to ensure that all beef certified for export to Japan is from U.S. cattle. Beef exporters must maintain records on the origins of all beef for export to Japan. The program may also be extended to beef exports to Korea in the near future (Forbes 2003).
History of Beef in Japan

Origins—The “eating of meat from four-legged animals was more or less prohibited in Japan for more than a thousand years prior to 1868,” primarily due to Buddhist influences and the protection of draught animals (Longworth 1983:1-2). Beef eating was a rarity and was primarily limited to the occasional consumption of culled draught animals. Beef consumption resumed in Japan as of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 (Kerr et al. 1994:17). Restaurants became popular. These included the first Western style restaurant on the Ginza that “pioneered hayashi raisu” (beef hash and rice) in 1868 (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:120).

Feeding cattle for meat consumption did not begin until after the mechanization of agriculture in the 1950s, and only since 1961 has the Japanese government encouraged the development and modernization of domestic livestock farms (Longworth 1983: xxiv,2). Holstein dairy steer feeding for beef developed in Japan in the 1970s, as a response to a growing economy and increased demand for beef. The per capita consumption of meat rose from 5.0 kg in 1960 to 22.5 kg in 1980 (Longworth 1983:3). Beef consumption did not rise as quickly as that of the other meats, probably due to two factors: domestic expansion of beef production in Japan was slow to develop and “beef imports have been tightly controlled” (Longworth 1983:5-6). An additional factor may have been price. Beef, chicken, and pork were all about the same price in 1960. By the 1980s, the retail price of beef Japan did not begin importing beef in significant quantities until 1957. The imported beef market, which the United States and Australia dominate, has grown incrementally over the last forty years. Figures from the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery for the late 1990s show that 70 percent of the Japanese beef supply was imported. Much of the imported beef does not end up on the Japanese consumer’s table at home. Purchases by the average household include only 33 percent imported beef, by retail weight (Peterson 2002:2-3). Imported beef is often eaten at family and fast food restaurants such as McDonalds, which imports beef from Australia (Peterson 2002:15).
was much higher than that of the other two meats.
Beef Production in Korea:
Small Farms Raise Superior Beef

**Beef Breeds**—The native beef cattle in Korea are known as Hanwoo. The average Hanwoo 18 month-old bull weighs 477.1 kg, (about 1,050 pounds) and the average 18 month-old female weights 308.7 kg (about 680 pounds) (FFTC 2001). This is smaller than many U.S. beef cattle. A typical 18-month-old Angus steer, for example, weighs at least 1,000 pounds and can weigh as much as 1,600 pounds. During the early 1900s, Hanwoo were crossed with Simmental to produce heavier cattle. Different breeding programs crossed Hanwoo with Angus, Hereford, Brown Swiss, and Charolais to improve the breed. A more recent program has focused on crossing Hanwoo with Charolais (FFTC 2001).

Because most farms in Korea are small, often about one hectare (about 2.5 acres), household cattle farmers typically raise up to five head. There is a gradual trend toward larger and fewer farms raising cattle. Due to the low milk production of most Hanwoo cows, calves are often given a calf starter supplement. After weaning, Korean cattle are typically fed roughage, hay, grass, and silage for 18 months. The roughage is often rice straw, a readily available crop residue that is sometimes ammoniated to improve nutritional value (FFTC 2001).

In 2000, beef cattle farmers in Korea began reducing the herd size, in anticipation of increased foreign competition after the planned liberalization of the beef market in Korea in
January 2001. To maintain the size of the national herd and increase stability in the market, the Korean government implemented the Hanwoo Integrated Measures Program. These programs, designed to improve the quality of Hanwoo cattle, include a project for stabilization of calf production, a subsidy for production of Hanwoo beef cattle, and other programs. Thus far, these measures have been successful in reducing the slaughter rate and increasing the cow-calf ratio. Breeding programs emphasize maintaining high-quality breeding stock, and Hanwoo beef is typically marketed as a high-quality, high-price product. Liberalized beef trade has not undermined the high prices for Hanwoo beef, and Korean farmers are showing greater confidence in the market (USDA/FAS 2002e:2).
U.S.–Korea Bilateral Trade—With East Asia’s fastest-growing economy after China, South Korea is a valuable trading partner. The United States has long been first among Korea’s trading partners, and Korea is the sixth-largest export market and fourth-largest agricultural export market for the United States (US&FCS 2002). In 2002, the United States shipped more than US$23 billion in exports to Korea, over 15 percent of Korea’s total imports for that year. The United States also absorbed over 20 percent of Korea’s exports for 2002. Although China is expected eventually to become Korea’s largest trading partner, due in part to its physical proximity, the trade relationship between the United States and Korea is expected to continue to grow (Korea Embassy U.S.A. 2003).

U.S.–Korea Agricultural Trade—Due to its high population density and lack of arable land, South Korea must import nearly 70 percent of its agricultural needs. U.S. agricultural products, particularly beef and poultry, citrus fruits, and animal byproducts compete well. The United States ships US$3-4 billion in agricultural products to Korea each year. These exports typically include approximately 30 percent bulk commodities, 25 percent intermediate goods, and 35 percent high-value products. The recent liberalization of trade policies has enhanced opportunities for U.S. agricultural products. In 2001, Korea allowed the importation of rice from the United States for the first time. Although agricultural imports into Korea are still subject to Korea’s stringent

U.S.-Korea Beef Trade—South Korea ranks third in the list of export markets for U.S. beef. Beef exports to Korea from the United States have risen rapidly in recent years, particularly after Korea liberalized beef imports in 2001. Although total beef imports to Korea dipped in 2001, the U.S. share has risen steadily, climbing from 51 percent in 1999 to approximately 63 percent in 2002. Although consumers view domestic Hanwoo beef as the highest quality, the shortage of Hanwoo has helped sustain high prices. The large price gap between Hanwoo and U.S. beef has served to increase sales of U.S. beef. Australia, New Zealand, and China compete with lower prices and strong marketing programs, but U.S. beef still leads the imported beef market in Korea.

Kansas-Korea Beef Trade—South Korea is second only to Japan as a market for Kansas exports overall and is also the second most important Asian market for Kansas beef. In 2002, Kansas exported over US$134 million in beef to South Korea. Over US$122 million of those exports were frozen beef. The remainder was in fresh or chilled beef, frozen offal, and other variety meats. Kansas beef exports to Korea fell significantly from 2000 to 2001. After a more than 100 percent increase in Kansas beef exports to South Korea from 2001 to 2002, beef exports to Korea in the first half of 2003 grew by only about 7 percent. Despite this recent history of uneven export levels, Kansas beef exports to Korea are likely to increase, in keeping
food regulations, inspections procedures and labeling requirements, U.S. agricultural products continue to compete well. Due to the increasing number of working mothers and the growing percentage of younger shoppers who enjoy imported foods, U.S. convenience foods also compete well. The expanding popularity of eating out further enhances opportunities for imported foods. The U.S. Agricultural Trade Office has identified cake mixes, coffee, frozen fruits and vegetables, wines, meat, confectionary and convenience foods as good prospects for U.S. export to Korea (USDA/ATO n.d.).

**Korea’s Beef Trade**—The demand for beef in Korea has expanded over the past few years. Beef consumption increased by 34 percent from 1995 to 2000. The worldwide foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in 2000 provoked a dip in beef consumption, but the BSE episode in Japan in 2001 did not depress consumption. Some Korean consumers opted for U.S. beef during that period, when U.S. exporters marketed U.S. beef as BSE-free meat. Domestic cattle production has decreased markedly over the past two years, in part due to anxiety among cattle farmers, who fear undercutting by foreign imports. While the Korean government has taken steps to rebuild the national herd, self-sufficiency in beef is expected to decrease for several years and fall to only 35 percent by 2010. At the same time, trade negotiations through WTO and other agreements have led to a decrease in non-tariff barriers related to beef. For example, the Koreans have now agreed to allow retailers to freeze fresh beef near the end of its shelf life. The distribution of imported beef has also been facilitated by the elimination of requirements for imported and domestic beef to be sold in separate facilities. Imported beef can now be offered for sale alongside domestic beef. All of these factors contribute to an expanding, dynamic market for imported beef in Korea (USMEF 2003j).
**History of Beef in Korea**

**History of Cattle in Korea**—The native cattle of Korea, known as Hanwoo, evolved from crosses between humped cattle (Bos indicus) and aurochs (Bos primigenius) that migrated to the Korean Peninsula from northern China about 4,000 years ago (FFTC 2001). Cattle were used primarily as draught animals, but the residents of the Korean Peninsula also had a history of eating beef from very early times. As in China, the development of iron tools led to more extensive use of cattle to pull iron ploughs.
Historians believe that wheat was brought to China from the Middle East during the Neolithic Period, possibly as early as 1500 B.C. By the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-200 A.D.), wheat had become so entrenched as a crop that a philosophical treatise written during that time included dates when winter wheat should be sown. (Needham Vol VI, 461-3)

Winter wheat and barley served as ideal supplements to native, summer season cereals such as rice and millet, allowing for an efficient crop-rotation system. (Needham, Vol. VI: 464).

Wheat served as an important crop throughout China’s dynastic history. Early historical texts included descriptions of farm implements and planting systems used to grow wheat. The Qimín Yáoshu (Essential Skills for the Common Man) of the 6th century lists instructions such as parboiling wheat before

In modern China, wheat continues to play an important role. Although China produced less than 25 million metric tons per year in the 1950s, production increased gradually through the 1970s. In the early 1980s, agricultural reforms spurred China’s wheat production to dramatic increases, peaking at over 120 million metric tons in 1997. (ERS China agricultural and economic data). The wheat harvest has now fallen to about 90 million metric tons per year, but China remains the largest producer of wheat in the world. Wheat consumption and production are shifting, though, as China steadily becomes more urbanized and a growing number of people become consumers rather than subsistence farmers.
storage to prevent mildew and facilitate hulling. (Needham Vol VI p. 382)
Wheat Consumption in China

The mix of wheat products consumed is also changing. In recent years, the influx of western-style bakeries and fast-food establishments has contributed to shifts in Chinese eating patterns. Affluent urban residents, particularly in southern China, are consuming increasing amounts of western style breads, buns and pastries from fast food restaurants and bakeries. Traditional steamed breads, however, remain more common than baked breads, in part because most Chinese home kitchens are not equipped with conventional ovens.

In China's more arid North, wheat has been the staple grain for centuries, used to make noodles, steamed breads, and dumplings. In southern China, rice has been the main crop, and wheat flour has traditionally been used to make fine dumplings, noodles, and snacks, rather than as a main staple.

As China becomes more urban and more industrialized, even residents of many rural areas are experiencing a life-style shift that includes more modern trappings. Where rising incomes are giving consumers greater access to well-stocked markets as well as a greater ability to own appliances such as refrigerators, many Chinese consumers have been able to diversify their diets with the addition of more fruits, vegetables, meats, and processed foods. This has resulted in a decline in wheat consumption. (Lohmar 5)

Shifting tastes have also affected the types of wheat grown, imported, and consumed in China. In northern and northeastern China, noodles, steamed breads, and dumplings still account for most wheat use, but demand is growing for pan bread, cakes, and other processed foods. Makers of pan, or loaf, breads require wheat flour high
Though experts generally agree that wheat consumption is decreasing, the actual amount is unknown, because the Chinese government does not publish national statistics for consumption. USDA estimates, based on unreliable statistics, that per capita consumption of grain is 222 kg (about 100 lbs) in rural households and 79.5 kg (about 36 lbs.) in urban households, but statistics on the relative percentages of rice, wheat and other grains is not available.

in protein and gluten, while cakes and crackers are made from low-protein wheat. Most of China’s wheat has traditionally been rated as medium in protein and gluten content. Hence, China's pan bread, cake and cracker producers have had to either use less than ideal flour or blend the native flour with imported wheat. (Hsu 4, 5)
Wheat in China - Production and Trade

Most of China’s wheat production is in the North China Plain in the central and eastern part of the nation, where three provinces — Henan, Shandong and Hebei — produce more than 50 percent of the national crop. These areas are susceptible to drought and are dependent on irrigation to cultivate wheat, a dependence that has contributed to the depletion of water resources in that region. This could restrict output in coming years (Lohmar 4).

China’s wheat industry has been relatively slow to implement market-oriented reforms. For example, China has only recently started experimenting with grading wheat, and the buying and transport systems, designed to treat most wheat as the same, don’t efficiently segregate different kinds of wheat. As a result, poor-quality wheat ends up mingled with high-quality batches. As millers improve facilities for segregating wheat types and increase payments to farmers for specific qualities of wheat, a more robust domestic market system for specific qualities and types of wheat is likely to develop (Lohman 6).
Chinese government policies on wheat production have shifted several times during the past two decades, as policy makers strive to satisfy both national security concerns and market needs. In the 1980s, the country imported as much as 13 million tons. Then, in 1995, Chinese policy-makers decided that the nation should be self-sufficient in grain. To this end, local officials raised the price they would pay for wheat, an incentive that led to huge wheat harvests in 1997-98 — harvests that were more than double those of the early 1980s. With such bin-busting numbers, inventories soared and imports dropped off the charts (Hsu 1).

Gradually, stockpiles were reduced and imports, from the United States and elsewhere, resumed, though they have not recovered to the level of the 1980s. Production has fallen, a reflection of a reduction in incentives and of farmers switching to other cash crops, such as horticulture products and cotton, which bring a better return. A soil and water conservation program that provides incentives to farmers to revert cropland, particularly sloped or otherwise fragile fields, to natural vegetation has also led to reductions in sown area (Lohman 4). The Chinese government has also shifted from a call for complete self-sufficiency to one of primary self-reliance, where farmers would produce 85 percent or 90 percent of China’s wheat needs instead of 100 percent (Jiang and Gifford 4).

China's heavy production of low-quality wheat has necessitated imports of high-quality wheat and, in recent years, has represented a steady export market for U.S. wheat. USDA predicts that Taiwan will import about 1.06 million metric tons of wheat in 2005, a slight decrease over previous years. Over 85 percent of the imported wheat is expected to come from the United States. The remainder is imported from Australia and India (Perng and Trachtenberg). The Taiwan milling and baking industry has sent many professionals to Kansas for training and familiarization with U.S. wheat purchasing and milling techniques (Kansas Wheat Commission).

Taiwan millers purchase a variety of wheat classes from the United States, including white wheat for Chinese noodles as well as red wheat. In late 2003, the Taiwan Milling...
wheat. In turn, China has been able to export wheat, often of feed quality, to a number of countries, with South Korea, North Korea, Vietnam, Hong Kong and the Philippines representing the largest markets.

To avoid stockpiling large quantities of hard-to-move, low-quality wheat, China's agricultural policy shifted, starting in 1999, to try to increase the amount of high-quality wheat grown, paying farmers a premium for wheat high in gluten (Lohman 6). While this policy was designed to meet the increasing demand from food processors for high quality wheat, the top-down, policy driven approach may not meet the needs of the market. Processors, for example, need low-gluten wheat, in addition to high-gluten wheat. In addition, the premium paid to farmers has not always compensated for the lower yields produced by high-gluten varieties.

Association made a commitment to purchase 1.7 million metric tons of hard red wheat over a period of two years. Because Kansas is the main producer of hard red winter wheat, most of that wheat is expected to come from Kansas (Kansas Department of Commerce).

Next: Wheat in Korea
Archaeological evidence indicates that wheat, along with barley, millet, rice, and other crops were first cultivated in China, then in Korea, and finally in Japan. Some of these crops, including rice and millet, were first domesticated in China. Others, such as wheat, were brought to China from further west. During the Neolithic period, many of these crops gradually made their way to the Korean peninsula: first dryland crops such as wheat and later, wet-field rice. Bronze Age archaeological sites in Korea reveal that wheat was already an established crop by about 1000 BC. (Crawford and Lee).

Next: Wheat Consumption in Korea
Korea’s annual wheat consumption is approximately 3.5 million metric tons. Of this, one million metric tons is used for livestock feed. The remainder is consumed as wheat flour for noodles, bread and confectionary items, and other products. Annual wheat flour consumption per person in Korea was about 81 pounds in 2004 (Choi and Phillips 2-4). About half of the wheat flour consumed in Korea is used to make noodles (Choi and Phillips 2-4). One of the most popular dishes in Korea is a bowl of guksu, or thickly sliced wheat flour noodles, served in anchovy soup with kimchi (Korean spicy pickled cabbage). These soup noodles can be served hot, garnished with a fried egg or stir fried vegetables, or cold, with sliced cucumbers. In another variation, bibimguksu, the noodles are served with hot peppery paste instead of broth. (Life in Korea), kalguksu are made from a mixture of wheat flour and soybean flour, also sliced into thin noodles that are either served in broth or with a sauce based on chilies and scallions (Life in Korea). Koreans also make udang, a thicker wheat noodle similar to Japanese udon and ramyeon, or ramen, the dried packages of noodles popular in the United States as well as throughout Asia.

Korean wheat noodles tend to be chewy and springy. The flour used for Korean instant fried noodles must have medium protein content (9 to 10.5%), a bit harder than the flour used for Japanese udon (Hou 4). As in other East Asian markets, Korean noodle makers prefer white flour for noodles, to prevent discoloration in cooking. Korean millers and noodle experts have shown interest in U.S. hard white wheat for these products. Although noodles are one of the most popular ways to eat wheat in Korea, Koreans are also fond of steamed buns, often filed with sweet red bean paste. These are usually made with softer flour. Korean cuisine is also known for mandu, or dumplings, made from wheat flour-based wrappers filled with meat, vegetables, or tofu, then boiled, steamed or fried.

