


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Revisiting Naomichi Ishige and the development of Asian food culture studies in Japan

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Abstract

In Japan, the discipline of food culture studies has developed since the 1970s under the initiative of Naomichi Ishige. Ishige's works have been referenced widely, but no one has attempted a critical reading of his writings. Therefore, the objective of this paper was to trace his life and contributions to the development of Asian food culture studies. Ishige's first contribution was to identify the commonality in Asian food cultures, tightly connected to rice and *umami*. Second, Ishige greatly contributed to institutionalising an interdisciplinary dialogue on food cultures in Japan and Asia. In fact, food culture studies are a product of food modernity because their disciplinary development has been conditioned by an increasing globalisation of food systems and the collapse of modern family systems since the 1970s and 1980s. Third, this paper analyses Ishige's food philosophy. Unlike Asian food culture studies in general, which mainly focuses on the genealogy of specific foods and dietary practices before modernisation, Ishige was also a careful observer of food modernity. His food philosophy, backed by long-term civilisational perspectives, was full of balanced ideas about how to cope with the loss of family meals, economic inequalities, and the rise of nutritional sciences during his period.

Keywords: Asia; food culture; food modernity; food philosophy; Naomichi Ishige; rice; umami

Today, Asian studies has taken on a new mission of “Asianisation” and “universalisation”¹ Asianisation is the shift of ownership in scholarly activities from the West to Asia, which epistemologically accompanies the inevitable shift from the Western-centred view of modernisation to plural ones that better explain regional particularities in Asia.² Far from being a new form of regionalism or nationalism, the Asianisation of Asian studies is open to international dialogues. The continuous *universalising* effort – that is, the act of reinterpreting and expanding Asian values to make them more universal – is, therefore, required.³ Keeping this ambition in mind, I take as a starting point for further reflection a specific theme that is tightly linked with Asian identities, namely food cultures.

In this article, I shed light on food culture studies in Japan and the contributions of Naomichi Ishige, a leading cultural anthropologist and the pioneer of such a new academic discipline in Japan. Under Ishige's advocacy, food culture studies started developing in Japan since the 1970s, and its movement has expanded to neighbouring Asian countries, such as South Korea and China.

¹This mission has been declared by many educational institutions with Global Asian Studies programmes. For example, see the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo (<https://www.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/welcome/>).

²Sato and Sonoda 2021.

³It is useful to introduce the distinction between the *universalisable* and the *universalising*. The former belongs to the dimension of truth whose legitimacy has been increasingly challenged in reflexive modernity, whereas the latter evokes the creation or production of the universal. See Jullien 2014 and Nakajima 2022.

A large body of Ishige's works has been archived by the National Museum of Ethnology and the Ajinomoto Food Culture Centre, and was compiled into the eleven volumes titled *Naomichi Ishige's Collection of Works* published in 2011, which creates the impression that his works have experienced rigorous evaluation.⁴ Some of his monographs, for example, *History of Japanese Food Cultures*, have been translated worldwide (into English and French),⁵ and world food history dictionaries have often cited Ishige as the representative spokesperson of Japanese food culture.⁶

Given this worldwide reputation, it is surprising that no scholar has yet attempted a critical reflection on his works. One of the reasons is that the majority of Ishige's works having been published only in Japanese and are thus unavailable to foreign scholars. It is necessary to open up Ishige's works and food culture studies in Japan to critical evaluation and it is desirable to do so in a shared space for global intelligence.

Thus, the objective of this article was to offer a critical reading of Ishige's writings. After providing an overview of his life history, I discuss three major aspects of Ishige's contributions to food culture studies in Japan and Asia: methodology, institutionalisation, and food philosophy. How has Ishige approached food cultures and then articulated common identities in Asian food cultures? How have food culture studies been institutionalised in Japan and Asia, and what have been the prerequisite social conditions? What is the food philosophy that Ishige has developed through many years of food culture studies all over the world? I will answer all these questions in this article.

Naomichi Ishige, the pioneer of food culture studies in Japan

In light of the absence of relevant literature currently available in English, I dedicate the first section to tracing Ishige's life and research history. Unless otherwise noted, the information below was obtained from the chronological record included in the extra volume of *Naomichi Ishige's Collection of Works*.

