

“Humans bring food to their mouths, animals bring their mouths to food”—The morality politics of school-lunch sporks in 1970s Japan

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ABSTRACT

We are not only what we eat, but how. This article examines the 1970s’ morality politics of spork usage that accompanied the rollout of rice in school lunches. I argue that these discourses about the material culture and etiquette of eating reflect the economic and political context of 1970s Japan and (re)emergent tensions about national identity and the role of children’s diet and table manners in determining Japan’s future. Japan’s national school lunch program is a critical site of “making Japan.” Schoolchildren and teachers generally eat identical meals in their classrooms, serving and cleaning up after each other. Revived in 1946 by the Occupation, the program was nearly universal in public elementary and middle schools by the 1960s. Meals were mostly bread, milk, and soup, stew, etc. The spork was the standard utensil. Cheap, multipurpose, and hygienic, it was a rational mass-catering solution. In the mid-1970s, simultaneous to the introduction of rice to the menu, the spork became the villain in a morality play about children’s eating habits and the nation’s fate. Culturalist pundits warned that sporks hindered development of the special dexterity, cleverness, and sensitivity that made Japan superior among the nations of the world.

KEYWORDS

Japan; material culture; morality politics; school feeding; spork

Introduction

The headline in *Asahi Shinbun* (1974) read, “Is school lunch tableware to blame for children’s poor manners?” The implication was, of course, yes. With the introduction of rice to Japan’s school lunch program scheduled for 1976, this article augured a new morality politics reframing the choice of school tableware and utensils as a battle for the soul of the nation. The spork had been the standard utensil for Japanese school lunches for over a decade because it offered a “rational” solution to the problem of providing cheap, multipurpose, hygienic utensils for Japan’s national school lunch program. Now it became the villain in a morality

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play centered on what and how children ate and what this portended for Japan's future. Beginning in the mid-1970s, culturally conservative intelligentsia repositioned the spork as a moral hazard. Unchecked spork use, they claimed, would result in a generation of Japanese youth unable to properly use chopsticks to properly eat a properly rice-based diet with proper manners. Moreover, because the spork demanded none of the manual dexterity required for chopsticks use, children would be denied the chance to develop the special cleverness that made the Japanese exceptional among the peoples of the world. After all, we are not only what we eat, but how.

The incident reported in *Asahi* was a local tiff between parents and the school board, but in retrospect it was also a bellwether for a new era of morality politics, an opportunity for populist moral entrepreneurship. Tanaka Minoru, a Tokyo dry cleaner, had brought a complaint to the school board of Tachikawa, Tokyo, on behalf of nearly 130 parents. They were concerned that the school lunch program focused on food and nutrition at the expense of manners. For newspapers like *Asahi*, this was a juicy human-interest story. The issue of children's manners was both personally relatable and a barometer of the health of the nation and social order. Moreover, Tanaka's complaint was graphic and detailed. Some of the ill-mannered children in question demanded spoons instead of chopsticks. Worse yet, alleged parents, were children who scooted back from the table, then leaned forward and put their elbows or even their jaws directly on the table and shoveled food into their mouths with ugly, clumsy sporks. The kids even had their own word for this phenomenon: *inugui*, or "eating like a dog."

I argue that the ensuing battle about table manners, utensils, and food is rooted in culturalist pushback against the mainstream postwar order and its values that illustrates trends in the cultural politics of Japanese identity in the long 1970s. My use of the term "culturalism" follows Alif Dirlik's (1987, 14) definition as "that ideology which not only reduces everything to questions of culture, but has a reductionist conception of the latter as well." Diet and its accompanying habitus are frequently moralized.¹ So are the scandalously deviant manners and mores of "kids these days." Utensils and tableware are less often singled out as exemplars of morality. Nevertheless, material culture—the forms, uses, and trajectories of things—and the discourses around it both shape and reveal societal trends (Appadurai 1994, 5).

To be clear, I am not arguing that the spork's foes were directly responsible for its fall from grace in subsequent years. The limited extant evidence suggests that they played a part in that story—a critical one, if historian Fujihara Tatsushi (2018, 199) is right—but also that the spork was likely doomed even without their kibbitzing. Instead, my primary interest is in

what spork-versus-chopsticks morality politics indicates about Japan in the 1970s, and how this discourse fits within the domestic and international contexts of the time. Japan's anti-spork, pro-chopsticks movement exhibited two distinguishing features. First, it had the structural and rhetorical hallmarks of populist moral entrepreneurship, i.e., morality politics. Second, it was directly tied to the official introduction of rice to school lunches in 1976 for the first time in the postwar, and to the political and economic circumstances behind this decision.² Put differently, calls to replace sporks with chopsticks appear to have been a leading indicator of a newly emergent politics of Japaneseness, one that resonated with the muscular Japanism, viz., Japanese culturalist nationalism of earlier decades (Person 2020, 8–11, 31–34), and which also laid the groundworks for the neo-Japanism of the 1980s (Hopson 2017, 201–48).³