Next: Korean Wheat Production and Trade
wheat consumption in Korea
Korean Wheat Production and Trade

Republic of Korea
(South Korea)

Most of Korea’s grain production fields are dedicated to rice. Korea produces only about 10 to 12,000 metric tons per year of wheat. Korea’s wheat needs are largely met through imports of about 3.5 million metric tons per year. The United States provides over half of Korea’s milling wheat. Australian and Canadian exports have also been very successful in the Korean market, particularly Australian Standard White for noodles and Canadian Western Red Spring for bread and rolls. (Choi and Phillips 3-4).

Democratic People's Republic of Korea
(North Korea)

North Korea produces very small amounts of wheat. USDA estimates that, in 2004, the total production of wheat, barley, and beans combined was about 0.26 MMT. North Korea’s grain production over the last decade has fallen far short of the population’s needs. USDA calculates that adequate nutrition for North Korea’s population would require a minimum of 6.6 million metric tons of grain, or over 2 million metric tons more than the country’s rate of production (Choi and Phillips, North Korea 1). Part of this shortfall has been provided each year by aid through international organizations and through South Korea. In some years, that aid has included wheat from the United States.

Next: Wheat in Japan: Introduction
Korea wheat production trade
Exactly when the Japanese began growing and eating wheat is not known, but what is clear is that, like many other foods and products, it probably made its way through China along the trade route known as the Silk Road. What is also clear is that to this day, many of the ways Japanese use wheat have been inspired by uses from outside the nation’s borders. Noodles in Japan reflect a strong Chinese influence, including the quick, popular and cheap Ramen that is slurped up by the Japanese and by college students worldwide. The same goes for the growing popularity of pan and other breads, which have been adopted and adapted from western sources, particularly in the wake of the American occupation after World War II (Ishige 77-79).

Next: Wheat Consumption in Japan
Overall, Japan uses about 6.1 million metric tons of wheat each year, with nearly 90 percent of the grain used for food and the rest going to feed livestock. Annual wheat consumption averages about 70 pounds per person (Fukuda, Dyck, and Stout 2).

The two primary ways that Japanese use wheat are in noodles and breads. The Japanese eat many kinds of noodles: some cold, some hot, some in soups, some not, some in fine restaurants, some in cups from vending machines. Regional variations are many, though it’s simplistic to say that one kind or another is limited to a certain part of the country.

Among the popular varieties are somen, a fine wheat noodle made by master craftsmen which is often served cold with a dipping sauce; ramen, a chewier Chinese noodle served in broth that has given the popular instant noodles their name; udon, made by rolling wheat dough flat and cutting it with a knife; and soba, a noodle that’s made from buckwheat, which is actually not a grain but a seed, like a sunflower. The general public belief is that soba noodles are more popular in Tokyo and eastern Japan (due to the mountainous, buckwheat-producing prefectures next to the Kanto plain and Tokyo), and udon are the favorite in western Japan, including the Kansai region to the west of Tokyo that contains Osaka and Kobe—in the Kansai, mild climates and fertile soil allow for a winter wheat crop after rice.

In addition to noodles, Japanese consumers also enjoy wheat breads. Ever since the Dutch and Portuguese established communities in Japan centuries ago, bread has been produced in Japan. At first it was seen as a between-meals snack, but it became popular as a breakfast food in the 20th century, particularly after the postwar occupation when Americans encouraged bread consumption. By the early 1990s, 30 percent of Japan’s adults ate bread for breakfast. To a great extent, when bread is eaten, it’s in the company of other western foods, such as hams and eggs, cheese, butter and jam, coffee, fruit juice or milk (Ishige 57, 161-162, 169).

wheat consumption in Japan

fields are drained and harvested. But, in reality, udon noodles are favored in some parts of eastern Japan, and soba are a local specialty in some places in the west. (Ishige 248).

"Wheat flour processed from Canadian hard and U.S. hard wheat is mainly used for bread, while wheat flour processed from U.S. semi-hard wheat is mainly used for Chinese-style noodles. Wheat flour processed from Australian and Japanese soft wheat is used to produce crackers and Japanese-style noodles. Wheat flour processed from U.S. soft wheat goes mainly to produce cake and cookies" (Mao, Koo, Suomala, and Sakurai 7).

A number of factors influence local tastes. "Consumers in Tokyo tend to prefer […] pork, buckwheat ‘soba’ noodles, and a greater cuisine variety. While in Osaka (Kansai region), consumers […] prefer beef and wheat ‘udon’ noodles" (Canada Agri-Food Trade Service).
Japan wheat production and trade

More than 100,000 Japanese farmers plant wheat or barley, and wheat is grown in paddy fields throughout Japan and on upland fields on Hokkaido, the northernmost and second-largest island.

Wheat production peaked at about 1.7 million metric tons in the early 1960s before dropping sharply to about 200,000 metric tons in the 1970s. Since then, production has gone back up to more than 850,000 tons in 2003. (Japan Statistical Yearbook, Chapter 7).

Still, Japan imports each year about 5.5 million metric tons, nearly 90 percent of the wheat the Japanese consume, and Japanese millers believe that domestic wheat is of inferior quality. To preserve the domestic wheat-growing capability, the Japanese government has heavily subsidized wheat farmers in two ways: by direct subsidies and by controlling the importation of wheat, which it then sells to domestic millers at a heavy markup, with the profits used to pay for

The Japanese government has encouraged efforts to grow better wheats and counter millers’ beliefs that the domestic crop is inferior. One new noodle variety, Sanuki Dream 2000, was being touted as superior to the Australian white wheat often used by udon noodle makers (Australian Broadcasting Corp.).

Wheat production has been encouraged as an alternative to rice, which was overproduced in the 1960s and 1970s, because of its nutritional value. "Wheat, barley, and soybeans have been favored because MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries) is trying to raise the caloric self-sufficiency of Japanese agricultural production, one of the goals set down by the Food Basic Law in 1998," according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture report (Fukuda, Dyck, and Stout 6).
the subsidies themselves.

All this comes at a high cost to consumers, who pay an estimated $800 million a year premium for wheat above what free market prices would cost. In stores, this translates into shoppers paying 70 to 80 cents a pound for flour in Tokyo, where shoppers in the U.S. Northeast pay 30 cents a pound. For another example, Japanese farmers receive more than $30 per bushel for the wheat they grow, while U.S. growers get from $2.62 to $3.56 per bushel. Wheat is more expensive to grow in Japan than in many other countries, and some analysts say the Japanese domestic production would plummet if exposed to free market competition. (Fukuda, Dyck, and Stout 14).

The Japanese, through the government grains agency, import about 5.5 million metric tons of wheat each year. The majority of the wheat, about 3.1 million tons, comes from the United States, with Canada supplying 1.5 million tons and Australia about 1.1 million tons.

Japan’s imports of American wheat have dropped slightly in recent years because Japanese millers have come to favor Australia’s white wheat for noodle making, which is one major reason why the U.S. wheat industry has pushed the development of a wheat called hard white (Midwest Shippers Association).

Japanese millers still buy great quantities of American wheat, though, and will likely continue to purchase bread-making varieties like hard red wheat, the kind that makes up virtually all of Kansas’ production.

Next: Kansas Wheat Production
Wheat isn’t native to Kansas, but for many people across the country and the globe, when they think wheat, they think Kansas. The state has the nicknames, “Wheat State,” “Breadbasket of the World,” and plenty of facts to support them: For instance, Kansas produces more wheat than any other state, nearly one-fifth of the U.S. crop, enough to fill a train stretching from western Kansas to the Atlantic (Kansas Wheat Commission).

Production grew steadily, hitting 100,000 acres in 1869 and 1,000,000 acres in 1876. Today’s harvests average about 10,000,000 acres. Early on, yields were low, usually 10 to 20 bushels per acre. From 1993 to 2002, yields averaged 38 bushels, from total crops averaging 375 million bushels. (Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service, Paulsen).

In addition to improved inputs, including fertilizer and irrigation, today’s high wheat yields are due in large part to the improved varieties of wheat, developed primarily by researchers at Kansas State University. Today’s varieties on average are made up of about half Turkey Red wheat, bred to produce more grain and flour, grow shorter stalks, respond to fertilizers better, mature sooner, and resist pests. The varieties are developed by cross-breeding, selecting the best traits from around the world, including some semi-dwarf
selling land and seeking farmers whose crops would move on their lines — from Russia's grain-growing regions.

Not only had these Mennonite farmers grown wheat, but they also brought seed with them. Unlike the varieties earlier settlers had grown, ones susceptible to heat and disease, the Turkey Red variety was a hard red winter wheat that could be planted in the fall, survive brutal winters and be ready to harvest in May or June, before summer's harsh heat. Turkey Red's popularity grew as farmers saw how well the Mennonites did with it, the seed supply increased, flour mills were developed to process the tougher hard wheat, and harsh winters killed off other varieties. Turkey Red remained the state's most popular variety for six decades.

From the start, growing wheat in Kansas was hard work requiring continual innovation. Settlers found a dry, cold climate far different than what they were used to. The soil had to be back-breaking unearthed from hard sod, and once exposed could become dried-out and wind-blown if good planting practices weren't employed.

Through trial and error, farmers, especially the farther west they were, learned to use less seed so as not to deplete moisture. It took decades to learn the right times to plant wheat in the fall, so that it would be well-established before going dormant for winter and so that pests couldn't prey on it (Paulsen). In the early days, when wheat was cut by hand, farmers worked far fewer acres and could cut only 2 acres a day. With the mechanical reaper, farmers could cut 8 acres a day. Today, when modern combines descend upon fields in waves, 1,000 bushels can be harvested in an hour and an acre cut in 6 minutes or less (Kansas Association of Wheat Growers). Technology has increased farm size, making farms more efficient but also making farming more economically risky. Wheat is a major part of the state's economy, with more than one-third of Kansas' 63,000-plus farmers growing the crop, contributing more than a billion dollars to the state economy.

Next: Wheat exports to East Asia
Pinning down exactly how much Kansas wheat goes to Asia is difficult because wheat is a commodity, shipped in bulk. Wheat from Kansas is indistinguishable from Nebraska’s or Oklahoma’s once harvests are combined for shipment. It doesn’t come with a tag saying, “Grown in Kansas.”

But Kansas produces about 20 percent of the entire U.S. wheat crop, on average about 400 million bushels (over 10.8 million metric tons) a year, more than any other state (Access Kansas). Half of all that wheat is exported, and nearly 95 percent of exports are hard red winter wheat, though a growing percentage is the hard white winter wheat valued by many Asian noodle makers.

So it’s fair to say that, even though specific figures aren’t available, the state represents a significant presence in wheat exports. The biggest Asian market is Japan, which imported over 3 million metric tons of U.S. wheat in 2004, nearly 56% of Japan’s wheat imports for that year (Fukuda 14). In the marketing year 2004/2005, China purchased over 2 million metric tons of wheat from the U.S., bringing this market up to second place for U.S. wheat in East Asia (Jiang and Gifford 14). This was a big change from the previous decade, during which China’s annual wheat imports had fallen dramatically to less than 1 million metric tons from over 12 million metric tons in 1995 and even higher levels in the late 1980s. Domestic production, however, has fallen

In contrast with the wide fluctuations in the China market, South Korea has consistently been the next largest customer in East Asia. South Korea imported 1.17 million metric tons of U.S. wheat in 2004, accounting for over 52 percent of Korea’s milling wheat imports for that year (Choi and Phillips 12). Following not far behind is Taiwan, which purchased 86%, or 935,000 metric tons, of its wheat imports for the marketing year 2003/2004 from the United States (Perng and Trachtenberg 3-4). Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have been steady customers for hard red winter wheat, which is good for baking but less suited for noodles.

Taiwan and South Korea have also imported hard white winter wheat from the United States. Hard white wheat is a growing part of the U.S. wheat industry, spurred on by market demands, especially the realization that Australia was taking market share. Though much of the rising U.S. hard white wheat crop is used domestically, exports have grown tremendously to 192,000 metric tons in the 2003/2004 marketing year, nearly 10 times the amount recorded for the year before (Lin and Vocke 14).

Next: Wheat trade and WTO, tariffs, and phytosanitary issues
recently and, as stockpiles shrink, China has finally returned to the wheat import market. Predictions vary as to the future scale of China’s wheat imports. USDA forecasts total wheat imports to China for the marketing year 2005/2006 at 6 million metric tons (Jiang and Gifford 1).

“We can anticipate them being in the 3 million to 5 million range, year in year out” said John Oades, director of the West Coast Office of U.S. Wheat Associates, referring to the amount the United States and other countries will compete for “… though they’re not going to be the huge customer, the 15 million tons that they were 20 years ago.”
Japan and South Korea are founding members and China and Taiwan (2001 and 2002) more recent members of the World Trade Organization, the international body created in 1995 to set “the global rules of trade between nations” (www.wto.org).

In regard to the U.S. wheat trade with Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan, the WTO has set what are known as tariff-rate quotas, or TRQs. The quotas vary from country to country but are designed to ensure fair trade and prevent nations from setting tariffs that will eliminate competition from another country’s products.

Tariff-rate quotas for China, a relatively recent member, are steadily rising, meaning that the potential market for the United States and other foreign nations is growing. The way TRQs work is that a certain amount of wheat can be sold, subject to a low duty, or payment, but, once that quota is reached, the duty on subsequent sales becomes much higher.

The WTO also tries to ensure that countries not subsidize their wheat in ways that give them an economic advantage over the wheat of other nations. The WTO is the forum for negotiating and resolving such issues. Still, there are a number of ways countries can use their bureaucracies to limit access to markets.

These can include making it difficult for

Nations, of course, have a legitimate concern about the quality of imported food, that it will not make their people ill, nor will it spread disease to their crops. Under the WTO, member states can set their own standards regarding what can cross their borders. But those standards must be based on sound science and not arbitrary restrictions designed to discriminate against a certain product or country (WTO).

Two wheat diseases are examples of phytosanitary issues that affect trade with East Asia and elsewhere. TCK smut, also called dwarf smut or bunt, primarily affects wheat in the Pacific Northwest because it thrives in crops planted under snow in unfrozen soil. The fungus can result in smaller plants, lower yields, and infect the heads of the plants with spores that have a fishlike odor and can spread to other plants. Though wheat containing TCK...
foreign businesses to find out which domestic companies have been given import licenses or granting import licenses that allow such small amounts of imports that they aren’t economically feasible. China was accused of doing both during the early days of its WTO membership, though such problems seem to have been ironed out (The American Chamber of Commerce-China).

Countries can also make regular changes in food regulations and inspection methods to make it difficult for outsiders to do business there, as South Korea has sometimes been accused of (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada).

Phytosanitary issues are a major point of contention and are sometimes a non-tariff barrier that countries use to shield domestic industries from foreign competition. Phytosanitary refers to plant health and includes any number of plant diseases that can affect human health, product quality (such as the color of flour), or can infect domestic wheat if tainted grain is brought in from another country.

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Before China joined the WTO, TCK smut was a major issue, with China banning imports of wheat from seven western and Pacific Northwest states. Slowly and steadily, the issue has diminished, with China dropping that seven-state ban. Now, a maximum allowable number of TCK spores has been established for U.S. wheat imported into China, no matter where it is grown, and it’s a standard American wheat has been able to meet. The first ship in many years to carry unrestricted cargo of northwest U.S. wheat to China sailed in early 2000.

Karnal bunt is a disease that can affect Kansas wheat, though it usually occurs in California, Arizona, and Texas. Karnal bunt can also affect yields and flour color. In infected areas, the USDA quarantines wheat, testing for karnal bunt and, if the crop is clean, certifying it so it can be shipped out of the area. The United States has considered ending the quarantines, but the costs would be high because of adverse reactions by China, South Korea, Taiwan and other markets (Vocke, Allen, and Price). Because of concerns about karnal bunt, Kansas requires that seed be tested for the disease (Kansas Secretary of Agriculture).

The WTO has brought normalization to tariffs, but phytosanitary issues are expected to continue on some level, as nations try to get the best wheat at the best price and preserve domestic markets at the same time. “Now the latest game to play is to slow down other countries’ exports,” said John Oades of U.S. Wheat Associates. “So we get issues like karnal bunt, TCK, pesticides. You just have to address these as they come along, and you have to do it on a scientific basis with the help of other countries.”

Next: GMO wheat and East Asia
Genetically modified wheat — created when scientists insert genes from one plant species into another plant to make a variety more resistant to blights, herbicides, or insect damage—is a major issue for Asian and European countries and, by extension, the U.S. market.

Japan and South Korea have resisted buying crops and products that contain genetically-modified organisms. These countries require labeling of such products. China, which has its own research program for GMO crops, requires a safety review for GMO imports. The Chinese Ministry of Agriculture recently issued approval for several varieties of GMO corn, soybeans, and canola (Jiang and Gifford 6).

Several U.S. consumer groups have also raised objections to GMO products.

In May 2004, Monsanto, the U.S. industrial giant that is the largest supplier of genetically modified seeds, abandoned plans to introduce modified wheat, despite having spent years and millions of dollars on research on a genetically modified spring wheat that could have been sprayed with the company’s Roundup weed killer without killing the wheat. Monsanto’s move was a reaction to strong opposition from European and Japanese governments and consumers (The Guardian).

Many American farmers also have opposed modified wheat because they fear that the introduction of GMO wheat would cause...
GMO wheat and East Asia

strong overseas markets to collapse. The United States exports half of its huge wheat production, meaning billions are at stake. Many U.S. farmers also fear the introduction of modified wheat because cross-pollination or mixing during storage would contaminate non-GMO crops, making them unsaleable. Such mixing has occurred with corn, canola, and other crops.