Born in 1937, Ishige's childhood spanned the Second World War and its aftermath. He later recalled that his interest in food and cooking was cultivated by the devastating food shortage in Japan during this period. Growing up near the archaeological sites of Chiba Prefecture, located east of Tokyo, he also developed a curiosity about ancient civilisation and entered Kyoto University in 1958 to study archaeology. Ishige belonged to its archaeological laboratory, the first of its kind in Japan, established in 1916 by Kōsaku Hamada (1881–1938), where he acquired methods of studying material cultures and applied them to his first thesis in 1963 (published later in 1968), "Genealogy of Japanese Rice Crop."⁷

Ishige was also an active member of the Explorers' Club of Kyoto University and the Fauna and Flora Society, both of which were in a close relationship with Kinji Imanishi (1902–1992), the pioneer of primatology in Japan and the theoretician of a unique anti-Darwinist (anti-selectionist) evolution.⁸ Ishige joined expeditions to Tonga in 1960 and Papua New Guinea in 1963, where he studied various tribes' material cultures and social relationships. A food-related part of the research results was later compiled in his first monograph, *Explore Food Cultures*, published in 1969. In this monograph, although he still regarded food culture studies as a "pastime," Ishige's awareness of and approach to food cultures had already started to take a form:

[Applying] anthropological thinking, which I consider my profession, to cooking and eating is an effective method to understand different cultures and societies [...] What is on my mind now is to analyse the names of dishes and cooking utensils [...] and reconstruct a

⁴Ishige 2011a. The Ajinomoto Food Culture Centre (<https://www.syokubunka.or.jp/publication/gallery/ishige/>) has a more informative archive than the National Museum of Ethnology (<https://nsearch.minpaku.ac.jp/ishige-archives/ishige.html>).

⁵Ishige 2011b, 2012, 2015a; Baumert 2013.

⁶For example, Ishige 2008, 2011c.

⁷Ishige 1968a, 1968b.

⁸Imanishi 1970, Sibatani 1983.

conceptual map of the culinary system. By doing so, we can arrive at a better idea of the Japanese culinary system.⁹

In 1965, Ishige joined the Social Anthropology section of the Institute for Research in Humanities at Kyoto University (Figure 1). This section was established by Imanishi in 1959 and Ishige served Imanishi's disciple, Tadao Umeseo (1920–2010), known for his ecological view of civilisation that was inspired by his master Imanishi's co-existing view of nature.¹⁰ Ishige spent about 5 years as Umeseo's research assistant, which was a rather fulfilling period for him. He joined a series of expeditions led by Imanishi and Umeseo and continued his anthropological studies of African tribes in Tanzania in 1967 and Libya in 1969. Based on his rich field experience, Ishige edited, mostly with anthropology colleagues, *World Food Cultures* in 1973, in which he proposed, for the first time, his methodological approach to food cultures in a formalised way.¹¹

After spending a couple of years at Kōnan University at Kobe carrying out teaching duties, Ishige became an assistant professor at the National Museum of Ethnology (known as Minpaku) that had just been established by Umeseo in 1974. Ishige spent the latter half of his life at Minpaku until his retirement from the director position in 2003. His first and seminal work at Minpaku was to initiate a collaborative research project, "A Comparative Study on Food Cultures in East Asia" during the 1980–1984 period.

This project included the development of an inventory of works by Osamu Shinoda (1899–1978), who "has almost singlehandedly carved out the field of Chinese food studies"¹² and perhaps the best food historian in Japan prior to Ishige's generation. Ishige wrote of Shinoda with immense respect, calling him "the great master of East Asian food cultures."¹³ Shinoda had conducted extensive research on the food histories of China, the Korean Peninsula and Japan, and the resultant works became known as the "Shinoda School."¹⁴ When living in Kyoto, Ishige frequently visited Shinoda's house and even called him a *sensei* (teacher) with affection. The death of his *sensei* in 1978 must have caused Ishige immense pain and it is quite natural that he inherited Shinoda's legacy to establish and develop East Asian food culture studies. During this period, Ishige ceased to call his food culture studies a "pastime" and the abovementioned research project at Minpaku marked the genuine beginning of food culture studies in Japan.