This article first briefly summarizes the definitions of and connections between moral entrepreneurship, populism, and moral panic. In their push to disappear sporks from schools, Japan's never-sporkers inveighed against the erosion of Japanese culture, deploying discursive strategies characteristic of charismatic moral entrepreneurs. To contextualize this morality play, I then overview the postwar school lunch program's first three decades, 1946–1976, and the spork's adoption as a utilitarian solution to the problems of mass catering in many Japanese public schools. With this in mind, the article examines condemnations of the spork as a threat to the identity and future of Japan, and proposals for a return to chopsticks as a panacea for the congeries of problems represented by the spork and *inugui*. Here, I focus on the discourses of journalist Hatori Shōhei and chopsticks historian/advocate Honda Sōichirō. Finally, in the conclusion, I connect these discourses to larger questions about manners, habitus, and Japan in the 1970s.

Morality politics, moral entrepreneurship, and populism

The term morality politics (sometimes “moral politics”) identifies political contests that are fundamentally ideological rather than socioeconomic (Doan 2014, 2).⁴ This is the difference between “sin politics and redistributive politics” (Meier 1999, 693).⁵ The practice of morality politics aims to “to legitimate a particular set of values” prescriptively in discourses of collective identity and/or regulatory change (Doan 2014, 3). Morality politics' protagonists are “moral entrepreneurs,” individuals with “enough social power to influence other people's values, morals, and perceptions through discourse” and action (Flores-Yeffal and Sparger 2022, 2). They are often what Howard Becker ([1963] 1997, 148–62) called rule creators, reformers driven by “strong feelings of righteousness” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda [1994] 2009, 19).⁶

Moral entrepreneurs can be allies to traditional values and systems, but they can also be populists who “creatively subvert traditional mores, overturning value tables to ‘bedevil’ traditional leaders” (Joosse 2018, 993).⁷ As self-appointed representatives of “the people,” “the nation,” “the silent majority,” etc., charismatic elites and subelites can mount populist challenges to mainstream moral and political leadership (Müller 2016, 102).⁸ Moral entrepreneurs’ claims to represent the people are rooted in the core elements of morality politics’ power: salience, intractability, and simplicity (Doan 2014, 7–10).

Moral entrepreneurs often pressure political systems and actors from outside, sometimes by fomenting moral panics.⁹ Numerous scholars insist we live in “the age of the moral panic” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda [1994] 2009, 2; Thompson 2005, 2; Rodwell 2017, 1). Moral panics start with anxiety about a person, phenomenon, etc. (a “deviant,” in Becker’s terminology), usually a minority or outsider portrayed as a cause and/or symptom of moral or social decay. Hostility toward the deviant is led by moral entrepreneurs who mobilize “common sense,” “tradition,” collective identity, and fears of a slippery slope to societal disintegration to agitate and homogenize often disproportionate negative public reactions. Moral panics can be volatile, appearing and disappearing suddenly, but they often spur social and legal crackdowns that reinforce mainstream hegemonies (Garland 2008; Toivonen 2013).¹⁰

In summary, moral entrepreneurs can act as charismatic leaders purporting to represent an organic “people” against corrosive or exploitative influences variously identified with “elites,” nefarious foreign interests, or “deviants.” Japan’s anti-spork campaign fit these patterns, combining anger against teachers, administrators, and bureaucrats with a grievance politics around cultural corruption by foreign influence. This was the flip side of a resurgent sense of Japanese cultural superiority. The morality politics of this crusade reflect larger trends in the 1970s, a “brittle decade” and an “age of uncertainty.”¹¹

The school lunch program, 1946–1976

This section sketches a historical overview of the first three decades of Japan’s national school lunch program (*gakkō kyūshoku*, or just *kyūshoku*) from its creation in 1946 to the official introduction of rice in 1976. *Kyūshoku* was designed to be revolutionary, proactive rather than reactive; General Headquarters (GHQ) health section chief, Colonel Crawford F. Sams (1998, 7), who called the Occupation of Japan “the greatest experiment in human relations in history,” understood school feeding as essential to overhauling the country.¹² “The point of attack” when remaking a nation, wrote Sams (1998, 62), “is always... the children.” Though

originally a response to post-surrender food shortages, from the outset *kyūshoku* was a program of social—not just dietary—reform. Alongside political, educational, and other reforms, school lunches would produce stronger, taller, healthier, independent, democratic Japanese free from the temptations of fascism, communism, and other illiberal ideologies.

Key to this change, concluded Sams, would be animal protein, especially milk.¹³ By 1950, public elementary and middle school lunches had settled into the pattern that would continue for a generation: (reconstituted powdered skim) milk, bread, and a dish or two to round out each meal's nutritional profile.¹⁴ In at least a plurality of cases, the side dish was soup or stew to supplement protein, fats, and micronutrients missing from children's diets.¹⁵ This basic trinity of bread, milk, and accompaniments (*okazu*) remained generally unquestioned until the 1970s (Hagiwara 1991; Fujihara 2018).