The issue has not been put to rest, either, with Monsanto saying it hoped that the World Trade Organization would rule that the European Union boycott of modified wheat is illegal. Proponents of GMO research, assert that it can be done safely and that genetic improvement can bring great benefits. Levels of genetically modified organisms can be measured in parts per billion, making wheat shipments susceptible to tainting from modified soybeans or corn that had been shipped in the same rail car or truck, Frey said. “They’ve detected genetically modified substances in wheat, and we don’t even have genetically modified wheat, it comes from the other grains,” Frey said. That’s why he favors Japan’s approach, which allows a minimum level of modified organisms instead of zero.

Next: Cleanliness and Logistics

David Frey).
Most Kansas wheat is shipped from ports in Texas via the Gulf of Mexico. About 58 percent of all U.S. wheat exports goes through those and other Gulf ports, about 35 percent goes through the Pacific Northwest, and smaller amounts leave by rail or via the Great Lakes or Atlantic ports.

Gulf ports traditionally serve markets in Africa, South America, and other points east and south, and Pacific Northwest ports serve East Asian markets. This is mostly a matter of proximity and economics: Those ports that are closer to the markets they serve are the cheapest point to ship from. It costs $20 to $25 a metric ton less to ship to Asia from the Pacific Northwest than it does from the Gulf of Mexico, meaning a million-dollar or more savings on every 50,000-ton shipment (Dickerson).

Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have, over the past decade, instituted more stringent requirements on how much dockage they’ll allow. Wheat that exceeds the maximum amount is either not bought by those nations or brings a lower price. For Japan and South Korea, the maximum allowance is now 0.3 percent; for Taiwan, 0.4 percent (U.S. Wheat Associates).

Australia and Canada, where monopolies buy and sell wheat and control exports, have long used their wheat’s cleanliness as a selling point. For example, Australian wheat to Japan averages about 0.2 percent dockage and Canadian wheat about 0.15 percent (California Wheat Commission).

To remain competitive and retain Asian customers, exporters in the Pacific Northwest have installed costly machinery to clean wheat. But shippers in the Gulf of Mexico haven’t invested in wheat-cleaning machinery.

“China, Japan, and Korea are as particular buyers as there are,” said David Frey, administrator of the Kansas Wheat Commission. “We can’t match the Pacific Northwest for cleanliness. The main reason they’re cleaning that wheat is because of Japan.”

“The Gulf exporters have not felt they can get an economic return on building cleaners,” said John Oades, director of the West Coast Office of U.S. Wheat Associates in Portland, Oregon. “Most of these operations up here put $5
The final destination of Kansas wheat — and 50 percent to 60 percent of it goes overseas, with the rest used domestically — is often based on where it is grown in the state. Virtually all wheat is shipped by rail, and rail lines in much of Kansas flow south like rivers to the Gulf of Mexico. An exception is in northwest Kansas where wheat can flow by rail to either Gulf ports or ones in the Pacific Northwest. The flexibility in shipping in northwest Kansas is especially important because the region grows much of the hard white winter wheat highly desired in Asian markets (Interview, John Oades).

Where wheat is grown is not the only factor in where Kansas wheat will end up. The cleanliness of the grain itself is a very important factor to Asian countries. Japan, in particular, through its wheat-buying Japan Food Agency, has demanded the United States “clean up” its wheat. The main measure of wheat “cleanliness” is the amount of dockage, foreign matter that can be removed using mechanical separators. Dockage includes chaff, seeds from other plants, straw, stones, and other material.

million to $6 million into putting in a cleaner.” Gulf Coast shippers “doubt they can get a return. Those elevators are much more involved in shipping corn and soybeans. The Pacific Northwest elevators are almost exclusively involved in wheat,” he said (Interview, John Oades).

Without cleaning, wheat shipped from the Gulf has dockage of 0.6 percent or 0.7 percent, making it less attractive to big Asian markets. That’s a major reason why Japan, which once bought much of its wheat through Gulf ports, now buys little there.
The United States has long been the world’s largest wheat exporter, and as the state that produces more wheat than any other, that’s brought Kansas a big chunk of income. In 2003-2004, Kansas harvested more than $1.5 billion in wheat, with more than half of it going overseas.

But over the past two decades, world wheat trade has been relatively flat. Economists and other wheat watchers think that’s going to change.

One forecast estimates worldwide trade in wheat will grow about 13 percent from 2003 to 2013 (Koo and Taylor). Another projection, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Baseline Projections, predicts trade will grow nearly 20 percent by 2015. At first blush, that sounds like good news for Kansas wheat and wheat farmers. And it will be if it is U.S. and Kansas wheat that feeds the growing trade in widespread markets.

Onetime sure bets as markets, such as China and former members of the Soviet Union, have become exporters. Argentina and India are selling large amounts of wheat outside their borders, and the European Union has gotten aggressive with export subsidies to move wheat. And Australia and Canada, both of which have national wheat-selling monopolies, have chipped away at U.S. strongholds, particularly in Asia, by selling wheat that more readily meets those markets’ demands for variety, cleanliness, and price.

So, while consumption has risen in parts of Asia, Africa, and South America, the United States hasn’t captured much of it. “Over the past 15 years the Korean food-use market has doubled from a million tons to 2 million tons, but the U.S. tonnage in that market has stayed roughly the same,” said John Oades, director of the West Coast Office of U.S. Wheat Associates, the national marketing and development arm for American growers. “Most of it has been displaced by Australian white. It has all gone to Australian wheat.”

Predictions of U.S. exports a decade from now vary. The North Dakota State report predicts that the United States will sell 2.8 percent less wheat overseas in 2013 than it averaged from 2001 to 2003 (though the domestic market is expected to grow). The USDA export predictions are brighter, with that forecast estimating the United States can be competitive for nearly all of that projected 20 percent increase in trade.
American wheat has long been synonymous with quality, but competition has become fiercer in the last 20 years, at the same time that U.S. wheat production has slipped slightly and wheat has become more expensive to grow.

Some of those markets American wheat brokers will be fighting for are in East Asia, with more than 10 percent growth expected in Taiwan and South Korea. Japan’s market is expected to stay flat, and China’s is growing but hard to predict (Koo and Taylor).
Food for Thought: On Rice, Beef, Nature, Food Safety, and McDonald’s in Japan

Interview with Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney
William F. Vilas Research Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison
By Norma Sakamoto-Larzalere
March 12, 2004

Professor Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney is a William F. Vilas Research Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. An expert in the social, cultural, and symbolic anthropology of Japan, she earned her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the author of 12 books in English and Japanese, including "Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan: An Anthropological View" (1984), "The Monkey as Mirror: Symbolic Transformations in Japanese History and Ritual" (1987), "Rice as Self: Japanese Identities Through Time" (1993), and "Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: the Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History" (2002). Professor Ohnuki-Tierney has been awarded the Guggenheim, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Japan Foundation fellowships, and is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

1. Background

2. Significance of Rice and other Foods in Japan

3. Concept of Nature and what is Natural in Japanese Foods
4. Food Safety in Japan

5. McDonald’s and Changing Table Manners in Japan

6. Globalism and the Japan/United States Food Market

7. Concluding Thoughts

Background

LARZALERE: First of all, could you tell us a little about your educational background? How did you come to study anthropology?

OHNUKI-TIERNEY: Oh, I just came [to the United States] without any particular ambition or even purpose. The first year I was totally confused, culturally. And somebody said, "you ought to take a course on anthropology because you don’t understand American culture." I took a course and I was fascinated—

L: Was this as an undergraduate?

OT: I was a graduate student. I had a BA from Tsuda College in Japan and came here. At that time, the only thing a woman was supposed to do was to get married. So I wasn't even trained to think in terms of a profession. But I always liked to read ever since I was little. I was very lucky even in elementary school; there were teachers who encouraged me. Rather than saying, "why should you read? You're just a little girl." So anyway, that's how I got into anthropology.

L: Do you have a BA and MA in anthropology?

OT: I have an MA and Ph.D. in anthropology.

L: Both at Wisconsin?

OT: No, I started out at Wayne State in Detroit and then transferred to Wisconsin.

L: You have such a wide-range of research--what are your primary areas of study in anthropology?

OT: My areas include symbolic anthropology and I did quite a bit of work with the Sakhalin Ainu. But I realized I couldn't tell my graduate students to find hunters and gatherers anymore. To do memory culture had limitations. So I switched to my own culture and I wrote my first book, "Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan"(1984). And I realized I couldn't understand Japanese culture as a synchronic slice of time. So I became increasingly interested in the historicization of anthropology. So after the first book--"The Monkey as Mirror," and "Rice As Self," [the second and third publications] were more into historicizing anthropology. And also my recent book, "Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms." So I would say [my areas] are historical anthropology and symbolism.

L: You cover a wide-range of topics including the Chinese in Detroit.

OT: Oh, yes, yes--actually that was historical. I spent a great deal of time going through the American newspapers and their coverage of the Detroit Chinese. I traced from when they first arrived for the Pacific Railroad construction, through the 1960s. I looked at what sort of social organizations had to undergo change.
L: I wonder if you could share with us something you had mentioned in the acknowledgments of "Rice As Self"? You were an elementary school student after World War II and discovered your calling to become a scientist. Could you tell us a little about that time?

OT: Yes, that was the time that--as I said, I was very fortunate to have this teacher, Fujita Sensei, for whom I dedicated my book --who really took care of me. Kônan [Elementary School] was an elite country school. Fifteen girls and fifteen boys. Most came from well-to-do corporate families. I did not but he took a special interest in me and encouraged me to study. He's the one who took us to see a movie about Madame Curie. And I was very impressed by her. I was so stupid and said to him, " I want to be Madame Curie." He did not laugh at me. Later, we began doing chemistry experiments together. In retrospect, he was just an amazing fellow since, at that time, no one saw a future for girls other than becoming wives.

L: And you have to consider the times--you had mentioned that at your school children suffered from a shortage of food, eating rice gruel and red beans with small potatoes. And that later Fujita Sensei gave you rice from his family’s private supply--he was able to rise above all of that and try to educate the students.

OT: Yes, that's right. And not only that--as I said--students came from very well known corporate families. We did not--so rather than catering to sons and daughters of big names, he took an interest in me just because I liked to study.

L: So he was right to encourage you--here you are today!

OT: I really feel indebted to him. Throughout my life I've had some individuals who helped me--who transcended the culture--I was very fortunate to encounter, for example, an editor for Iwanami, the top publishing house in Japan. He was from the International Christian University and read English very well. So he read my, "Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan" --and he traveled from Tokyo all the way to my mother's home--and said he’d liked to have a Japanese version of this. And later he became president of Iwanami. The last book he pushed was my " Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms." He has since retired from the presidency. So--there are a few individuals who were crucial in helping me in my profession.

L: It just happens sometimes in your life—

OT: That's right. I didn't have to come from Harvard for him to even take a look at my book.

Next: Significance of Rice and other Foods in Japan
In the early 1970s, Hiroko Kajimura and Yasuko Munekata relocated with their scientist husbands and families to Tsukuba Science City, located approximately 30 miles northeast of Tokyo. Before moving to Tsukuba, they both experienced living overseas with their families—Mrs. Kajimura in Westchester County, New York, and Mrs. Munekata in Heidelberg, Germany. Mrs. Kajimura is the mother of two grown children and a longtime volunteer teaching Japanese to foreign researchers and their families at Tsukuba University. Mrs. Munekata is the mother of three grown children, a grandmother, and leader of various Catholic church volunteer groups in Tsukuba.

1. Thoughts on Natural Foods, Beef, and Food Safety

2. More on Beef
More on Beef

Larzalere: What is the average cost of beefsteak?

Mrs. K: When I buy beef, I usually get around 100 to 150 grams [.22-.33 lbs.]--100 grams is around 600 yen [$5.70 US]. It's already prepackaged where I buy it.

Mrs. M: When I buy it at the Kasumi store in town [local supermarket chain], it costs 880 yen [$8.35 US] for 100 grams of the cheaper cut of beef. When I get it at the local butcher it's around 2,000 yen [approximately, $19 US] but it's a better cut of beef.

L: When I went to Seibu department store the other day, I noticed a large display of wagyū [type of high-grade Japanese beef] on sale. Is that for special occasions or for everyday consumption?

Mrs. K: Wagyū? It's not particularly special--I don't buy it at the department store.

L: Is wagyū only eaten on special occasions at home?

Mrs. K: No, some people only eat wagyū. Not so much recently, but in old times.

L: I just wondered because I noticed that there are wagyū cuts of beef prominently on display at places like Seibu.

Mrs. K: There are many different cuts of wagyū. It depends on the dish to be prepared such as yakiniku [grilled meat]--the high fat content is importance for such dishes.

L: Do you cook naizō [offal] at home?

Mrs. K: No, I don't.

Mrs. M: No.

L: Although it was labeled as “pre-banned beef,” I was surprised to see Canadian beef offal
being sold in the wholesale market in Tsukuba.

Mrs. K: Perhaps, it's being sold to foreigners such as the Brazilians who are living here in Tsukuba.

L: With the outbreak of BSE and the ban on the import of U.S. beef to Japan, do you think that beef is considered impure and "outside" and such things as rice, as a domestic product, may be considered "pure" and inside?

Mrs. K: Yes--that is perhaps that case--but at one time fish was marketed heavily. I recall when the fish merchants and companies marketed a song about fish and promoted how fish was healthy to eat and good for one's health. The supermarkets used to have it blaring in the stores.

Mrs. M: Yes, children used to sing to it and knew the fish song by heart!

Mrs. K: Something like "sakana, sakana. . . . " [fish, fish]. It was promoted a lot a few years ago. We heard it all the time over the loudspeakers at the supermarkets while we shopped. It's like a kind of propaganda! And with all the BSE problems, people were more inclined to buy fish. It's a kind of brainwashing by the merchants and companies.

Next: Importance of Rice in Everyday Life
In the early 1970s, Hiroko Kajimura and Yasuko Munekata relocated with their scientist husbands and families to Tsukuba Science City, located approximately 30 miles northeast of Tokyo. Before moving to Tsukuba, they both experienced living overseas with their families—Mrs. Kajimura in Westchester County, New York, and Mrs. Munekata in Heidelberg, Germany. Mrs. Kajimura is the mother of two grown children and a longtime volunteer teaching Japanese to foreign researchers and their families at Tsukuba University. Mrs. Munekata is the mother of three grown children, a grandmother, and leader of various Catholic church volunteer groups in Tsukuba.

1. Thoughts on Natural Foods, Beef, and Food Safety

2. More on Beef
Importance of Rice in Everyday Life

Larzalere: I would like to talk about rice and the significance of rice. How do you buy your rice and where do you buy your rice?

Mrs. M: I buy a bag of rice—five kilograms of rice [approximately 11 lbs.] each time.

L: How much is a five kilogram bag of rice?

Mrs. M: 2,500 yen [$24.46 US].

L: Does the price of rice fluctuate very much?

Mrs. M: Since last year the price has gone up a little bit. Usually, I buy rice at a local butcher shop.

L: And Mrs. Kajimura, where do you buy your rice?

Mrs. K: I buy rice at the local farmer’s market. I also buy a five kilogram bag each time.

L: And how much is a five kilogram bag at this market?

Mrs. K: 2,230 yen [$21.82 US].

L: Is it the same kind of rice as Mrs. Munekata buys?
Mrs. K: It may be a different brand.

Mrs. M: The brand name is Yumegokochi.

L: The brand name, the type, is a little different?

Mrs. M: The Yumegokochi rice is stickier than koshihikari (type of short-grained rice).

L: Can you tell the difference between California rice and Japanese rice? If I blindfolded you and you tried both types--if both samples were fresh--do you think you could tell if it was Japanese rice or American rice?

Mrs. K: I think that I can because I’ve been eating the same type of rice for a long time. But when I was in the United States with my family, I ate California rice. At that time, we found it very delicious. However, when we were in Japan, before we left for the United States--it was a long time ago--I bought a mixed blend, more economical, so it didn’t taste that good. I bought hyôjunmai [standard rice], a kind of mixed blend, and a more economical type. It didn’t taste good so compared to that kind of rice and California rice, the California rice tasted very good. As for the difference between California rice and the Japanese koshihikari type of rice, I can’t really tell the difference.

L: Mrs. Munekata, you were recently in Minnesota, did you eat rice during your stay?

Mrs. M: Yes. But I stayed there a very short time so I didn’t cook much everyday.

L: What about when you were in Germany? Did you eat rice at home?

Mrs. M: Yes. But at that time we bought Italian rice. It wasn’t very good.

L: So they didn’t have Japanese rice there?

Mrs. M: Of course there was--but it was very, very expensive. California rice was also very expensive since it was imported.

Mrs. K: Before we went to the United States, we traveled to Europe, to France, and I remember we were invited to a Japanese family’s home there. They served us California rice that was very good.

L: That’s interesting. As you say, there are some differences, but not that significant. To the average consumer, is buying Japanese rice important? If so, why is it important to the Japanese?

Mrs. M: We eat it everyday. We need it everyday.

L: It’s not considered a meal unless you eat rice? For example, if you go to McDonald’s?

Mrs. M: If it’s only bread or noodles, we don’t consider it a real meal. Once a day we want to eat rice.

L: What might be other reasons why rice is important to the Japanese? To the average person buying rice--do they really care whether they buy imported California rice or Japanese rice? Is the cost more of a consideration or is it more important to buy Japanese rice?

Mrs. K: There are two types of rice--long-and short-grained rice. Long-grained rice is not sticky--so many Japanese don’t like that kind of rice. And, we don’t have much rice like California rice that is imported. So, in Japan when we think of short-grained rice,
we think that it is made in Japan.