The first outputs of this project were an interdisciplinary symposium on East Asian food cultures and the publication of a collection of relevant articles.¹⁵ In the latter collection, although still in an embryonic form, Ishige proposed a research agenda for East Asian food culture studies, such as a complex relationship between staple food (rice) and side dishes, the role of fermented products and their umami flavours, and the Eastern philosophy of food. Ishige developed these themes empirically and theoretically in most of his subsequent works, and (East) Asian food culture studies became his life's work. One might cite *History of Japanese Food Cultures* as Ishige's seminal work, but this is not true. This book was originally aimed at the French public as an introduction to Japanese food cultures, and it is hard to claim the scientific originality of this work because most of the content came from his collaborators.¹⁶ His genuine scientific contribution should rather be attributed to his Asian food culture studies.

We have thus far understood that Ishige has received the strong influences of archaeology in his early career and, later, of two of his teachers' philosophical outlooks – namely Umeseo's view of civilisation and Shinoda's view of Asian food history. Ishige has then aspired to develop food culture studies and focus his efforts on Asian countries.

⁹Ishige 1969, p. 264.

¹⁰Umeseo 1967.

¹¹Ishige 1973.

¹²Chang 1977, p. 5.

¹³Ishige 2002, p. 299.

¹⁴Shinoda 1970, 1974.

¹⁵Ishige 1981, 1985.

¹⁶For example, Miyamoto 1977; Harada 1989, 1993; Kumakura 2007.



Figure 1. Naomichi Ishige in his early career.
Source: The Ajinomoto Food Culture Centre.

Ishige's methodological approach to food cultures and Asian identities

One of Ishige's contributions is that he articulated the methodological basis in food culture studies and applied it to identifying common features in Asian food cultures. In so doing, however, we immediately encounter a challenge. Food culture scholars in the West have traditionally expressed their own methodological stances in reference to major epistemological paradigms such as functionalism, culturalism, structuralism, and post-structuralism.¹⁷ In contrast, Ishige has intentionally refused to become actively involved in discussion about "great theories such as that of Claude Lévi-Strauss."¹⁸ Therefore, it would be more productive to focus on the local narrative that has characterised Ishige's approach to food cultures, which might be justifiable in light of the increasing importance attached to the Asianisation of Asian studies.

In an article included in *World Food History* in 1973, Ishige formally proposed his methodological approach to food cultures. Although he was to conduct extensive food culture studies subsequent to this early-stage proposition, his view did not change significantly throughout his career. The following text represents Ishige's view of food cultures well:

Eating is a series of activities that extend from environment to physiology through processing and incorporation. Agricultural sciences for the environmental domains already exist, while the nutritional sciences do for the physiological spheres of eating. Cultural perspectives are thus needed, mainly for analysing food processing and incorporation. Humanity builds on these two stages of cultural activities, contrary to animals, for which environmental and physiological needs are in a direct relationship.¹⁹

According to Ishige, anthropological and primatological findings indicate that cooking with fire is an exclusively human activity, whereas primates exist that can process food but without fire (Figure 2). Similarly, eating together with others is also a uniquely human activity, excluding parent animals, which share food with their babies but cease to do so once the latter grow up. From this understanding, Ishige derived an allegedly universal thesis for food culture studies: "Human beings are the animals that cook and eat together."²⁰

¹⁷For example, see Poulain 2017a.

¹⁸Ishige 1973, p. 209. This reluctance to engage in theoretical discussion might be one of the reasons why Ishige's contributions are not more visible in international academia. In addition, as Chie Nakane, the former director of the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, has highlighted, such theoretical reluctance is a weakness in Japanese anthropology in general, not just food culture studies in particular. Nakane 1974, p. 71.

¹⁹Ishige 1973, p. 5.

²⁰Ishige 1973, 2005, p. 12.

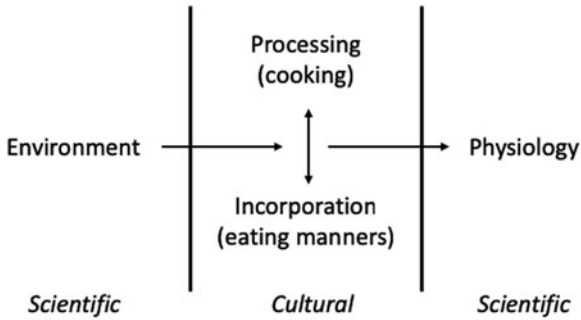


Figure 2. Ishige's concept of food cultures.
Source: Translated by the author from Ishige (2015b, p. 12).