Nevertheless, notable changes occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s. The first was increased professionalization and institutionalization. Professionally trained Japanese nutritionists began to take charge of school lunch planning and preparation after 1964.¹⁶ Along with logistical and other improvements, by the end of the decade these changes had transformed school lunches into a professional mass catering enterprise serving nearly all of Japan's public elementary schoolchildren.

The second notable change was to the menu. Two points deserve attention. First, noodles and other carbohydrates more frequently substituted for bread. Second, though soups and stews remained common, accompaniments diversified; salads with seafood (occasionally meat), Japanese dishes such as *oden*, Chinese-style stir fries, etc., were served with increasing regularity as Japan's economy and logistics improved. These changes are exemplified in the 1969 meal replica displayed in the School Lunch Museum (Figure 1): spaghetti with meat sauce, "French salad," pudding, and milk.

The third significant change to *kyūshoku* was the rise of the spork as an affordable, hygienic eating implement for millions of children. The dominant spork type was the "split-tip spoon" (*sakiware supūn*), with a large bowl and three prongs (Figure 2).¹⁷ The story of how sporks came into wide usage is murky. Perhaps the most popular version starts in 1959, in the city of Tsubame, Niigata, with a metalworking firm proprietor named Morii Tsukasa.¹⁸ In an interview, Morii claimed that by the late 1950s, the education ministry wanted to unify elementary school utensils (Izumi 2001).¹⁹ However, school meals were diverse. Chopsticks were well suited for rice and miso soup (both lifted to the mouth with the chopsticks as a kind of guide), but suboptimal for most non-Japanese foods. In short, school lunches were difficult to wrangle with just chopsticks. Or just a spoon. A fork and spoon together might work, but would be



Figure 1. 1969 school lunch replica of spaghetti with meat sauce, “French salad,” pudding, and milk. Courtesy of the Japan Sport Council.



Figure 2. 1970 school lunch photo, with spork in the foreground. Courtesy of the Nagoya City Archives.

expensive to purchase and maintain. Morii’s spork was inspired by melon spoons, a single implement able to stab and scoop. Within a decade, his company manufactured six million sporks a year for schools around Japan.²⁰ By the end of the 1970s, Tsubame accounted for over 90% of school spork production. However, the local metalworking firm cooperative was already eyeing a post-spork future (Chiba 1979).

Doubts about the spork's prospects were related to the final big change to *kyūshoku*: the epochal addition of rice in 1976. For some time, the agriculture ministry had advocated serving rice and rice-based “Japanese” meals in schools. Reliance on milk and bread as dietary centerpieces had been mostly a matter of expedience—first American, then Japanese. Bread and milk were first what the Americans and international aid organizations could supply, and then what Japan could cheaply import within the context of the Cold War and American food aid and diplomacy (Hopson 2020). However, Japan's economic and political circumstances had changed, driving a wedge between the agriculture and education ministries.

This came amidst triumph and trepidation. As the 1960s ended, Japan was restored to economic greatness and anxious about its future. Unprecedented economic growth had improved living standards and brought pride and optimism to millions, as reflected in the myth of the all-middle-class society (Chiavacci 2008).²¹ Japanese cultural power was ascendent, with the 1964 Tokyo Olympics in the books, the bullet train on the rails, and both Asia's first world's fair (1970) and a second Olympic Games (1972) on the horizon. Still, the complexities of the global 1960s and the peculiarities of Japan's relationship to the United States and its own recent imperial past had created or exacerbated ruptures within society. Protests against renewal of the US-Japan security treaty bookended the decade. In between, the spectacle of youth in rebellion, especially at elite universities, shook older generations (Igarashi 2012; Marotti 2013; Neitzel 2016; Kapur 2018; Koda 2020; Gerteis 2021; Schieder 2021; Abel 2022). The situation deteriorated in the early 1970s, with the first Oil Shock, Nixon's rapprochement with the PRC, the dissolution of Bretton Woods, etc. As Elise Tipton (2002, 190) wrote, “Events in the early 1970s increased the anxiety about Japan's place in the world and created a sense of vulnerability” throughout society. Japan had clawed its way out of the midcentury “Dark Valley,” but stood to lose it all again.²² This compound of change and optimism and anxiety provided opportunities for populist moral entrepreneurs.

Simultaneously, Japan's agriculture ministry discovered in the school lunch program a potential solution to worrying imbalances between rice production and consumption.²³ Put bluntly, in the 1970s, schoolchildren were once again mobilized as a captive audience for agricultural surplus. When that surplus had been American wheat and dairy, bread and milk had dominated *kyūshoku*. When Japanese agricultural policy created increasingly large surpluses of domestic rice—just as per capita and total rice consumption began dropping in the late 1960s (Oguma 2011)—rice was served up in schools.²⁴ This was obvious even to bread-and-milk *kyūshoku*'s critics (e.g., Hatori 1978a; Amemiya 1983, 268). Like the USDA, Japan's agriculture ministry wanted a guaranteed market for farm surpluses that would open up a new generation of lifelong consumers, support

politically important domestic producers, and increase food self-sufficiency.