L: Short-grained rice is not originally Japanese rice, is it?

Mrs. K: No. But for us short-grained, sticky rice is Japanese rice.

L: It’s interesting that rice is so important as a symbol to the Japanese too.

Mrs. K: Yes—it’s—in a way—in our DNA. In our generation—generation after generation—we ate rice all the time, but actually Edo era people [1600-1868], particularly farmers and merchants, ordinary citizens did not eat white rice. At that time, to eat white rice was a very elite thing to do. Very luxurious. Now, everybody can eat white rice. And now—we have imported breads, pastas, and such—there are many varieties available in Japan. For some people, it’s a sort of substitute for rice. In the morning, I never eat rice. I always eat bread. For lunch, if I am at home, I’ll sometimes eat rice and sometimes noodles or bread. I don’t eat rice necessarily for lunch. However, at night I always eat rice. But when the rice is good I think many Japanese feel very contented eating only rice and some pickles and maybe with miso soup. That’s enough. That’s also considered a very good dinner for us because we can really enjoy the taste of white rice—as a kind of standard “classical” Japanese meal.

L: I’ve been watching a lot of home dramas on Japanese television and the rice cooker is always placed next to the kitchen or dining room table with the okusan [woman of the house] serving the rice in bowls to the family members—which is probably an ideal, right?

Mrs. M: I have the rice cooker in the kitchen.

Mrs. K: Ideal presentation and reality in everyday life are quite different!

Mrs. M: Getting back to your question about whether I prefer Japanese or foreign rice—if the price or the taste is the same, I prefer to buy Japanese rice because I believe Japanese rice has fewer chemicals in it. We don’t know how much they use in America. Also, another important reason I buy Japanese rice is to support the Japanese farmers. In this way, we maintain the Japanese rice fields that, in turn, are very good for the environment. So it’s very important to us. If we buy imported or cheap rice then the farmers have to quit cultivating the rice fields—we lose the precious green rice fields and that’s not good for the environment. That’s the reason why I prefer to buy Japanese rice.

Next: Generational Differences; Rice and Bread
In the early 1970s, Hiroko Kajimura and Yasuko Munekata relocated with their scientist husbands and families to Tsukuba Science City, located approximately 30 miles northeast of Tokyo. Before moving to Tsukuba, they both experienced living overseas with their families—Mrs. Kajimura in Westchester County, New York, and Mrs. Munekata in Heidelberg, Germany. Mrs. Kajimura is the mother of two grown children and a longtime volunteer teaching Japanese to foreign researchers and their families at Tsukuba University. Mrs. Munekata is the mother of three grown children, a grandmother, and leader of various Catholic church volunteer groups in Tsukuba.

1. Thoughts on Natural Foods, Beef, and Food Safety

2. More on Beef
3. Importance of Rice in Everyday Life

4. Generational Differences; Rice and Bread

5. Japanese and Foreign Food

Generational Differences; Rice and Bread

Larzalere: Here in Tsukuba, I see rice fields all around and within the city. It’s very different to Tokyo. Do you think the younger generation, referring to your sons and daughters, do they have as much concern about rice or things like that--do they care about such issues? Do they eat as much rice for one thing? Do they feel as you do? Do they need to eat rice everyday?

Mrs. K: Not so much I guess--when they were young. Up to around the age of 20, they didn’t think their taste is Japanese, but after that, gradually, their tastes changed and became like a typical Japanese. Until 20 years of age or so, the body is growing so when it grows the young people eat anything, very oily things-- but once they become adults, they tend to prefer typical Japanese cooking-- and they shift a little bit to being Japanese--not only the girls but also the boys.

Mrs. M.: That’s true. It was that way for my daughter. Now, my daughter is 33 and married but when she was single, she didn’t take heed as to what she ate. But now that she is married and has two children, she takes much care with her diet and prefers to cook Japanese locally-grown Ibaraki rice.

L: For the health of the children, right? Did that surprise you?

Mrs. M.: Yes. When my daughter and her family eat out, they go to McDonald’s or to restaurants that serve Western-style dishes, but at home she cooks and eats Japanese dishes.

L: What about your daughter, Mrs. Kajimura?

Mrs. K: When she was a student, she didn’t cook so much for herself. When she ate lunch, or other meals out, she always had something fried or a very oily food. But at home, she liked to eat Japanese-style food.

L: She cooks much more at home now, right?
Mrs. K: No. Her husband cooks a lot! His favorite book is the one I gave to my daughter. He loves this book. Both of them are working full-time so they don’t have much free time, but he likes to cook—but not housecleaning so that’s what she does. Not always, but he usually cooks and she cleans. L: Getting back to the significance of rice--

Mrs. K: It’s just like air. It’s too close to our lives that we don’t think about it much in our everyday lives.

L: An outsider like myself will say it’s significant, but as you said—you don’t think about its importance—you just know it’s important—like the air you breathe. With all the rice fields in Tsukuba, are there many rice festivals?

Mrs. K: In autumn, there are many rice harvest festivals all over Japan—for example—there are Inari jinja [Inari shrines]. This kind of shrine has a fox in front at the entrance. The first character—inaweans rice—the second character ri-- means pack or load—and jinja means shrine.

**Festivals**

L: Do you participate in any festivals?

Mrs. K: No.

Mrs. M: No.

L: Who participates in the local festivals? Mostly the rural residents?

Mrs. K: Many of these shrines have their own people who organize the festivals.
In the early 1970s, Hiroko Kajimura and Yasuko Munekata relocated with their scientist husbands and families to Tsukuba Science City, located approximately 30 miles northeast of Tokyo. Before moving to Tsukuba, they both experienced living overseas with their families—Mrs. Kajimura in Westchester County, New York, and Mrs. Munekata in Heidelberg, Germany. Mrs. Kajimura is the mother of two grown children and a longtime volunteer teaching Japanese to foreign researchers and their families at Tsukuba University. Mrs. Munekata is the mother of three grown children, a grandmother, and leader of various Catholic church volunteer groups in Tsukuba.

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Larzalere: We've talked about rice. In the same way, how do you view bread? Is bread a Japanese food?

Mrs. K: Yes, I think so. I especially like bread in the morning for breakfast. So did my children. So bread was a regular part of our daily diet. But when my children grew up and went off to Tokyo to study and talked with their friends, they realized that it wasn't so commonplace to eat bread for breakfast. Although, I heard from someone that in the Osaka and Kobe area bread is very popular. But not so much in the Tokyo area.

Mrs. M: Kobe is very famous for their bakeries. Very good German bakeries--people come from all over just to buy the baked goods there.

L: What do you think of places like McDonald's?

Mrs. K: It's for young people. I've been to McDonald's but not recently.

Mrs. M: When our children were young, we used to go to places like McDonald's.

L: What did you think of McDonald's?
Mrs. M: For the children, it was the thing to do. It was fashionable to go to McDonald's for American food.

L: Have such fast food places changed table manners in Japan?

Mrs. K: Since we sip the drinks through a straw and eat the food with our hands, it doesn't feel like we are eating a meal. It's like between eating a meal and a dessert--a snack.

L: How do your children feel about places like McDonald's now? Since they are now parents themselves?

Mrs. M: My daughter mentioned that places like "Mos Burger"[Japanese fast food chain], compared to McDonald's, is safer--although it's more expensive to eat there. The beef and vegetables are better at this Japanese fast food restaurant.

L: What do you think is Japanese food?

Mrs. K: We have classic Japanese food. Perhaps, people nowadays don't cook in such a regimented way. We gather from all over the world--different ways to cook and use various ingredients--cuisine from China, Europe, from the U.S., and from Thailand and India too. So--to answer your question--I can't say what is purely Japanese cuisine. It's all mixed up.

Mrs. M: Well, I guess sushi can be seen as a Japanese food.

Mrs. K: Or sukiyaki [thinly striped slices of beef and other ingredients cooked in a soy sauce broth] is a Japanese food. But we don't eat it that much--around once or twice a month.

L: When you lived abroad, did you go to Japanese restaurants?

Mrs. M: I ate a lot of Chinese food.

Mrs. K: Japanese restaurants were very expensive. Chinese restaurants were not so expensive. And we could find Chinese restaurants anywhere. So it was comforting to us. I don't remember going to any Japanese restaurants when I lived in the U.S.

Mrs. M: I thought that the Japanese food tasted a little different.

L: How was it different?

Mrs. M: The cut of the meat was different. For example—gyûdon--the meat in this dish was not sliced as thinly, and different vegetables were used. When I was in Minnesota, just last year, I was surprised at the number of Asian restaurants there and that such foods as sushi were considered an everyday American kind of food.

L: Sushi is available, even at the University of Kansas.

Mrs. K: You mean with nori [seaweed] and everything? That's interesting. I'm surprised that such foods as sushi are so common on college campuses in the United States.

L: It was enlightening to talk with you today about food in Japan. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts with us.
Authentic Voices:  
Conversations on Food and Agriculture

Bringing Home the Sushi:  
Food as a way of understanding each other's livelihoods

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Neighborhood Tokyo: Miyamoto-chô

L: We are moving ahead in time--your dissertation became the award-winning 1989 book, "Neighborhood Tokyo." Could you tell us first how you came to choose "Miyamoto-chô"?

B: Well, because I had the experience of living in Tokyo before, I kind of had this intuitive sense that urban communities were interesting places. I didn't have a particular place in mind but I wanted to find an area somewhere off the beaten track. Not a busy urban center but a quiet backwater neighborhood. I wanted to find a place that didn't have anything particularly special about it. Nothing famous--no landmarks--nothing that someone would go out of their way to come and see. So that the neighborhood really contained things that were by and for the people of that community. And that sort of cut it down to 10,000 neighborhoods.

Fundamentally, it was by accident and good luck. My wife and I were staying with a friend of ours who happened to have some extra space. He and his family let us stay for a couple of weeks while we were searching around to find a spot for research. We talked to him over dinner about what we were interested in and finally he said, "You know, sounds like you're talking about the kind of neighborhood I grew up in. Why don't you go look at this place?"

He gave us directions and gave us some introductions; we went walking around an spent a couple of afternoons looking around and went, "Oh, yeah, this very . . . [is what were looking for]. It's remarkably difficult to say, "I'm looking for an ordinary place." I mean, nobody wants to say, "We're ordinary." And it's very hard to define what ordinary is. So finding an ordinary place was really tricky. But in any case, through the good offices of our friend, we ended up being introduced to this neighborhood and looked around and very quickly decided this was the right kind of place.

L: And the key was this idea of networks, right?

B: I wanted to do research in a neighborhood where people had some degree of connection with one another. They weren't just commuting strangers. Where people interacted on a daily basis.

What we ended up doing was renting an apartment over a pharmacy on a shopping street in the middle of the neighborhood. And so, from my apartment window, I could look down and watch the ebb and flow of shopping. The housewives going off in the late afternoon to the local grocery stores and butcher shop, and other stores. And in the morning, the kids going off to school and the husbands going off to offices over there. So we were right in the middle of this little community and had a sense of it ebbing and flowing throughout the day and throughout the year.
L: You had mentioned in some of your articles about mapping the scene and looking for labels as clues for understanding what Miyamoto-chō was all about. Could you elaborate on this and how this applies to your later research on Tsukiji?

B: It works in any community whether it's Japanese or not. The number of things you can understand about a place--just watching the patterns of where people go in the course of a day. How they do different things at different places. To getting a spatial sense of how people spend time. You can get a sense of what is and what is not important to them.

In Japan, perhaps more than in the United States, people kind of do wear their identities on their clothing. The school kids wear little badges that tell what school they go to, what grade they're in, what class they're in. Sometime, even what bus or train they take in commuting to school. Employees of companies wear little badges on their lapels that say what company they're a part of. People in different occupations have different styles of dress.

I became quickly attuned to watching what people were wearing. Looking for all the subtle labels that would give me the idea of who they were and what they did. And also, where would I find, in terms of mapping out spaces, how people use their social time and their social space. Just noticing what kind of people end up in what kind of places.

L: You had mentioned about the community bulletin boards as great sources of information too.

B: Yes, just as if you go into a grocery store in the United States and you spend twenty minutes reading the bulletin board by the checkout counter. You know--there are notices of church lunches, school bazaars, a play that some people are sponsoring, a little league game, people selling used baby furniture--you're not going to learn everything about the community but it gives you a sense of what kinds of things are happening—who’s involved, who’s not.

L: Which is why to do research, for anthropologists, you've got to be there. What were your surprising discoveries about Miyamoto-chō? Things that perhaps you had assumed and then realized otherwise.

B: If I went in with any preconceived notion, they were typical North American notions—that neighborliness is a rural phenomenon—people who live in towns and cities are supposed to be less involved with their neighbors. And certainly in the case of Tokyo, at least at that time, that wasn't the case. So, I suppose one of the things that really surprised me is, the extent to which even in the middle of busy, crowded, highly populated metropolitan area, there is an incredible amount of to-ing and fro-ing between neighbors and people who really know each other's lives quite intimately.

L: And, there is an order to it.

B: Yes, exactly. It’s not chaotic interaction like billiard balls bouncing back and forth but they actually organize their lives around each other's activities. And they are attuned to the rhythms of each other's lives and so forth. In that sense, from a North American perspective, there was a really small town feel even in the middle of Tokyo. People knew their neighbors, knew their neighbors' children.

L: Everyone is in close proximity.
B: Right.

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Bringing Home the Sushi:
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Tokyo's Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World

—Discovering Tsukiji

L: Then, how did you go from Miyamoto-cho to Tsukiji?

B: Well--it's a sort of complicated chain of direction. When I was studying Miyamoto-cho and interested in the neighborhood and the social glue that kept it together, it was clear from that research, the most important actors in the neighborhood were, by and large, local business people. Which makes sense--if you've got a shop, you not only have an interest not just because they're your neighbors but they're also your customers. So you are interacting with them in a different way. And this other neighborhood becomes important to you for your business as well as for your own personal satisfaction.

So, I became aware very quickly of the central role of that the small family businesses played in this community. But at the time because of the friction between the U.S. and Japan, one of the big complaints, one of the big issues, that kept coming up in the press and the colleges and so forth, was that small family firms were a trade barrier. That they were part of this complicated distribution system which allegedly discriminated against foreign products. Specifically, U.S. [products].

And, of course, there were resistances to importing American beef and other American agricultural products. There were lots of explanations and issues involved but one of them was always--Japan needs to modernize its retail sector--get rid of all these small family businesses, modernize and enable globalization of markets to be fixed.

And I looked at that and thought, first of all for Americans to say to Japan—“You've got to get rid of all these family businesses”—it would be like if Japanese came to Kansas and said, "Get rid of the family farm."

You're trampling on very sacred ground of these institutions. So, first of all, family-owned businesses and companies are important in Japan. Not only for their economic role [but also] because of their connections to communities.

Then I said, "Let's look at them in an economic light." I began getting interested in distribution systems and I wanted to figure out a way to look at how small family
businesses were in some kind of wholesale/retail relationship. How did they actually interact? How did kinship, how did family ties shape their businesses? How did other community ties shape their businesses.

So, I went back to Tokyo with an idea of looking at the distribution system in small family firms. But I very quickly realized when I was doing that research that it's just too broad a topic. There were too many firms, too many kinds of businesses. I needed to focus on something--so I decided to focus on the distribution of food. Since food is after all something that everybody is interested in--rich people, poor people--everyone consumes [food] and [it] is sold everywhere.

But then, food is also too broad a topic--there are too many kinds of foods, too many kinds of businesses. So I surveyed different parts of the Japanese business world to find a place where I could really look at an integrated set of companies. And to understand the transactions among them, not just the economic transactions, but the social ties and social networks as well.

And someone again--the good luck of people giving me suggestions--someone said, "Oh, you should go to Tsukiji, the fish market. There are lots of family businesses there." And of course, it's also a fish market so [it involved] distribution, wholesale/retail, and so forth.

I thought that was an interesting idea and would take a look. I didn't really expect it to become the focus of my research. But I was there and interviewing somebody who was giving me an overview of the history of the marketplace and suddenly a light bulb went off in the back of my head and I thought, "Wait a minute, this is the place to look at this since there are thousands of businesses."

L: It's like an epiphany.

B: Exactly. I thought—“Oh my God, how could I miss this!” For the first time, I suddenly realized, as I was talking to this guy, that markets themselves were these incredibly interesting social institutions that have histories all their own.

So, the more I got into studying Tsukiji, the less my focus became the family businesses themselves. I'm still interested in family businesses but more the overall structure of the marketplace. And that, of course, also led me to the realization that I was interviewing people about their businesses in the fish market. And I had to know something about fish. I had to know something about the products they were dealing with. Otherwise, my questions were meaningless. And if I didn't know the difference between octopus and tuna, it would be a big problem. Of course, not just knowing the difference between an octopus and a tuna, but also learning how tuna is used in some ways in Japanese food culture and octopus is used in others.

So, I had to learn about the fishing side of things--where these fish are caught, how they are caught and how they are handled. But also where they go. Why are the people buying this kind of fish? So, very quickly where I thought I was narrowing my topic down, very quickly it blossomed out into this worldwide trade in fish.

Next: Tokyo's Tsukiji, cont: Globalization
Authentic Voices: Conversations on Food and Agriculture

Bringing Home the Sushi: Food as a way of understanding each other's livelihoods

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1. Background
Japanese Food Culture: Looking at Sushi as a Japanese Food and Icon

- Introduction

Japanese Food Culture: Looking at Sushi as a Japanese Food and Icon

- Introduction: Food in Japanese Culture

L: And then your research on tuna lead to your research on sushi. For those of us who don’t know much about Japanese cuisine, why is sushi considered traditional Japanese cuisine? I thought it was a recent invention.