It must also be noted that the methodological focus on cooking and eating manners does not exclude the analysis of the environment and physiology. Rather, it creates the possibility for interdisciplinary dialogues and collaboration, by which food culture studies are to become “a total academic discipline.”²¹

Ishige then introduced some linguistic distinctions to explain his approach. The first one was the emic/etic contrast that was to attain popular (but controversial) usage in anthropology in the 1960s.²² Far from being engaged in the fundamental epistemological debates regarding this distinction,²³ Ishige's interpretation of emic and etic was somewhat naïve: to him, an emic approach was the in-depth study of a particular cultural system, whereas an etic approach was the comparative study of different cultures to arrive at a universal, or at least systematic, understanding of human civilisation. It is obvious that Ishige was more interested in etic than emic, to distinguish himself from previous food historians or folklorists who studied only national food cultures.²⁴

Another linguistic distinction introduced was the diachronic/synchronic one.²⁵ The former relates to the study of the historical process of cultural change, whereas the latter concerns the analysis of cultural events in a specific period. While respecting diachronic approaches to food culture characteristic of the preceding period, he stressed synchronic analysis. This is because the natural sciences play a key role in the synchronic analysis of contemporary agricultural and nutritional issues, but no discipline does so for food cultures. Nevertheless, we shall later confirm that Ishige's ambition to address contemporary food cultures was achieved only partially and, in reality, he was more dedicated to diachronic analysis. The question of why the “etic-diachronic” paradigm characterised Ishige's methodology is an interesting one. As noted above, this tendency cannot be explained without mentioning his life history.

First, the onset of his scientific career as an archaeologist gave him a strong intellectual interest in the past, that is, the origin and genealogy of the food in question (e.g. rice, fermented sushi, fish sauce), which, made him reluctant to scientifically address contemporary issues. This methodological drawback can also be attributed to his inclination for the “modernology” proposed by Wajirō Kon (1888–1973), a Japanese ethnographer and folklorist, as an applied study of archaeology to modern social customs.²⁶ Although it helped to facilitate Ishige's scientific repositioning from archaeology to anthropology in his early years, it did not take Ishige far from the positivist analysis of material cultures (such as cooking utensils) and their classifications – the approach which Ishige himself later criticised as a “detour” to imminent social issues.²⁷

²¹Ishige 2015b, p. 14.

²²Ishige 1973, pp. 8–10.

²³Mostowlansky and Rota 2020.

²⁴For some classical works, see Yanagita 1931; Sakurai and Adachi 1934; Miyamoto 1977.

²⁵Ishige 1973, pp. 10–12.

²⁶Ishige 1975; Umesao 1971, pp. 499–515. Umesao criticised this modernology as “an unmaturing scientific approach” and, at best, “the auxiliary to sociology.”

²⁷Ishige 2016, p. 13.

The second influence was Umesao's proposal of the "ecological view of civilisation." Inspired by his collaborator-anthropologist Imanishi, Umesao introduced the anti-monist view of evolution and explained Japan's modernisation as "parallel evolution" to that of Western countries, in contrast to the previous catch-up view of the former with the latter.²⁸ Ishige aspired to assess and develop Umesao's general theory of civilisation by using food as a concrete standpoint. Basically, Ishige aspired to conduct a comparative study of food civilisations.

Third, to advance this research programme, Osamu Shinoda's approach to East Asia as a unit of analysis appealed to Ishige. Inheriting the same spirit Shinoda had, Ishige announced his approach as a scientific enquiry into: "What are the characteristics of East Asian food cultures, how can they be positioned on the world map and what are their universal implications for human food cultures," which also becomes the fundamental task for "the genealogical study of Japanese food cultures."²⁹ For Ishige, East Asia was a methodological unit for knowing the self and contributing to humanity.