The introduction of rice was not smooth, however. In 1971, with education bureaucrats' grudging cooperation, the agriculture ministry began a two-year experiment to assess rice's suitability for *kyūshoku*. Initial results indicated that replacing fortified wheat bread with unfortified white rice would require costly and labor-intensive nutritional supplementation and lead to increased food waste. This had been predicted by the education ministry, medical establishment, and influential media outlets, and contributed to parental skepticism (Monbushō and Nihon Gakkō Kyūshokukai 1976, 133–95; Hagiwara 1991, 1:133–34). While there were simultaneously anxieties about the industrialized food production economy that supplied schools with bread, it is remarkable that despite the cultural and dietary significance of rice, the government attracted only 59 pilot schools in the experiment's first year, well short of the goal of 112.²⁵ The experiment was repeated until the desired result was achieved in 1975. Rice began rolling out nationwide with the new school year in April 1976. Initially, just one in three public schools served rice, and there was enormous regional difference.²⁶ Within a year or so, however, that number had almost doubled: in May 1977, nearly 60% of public elementary schools served rice at least once monthly. Growth continued. By 1988, the national average had surpassed the ministry's twice weekly rice *kyūshoku* target (Monbushō 1988, sec. II 6.5.4).

Widening public support for rice *kyūshoku* was accompanied by calls to eliminate the spork. The spork was an inelegant utensil, neither well suited to the soups and noodles of the bread-and-milk era of *kyūshoku* nor culturally, historically, or culinarily linked to rice-based “Japanese” meals. This made it easy for pundits to use the spork as a cultural wedge issue. The writing of *Yomiuri Shinbun*'s Hatori Shōhei, for instance, amplified the concerns of anti-spork zealots such as Honda Sōichirō as if they represented mainstream opinion. This discourse, on the pages of Japan's number one newspaper, exploited rifts in Japanese society just as the functions of publicly funded, universal school lunch were being reexamined. Postwar school lunches had successfully improved the health of millions of Japanese schoolchildren and contributed greatly to raising a bigger, stronger, and better educated Japanese population. But some had begun asking whether that was enough for the new age dawning. Could *kyūshoku* rest contentedly on its laurels as a successful public health program? Or should it set its sights on new goals? And how should that role be reflected in the material culture of school lunches?

The anti-spork morality politics of Hatori Shōhei and Honda Sōichirō

Hatori Shōhei was born in 1933. After graduating from Tokyo's prestigious Waseda University, he joined *Yomiuri* in 1957 and worked there until his

retirement in 1993. At first, Hatori wrote primarily on culture, education, and the arts. He wrote often about the performing arts, and in 1971 published a book on the Tokyo kabuki scene. However, at *Yomiuri*, his interests shifted toward cultural commentary on women, children, and food, among other things. When Hatori became chief of *Yomiuri's* Women's section in the late 1970s, he was already writing culturally retrogressive screeds blaming selfish women for the loss of authentic Japanese culture. From the beginning, food was a central concern.

Hatori began to opine about *kyūshoku* sporks in 1975, and wrote sporadically on the issue until 1982. He tried to transform a relatively minor dust up in one neighborhood in Tokyo into a dramatic national moral panic, and a relatively minor fringe organization dedicated to replacing sporks with chopsticks into a cultural force. Both his goal and rhetoric are indicative of the changing cultural and culinary politics of the era. Hatori first addressed *inugui* in March 1975, lamenting the loss of “true” cultural richness. Sadly, he noted, in the decades since Japan's defeat, tomatoes and cucumbers and chicken and eggs had all lost their flavor. Women measured ingredients in grams and “godlike” instant foods anchored the diets of busy families. Worse, “dog style” had become the “official etiquette” of school lunches (1975a). That November, Hatori worried that Japan had “simply thrown away” its outstanding culture. His grumpiness was ecumenical, aimed at everything from modern housing with warm, comfortable, convenient interiors to instant foods, soft tofu, and children who could not use chopsticks properly. For Hatori (1975b), convenience was the enemy of culture, and it was time for Japan to reevaluate “what is truly necessary and important in order to live with humanity.”

In December (1975c), Hatori began formalizing the four major themes of his anti-spork, pro-chopsticks oeuvre. As he developed his arguments over the next seven years, Hatori often repeated three key points from this initial sortie nearly verbatim. First, school lunches influenced eating habits and manners more than meals at home. Second, citing eminent food anthropologist and historian Ishige Naomichi, Hatori claimed that *kyūshoku* had accomplished its initial goal of improving schoolchildren's health and development, and that it was now time to demand greater emphasis on culture and manners. Finally, referencing *inugui*, Hatori wrote, “Food is not feed.” In other words, proper eating habits, including table manners, distinguish humans from animals. To eat like a dog is to reject humanity itself, not to mention Japanese culture.