B: That’s a really good question—I think it is a relatively recent invention. Sushi as we know it in the United States—that kind of sushi—was developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Japanese had been eating various kinds of sushi for a thousand years or more. Until the 19th and early 20th century, almost all sushi was involved in fermentation, pickling, soaking fish in soy sauce or vinegar. It was a means of preserving fish. It wasn’t fresh fish [with sushi].

L: The rice was thrown away.

B: Exactly. The biochemical interaction between the protein and the carbohydrates in the fish would create the fermentation process. So you’d throw away the rice and eat the fish. The fish would be like fish jerky. Some kind of preserved fish.

So, the idea of fresh sushi--fresh fish being part of sushi--is a relatively modern idea. So why is it considered traditional? I think part of it is through the interaction with the West. It is a style of cuisine that is so different from what Western cuisine has traditionally been.

L: Everybody says sushi is Japanese.

B: Yes—everybody including the Japanese say, “This is Japanese.” So, the distinction between this food that’s really special—even though it’s relatively recent—it’s special so it must be traditionally Japanese.

L: And seafood itself is an essential part of Japanese cuisine. Not just tuna, but a range of fish, you had mentioned the symbolism of fish like the tai [sea bream], because of its red color and —

B: Well, I think fundamentally that it is natural that since [Japan] is a small island
nation surrounded by oceans, people are going to pay a lot of attention to seafood. So, I think seafood has been a major part of the Japanese diet all the way back to the Manyōshū [Ten Thousand Leaves, 8th century anthology of Japanese poems]. So that’s not surprising. And it’s not surprising that [seafood] is the kind of food that is the staple food for a society—one that is so varied by seasons and climate—that lots of symbolism is going to be attached to it.

Particularly, Americans in the 21st century are so accustomed to a standardized national diet. It doesn’t matter so much if you go to a supermarket in Dallas, Texas or Missoula, Montana or Gloucester, Massachusetts—you’re going to find pretty much the same things. And, throughout the year, you’re going to find pretty much the same things. But, I suspect, if we went back two or three generations, our grandparents or our great-grandparents would not have expected to find the same things everywhere. So, the regional associations—the notion that you eat particular dishes at particular times of the year—are a part of food culture that in the modern world we are losing. Japan has held on to that more than the United States has. And there is, I think, simply an aesthetic appreciation of food in Japan that Americans don’t have.

L: How is this obsession with food culture in Japan manifested in everyday life?

B: I’m sure lots of people have seen the “Iron Chef” which is almost an extreme version of the Japanese obsession with food. But, if you go to a typical convenience store in Japan, you’ll find hundreds of varieties of almost the same thing. They are competing for shelf space with very minutely different flavoring, minutely different coloring, and so forth. There is a very different sense of the consumer being given ultimate choice. Every chain that you see in a Japanese food floor, whether it’s a convenience store that’s selling prepackaged foods, or a fresh food, like a fishmonger or a vegetable store, or whatever—the degree of care with which food is displayed and handled is really—

L: Quite extraordinary—

B: It is—you almost expect everybody in a food store is going to be wearing white gloves.

L: Some of them do.

B: Exactly.

L: In terms of foodstuffs, certain times of the year, are important—such as the first of the season [hatsumono]—first catch of the year.

B: Right, but that is not unknown in other food cultures as well. But there is a high premium, a high value placed in Japan on the first something of the year—the first harvest. And this gets back to the notion of seasonality and that there is the perfect season for every product. But in order to understand that and appreciate that as a consumer, you have to have an almost connoisseurship level of understanding. [For example] in this particular region in Japan, peaches ripen at this time of year—therefore, May, in such and such prefecture, is the height of perfection.

L: That, of course, the media and television such as travelogue programs capitalize on this notion.

B: Right—where they go off in search of [such things as] the perfect peach.

L: Somehow, everything ends up being oishii [delicious]—
B: And the amount of emotion that goes into saying those things.

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Issues of Safety and Hygiene

L: I wanted to ask you a few questions about food safety. I thought this was a good segue to talking about food safety with its historical connections with Godzilla. You had described in your book about the “Number 5 Lucky Dragon” incident. What were the ramifications of that day, after the American nuclear bomb testing at Bikini Atoll in terms of food safety in Japan?

B: In the immediate aftermath of that awful accident, there was a panic in Japan about eating fish. I have a photograph of public health officials using Geiger counters to check fish in the Tokyo marketplace. So there was a panic—

L: It was a tuna boat that was near the bomb-testing site, right?

B: Yes, it was a tuna boat. There was a panic over fish in general and whether nuclear testing had made the entire parts of the Pacific Ocean radioactive. Therefore, it made the food suspect. But with all such panic, in and of itself, it didn’t last very long. It was only a few weeks or months before fish consumption was pretty much back to normal.

What I think is interesting about Japan is the frequency with which these kinds of panic and concern—something happens every few year that sparks it. And each time it creates enormous dislocations in people’s eating habits—sometimes permanent, more often, not so permanent.

About ten years ago, there was an outbreak of E.Coli in the Osaka area. And across the country, people stopped eating fresh, uncooked food of any kind. So sales of sushi plummeted, even though that kind of E.Coli doesn’t exist in fish. You don’t have to worry about eating tuna and getting E.Coli.

L: What about presently—as you see from the ground level in Japan—in terms of the U.S.-Japan beef negotiations and U.S. beef—do you think that the average consumer is concerned about food safety?

B: I don’t think the average consumer is that concerned. I think the Japanese media often seizes on issues like this. And things become the center of media attention in Japan, and then consumers pay attention. I don’t think the average Japanese consumer is any better informed about conditions of food safety than an American consumer—which is to say—not very much at all. But I think it’s one of those hot button issues that when something happens, when it gets picked up by the mass media, the impact of the mass media in Japan on public opinion is much stronger than in the U.S.

There is a pre-disposition on the part of many Japanese—if it’s pointed out to them—to say, “Well, probably foreign foods aren’t as safe and as good for us as Japanese foods.”
One can understand that argument if one is putting paramount attention on freshness and place of origin. It’s only natural that you are going to have more confidence in places closer at hand. Places that you know.

L: So, domestically produced food is going to feel safer to the Japanese?

B: Yes, it’s going to feel safer even if it’s not. So, I think there is this pre-disposition to be skeptical about foreign imported foods. And when there is a case and when the mass media points it out, then people get in a dither and go, “My god!” And there is usually an overreaction.

L: You also mentioned the importance of kata [form]. Idealized form—how is that connected with issues of food safety, appearance, especially with seafood?

B: We were talking about it earlier—appearance is so important—there is this aesthetic sense of proper appearance for foodstuffs. And proper handling of foodstuffs. And there is a kind of assumption that if something doesn’t look right, if it’s not properly handled and not properly shaped, then there might be something wrong with it. Not just the external appearance. But that it indicates somebody hasn’t been taking care of it [the foodstuff] properly along the way. So, it may not actually have any nutritional or food safety issue at all. But it becomes a kind of marker that it doesn’t look right. And somebody along the line wasn’t paying proper attention to the shape—so what else weren’t they paying proper attention to?

L: So, that could even be a slight blemish on the outside of something, or the length of something—

B: Right. If you have ten mackerel laid out in a row and one of them is considerably different in size, you are going to look at it and assume something is wrong. Somebody didn’t sort these fish properly. They should all be arranged by size. If there is a bruise or a cut, then you assume somebody wasn’t handling this [foodstuff] properly. And if they weren’t handling it properly, why should we trust that is was well refrigerated or well washed, and so forth.

L: I don’t think the average American realizes how important the appearance of food is to the Japanese. For example, produce in a supermarket is carefully laid out.

B: I think you are absolutely right. You can walk into a Japanese food store and think you are in a jewelry store. It’s amazing. And a lot of it is aesthetics—aesthetic judgment of what’s important—those aesthetic judgments become symbols of other possibilities—both positive and negative.

L: Japanese refer to foods that are “domestic and foreign” and “pure and impure.” You brought up an interesting point in your book about fish that is “wild and natural,” as opposed to “cultivated and cultured.” How is that important in terms of foodstuffs?

B: I think again to use an American comparison—organic, free-range chicken and chickens sitting in a coop. The average consumer doesn’t really know much one way or the other. The advantages and the disadvantages, the merits and demerits of either kind. But there is a kind of romantic assumption that the free-range, wild, organically fed whatever is going to be naturally better—and it’s going to taste better. And there may be some truth to that. But, like the question of appearance, it can become sort of a fetish where people are so concerned about the farm-raised version—the feedlot tuna or salmon—that it becomes a real marker in the marketplace—in terms of prices. It also becomes an issue of prestige and status. And this is where the arrogance comes in.
“I’m enough of a connoisseur that I can tell the difference between natural and wild.”

L: I wonder if they really can tell the difference.

B: In almost all cases, probably not.

L: Have you become a connoisseur of fish, at least of tuna?

B: Well, let me put it this way. When my wife and I go shopping at the supermarket, she now has me pick out the fish. I don’t think I’m a connoisseur but I certainly have a much more practiced eye for looking at fish than I did say ten years ago. I grew up as a kid in central Illinois. I don’t think that we had fish. The only kind of fish I remember eating as a child was breaded, frozen, and already cut into blocks, into fish sticks. Certainly, I didn’t grow up evaluating fresh fish.

Next: Lessons to be Learned from the Field: Linking Kansas with Japan
Authentic Voices: Conversations on Food and Agriculture

Bringing Home the Sushi: Food as a way of understanding each other's livelihoods

Interview with Theodore C. Bestor
Professor
Department of Anthropology and Reischauer Institute for Japanese Studies
Chair of the Social Anthropology Wing, Department of Anthropology
Harvard University

By Norma Sakamoto-Larzalere
October 28, 2004

Theodore C. Bestor is Professor of Anthropology and Japanese Studies at Harvard University, and is past president of the American Anthropological Association’s East Asian Studies Section and the Society for Urban Anthropology. His many publications include: “Neighborhood Tokyo” (1989), “Doing Fieldwork in Japan” (co-editor, 2003), and his most recent, “Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World” (2004). His current research looks at the development of Japanese food culture and his ongoing project on “Global Sushi” examines the “global reach” of Japanese seafood markets, their impact on markets and fish industries, and the popularity of sushi and other types of Japanese foods.

1. Background
2. Neighborhood Tokyo: Miyamoto-cho

3. Tokyo's Tsukiji: The Fish Market and the Center of the World

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Lessons to be Learned from the Field: Linking Kansas with Japan

L: So, your research has personally helped you grow—

B: Yes, absolutely. It’s been a culinary odyssey.

L: That’s wonderful. As a culinary odyssey, how can your study of Tsukiji inform Kansans and other Midwesterners? What kinds of things could inform us?

B: Well—that’s a great question—I don’t think anybody in Kansas is going to go out to start a tuna fishing industry.

L: Maybe carp.

B: Maybe carp—I think that regardless of whether Kansas or anywhere—I think one of the points my book tries to make is that looking at food as a cultural and social resource or commodity, you can learn an awful lot about the history and structure of a society by looking at how it feeds itself. And one of the things North Americans are not particularly good at, unless they are themselves directly involved in agriculture, is that they have no conception about where food comes from.

L: It’s just there.

B: It’s there—it came in a truck. One of the things that is impressive about Japan is that the ordinary Japanese—they may not be expert or have a deep knowledge—but they have much better general sense of food supply--where it comes from, who produces it, how it’s distributed—than the average American. And because of that, food becomes invested with all kinds of cultural meaning, social meaning—and so I suppose from the perspective of an average Kansan, looking at the food supply of Tokyo, looking at sushi, looking at the history of Japanese fishing, it may at first glance not be particularly relevant. But it is certainly relevant for understanding how Japanese themselves understand their lives. And by extension, how any society can be understood through—that is a cliché but—“We are what we eat.” And if you don’t understand what other people eat, then you don’t understand them.

L: Also, what are ways do you think that we can reach out to bring Asia to rural communities
or places that wouldn’t normally be informed about Asia?

B: Eat sushi. That’s a tall order—I don’t know what to say—but I do think an emphasis on food is good way to bridge lots of cultural gaps. Even food that’s unfamiliar.

L: Everybody likes to eat.

B: Everybody likes to eat. Everybody likes to talk about what they like to eat. Everybody’s proud of something their mother cooked or grandmother cooked. Or that they’ve learned how to cook from their friends, and so forth. And, of course, not only is food eaten everywhere but food is produced everywhere. One of the things that most Japanese don’t know is how much American food is actually in their diet. Soybeans and corn and wheat.

L: True globalization of food.

B: Yes. Kansas and other states around it are not only the breadbasket of North America, they are the breadbasket of Asia. Food is not only a way for people to understand each other’s lives but to also understand each other’s livelihoods. I suspect that if an ordinary Japanese had an opportunity to visit a rural Kansas community, they would be just amazed and impressed and awestruck. How food is produced and the scale of food production. Plus, places like Kansas have, not only to Americans, but to other people as well, have this ring of the authentic American experience.

I don’t know how many Japanese visit Kansas every year—probably not that many. Certainly, in the Boston area, we get lots of Japanese visitors just to see the leaves in the fall. Somebody in Kansas should put together an ecotourism for Asians—to come and see American farming.

L: My next project.

B: Yes, there you go.

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Concluding Thoughts

L: My last question—what advice would you give to budding researchers and scholars?

B: Be patient. One of the things I’ve come to realize is—and it sort of came out in the things I was saying earlier that you were asking me—is the role of chance, the role of luck. People introducing you to things. If you’re interested in a foreign culture, you’d have to set aside your preconceptions of what the connections are. It’s only by immersing yourself in the unknown, and letting people point you in different directions, that you’ll find out what’s important to them.

L: It’s the scary part of fieldwork, but also the fun part.

B: It’s the fun part of fieldwork. If I ever reached a point that I felt that going to Japan was utterly predictable, then I’d probably want to do something else. Because what is always interesting is the unexpected connection of the place—where I think I’m looking at family businesses and suddenly people say you should actually be looking at the fish or you should be looking at the sushi. And where they will be pointing me next—I don’t know.

L: You started as a fifteen-year-old, living in Japan--who would think you would end up doing research on Tsukiji. And even thirteen years earlier, you had been introduced to the market but didn’t think of doing your research on Tsukiji at that time.

B: Right. Like many things, a fascinating experience that I tucked away in the back of my head. I’ve been putting things in the back of my head long enough now that pulling out the connections is sort of the fun part. It’s like rummaging through an old filing cabinet, and finding something [and thinking], “Oh, that’s interesting! What connects to that?” The most important thing is to stay open to new experiences and listen to what people tell you.

L: And be patient.

B: Yes—be patient.

L: Thank you very much. I enjoyed talking with you.

B: Thank you very much.
1. Developing the market for U.S. beef in Japan

2. Products for the Japanese market

3. Japanese requirement for BSE testing

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**Products for the Japanese market**

**W:** What kinds of cuts are they most interested in?

**F:** The nice thing about the market is that they take a lot of the offal and variety meats. One thing that's wrong with what the USDA is doing now is that they're worried about the approximately twenty dollars per head cost [for testing]. Well, now the USDA has already taken almost ten dollars a head in revenue away from the producer so half the cost of the test is out the window right now if something doesn't change. In [the restrictions on SRMs (specified risk materials)], they've said that we could not save the small intestine or the large intestine [from any age cattle] but, at the same time, they say that in a young animal it's impossible to have BSE. So, we've asked and no one will give us an answer as to, if there is
no problem in young cattle, why do we have any SRM [restrictions] in young cattle. If you go a step beyond and test them, even though they say scientifically you don't need to test, then let us save the SRMs. The small intestine by itself is worth about seven or eight dollars a head, being sold in Japan. And [here is] more than you probably ever wanted to know—they will pay a premium of about three or four dollars a head if you'll turn the intestine inside out. We are one of the few packers that had developed equipment to do exactly that.

W: Have you invested in other special equipment to process product for this market?

F: On some things like that. You can do it manually but you can do it more efficiently with special equipment. But [they buy] outside skirts, hanging tenders, hearts, tongues, livers, all the good items. A lot of [the stomach] goes to Mexico, but there is a market for every single item in Asia. We were selling a lot of our bones to Asia for soup stock and other uses. At the same time, they buy very few round cuts, but they buy a lot of chuck cuts. What we call boneless chuck ribs were selling in the three dollars a pound area and [now] we have to sell the same product in the dollar a pound area. It equals almost fifty dollars a head that we lose right now [compared with what we earned] with the Japanese market. They also buy tenderloin strips. And they like to buy prime product. That's close to their Kobe beef. There is a market for almost every cut, and it just depends whether there is a better market there than what we can sell in the U.S. In the U.S., we have more demand than we can supply for prime, so not much of our prime would go to Japan, but some still did. But the striploin, the ribeye, and the navel [went to Japan]. [The navel] was an item that was very difficult for all processors when that market was cut off. The navel is cut up into pieces that go in to the rice bowl—I am sure that you are familiar with the rice bowl restaurants. The navel – it's not the stomach, it's the belly, that same item you make bacon out of in pork. In some cases, Japanese taste is to like a higher degree of fat. That's perfect. The U.S. likes leaner and Japan or Asia likes fatter. You go accordingly. And we are better off by doing that.

W: Have you eaten many of the dishes that the Japanese make with your product?

F: Oh yes!

W: How do they fix it? What do they do with, for example, intestine that has been turned inside out?

F: Oh yes, some of it is chewier than what I like, but good. Tongue is very good. There’s a fair amount of tongue sometimes in upper-end restaurants. They slice it thin. In Japan, in some nice restaurants they have what looks like a small Hibachi that they put on your table and you barbecue it. It’s very good. Hanging tenders are sold at some high-end restaurants as well. I’ve tried pretty much all the items.