Below, I discuss three major themes – rice culture, umami culture, and conviviality – to which Ishige has applied his East Asian comparative approach. In so doing, attention needs to be paid to Ishige's definition of "East Asia," which included China (excluding the Northern region above the Great Wall), the Korean Peninsula, Japan, and Vietnam, the last of which had long been under the influence of Chinese civilisation and was thus considered closer to East Asia than Southeastern Asia from the food cultural perspective.³⁰ Having said that, this regional distinction was flexible, depending on the theme of analysis. Moreover, Ishige's scope of analysis often extended beyond East Asia.

Rice culture

For Ishige, the most critical element shared in East Asian food cultures was the rice culture. In fact, most of the other common aspects were derivative of this rice culture. The importance of this theme was already seen in Ishige's first article in 1968, "Genealogy of Japanese Rice Crop," in which he analysed the functions, typologies, and geographical distribution of stone knives and provided evidence to support one of the contested views that rice culture in Japan originated from the lower Yangtze River and then travelled through the Tsushima Current to today's North Kyūshū region of Japan.³¹ This view was to be later supported by the science of genetics.³²

Ishige went on to develop his rice culture thesis by borrowing inspiration from Umesao's theory of the parallel evolution of civilisations. According to Ishige, the world before modernisation could be classified into four cultural groups based on staple food: wheat culture, rice culture, the culture of root vegetables, and that of miscellaneous grains, the first two of which characterised both sides of the Eurasian Continent and developed in a parallel manner. That is, wheat culture went in hand with livestock culture to meet dietary needs, whereas in rice culture, soybeans as "meat of the field" and fermented seasonings (e.g. miso, soy sauces) played a substituting role for protein intake and rich flavours complementary to the otherwise overly plain taste of rice.³³ Ishige and his collaborators later extended his exploration of the East Asian (non-) use of livestock products and fermented products,³⁴ among which I focus below on Ishige's most dedicated study on fermented sushi and fish sauce.

Indeed, rice culture was not the only entry point into East Asian food culture studies. In the same volume of *World Food Culture*, Japanese folklorist Tsuneichi Miyamoto (1907–1981) presented a

²⁸Umesao 1967. Although Umesao's main argument was to distinguish the so-called first-type civilisation (Western Europe and Japan) from the second type (India, China, the Islamic and Mediterranean countries, and Russia), strictly speaking, his "plural" views of evolution/modernisation also applied *inside* the first-type civilisation.

²⁹Ishige 1981, pp. 14–15.

³⁰Ishige 1985, pp. 20–21.

³¹Ishige 1968a, 1968b.

³²Satō 2018.

³³Ishige 1973, pp. 148–177.

³⁴For livestock products, see Harada 1993; Yi, 1999; Shū 2004; Ishige and Wani 1992. For fermented products, see Ishige and Ruddle 1990; Ishige 1998c.

contrasted view to that of Ishige, arguing that “rice as a commodity prevailed across Japan exactly because the Japanese were the people with the culture of miscellaneous grains” and “it was not until the wartime establishment of rice rationing that rice become a nationally available staple.”³⁵ It is now well known that non-negligible inequalities in the access to rice, depending on social class and region, existed not only in Japan but also in other Asian countries. Although being aware of this conflicting view, Ishige nevertheless insisted on the thesis of rice culture being universally shared in Asia. In so doing, he followed his collaborators’ quantitative study.³⁶ By investigating food availability in Hida country, at the centre of Japan, at the end of Edo period (the mid-nineteenth century), the authors of this study calculated that about eighty per cent of protein intake from grains and rice amounted to half the grains consumed, although, in my understanding, no discussion was provided regarding various in-country inequalities of distribution. Ishige also employed a similar quantitative rebuttal to some historians’ proposal of a deep-rooted culture of eating meat in Japan.³⁷ It is important to note that the thesis of rice culture was his methodological choice, not a shared consensus.