These ideas formed the backbone of Hatori's four core arguments against sporks and for chopsticks. First, he pinpointed the spork as the root cause of *inugui*. This was disingenuous; the first complaints about *inugui* identified the use of plates instead of bowls (to be lifted to the mouth) as the major culprit. The Tachikawa parents had made this the focus of their 1974 presentation to the school board. Hatori himself (1975a) initially

framed the issue this way. In later years, though, plates took a backseat to sporks (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 1988). The spork was a more obvious abomination, aesthetically unpleasing, unwieldy, and foreign—more easily “disparaged as bizarre,” as Hagiwara Hiromichi (1991, 1:138) put it in his history of the school lunch program. Capitalizing on the image of children eating like animals, Hatori decried *inugui* as the literally inhuman and degrading result of spork usage. Hatori (1978b, 1978c) repeated the refrain, “food is not feed,” adding, “Humans bring food to their mouths. Animals bring their mouths to food.”

Second, Hatori argued that while *kyūshoku* had done much for children’s health and development since the 1940s, that was no longer enough. A publicly funded, national school lunch program must also be the bearer of culture. At a minimum, this meant instilling “proper” manners. In a huffy retort to a primary school teacher who opposed eliminating the spork (Otohe 1978), Hatori wrote, “Food is culture, and must be properly passed down. The school lunch program must be based on this understanding, and for this reason the spork must be eliminated first of all” (1978c). He even suggested transferring administrative responsibility for *kyūshoku* to Japan’s Cultural Agency to acknowledge and promote this role (1978a).

Hatori’s third strategy was to magnify the impact of the “Association to Ban Sporks from School Lunches (Gakkō Kyūshoku kara Sakiware Supūn o Tsuihō suru Kai)” In a country overrun by public intellectuals, association founder Honda Sōichirō was not a household name. He was a minor folklorist-historian who wrote about Shinto, Japanese heraldry, Yasukuni Shrine, and chopsticks, and claimed to be the director of a “Lifestyle Ethnology Institute.” While placing Japan within the East Asian “chopsticks cultural sphere” (*hashi bunkaken* or *hashi shoku bunkaken*), Honda (1987a, 27) wrote that unlike China, Korea, and Vietnam, Japan had developed a “pure ‘chopsticks culture’” not reliant on spoons and other utensils.²⁷ This had shaped what the Japanese ate and who they were. Versatile but demanding chopsticks were the cornerstone and essence of Japanese culture, aesthetics, and national character. “The ‘multipurpose nature’ of Japanese chopsticks is symbolic of Japanese rationalism,” he wrote, “and has elevated the manual dexterity and cultivated the subtle and delicate sensibility of the Japanese... Plant-eating East Asians, who use chopsticks, have tended to cultivate ‘warmth,’ while meat-eating Westerners, who stab the flesh of livestock to eat, tend toward ‘brutality’... Eating with chopsticks has cultivated the gentleness, elegance, calm, and delicate ‘emotional Japanese’” (1987b, 48–49).²⁸

The fingers are the “second brain,” he continued, intimately connected to neurological and moral development. Without proper chopsticks training before age ten, future generations would never reach their full, Japanese

potential. Because it threatened the superior Japanese national character, the spork must be stopped.

Hatori began covering Honda's chopsticks-boosting, spork-busting organization when it was just a study group of less than a dozen parents. He used his platform to give Honda's claim that chopsticks were essential to the survival of the Japanese nation massively outsized influence. Both Hatori and Honda displayed the self-assured "strong feelings of righteousness" characteristic of moral entrepreneurs. Who would dispose so easily of a thousand years of beautiful history and replace it with the awkward, alien spork, asked Honda (1983). What would be the consequences for the manual and mental dexterity, honed by using chopsticks from an early age, that made the Japanese nation unique and superior? This appeal to tradition, commonsense, and nationalist aesthetics was classic, populist moral entrepreneurship. Like Honda, Hatori (1978c) asserted that it was crucial for children to learn proper chopsticks use early. Doing so later would make them no better than the rare Westerner who could use chopsticks: a pale shadow of the genuine article. Children deprived of the opportunity to use chopsticks—Hatori (1978b) called them "victims"—would never become "true" Japanese. For both men, the spork robbed children of their full Japaneseness, their cultural heritage of national greatness.