W: Have their preferences changed over the years, as you have been working with Japan?

F: A little bit, but it might be a little surprising. There’s still a very good market in Japan, even among the young people, for intestines, but there is some decline in some of the items. Some of the items were consumed because of price but, at the same time, there were items that you would think [sold] only because of price and, yet, when there is a shortage of it, the demand is still there, and that market price can go up substantially. It’s part of the diet, part of what they like to have, and they want to buy it at whatever the market price for it is.

W: Are your products packaged differently for the Japanese market?

F: Some are, and some aren’t. Just like with the meat, they will have some requirements. They might like dividers—it just helps the appearance [of the packaging]. Sometimes the boxes are different. But that becomes difficult in the plants to create what you [need]. There a number of
items that we do in smaller boxes. [The Japanese] were among the first who just wanted [a box] that was nothing more than 60 pounds, versus some of the boxes that used to be 80 to 90 pounds. In some cases, we put we put bubble packaging in the shipments. They have other requirements – they really put a lot of emphasis on minimizing the purge in bags, [for example]. Temperature control is very important. Of course it is important here in the U.S. as well but when you are shipping so much farther, it becomes a little bit bigger issue.

**W:** *Is it almost all chilled beef?*

**F:** They [also] take a lot of frozen. I don’t know what the percentage is. It may be close to fifty-fifty. Some things like navels may be frozen. The shelf life of product in the U.S. has been improved tremendously, with some of the things that have been put in place to reduce bacteria. Even [removing] the non-harmful bacteria increases the shelf-life of product. We put carcasses through acidic washes and other methods, a lot more hot water and other things, and that really made the difference. So you can keep [the product] refrigerated for thirty to sixty days with no problem at all.

**W:** *How is your product marketed in Japan, under what label?*

**F:** Under the Creekstone label. A good deal of our business has been in food service. There may have been a little bit [sold] in retail under the Creekstone brand. After all this, I think we may have a lot more. We’ve had a number of retailers who said they wanted to be the first to buy Creekstone product no matter what because they feel that there is a trust level in what our company is trying to do in taking care of the consumers. It will open some day, I am not sure exactly when or how.

**Next: The Japanese requirement for BSE testing**
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4. Thoughts on the future: beef in Asian markets, the U.S. beef industry

**The Japanese requirement for BSE testing**

W: I read that, based upon your recent trip to Japan, you think the Japanese consumers will continue to demand testing. What convinced you of that?

F: Well, based on what I saw when I was over there, there were two things. [First, it was ] seeing first hand, talking to some consumers. Of course, the translator could have misled me, but we stopped people in the store and asked them as they were picking up meat. It was in one of the biggest retailers in Japan. We were there with a television crew. Some of them were a little bashful about speaking on camera [but] we asked them. Then, we also relied upon the meat export federation…and they remain convinced that Japan is not going to change their approach to this because it is important to the consumer.
Then, since all this has happened, I think we’ve been in just about every newspaper and television station in Japan. And the feedback we get from these reporters—who knows, they could be biased one way or another—but [one reporter] told me a week ago that the old people in Japan really appreciate what we are doing. That surprised me, because I thought this might me more of a young person’s issue, sort of the freedom of choice and that type of thing, but she said that her mother wanted her to say that she was appreciative of what we were doing and that it was important to the older people of Japan as well as the younger people. She asked me an interesting question. She said what would you like to say to the consumers of Japan? And my response was just that we had a tremendous respect for what they value and we appreciate their long-term loyalty to a company that would supply what they wanted. There was an article, or maybe it was an email—we are getting hundreds of these emails, maybe in the thousands now—that said, it is just wrong to say to your customer that you are dumb or you don’t know what you talking about; you shouldn’t ask for this just because it is not scientifically needed, or why are you so dumb to think that you need to have this. That’s not what you tell your customer.

We are not a company in an industry that has to try to sell people something that they don’t want. For thirty years I’ve been involved in agriculture. One of the reasons I got into agriculture was because you don’t have to go convince somebody that they want something. They are going to eat food. And it’s whether yours is better than someone else’s, and it’s the market. The price is involved and the quality is involved. You don’t have to sell them something that’s not [wanted]. So we don’t hesitate to say to a customer we don’t think you need this and here’s why, but then when that customer comes back and tells you, thanks for telling me this but this is still what I want, then your next thing is well, here’s what it is going to cost you. It’s going to be more trouble for us to do it; we’ll have to go to extra expense; it’s got to be worth our while; so here’s what we have to charge you. They just say, “great, let’s go,” and that’s the case here.

I am totally convinced [that the Japanese will continue to demand testing], and I don’t know whether it’s fifty percent of the population or twenty percent, or a hundred, but whatever it is, the market should determine that. What should happen is that the market should open back up and we should still be able to continue to test. Even if the [Japanese] government tomorrow said ok, the markets are open and testing is not required, we would still like to test. It will be interesting to see whether, after the trade is opened up so that they no longer can say that every body is going to have to test, is the USDA still going to tell us we can’t do that? I suppose it looks right now like that’s what they would tell us.

I thought that the letter that Nancy Landon Kassebaum wrote [to the USDA] was great. I can’t imagine that she would write that letter if she did not know or have a feeling that Japan was going to still insist [on testing]. [Even if there is] some type of compromise, for example, [allowing us to] test old cattle, well [what we process] is only one percent old cattle. Plus, it’s not what Japan is asking for. [They] are asking for all cattle to be tested.

Next: Thoughts on the future: beef in Asian markets, the U.S. beef industry
Authentic Voices: Conversations on Food and Agriculture

Exporting U.S. Beef to East Asia

Interview with Bill Fielding, COO, Creekstone Farms

By Sheree W. Willis
April 19, 2004

1. Developing the market for U.S. beef in Japan

2. Products for the Japanese market

3. Japanese requirement for BSE testing

4. Thoughts on the future: beef in Asian markets, the U.S. beef industry

W: I wonder if I might ask you to speculate a little bit about the future and share with us your thoughts about, when the BSE issue is resolved, what you think the future is for U.S. beef in Asian markets? And do you have some opinions on China and Korea, as well as Japan?

F: I think there is a huge opportunity, and it has been growing every year. It’s been double digit growth, I think, over the last number of years. I’ve spent a lot of time in Asia. With Cargill, we built a chicken plant in Thailand. We built a pork operation in Taiwan. Anyone who has spent any time over there knows there is a demand for U.S. product and for meat, whether it is beef or pork or chicken. What we have to do is just meet the demand, just do the
things that they would like and let price determine [the market]. There will be a lot of factors. The weakness or strength of the dollar is going to play a huge role [as well as] how economical the various cuts are. As you do anywhere, you have a wide range of income [in Asia] and, even if the population with upper income is only one percent, one percent of China or even half a percent is still a lot of people. The issue is going to be whether we can continue to produce the quality efficiently. South America is going to capture some of [the Asian] market…and Australia…it’s going to be critical that we are aggressive on beef. The quality of U.S. beef is different. The more we can do to get them geared to our product is great. When we have embargos and trade restrictions like that it only ends up hurting agriculture in the U.S., but there is no question that there is a tremendous market over there.

W: Have you been to Korea? What do you think of their market?

F: The demands in Korea are a little different from Japan. For example, bones—they buy more bones than Japan does. They use them for soup. I don’t know all the uses. They like variety meats. They like some rib cuts. [Sometimes] there is a higher demand in Korea. They take all of the cuts. There also is a demand for strips, tenderloins.

W: What about China? Do you ship there?

F: We ship some items to China but for us, this [amount] has been small.

W: I would also like to hear some of your thoughts on the future of the beef industry in general. You have a position in a certain type of niche market. Do you see more niche markets in the future of the industry, for example organic beef or grassfed beef or other types?

F: Yes, over the last ten, fifteen years, even some of the bigger packers have things like Certified Angus Beef [trademark]. Excel has the Sterling Silver [Premium Meats trademark] that you see in stores. These were developed maybe fifteen years ago with the idea in mind that there is a demand for a specific product, but it is very difficult for the bigger packers to fill some of that demand. That is why certainly all of the organic beef is being processed by small plants. I don’t know of any of the big packers that are doing that. And the All Natural—We have plans that within three to four months, probably as much as half of our production will be All Natural. We’ll be able to trace all cattle back. We’ve put a software system into this plant to be able to track cattle through the system and all the way back to the ranch. With the BSE issue, there was all of a sudden a bigger demand for All Natural product. People have a misconception that All Natural has less of a chance for BSE. It’s the same chance. It’s in the feedyard. It’s the same as any other animal. The only difference is that there are no hormones and no antibiotics but neither of those contribute one way or the other to BSE. But the perception of the consumer mind is that All Natural might be safer.

W: All of your beef is finished as grain fed, you don’t process any grassfed?

F: Yes, we don’t do any grassfed, but if there were a market for high end Angus cattle that were grassfed we’d see. If there was a big enough market for that, it’s very possible. Grassfed [beef] is a distinctly different flavor. I think that the demand for all that will increase. Whether it increases enough…

We are sort of a big little packer. Some of these things will start with a really little, little packers. And then if it builds up to where it is of interest to bigger packers, we are sort of at the second level. That’s been both the opportunity and the struggle with our plant. We are not big enough to compete on a cost basis with the big packers, but we are much bigger than just a little player so we have a huge overhead structure, a big plant. You always need to maximize what you put through any plant. You’re always better to have a plant that doesn’t have quite enough capacity and you are pushing it to the limits versus a really big plant where
you are only running about a half or two thirds of what it could produce. That was one of the big impacts here when we were cut off from our export market. We’ve only been running three or four days a week. That just will not work.

**W:** *I read that you had to lay off people.*

**F:** Yes, both the layoffs, and we’ve had to have fewer hours for all the employees that are here. That impacts upon the whole economy of Kansas, for the towns of Winfield and Ark City. [Laid off workers] don’t buy cars. They sell their homes or whatever they have to do to survive. Most of the people in the plant work week to week. That is what’s upsetting. Politicians will not set timelines. The government negotiations here are taking way too long. This happened on December 23. There should be more of a public outcry.

**W:** *One last question, what do you think that Kansans need to know about Asia in order to market our products there?*

**F:** I think more Kansans need to travel there to understand Asia. What they need to understand is what great customers they are. The great thing about Japan, and certainly some people do understand this, is their integrity. I’ve never known a contract in Japan that has not been honored. We do a lot of verbal agreements. I think it all [comes from] their attention to detail and that’s what ‘s important when you see them as a customer. They are very detail-oriented and they know what they want. [U.S.] suppliers should be a lot more aggressive [in that market]. We’ve got a lot of items that Japan wants. The people who have done well with Japan a lot of the time are small entrepreneurial companies where someone went to Japan and developed those relationships. That is true anywhere in Asia.

**W:** *Thank you for talking with us. We have learned a great deal.*
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The file http://www.asiakan.org/ag_products/kacc%20ag%20report%201%20beef%20text.pdf is a secure document that has been embedded in this document. Double click the pushpin to view.
Beef Production in China: Marketing and Distribution

Marketing and Distribution—Prior to 1980, the distribution of beef was tightly controlled by the government. Culled draught cattle were often slaughtered by nearby butchers for local consumption. The government brought some live cattle from pastoral areas to be slaughtered at government slaughterhouses in large cities. Some of that beef was distributed through the hotel and restaurant industry but much was reserved for urban Muslim populations. Most of the meat purchased by individual consumers was rationed. Han residents were generally given pork ration coupons, and beef ration coupons were issued to Muslims (Longworth 2001:240).

Ninety percent of the cattle slaughtered in China are butchered by specialized household slaughterers. Some of these household slaughterers are concentrated in specialized slaughtering villages (often Muslim) located near large urban areas. Because the highest demand in China is for low-cost, low-quality beef, the household slaughterers are able to compete well against the larger, government-certified slaughterhouses (Longworth 2001:190-192).

Most beef sold in China today is marketed within a few hours of slaughter, at local “wet markets.” These are markets where agricultural products, including meat, are sold with little or no packaging or processing. Chickens, for example, are often slaughtered...
to order on the premises. The sellers usually operate from individual carts or tables in an open-air area or in a minimally finished building. Household shoppers tend to purchase beef at the “wet markets,” including various types of permanently established market centers and “morning markets,” street markets with mobile carts open only a few hours each morning. More affluent shoppers often purchase beef at government shops or supermarkets. A few shop at one of the large-scale central wholesale markets established by the Chinese government in some major cities in the late 1990s. Most beef sold in China is not inspected or graded. As of 2001, a few larger meat-packing companies were using in-house grading systems. A grading system proposed to the Ministry of Agriculture would include four grades: Prime, 1st grade, 2nd grade, and other, based on marbling and tenderness (Longworth 2001:259).

Premium beef in China is generally distributed to hotel and restaurant customers, either directly or through wholesalers, or sold through supermarkets, including those that cater to foreign residents, or government shops. Most imported beef is also distributed through these channels.
Food for Thought: On Rice, Beef, Nature, Food Safety, and McDonald’s in Japan

Interview with Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney
William F. Vilas Research Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison
By Norma Sakamoto-Larzalere
March 12, 2004

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Significance of Rice and other Foods in Japan

L: I thought we'd start with a discussion about rice—the significance of rice—and you've written a wonderful book called, "The Rice as Self"—in it you talk about how rice is related to the Japanese concept of self.

OT: Yes—

L: I thought we'd first go back to ancient Japan—how was rice viewed?

OT: Well, I was doing research about marginalized people in Japan—the Ainu minority. And then I did research on the monkey itself. Initially I had only wanted to do research on the monkey until I realized the monkey trainers were formerly hisabetsu burakumin [the community settlers "under discrimination"]. And so the rice was my attempt to understand the so-called dominant Japanese. I think the creation of minorities was the flipside of the development of the agrarian culture.

In ancient Japan, rice was introduced from the Asian continent and became the food of the elite. So even during the modernizing period, government and industry wanted to attract women from rural Japan. They told them they could provide the women—rice—three times a day. So I realized, throughout Japan until very recently, rice was prestige food confined to the elite and that farmers were rice producers, not the consumers.

And so it's only a recent phenomenon—yet the Japanese talk now about Japanese rice—they believe in this. But in fact, Japanese agriculture was very exceptional in that there were no national seed distributors in Japan. Rice was reproduced by the local farmers from their old seeds, last year's seeds [planting homegrown seeds].

L: Could you tell us about the mythologies of ancient Japan and how these are related to rice—how rice came to be sacred and deified? In particular, you've written about the stories about Amaterasu [the Sun Goddess and imperial ancestress] and other deities.

OT: There are many versions of the myth—but one version is that the grandson [Ninigi-no Mikoto] of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Ômikami, delegated to him to bring down [the rice grains] from Takamagahara [Heaven], where the original rice was grown. So the origin myth of Japan is about how the grandson of Amaterasu transformed a wilderness [Japan] into a land of succulent rice crops, in contrast to the origin myth of other peoples that are creation myths.

L: In your book, "Rice as Self," you write that rice is mentioned in the first written chronicles, the “Kojiki”[712 A.D.] and the "Nihonshoki,”[720 A.D.].

OT: Yes, that's right. There is some controversy among scholars, but they believe the "Ta-no-Kami," the Deity of Rice Paddies, came from the mountains. The mountains were the most sacred place in the Japanese universe, or at least in the agrarian cosmology. So the Mountain Deity [Yama-no-Kami] became the Deity of Rice Paddies.
The [Mountain] Deity came down to the rice paddies [and lodged] on the petals of the cherry blossoms to look after agricultural production. So the farmers planted rice at the time of cherry blossoms. And if you had gorgeous cherry blossoms, it forecast a good rice crop in the fall. Cherry blossoms were the spring counterpart of rice.

L: And that's why farmers planted cherry trees around the rice paddies. It's an interesting connection between cherry blossoms and rice.

OT: Yes--the cherry trees used to be only in the mountains—it was only later on when the farmers wanted to have their own cherry blossoms that they planted [the trees] in sato, the people's villages.

L: With that of course comes the cherry blossoms--what is the significance of the blossoms?

OT: Yes, the cherry blossoms were assigned with the power to expel evil spirits. So the flower festivals were all to expel evil spirits that cause epidemics and all negative phenomena, by the vitality of the flower. And so I spent a great deal of time following those flower festivals at the beginning of my research.

L: It must have been a lot of fun!

OT: Yes, yes--going around Kyoto—

L: During the flower festivals, didn't people pray for the cherry blossom petals to last as long as possible?

OT: Yes, that's right. Like the Yasurai Matsuri—which means to rest and stay as long as possible.

L: To ensure a good crop and long season?

OT: Yes, and in this one festival, the Yasurai Matsuri, a prayer for the cherry blossoms to stay long was written on a fan and paraded at the festival.

L: You also wrote about the etymology of the cherry blossom--sakura. The sa and kura. Sa means?

OT: The sa [namely, the Deity of Rice Paddies] etymology is the same as in fortune and all auspicious things. Kura means the seat of the spirit of the deity. Kura means seat, for example, the leather equipment on a horse.

L: Sa also in used in the word sake [rice wine]?

OT: Yes.

L: It's interesting that sa signifies prosperity. And with rice being a significant symbol, among other symbols such as cherry blossoms as you talked about in your presentation last night, how is rice a symbol of an "unchanging Japan"? You had written about rice weathering the storm of westernization, urbanization, and modernization. What do the rice paddies represent?