Umami culture

It was the study of fermented sushi and fish sauces that enabled a shift from Ishige’s thesis of rice culture to that of umami culture.³⁸ Ishige and his collaborator, American ecologist Kenneth Ruddle (1942–2023), surveyed more than ten Asian countries until 1985 and (half-)completed the genealogy of fermented sushi and fish sauces. This seminal study became Ishige’s doctoral thesis, “Study of Fermented Fishery Products,” submitted in 1986 and later published as a research monograph.³⁹

One might ask why he chose fermented sushi and fish sauces. These products were almost extinct in contemporary Japan and China, but had previously been important in a close relationship with rice culture. Moreover, Shinoda pioneered the study of sushi in East Asia and Ishige thus had an ambition to advance this subject. According to Ishige, historically speaking, salted fish (*shiokara* 塩辛) was the first invention and its role was to supply the necessary salty and umami flavours to offset the plain taste of the rice. Fermented sushi (*nare-zushi* ナレズシ) was then developed by adding rice to salted fish for stocking and seasoning purposes. Fish sauces were another derivative from salted fish and developed mainly in Southeastern Asian regions.⁴⁰ Its development was hampered in East Asia, notably China and Japan, where the production of grain-based sauces such as miso and soy sauce had long been favoured.⁴¹ Although the materials were different, the people’s preferences for the umami taste (in this case, glutamic acid) were common in both products. Therefore, Ishige went on to propose “umami culture” as a shared component of Asian food cultures. The following are some of his further comments about the nutritional and cultural characteristics of umami culture in Asia:

In East Asia and Southeastern Asia, characteristic of their low intake of animal products, a heavy reliance on rice as a staple became a general meal pattern. In this meal pattern, rice became a major source of protein, being cheaper than meat and fish, and only a small portion of side foods (*fuku-shoku* 副食) was needed as salty appetisers to facilitate the incorporation of a large amount of rice into the stomach. Grain-based and fish-based sauces were the best side foods for their small portion, salty flavours and even suitable for stocking and reducing the time and effort of everyday cooking. Moreover, these sauces can supplement umami flavours for vegetable-based dishes that would otherwise lack such savoury tastes.⁴²

³⁵Miyamoto 1981, p. 113.

³⁶Koyama and Gotō 1985; Ishige 1985, p. 54.

³⁷Ishige 1985, p. 56.

³⁸Ishige’s thesis of umami culture was proposed before a scientific consensus was reached that umami was the fifth basic taste, along with sweetness, sourness, bitterness, and saltiness.

³⁹Ishige and Ruddle 1990.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 81, pp. 320–21.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 330.

⁴²Ibid., p. 347.

In this monograph, Ishige also mentioned the status change of sushi from being a stock food to a luxury commodity and the scientific invention of umami seasoning (*ajinomoto* 味の素) in modern Japan,⁴³ but his implications about modernity were minimal and, similarly to the study of rice, the major focus of his argument remained on genealogical problems prior to modernisation.

Conviviality

Although most of Ishige's studies were concerned with food cultures in pre-modern eras, his study of the act of eating together (*kyōshoku* 共食) and its modern evolution was an exception. This study was conducted in the 1980s as a part of Minpaku's ten-year project, "Traditions and Evolution of Contemporary Japanese Cultures," with the explicit aim of objectifying food modernity. The research output was finally translated into Ishige's monograph, *Civilisation of Eating Manners*, published in 2005.

At the beginning of the monograph, Ishige mobilised primatological and anthropological evidence to claim that eating together was a human act that was institutionalised to reinforce the social bonds of the family as a unit of distribution.⁴⁴ Ishige went on to propose a method to analyse and classify the act of eating together, depending on eating postures (e.g. sitting on the floor or a chair), table utensils (e.g. chopsticks, spoons, knives), and serving manners (e.g. individual/shared, diachronic/synchronic).⁴⁵ Using this method, he delved into the East Asian comparison of eating manners.

Historically, eating together for Han Chinese was characterised by the "sitting on a chair, chopsticks, synchronic, shared" typology, whereas for Koreans it was the "sitting on the floor, chopsticks, synchronic, both individual and shared" typology. Having said that, in "shared" eating, in fact, there was separation by gender under the patrilineal family system that was backed by the Confucianist value of filial piety. Ishige was also aware of the contemporary evolution of eating manners after the Korean War in the 1950s and the Chinese economic reform of the late 1970s. That is, contemporary Chinese and Koreans usually ate together with family members regardless of gender.⁴⁶