Hatori's final contribution was a populist emphasis on the conflict between parents and teachers. Hatori played up the parents-versus-educators, "us-them" rift visible in early reporting on the Tachikawa incident to pit "the people"—i.e., his readers—against out-of-touch elites. The Tachikawa parents' group had accused school lunches of undoing their efforts to raise "good" children with proper manners. Despite repeated scolding, they reported, the manners they had taught their preschoolers had been overwritten by eating habits tainted by elementary school lunches. Backfooted administrators placed those feet firmly in their mouths. "Children with proper manners training at home have good manners at school, too," gaffed one. "It's not a problem of tableware." Tachikawa's school board director solidified the battle lines by pointing out that because children ate just one-in-ten meals at school over the course of the year, "We really need to rely on manners education at home." Concerned parents had asked their local schools to consider lunchtime as an educational opportunity and to teach proper manners (*Asahi Shinbun* 1974). Not only had parents been rebuffed by teachers and administrators who claimed they were too busy with "real" education, but those same educators had placed the blame for poor manners back on the parents themselves. Hatori (1975c, 1978b, 1982) grasped the power of this opposition and exploited it from time to time in his articles.²⁹

When the education ministry introduced rice to school lunches in 1976, its accompanying list of desiderata included the use of "appropriate

tableware and utensils” for diverse meals (Gyōsei 2013, 476). The ministry strengthened its position in the 1980s, while simultaneously attempting to repair the parent-teacher rift opened up in the 1970s. Starting in 1982, for example, it invited schools and families to cooperate in teaching correct chopsticks usage, and invited parents of elementary and middle schoolers to sit in on school lunches (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 1982). By 1987, the ministry declared the use of sporks alone “inappropriate” from the standpoint of developing “desirable eating habits” and manners (Niigata 2021, 48). Though nine in ten schools had introduced chopsticks by this time, the spork had not been fully phased out. While just six-percent of elementary and middle schools relied solely on sporks, three of four still used them in combination with other utensils (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 1988). Education ministry statistics (2006) show spork usage continuing to fall in subsequent years, a trend that continues today, spurred by the government’s “food education” (*shokuiku*) campaign (Kojima 2011; Assmann 2017) since 2005.

Concluding remarks

In her history of cooking and eating, Bee Wilson observed that tableware is a locus of cultural meaning at least as much as it is a utilitarian toolset. However, for Wilson, the spork is *sui generis*, alone in a vacuum outside the world of manners and mores and culture:

Unlike previous utensils... the spork is entirely devoid of culture... It carries with it no particular mores and demands no etiquette. Eating with a spork is neither mannerly nor unmannerly (2012, 208).

Wilson is wrong. Sporks are not exempt from the heavy baggage of cultural symbolism that accrues to all eating implements and the manners that govern their use.

Analyzing Meiji-era (1868–1912) Japanese guides to Western etiquette, Mary Redfern (2014, 166) observed that “cultural competence in foreign dining” was a way for Japan to demonstrate its status “as a civilized nation equal to those of the West.” This is because manners and etiquette visibly manifest the dispositions arising from embodied social knowledge (*habitus*) acting as markers of “distinction,” i.e., hierarchical social difference maintained by symbolic and cultural capital (Elias [1938] 2000; Bourdieu [1979] 2012). By the 1970s, this dynamic had changed. Proper table manners remained a key milieu for Japan to perform a cosmopolitan civilized national *habitus* on par with the high-status “West.” Simultaneously, while the fork-knife-spoon triumvirate had been absorbed into Japanese culture writ large, for some parents and pundits, the spork emerged as a threat to Japan’s “native” civilized national *habitus* and national identity. There

are multiple reasons for this change. First, the physical body is also the social body, so its “proper” use serves as “an index of moral uprightness” (Bourdieu [1979] 2012, 35–36). In other words, to the extent that the spork became associated with slovenly, uncivilized bodily performance (*inugui*), it was already a source of moral degradation and a threat to Japan’s status in the hierarchy of nations. Second, using sporks meant never developing the manual dexterity required for chopsticks that was also essential to the cleverness and sensitivity that distinguished and elevated Japan among the nations of the world. Because the spork-versus-chopsticks choice was a zero-sum game, the spork could only be subtractive, an agent of loss, a thief of the Japanese national character and future.

Finally, there is the specific context of the 1970s. By the early 1970s, culturalism (Japanism) was enjoying a renaissance. Diet and its habitus and material culture became foci for a moral politics of national authenticity. Anti-spork evangelists and moral entrepreneurs such as Hatori and Honda were fellow travelers of an ascendant generation of Japanist intellectuals. Bread-and-milk *kyūshoku* had nourished the nation’s postwar comeback. But Japan was no longer a weak, defeated nation forced to sustain “bare life” (Agamben 1998) with foods and eating habits endangering its authentic *cultural* life. In this context, sporks were more than just awkward physical and lexical portmanteaus. They were foreign bandits stealing the cultural identity of the children, the “treasures of the nation” (Ambaras 2006, 4). This reflects the reality that culturalist declarations of self-confidence often mask anxiety (Shirana and Ikeda 2016). In this context, Hatori (1978b) accused sporks of promoting “eating habits of indeterminate nationality.” Similarly, food historian Ehara Ayako (1999, 58) later condemned *kyūshoku* as “meals of indeterminate nationality.” Rather than the cheap, nutritionally complete meals that the nutrition science establishment claimed them to be, from the 1970s and 1980s on, these meals were increasingly demonized as the epitome of a Western diet associated with violence, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and other lifestyle diseases and social issues (Yamamoto 1982). Most of all, like the spork, they eroded and erased Japaneseness itself. Conversely, rather than the crop that had lost the war and dumbed down the Japanese (Hayashi 1958; 1960), rice was not only a hot-button political and economic issue, it was returning to the core of Japanese cultural discourse (Hopson 2020, 8). In this context, the spork was an invader, as Hatori (1978b) put it. In the coming decades, the “Westernization” of the diet became the subject of conspiracy theories about attempts to suppress Japanese culture and destroy the greatness—the health, intelligence, and cultural integrity—of the Japanese nation (Suzuki 2003; see also Hopson 2020, 3–6). The campaign against the spork was an opening salvo in this new battle for the “soul of Japan.”