OT: Nationalism so to speak—we have to distinguish between cultural nationalism and political nationalism. But in both cases, whether it's in Germany or Japan, they construct a primordial self. And so here we have a reflection of the dominant agrarian culture providing the primordial self of the Japanese—which they find in rice agriculture. It's like when Mao Zedong wanted to bring Chinese agriculture as their
identification of the Chinese primordial self. That primordial self in Japan was aestheticized by woodblock prints in Japan.

L: The primordial self is unchanging and also pure. In the woodblock prints, the rice paddies are shown without the sweat and manure. Rice in this way is shown to be pristine?

OT: Yes, that’s right.

L: Could you explain the Japanese notion of soul in relation to rice?

OT: Rice is the locus for the deities—and that’s how the mythology and deities build up the importance and sacredness of rice. And later on with the Confucian ideology—you cannot waste even a single grain of rice. The grain is the locus of the soul of the rice [plant]. Interesting part about rice is that the deities are supposed to have both aspects of the aratama [violent power] and the nigitama [peaceful/positive power]. But in the case of rice, it has only the nigitama. As for aratama, it is assigned to such things as flooding, and other deities.

L: And is the rice deity referred to as the ear of the rice plant and not the grain?

OT: The term used is mizuho—the ear—water [succulent] heads of rice. But, the grain is important.

L: And is the grain the soul?

OT: Yes, that’s right.

L: The soul is alive, is that right? It departs like the human soul?

OT: Yes—in the ancient idea about the soul, after death it departs from the body. There have been rituals to bring the soul back into the body.

L: You have also written about commensality between deities and humans. Could you tell us about the significance of harvest rituals?

OT: The harvest rituals involve repayment, in other words, a return gift to the deities. So you multiply the original seeds and then—it’s almost like you earn interest or a kind of investment—you return [and repay] the deities by eating together with the deities and humans, and then among humans.

L: So, getting back to the rice again—considering the kind of rice that the Japanese now think as Japanese—domestic short-grained rice [japonica type], in fact, it was a foreign import brought back from somewhere in Asia.

OT: Exactly, the Japanese had to come up with the mythology of rice—that rice was grown in the Japanese heaven—precisely because the rice was imported matter.

L: As you pointed out earlier, it is important to note that rice was not a prevalent food for the masses and it was only for the elite.

OT: Yes, absolutely. All the rest was called sakkoku [miscellaneous grains]. And only rice was singled out.

L: And the rice was singled out for rituals, was it not?

OT: Upper class ate rice in their daily lives—but rice was really a ritual food for others.
L: And so considering all that, do you think that to the average Japanese consumer, whether the rice is homegrown or imported from California, matters to them? You had written about the GATT issue in 1993 between Japan and the U.S. [1995]—do you think these trade issues are important to the consumer now? Is there a distinction made between Japanese and U.S. rice?

OT: Rice purchase in Japan is an intriguing affair in that most households have their own grocers. And it is the responsibility of the grocers to deliver the best rice to the households.

L: So it becomes the grocer’s rather than the consumer's decision.

OT: Yes, that’s right.

L: Would this apply to farmers, to everyone?

OT: I don’t know but for sure in urban areas. After Hosokawa [former Prime Minister of Japan] decided to import rice, suddenly the government went through all kinds of interesting experiments. They showed them on television—without telling the testers [school children] which rice was from California and which one was grown in Japan. It was meant to show that they couldn’t make distinctions. But, before the government decided to import rice, it was interesting that housewives started writing to the Japanese newspapers to point out that California rice does not purify the Japanese air. And the California rice is contaminated with chemicals. In fact, Japanese rice is contaminated with chemicals.

So the purity/impurity principle is applied to rice. They reported they found mice in the Chinese rice and this and that. So the consumers were unwittingly cooperating with the government. On the other hand, other rice [imported rice] had been used for such things as rice cakes and rice crackers. I tried to eat at different kinds of restaurants, including lower-class restaurants, and obviously all kinds of rice were used.

L: Can you distinguish between homegrown Japanese rice and California rice?

OT: Not California rice but I can distinguish between old rice and new rice. Old rice is much drier. But I’m not that fussy so I cannot be the best judge.

L: In consideration of what we have discussed—this notion of Japanese uniqueness—being distinct—does that apply here? Is the rice issue important to the average consumer and to government agencies?

OT: It’s only when there is an external pressure, as in the case of California rice. So we have to consider when the other presses the Japanese. That’s the time nationalism comes out. Yes—just like in the States—right after 9/11—

L: What about the younger generation?

OT: As far the younger generation, their tastes have changed so much—they use garlic as extensively as the Koreans do. And they love Kim chi and meat.

L: Do you think the younger generation is as concerned about the quality of rice?

OT: I don’t think they are—much.
L: Also, talking about the aesthetics of rice, as expressed in Japanese poems, essays, and works of art such as woodblock prints—I’ve brought some examples here—

OT: This is not articulated in the minds of the people but if you look at the brands [referring to rice brands], they label their products as sasanishiki and koshihikari [Japanese rice cultivars]. Those brand names capitalize on the luster and aesthetics of rice. And then a literary figure like Tanizaki would describe the rice “like pearls in the dark [black lacquer].”

L: Rice is described in literature as you said to have luster—and it perhaps refers back to when rice was used as currency before coins and in this way rice is also described to have a golden luster.

OT: Yes, and gold was used for assess the daimyo—the feudal lord’s—territory and the golden waves of rice, that is, [measured by] how many koku [about 5 bushels], that’s the yield of rice. And in the fall there were golden waves of rice in a daimyo’s territory, referring to rice plants. Money actually in every society starts with a religious meaning. [Juno] Moneta is the temple where coins were minted in Greece [where the word money originates]. In the West as well, money is sacred.

L: Yet, money itself in Japan is not considered clean and especially in the case of the metallic currency that was first introduced.

OT: Yes, it took a long time to change to coin currency. And it went back to rice at one time. Currency itself, when it became secularized, acquired an ambivalent value. On the one hand, [it was considered] in terms of the economic value of the time. On the other hand, in the day-to-day Japanese notion, to be greedy was bad, and capitalism was bad, and money was handled by anybody—you always had to wash your hands after handling money.

L: For example, when you receive or give a gift of money in Japan, you always put it in an envelope.

OT: It also has to be a non-circulated bill, so you can’t give a person a used bill as a gift. And you have to give the money in a certain kind of envelope.

L: In talking about the aesthetics of rice, you described particular woodblock prints [Hokusai and Hiroshige prints. In the prints, what do you see as significant features referring to rice and rice agriculture?

OT: At the time of these woodblock prints, Edo was the urban center. For example—the 53 Tōkaidō stations—people were always paying homage to Edo. But along the way, what they were depicting was an unchanging Japan, symbolized by cherry blossoms, rice paddies, Mount Fuji, and the travelers going to Edo and back in the unchanging part of Japan.

L: And the travelers themselves were in a kind of liminal space?

OT: Yes, that’s right.

L: You have mentioned that, in the scenes of rice paddies—the rice paddies are always portrayed as pristine and pure.

OT: Yes—agriculture is often displayed in nationalism for the identity of self—without manure, without sweat, without taxation.
L: What was the significance of the rice sheaf itself?

OT: The significance of the ear of the rice plant.

NL: Are there any other foods as significant as rice in Japan?

OT: Depends upon how significant—for example, rice is above everything else—it is the only food that is shared. Commensality is very important. And even today, in Japanese households, people have their own rice bowls and the dishes are not shared but rice is shared. It always comes [from a single container] and then the head of the household—that is, the woman of the house would scoop and serve the rice [with a spatula].

Fish is important, sea bream is the fish for celebration—but there is nothing comparable to rice. McDonald’s became very prosperous but it is always considered to be a snack.

Next: Concept of Nature and what is Natural in Japanese Foods
Food for Thought: On Rice, Beef, Nature, Food Safety, and McDonald’s in Japan

Interview with Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney
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Concept of Nature and what is Natural in Japanese Foods

L: You mention in your book about nature as being culturalized—could you explain what the concepts of nature and what is natural as is relates to Japanese cuisine and in particular, rice? Are these concepts different from the Western perspective?

OT: I think every nature is culturalized. Except the Japanese concept of nature doesn’t have the wild nature. Americans really like wild nature when in fact it’s not that wild. The Japanese don’t have an appreciation for wild nature. In the case of Japanese food, what is really stressed is freshness. So the food is much more expensive, but at the same time it’s fresh. In Japan, unlike in America in which you buy food for the week, you buy on a daily basis. I mentioned about the unripened fruit in American supermarkets to some Japanese who were not terribly wealthy, and they said to me that the Japanese consumers would never tolerate that. And so if you go to any supermarket [in Japan] food is very expensive but just gorgeous. Everyone just buys for the evening, for the day, and not for the week or month. But this is true in France too—in Paris people buy food for the day—so you see many men and women buying bread and other food items in the late afternoon.

L: What about this concept of nature becoming natural? For example, how food is manipulated to look natural, such as fish, prepared in fancy restaurants, is served a certain way so it still flaps its fins and is presented as if it were still alive—

OT: Yes, but I think in case of freshness, the Japanese consumer is much more educated, when it comes to vegetables, and especially when it comes to fish. I’m appalled to see browned tuna even in fairly good stores! The Japanese are trained to look at the eyes of the fish—so they can tell how fresh it is.

L: Do you think there is a distinction with other foods such as Chinese or Korean food?

OT: The distinction between Japanese and other foods—the Japanese chefs are determined by their ability to select the best raw materials rather than their ability to cook. So Chinese and Korean and especially French food, are all cooked. So that’s an important distinction.
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L: Another food issue that’s been in the news is the food safety issue in Japan. And with the problems of hygiene and Mad Cow Disease [BSE] outbreak in Japan, Canada, and the U. S., in your opinion do you believe the average Japanese consumer is concerned about food safety?

OT: They get terribly concerned about imported food. But they are much less guarded when it comes to the domestic agricultural products that do have chemicals in them—but somehow the consumers don’t get much information about these products—so they are not as cautious about it. But when it comes to imported products, in many societies, they are far more guarded.

For example, beef, after all, only started to be eaten in the Meiji period. The emperor in fact encouraged the Japanese to eat meat. There was a great deal of discussion on beef eating and associating it with Western Enlightenment. That started in Meiji—but the consumption has not been that great. Meat still is a kind of foreign element—and so when Mad Cow Disease and all of that comes out, people jump. Some of the native foods could be just as dangerous but the Japanese are not as cautious about that.

L: Mad Cow Disease was discovered in Japanese meat as well—

OT: Yes, that’s right.

L: Is the packaging and labeling of the origin of food products important in the consumer market?

OT: Yes—they do look especially when it comes to imported food products especially foreign introduced food such as cheese, milk, and yogurt. They [markets] all mark where they come from. The food industry [in Japan] tried to promote the consumption by, for example, talking about such things as the beautiful nature of Alaska and Norway. Now, they are concerned about farmed fish. And when they try to increase the consumption of dairy foods such as milk and cheese, they always depict pristine nature and the mountains of Hokkaido.

L: As part of the food industry’s marketing strategies?

OT: Yes, that’s right. That’s not always translated into the real purity of the food.

L: But it was an ideal image to promote the purity of certain kinds of foods. And in relation to this purity of food, there are the Japanese concepts of uchi (inside) and soto (outside). How do these concepts relate to the purity of food?

OT: That I think relates to basic hygienic—in other words—the Americans don’t mind having dogs go out and come back in the house—the middle-class Japanese are very conscious about taking their shoes off, washing their hands, and even gargling after they
come back from outside.

Uchi/soto has been a little too stereotyped by outsiders and also tatemae/honne [outwardly expressed feelings/true feelings] has been absolutely stereotyped since Americans have that too.

L: It exists just as much in American life—

OT: Absolutely—you have this all the time in politics, at the national level and the governmental level. These concepts are attributed as though they were unique to the Japanese.

L: I suppose another way is to see things such as rice as pure as opposed to foreign things that may be impure such as meat—

OT: It's not that something is just impure—it's when something happens suddenly it can acquire an impurity far more readily.

L: In what way?

OT: Well, for example, when the Mad Cow Disease comes, then suddenly the Japanese think of beef as impure. Although on the other hand, beef has been thought of as a source of Enlightenment, a source of energy--like urban centers everywhere, there are double sides, right?

L: Do people now think of beef in the historical sense, when it was against the Buddhist teachings and it was taboo to eat meat and butchers were "outcastes?"

OT: I don’t think so—that is the intriguing part—at that time [during the Meiji period] the butcher stores were always in marginalized areas such as across the Sumida River. And attributed to the former outcastes, but that notion of impurity disappeared fairly radically.

L: What about bread?

OT: Bread is an intriguing food because it came to Japan very early—and like my hometown of Kobe—they have excellent bakeries. They distinguish among types of bread-- German bread, and French bread—some would drive for hours to get bread from a very famous bakery. But bread is always a breakfast food—or lunch food. It did not replace [rice] for dinner.

L: Yes, the Japanese miss rice for dinner. You mentioned about cat burgers in one of your articles—that there were rumors circulating about burgers made from cat meat at McDonald’s—why do you think these rumors circulated about these foreign foods?

OT: Whatever comes from outside is welcomed on one hand, and there is the other side that lurks behind it—the negative things such as Mad Cow Disease or stories about cat burgers or epidemics that are attributed to foreign things. Things that are foreign are a source of Enlightenment, and at the same time, the sinister side is lurking behind.

Interestingly, McDonald’s started to target the busiest places such as very busy [train] stations or at the Ginza, whereas, Mos Burgers [Japanized fast food] targeted the younger population and the university areas.

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**McDonald’s and Changing Table Manners in Japan**

L: You mentioned McDonald’s—how is McDonald’s seen by the Japanese? Is it seen as a part of Americana? Is there a generational difference in the perception of McDonald’s?

OT: I think initially Den Fujita [founder of McDonald’s in Japan] tried to link McDonald’s with Americana. McDonald’s introduced the idea that you can eat standing up—that was from the perspective of Japanese table manners revolutionary. He tried to promote in McDonald’s magazine, using blonde Americans and stars [stars and stripes] as part of the McDonald’s image. But then as McDonald’s became more domesticated, to the extent that little children from Japan were quoted here in the U.S. saying, “I’m glad they have McDonald’s here in the United States.” [They thought] McDonald’s [hamburger] was a Japanese food!

L: What do the older generation in Japan think about McDonald’s? I think in the United States, McDonald’s seem to appeal to the senior citizens and is a gathering place for them as well as for younger people. Do you think it’s the same in Japan?

OT: I don’t think that much. There are older people eating at McDonald’s but it’s still considered a snack food rather than restaurant food—as after school food, before going to juku [private cram school]—now it’s very much an in thing to do with friends after school or sometimes young mothers with children. And just like here, McDonald’s has introduced things like birthday parties. But as the Japanese people get older they go back to [traditional] Japanese food.

L: Do you eat at McDonald’s here in the United States or in Japan?

OT: Not really.

L: You mentioned how McDonald’s changed table manners in Japan—your discussion of the hand—as a kind of liminal part of the body?

OT: It’s the part of the body that touches outside so to speak—handles money, the railing of stairways, public places—so it’s the dirty part of the body. If you observe people eating at McDonald’s, you’ll find people holding on to the wrapping when they eat the food. When ice cream was introduced, they came up with a cup holder so you didn’t have to touch the cone.

L: Also, you mentioned about sipping a beverage with a straw as revolutionary too.

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Globalism and the Japan/United States Food Market

L: In consideration of globalism and transnationalism in relation to foods—in various studies such as in anthropology—

OT: Globalism is actually only one side of the phenomenon. You see ethnic revivalism and cultural revivalism—yet at the same time you see all this bloodshed for nationalism or ethnicity as in Sri Lanka or in the former Yugoslavia—so I don’t think we can just consider globalism. After celebrating globalism, then 9-11 came and suddenly the "we" versus "they" distinction became loud and clear.

Also, anthropologists haven’t come up with a term to distinguish the current globalism from earlier globalism, for example at the time of colonialism, and how the colonization of the New World changed the eating habits of the old country. Like the use of sugar and all of that.

What is the spread of capitalism, what is the spread of imperialism?—versus current globalism with it origin in the United States. The United States is the epicenter of globalism. There are different kinds of globalization. I think we have to come to terms with the time old phenomenon of globalism and what is new about the current situation.

Also, we should never forget there is the other side—which is the enormous tension over the demarcations among different ethnic and national groups.

L: Perhaps the term translocal might be a more accurate term to describe such things as the McDonald’s phenomenon in Japan and other countries? As you mentioned in your chapter on McDonald’s, the focus should be more on studying, “how new commodities become embedded in culture” and how culture, whatever that may be, is always changing and constantly in motion.

OT: I published an article called, “Historicization of the Culture Concept” [2001]. I think what really derailed us was to look at culture in a synchronic perspective. And so if we realize there has never been a pure culture—that culture is always in motion—and deny the notion of hybridity because it presupposes pure cultures—if you look at it that way, McDonald’s is not a new phenomenon.

L: Globalism now is seen as something new—

OT: Which is wrong.

L: In consideration of what we have discussed, do you envision changes in the global food market and the impact on the “culture” of contemporary Japan and the United States?

OT: There is hardly what we may call Japanese food in the first place. Now, Japanese restaurants feature 16-course Japanese menus—but we have absolutely no idea where these came from—probably from the tea ceremony in Kyoto. But it’s never the same. For example, my colleague treated me to a very fancy Japanese restaurant in the Ginza,
and I ate some sea bream fish—there was a writing about the origin of the fish. A feudal lord, impressed by Portuguese food, came up with this dish. Also, the Chinese ramen, as seen in the film Tampopo, is considered Japanese food. So if you see food historically, it is going to be changing all the time.