Notes

1. In addition to research on vegetarian diets' morality, there are numerous general sources (e.g., Covey 2006; Friedland 2008; Knight 2012; Caldwell and Leung 2020).
2. Rice was approved in 1963 on an emergency basis for bread-scarce rural areas (Hagiwara 1991, 1:133).
3. Japanism is a web of ethnonationalist discourses with roots in the defensive nationalism of Meiji-period modernization. By the 1930s, it was part of the hegemonic assumptions of social and political discourse. Neo-Japanism revived elements of this ethnonationalist chauvinism in the vastly different context of the 1980s.
4. In morality politics discourse, morality is a system of normative value judgments derived from a combination of relatively fixed value systems (culture, religion, etc.) and personal predilections (Flores-Yeffal and Sparger 2022, 2).
5. Kenneth Wald, et al (2001, 221), identify a "shift from materialist to postmaterialist values" and the consequent displacement of political economy by "culture wars" and other morality-driven disputes.
6. Rule creators act through moral framing networks: spheres of influence shaped by shared values and fields of communication (Flores-Yeffal and Sparger 2022).
7. My starting point is Ernest Laclau's definition of populism as *at least* a politics anchored in "the people" as protagonist, defined in antagonistic opposition to a corrupt, predatory elite (Featherstone and Karaliotas 2019, 31–32; and see Müller 2016, 19–20; Gagnon et al. 2018, v–viii; Itabashi 2021, 1).
8. In the taxonomy proposed by Jean-Paul Gagnon, et al. (2018, xi), the most relevant types of populism herein are "nostalgic" and, to a lesser extent, "xenophobic." The former describes a classically romantic intuition conflating the natural, the traditional, and the right, and finding all of these in the whims of the masses. The latter privileges the organic, unified, natural identity of the people, nation, etc.
9. Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* ([1972] 2015), is the seminal work on modern moral panics. Stuart Hall ([1978] 2013) and Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda ([1994] 2009, 19) built the foundations of today's scholarly consensus on Cohen's work.
10. As Goode and Ben-Yehuda noted ([1994] 2009, 22), moral panic is a "characteristic feature [of] late modernity," especially notable since the 1960s. Moral entrepreneurs, observed Toivonen (2013, 420), leverage their social capital to "attract media coverage and... institutional support." They use media access and social and/or economic capital to disseminate information and shape public discourse via agenda setting, priming, and framing public anxieties (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007; Furnham and Boo 2011).
11. I use "brittle decade" here referencing the eponymous book about the 1930s (Dower et al. 2012) as well as John Kenneth Galbraith's retrospective (1977) characterization of the early 1970s as an "age of uncertainty," which resonates with the Japanese Economic Planning Agency's (1974) label, "an age of anxiety."
12. Sams, who spearheaded dietary reform efforts under the GHQ, was an experienced medic with missionary zeal vis-à-vis rationalizing the diet. As discussed herein, in Japan's case, that meant first and foremost diminishing overreliance on nutrient-poor carbohydrates and dramatically increasing consumption of animal protein, especially cow's milk, which Sams (1998, 65–84, 135) considered a nearly perfect food.
13. The Occupation's centering of animal protein in dietary reform has been explored (e.g., Aldous 2013; Aldous and Suzuki 2012). This apotheosis of milk was supported by the highest echelons of Japan's nutrition science establishment (Hagiwara 1991,