L: And as you said, it’s a reflection of self.

OT: Yes, that’s right.

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By Norma Sakamoto-Larzalere
March 12, 2004

Professor Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney is a William F. Vilas Research Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. An expert in the social, cultural, and symbolic anthropology of Japan, she earned her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the author of 12 books in English and Japanese, including "Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan: An Anthropological View" (1984), "The Monkey as Mirror: Symbolic Transformations in Japanese History and Ritual" (1987), "Rice as Self: Japanese Identities Through Time" (1993), and "Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: the Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History" (2002). Professor Ohnuki-Tierney has been awarded the Guggenheim, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Japan Foundation fellowships, and is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

1. Background
2. Significance of Rice and other Foods in Japan
3. Concept of Nature and what is Natural in Japanese Foods
4. Food Safety in Japan

5. McDonald’s and Changing Table Manners in Japan

6. Globalism and the Japan/United States Food Market

7. Concluding Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts

L: As a final question, what advice would you give to budding anthropologists and those in other disciplines?

OT: Well—I have not been politically sagacious and I have been lucky, as I told you in the beginning, that what I have been doing has always been a hobby. I just pursued what I felt like doing. And I never went on a bandwagon. What saved me—and I feel I still have many more books to write along the way—was that I could do whatever I felt was interesting. I think some people are successful professionally but if you don’t pursue what you are passionate about, you get burned out.

L: Also, you mentioned about discovering things along the way too—

OT: Yes, indeed. Because every book I started out in a different way—for example, in “The Monkey as Mirror,” I just wanted to study the metaphysical importance of the monkey and ended up with a dynamic social history—and with “Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms,” I just wanted to have fun writing about cherry blossoms—and then I discovered how the military abused the symbolism of the cherry blossom—and the unexpected angles and results of the research.

L: And your research on the, “The Rice as Self,”—

OT: Yes, as I said earlier, I was interested in marginalized social groups and the agarian population—and was getting interested in food—and the concept of identities. But I did not realize to what extent the agrarian hegemony was part and parcel of the development of the minorities. I did not realize rice was not eaten by the majority of the Japanese until very recently.

L: And in terms of nature and natural, the most unnatural food is polished white rice.

OT: Absolutely, and in fact it has a great deal to do with the military—they invited the soldiers from the countryside—who were rice producers and not consumers—and they were feeding them white rice. Beriberi was the major cause of death among the soldiers. And they tried to counterbalance that with other foods. Polished rice was the least nutritious food.

L: You are in a unique position, originally from Japan and coming over to the United States. What do you feel is your contribution to anthropology?

OT: I don’t know what my contribution is but I blindly pursued my own interests, regardless of what was expected of me—and I have been influenced by major debates—I was influenced by structuralism to a certain degree—I was influenced by postmodernism to a degree. But I never took any of that in toto. So some people think I’m really interested in theory but it was only to illuminate my historical ethnography. I always want to build my conclusions out of the dialectic between theoretical interests and
historical and ethnographic data. But as far as my contribution goes—I just don’t know —

L: As you said, you do what you feel is right, and, most importantly, you have a passionate interest in your research.

It was a pleasure and an honor to meet with you today.

OT: I enjoyed it very much. Thank you so much for paying attention to my work.

L: Thank you very much.
Bringing Home the Sushi: Food as a way of understanding each other's livelihoods

Interview with Theodore C. Bestor
Professor
Department of Anthropology and Reischauer Institute for Japanese Studies
Chair of the Social Anthropology Wing, Department of Anthropology
Harvard University

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Tokyo's Tsukiji: The Fish Market and the Center of the World

-Globalization

L: Later, you specifically focused on the intermediate traders. Could you describe in a nutshell a typical morning at the fish market? If I walk in as a tourist, what would I see at Tsukiji?

B: Well--you're going to see more fish than you ever imagined. Tsukiji sells roughly 24 hundred metric tons of fish everyday.

That's 2 million 400 thousand kilograms a day.

L: That's phenomenal!

B: It's an absolutely amazing phenomenon. The only standard of comparison I can give you is the Fulton Fish Market in New York City which is the largest fish market in North America. It handles only about one-sixth that amount.

Obviously, Japanese food culture is centered on fish so that's not surprising. But it astounding, at five in the morning, to walk into this marketplace--tuna lined up as far as the eye can see or crate after crate after crate of shrimp. And [fish] from all over the world. Not just Japanese fishing but Canadian, American, Mexican, Chilean, West African, Spanish, Turkish, Tunisian, Italian, Indian, Indonesian--

L: It really is astounding. Your research has taken you to many parts of the world because of that--

B: Well--not as many parts as I'd like--but in the course of trying to understand this global fishing industry, and the way the distribution is centered on this marketplace, I've done research now in Spanish fishing ports. I've visited a couple of dozen fishing ports on the Atlantic coast. I've gone to fishing markets and ports in Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Essentially, anywhere there is a coastline and sometimes where there isn't. If people can catch fish or grow fish, they are probably doing business in some way with the Japanese fishing industry.

L: You had mentioned in your book that there is running joke at Tsukiji the biggest Japanese seaport is Narita airport. Is that right?
B: That's right. That's true in terms of the monetary value of the fish. Fish that is flown to Japan by jet is an enormous amount. And in fact, I've gone to the Narita fish market. There is a wholesale market at the airport where fish are brought in, they go through customs inspection--it's off the map. The crates are opened up and the people there make decisions about whether this set of imported fish will go to Tokyo or Yokohama or Kyoto or Osaka or wherever. From Narita [the fish] can go almost anywhere in Japan.

L: As far as Tsukiji being an example of globalization, can you tell us a little about the intermediate traders themselves? You called them the "technicians of globalization." What do you mean by this?

B: I referred to them as technicians in the sense that in their day-to-day job they're not worried about globalization. They are worrying about where this fish came from and where it's going to go. But it's in their business that really, the nuts and bolts of all this happened, because what they're doing is making decisions on a daily basis and who to call. You know--calling up a fish broker in Norway or a fish broker in New York or a fish broker in Seoul--and saying, "What are you sending? What's coming?" Or saying, "The prices are down this week on such and such so don't send anymore because we have enough."

So, on the one hand, they're coordinating the flow--not because they're thinking globalization--but they're thinking, "My business depends on this, this, and this. I know these people in other parts of the world and I can call on them."

L: "And how do we connect?"

B: Yes. And then the fish arrives and then they're making decisions. "Is this a high quality fish, a high quality tuna that is going to end up in a Ginza sushi bar being sold at fantastic prices? Is it something that's going to be sold in supermarkets and cut up in little plastic boxes and sold to housewives?"

So there are decisions on the selling end that are determining what ordinary Japanese are going to have available to consume. Again, they’re not thinking about it in abstract terms. They’re just thinking that, “I’ve got 200 kilos of tuna, where am I going to sell it?"

It’s in those mundane details, thinking about, “Where can I get more of this? Who can I call to get more shipped here? Where am I going to sell this stuff?” It’s in those mundane details that the connections of globalization are really being made.

The housewife, who buys Chilean salmon at the supermarket, doesn’t necessarily stop to think about, “How did Chilean salmon end up in my local supermarket?” But you can trace it back in a chain of thirteen or fourteen steps where people all along the way are simply in their daily business, making lots of daily decisions that end up creating the supply chain between a Chilean fish farm and a Japanese supermarket.

L: You had mentioned that globalization at least by Western scholars as the idea of the Western conglomerate. What you describe is quite the reverse. It’s switching the idea of globalization in the other direction when talking about the Japanese market.

B: Exactly. So this stereotype of globalization is this Western imperialism, Western businesses—taking over—we're the source. But, clearly, globalization is taking place on a thousand different dimensions all at once.
“Godzilla” is a primary example. In popular culture, there are lots of things coming from Japan to the United States or to the rest of Asia. In terms of fish markets, food supply chains. I don’t know that much about the grain business but I’m sure there are lots Middle Western grain farmers—whether it’s soybeans or wheat or corn—who are producing things to be exported to Japan or China or other parts of the world. It’s not that a Midwestern grain farmer is on the periphery of the world. But that there are different kinds of centers. There may be centers for some businesses, some trade for some commodities based in the United States and others may be based overseas. Tsukiji is a perfect example of a global center [that] drives all kinds of production and distribution around the world.

L: Then, Tsukiji literally sets the prices worldwide?

B: The price at Tsukiji will determine, directly or indirectly, the price that a fisherman gets in Gloucester, Massachusetts or Cartahena, Spain. It’s going to be based on somebody looking at the market reports and finding out [for example] tuna was down three-percent yesterday, so the price drops around the world.

And it’s that kind of—I don’t know what you’d call it exactly—globalization with many centers. Each center perhaps only important in some limited domain. But nonetheless, important for that domain--Tsukiji may be totally irrelevant to people in the computer business or in popular entertainment, but on the docks on Maine it’s very important. Just as in a grain elevator in the Midwest, the Chinese price of sorghum may be crucial.

Next: Tokyo's Tsukiji, cont: Cultural Stereotypes; Tuna
 Bringing Home the Sushi: 
Food as a way of understanding each other's livelihoods

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Japanese Food Culture: Looking at Sushi as a Japanese Food and Icon

- Sushi in the United States

L: Talking about bluefin tuna again—going back to the U.S. market—was it in demand as much as it is now? What did people in the U.S. think about bluefin tuna before?

B: Well—that’s a great question—I’ve talked to older people in the fishing business and essentially until the 1960s, bluefin tuna was really not a commercial species. It was a sports fish. If you caught it and were trying to make a living, you would sell it for cat food or sometimes it would be canned and sold like “Charlie the Tuna.” There wasn’t a special market for it [bluefin tuna]. So the only real attention it got was as a trophy fish. People would hire a fishing boat and go out for the day and if they caught a tuna, they’d have it stuffed and mounted over their fireplace.

So, it’s really I think the case that it wasn’t until the 1970s, that the Japanese fish buyer began to appear on the east coast of the United States. That people started to identity tuna as a commercially important fish. At least that’s when the Americans began to identity it.

L: In conjunction with that, is that when sushi started to be discovered in the United States? It’s cool to eat sushi now but at one time it wasn’t popular to eat raw fish on rice—

B: It is almost that time, I’d say—it begins—it’s a reflection of several things. It’s a reflection of Japanese economic power. That increasingly, Japanese businessmen were doing business in the United States and sushi restaurants in major American cities sort of developed in the first wave, as places where Japanese business people could take their American clients to impress them, with this exotic cuisine. And, similarly, at the same time, American business people were beginning to go to Tokyo more and more, and of course being taken out.

So, if you look at different kinds of “ethnic foods,” in the United States, North American, more generally—most ethnic foods start out with immigrant populations. pirogi or spaghetti or tacos, or whatever. It starts out as kind of a working class immigrant food and gradually spreads outside in which the elite gourmet replaces it at the upper echelon.
The history of Japanese food in the United States is a top-down history rather than a bottom-up history. The Japanese American communities on the West coast really didn’t introduce Japanese food to the American public. There are good historical reasons for that—the anti-Japanese sentiment on the West coast, the impact of World War II, the [Japanese-American] internment camps—one can easily argue that for Japanese-Americans in the postwar period, advertising their difference and advertising the unique, special qualities of their cuisine would have been culturally impossible. You are not trying to emphasize your differences.

L: They are trying to act the same—

B: Exactly. So, I think it’s with the growth of international business with North America and Japan, starting in the 1960s and 1970s, that sushi becomes this very elite, very specialized high status cuisine.

L: And it is always identified as a Japanese food too, isn’t it?

B: Right, though it’s probably changing. It’s now so common, even in Boston, you can walk into an ordinary supermarket and find sushi.

L: Definitely not made by Japanese chefs—

B: Yes, not made by Japanese chefs. But you are right, it is still identified as Japanese. But in a generation I bet it won’t be. It will join the taco and the pizza and the hamburger as finger food.

L: And sushi is an excellent example of globalization of food.

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Authentic Voices:
Conversations on Food and Agriculture

Bringing Home the Sushi: Food as a way of understanding each other's livelihoods

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Tokyo's Tsukiji: The Fish Market and the Center of the World

-Cultural Stereotypes: Tuna

L: I refer to an interesting story, related to globalization, that you wrote on the trading of tuna on the docks of Maine, and the actions you observed about the interaction of the Japanese traders and the American fishermen—they were bringing in their catch of the day to trade with the Japanese. And you mentioned there are a lot of things going on at the same time. You have, on the one hand, the American fishermen, many who really don’t know about the Japanese but think they know about the Japanese. And the Japanese traders, on the other hand, who handle the American traders in a certain way to get the best prices.

B: Yes, in any kind of trade, I suppose, particularly where people are buying and selling things with a distant market and through a foreign language or foreign culture, it’s easy for stereotypes to get attached. And creating explanations, creating stereotypes to try and account for, “Why is this fish more valuable than that fish?” And in making those stereotypes and those judgments, they’re drawing on the images of a society—the images of culture that they’ve gotten from other places—movies—

L: How would they know otherwise? They’ve never been there.

B: Exactly. They’ve never been there and they can be mysterious—just because you’re a tuna fisherman for example, doesn’t mean you can evaluate that this tuna is better than that tuna. In any case, every fisherman in the world knows that the fish that is caught that day is the best fish that’s ever been caught.

So, they need a sense of explanation for, “Why can’t I communicate? Why can’t I get a better price? It must be something about the buyer—the buyer is Japanese so therefore —What do I know about Japan?” And they go through a sort of checklist and come up with a stereotypical explanation. But as I say, it’s not based on anything to do with the fish or the trade. It’s based on the stereotypes that are created through popular culture.

Tuna

L: You focused your research on the Atlantic bluefin tuna fish. Could you describe the kind of tuna that is being served to the Japanese? What is the tuna of choice in Japan?
B: The tuna of choice is a species called bluefin tuna. Sometimes, when I’m giving lectures, I carry a little can of tuna fish with me. Charlie the tuna—because I think most Americans haven’t ever really thought of what tuna is. They just think it’s this little can. Then I show people a can of Starkist tuna—Charlie the tuna—and then I stand up and say, “If I were a bluefin tuna, you’d have to throw me back. I’m too small.” Bluefin tuna are huge fish. They can be 300, 400, 500 pounds. They can be 6, 7, 8 feet long. And a single very good tuna might sell on a dock in Massachusetts or New Hampshire for maybe 10,000 [U.S.] dollars for a fish.

But if in fact it is a good tuna—and is shipped to Tokyo—that same fish may sell for 20,000 or 30,000 [U.S.] dollars in Tsukiji.

L: What do the buyers look for in a prime slice of tuna?

B: It’s the red color, it’s the marbling of fat. And just like Americans may look at a prime cut of beef, as in Kansas, and look at the way the flesh is marbled with fat. So too with a slice of tuna. You look at it and decide what the fat content is. There is a technique where a buyer will take a tiny piece of tuna—rub it between the thumb and forefinger—squeezing it for the oil and depending on how much fat content there is, the thumb and forefinger will be very slippery or not. They are [also] looking at the shape of the fish.

L: What about seasonality?

B: Seasonality is very important in Japanese cuisine. The highest prices are going to go for things that are considered to be the peak of the season for the area where they are caught. So, people at Tsukiji pay a lot of attention to where a particular fish comes from. Not just any old fish. [For example] this is a fish that came from this area off of New Hampshire or this area off of Nova Scotia or this area off of Florida. Depending on the season, and where the migration pattern is of tuna, the fish off of Nova Scotia may be past its seasonal peak. Or a fish off of New Hampshire is perfect. Or later in the year, maybe the best fish are all in Florida.

L: Which, of course, sets the prices again.

B: Yes, it sets the prices again.

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**Japanese Food Culture: Looking at Sushi as a Japanese Food and Icon**

- *Sushi* as fast food

B: The other interesting, historical irony or repetition is that sushi started out as fast food. In the 19th century, it was street food. And it’s getting back to being fast food. We pick up a box of sushi at a 7-Eleven [convenience store]. So this notion of sushi as this very elite, very expensive, ultra-fresh, ultra-sophisticated cuisine, is true. But there is also its history as finger food--somebody standing on the corner making sushi—you pick up a box and take it home—it’s still the case in Japan.

L: So, in the everyday life of the Japanese housewives, they follow a different path to their mothers, in terms of preparing the family meals. In particular, you have written about this “industrialization of consumption.” What about the gourmet boom in Japan? Has it affected the consumers in their everyday lives?

B: Well, it has in a couple of ways I think-- and not at all unfamiliar in a North American context either—certainly an emphasis on authentic but venerable ingredients. I mean, you go to the supermarket or you go to a specialty store and find [for example] a balsamic vinegar that you’ve read about in a magazine as being the authentic balsamic vinegar that they use in Tuscany. There is this kind of fixation on famous brands, whether they’re Japanese brands or American brands or European brands. There is this idea that there are gourmet ingredients you can find out there.

But there is also in the gourmet boom, both in the U.S. and in Japan, this rediscovery of regional cuisine, a rediscovery of the importance of using very fresh things that are locally produced which has never been entirely absent in Japan or in the United States. But during a certain period of the last 50 years, the homogenization of food and the growth of supermarkets—

L: And the standardization of stores such as Daiei in Japan--

B: Right. In the United States--A & P or Safeway, or whatever--I’m sure that my mother never in her life worried about choices of olive oil or coffees. Coffee came in a can, that’s all you needed to know. I suspect she didn’t pay a lot of attention to whether this head of lettuce was grown in this county, or had come from thousands of miles away.
It wasn’t important. So, I think that the gourmet boom in lots of wealthy, industrialized countries, has led to the luxury of being able to pay attention to ingredients in ways that they didn’t used to be able to.