- 1:80–82; Solt 2014, 98–99). Beginning in 1946, the Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia (LARA) coordinated the distribution of tons of milk and other food aid, mostly supplied by the United States. Bread followed soon after (Hagiwara 1991, 1:87). In time, UNICEF became Japan’s major milk supplier, especially for *kyūshoku*. After 1954, American food aid, including milk, was institutionalized as a Cold War foreign policy tool under Public Law 480 (Mayo 2016; Hopson 2020).
14. By June 1948, over five million Japanese schoolchildren regularly received publicly provided school lunch. Whether ladled into cups or as the base for creamy stews, milk was *the* key ingredient. By July 1950, GHQ wheat stores anchored “full lunches” (*kanzen kyūshoku*) of bread, milk, and accompaniments (*okazu*) in Japan’s eight largest cities (Niwa et al. 1971, 69).
 15. A serving of miso soup with canned mackerel, daikon, and turnip greens supplied 12.5 grams of protein and 5.3 of fat, 39 milligrams of calcium, and over 100 calories. With milk and bread, this was considered a nutritionally complete meal (Niwa et al. 1971, 47–51).
 16. This was the result of two legal developments, the creation of a two-tiered national licensure system to increase professionalization (Hopson in press), and government subsidies for school nutritionists’ salaries to encourage hiring (Kaneda 2005).
 17. Spoon-fork hybrids date back at least to medieval Europe’s sucket forks and include nineteenth-century American terrapin spoons and ice-cream forks (Gross 2013). According to Bee Wilson (2012), the first American spork patent was granted in 1874. Australian William McArthur produced a similar product called Splayds (also “Splades”) in the 1940s. The urban legend that General Douglas MacArthur was responsible for the use of sporks in Japan, as Wilson observes, likely conflates the two M(a)cArthurs. There is no evidence that MacArthur considered chopsticks barbarian and forks too dangerous for the Japanese.
 18. The area’s metalworking industry has a long history. In the 1920s, Tsubame began to export metal utensils. After a wartime hiatus, the industry revived rapidly (Kobayashi 1967).
 19. The ministry’s (1976) history of *kyūshoku* makes no mention of this.
 20. Sporks lasted five to six years on average, too long for spork manufacturers. Because salt breezes shortened that lifespan, oceanside schools were welcome customers. Later, students mangling utensils in emulation of spoon-bender Uri Geller boosted orders for both spoons and sporks (Morii, in Izumi 2001).
 21. My understanding of myth as “just-so stories” to make sense of the world borrows from Richard White (1991, 615).
 22. The phrase “Dark Valley” describes the decade and a half from the Great Depression to the end of World War II (e.g., Havens 1978; Tsutsui 2003; Brendon 2016).
 23. Use of the school lunch program to “educate” children’s tastes replicated the logic of both Japan’s prewar attempts to establish a national, public, school lunch program, and also the postwar American reboot of *kyūshoku* and its transformation into a conduit for agricultural surplus (Hopson 2019; 2020). In 1971, the government also introduced the “set-aside” policy (*gentan seisaku*) in a largely unsuccessful effort to reduce surpluses and promote agricultural “rationalization” (Bray 2020, 29–30)
 24. During the 1960s, rice consumption among non-farmers dropped by one-fourth, over 25kg per person. Japan lost almost 750,000 farming households and food self-sufficiency fell from almost 80% on a calorie basis in 1960 to 60% in 1970 (Nihon Tōkei Kyōkai 2006). For the ministry, this was a crisis.
 25. Food safety concerns around artificial colorings, residual pesticides in milk, and industrialized food production writ large were embedded in the context of “greater

acknowledgment in the late 1960s and early 1970s of the environmental costs of the country's rapid economic rise," (Siniawer 2018, 103; see also Hagiwara 1991, 1:139; Iyoda 2010, 60–61; Walker 2010 chapters 4–5). The “lysine problem” (*rijin mondai*) of 1975 kicked off public panic about bread just as rice was to appear in school lunches. Lysine was a common additive in *kyūshoku*-bound bread by the 1960s, but reports of worrying levels of carcinogenic benzoapyrene prompted this major scare. Evidence conflicted, parents and consumer groups panicked, and the health ministry flip-flopped before punting lysine regulation to the prefectures (Ōiso 1966; 1968; *Asahi Shinbun* 1975a; 1975b; 1975c; *Japan Times* 1975a; 1975b; Hagiwara 1991, 1:142–43). At the margins, this may have contributed to public acceptance of rice *kyūshoku*, but at the cost of decreased trust in government, industry, and the food system.

26. 70% of schools in five prefectures served rice from the start. In contrast, six prefectures, including major urban centers, served rice in one percent of schools.
27. Honda is not alone among Japanese scholars dividing the world into three “cultural spheres” based on eating habits: chopsticks, fork, and hands (Isshiki 1987; 1998; Mukai and Hashimoto 2001; see also Wang 2015, chapter 4).
28. A decade later, in a compendium on the material culture of the Japanese diet, Honda (1997, 247–53) repeated this refrain nearly verbatim.
29. Reader letters to *Yomiuri* about *inugui* and sporks reproduce many these arguments. A thirty-year-old mother who had learned of the spork problem in *Yomiuri*, wrote to advocate for a national ban (Hirokawa 1976). A high-schooler (Komada 1977) warned, “If parents are letting children use spoons at home, Japan's future is dark,” adding, “We must keep increasing rice meals to protect Japan's soul (*kokoro*).” A 47-year-old father (Shioda 1978) concluded simply, “It is important for Japanese people to eat with chopsticks.” There is little additional evidence for a groundswell of anti-spork sentiment, but the hyperbole of these responses is a hallmark of morality politics generally and the contemporaneous morality politics of the spork in particular.

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