On the contrary, for Japan, Ishige conducted extensive interviews with about three hundred Japanese elderly in their seventies (who were born around the beginning of the twentieth century) to understand the evolution of eating together. Ishige and his colleagues elucidated the transition process from *meimei-zen* 銘々膳 (individual box-shaped tables) to *chabudai* ちゃぶ台 (low dining table sitting on the floor) within urban middle-class households in the 1920s, and from *chabudai* to dining table (sitting on chairs) nationally since the 1950s.⁴⁷ From Ishige's perspective, the basic foundation of Japanese families was the bilateral descent system. Thus, the impacts of the Confucianist values introduced in the pre-modern era and the patrilineal principles transplanted in the Meiji Civil Code were limited. This is why, in pre-modern Japan, both male and female family members ate together, although some gender-based ordering existed in terms of space, timing, and utensils.⁴⁸ Having said that, similarly to China and Korea, conviviality in a modern sense did not exist during the *meimei-zen* period. The possibility for a convivial, friendly, and fun atmosphere at family tables was half-opened by the appearance of *chabudai* and finally achieved by the mainstreaming of dining tables.⁴⁹

Undoubtedly, this 1980s survey supplied precious oral records in Japan that would be otherwise lost forever. Nevertheless, its implication for East Asian food culture comparison was constrained partly due to the data unavailability in China and Korea, but, more importantly, due to the theoretical limitation for objectifying food modernity. Indeed, what Ishige problematised was the "modern family

⁴³Ibid., p. 89.

⁴⁴Ishige 2005, pp. 12–22.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 70–89.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 92–107.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 130–31.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 164.

system” (to be discussed later), but it is unfortunate that Ishige’s analysis of conviviality was distanced from the relevant sociological debate.⁵⁰

Institutionalisation of food culture studies in Japan and Asia

Ishige’s other important contribution was to foster the institutionalisation of food culture studies in Japan. Since the 1970s, the world has witnessed the rise of food culture studies. Under the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which was premised on the dichotomy between mind and body, food had long been excluded from the intellectual domain and relegated to the inferior corporeal realm. In addition, the evolutionist paradigm has made it difficult to approach food issues in modern societies, with food in “primitive societies” having been the legitimate domain of anthropologists. It was not until the 1970s that these modern premises have been increasingly challenged in reflexive modernity (also known as the second modernity) and that food has been finally thematised in social sciences and humanities.⁵¹

The development of food culture studies was a response to the emergence of reflexive modernity. Contemporary eaters were alarmed by the loss of traditional food cultures under the existing globalised food systems. Facing a growing food anxiety characteristic of reflexive modernity, traditional food cultures were also revalorised as a legitimate source for reconstructing dietary norms. In this social context, the sociology of food and the history of food (the Annales School of social history) emerged in France, whereas “food studies” was developed as a derivative of cultural studies in the Anglo-Saxon countries.⁵²

This social dynamic has been common in food culture studies in Japan since the 1970s, but it was Ishige who brought a strong impetus to its institutionalisation as a new discipline in Japan. As the director of Minpaku, he took the lead in editing two series of food culture studies involving about a hundred food scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds, namely *Food Culture Series* (Vols. 1–7: 1998–1999) and *World Food Culture Series* (Vols. 1–21: 2003–2009), with which food culture studies in Japan were established as an academic discipline.⁵³ Although the latter series had a global outlook, half of the volumes were dedicated to food cultures in various Asian countries (e.g. South Korea, China, Mongolia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar) and thus constituted a genuine output of Ishige’s Asian food culture studies.

This swift institutionalisation has been facilitated by Ishige’s interdisciplinary approach to transform food culture studies into “a total academic discipline.”⁵⁴ However, this interdisciplinarity and totality needs to be carefully understood. Figure 3 represents the disciplinary distribution of food culture studies in Japan, which was calculated based on the academic profession of Ishige’s collaborators in the *Food Studies Series*.

There was a good balance between the social sciences and humanities (62.9%) and natural sciences (37.1%), in which sense Ishige’s initial intention to conduct an interdisciplinary dialogue seems to have been achieved. However, a closer look at the disciplinary balance within the social sciences and humanities results in a different impression. Most of the articles were characterised by orthodox disciplines in food culture studies (anthropology, ethnology, history, and folklore studies), whereas other social sciences and humanities, notably economics, sociology, and philosophy, were excluded. This might be one of the reasons for which food culture studies in Japan have lacked critical analysis of food modernity. This situation in Japan marks a clear contrast with Western food culture studies, because sociology and economics (political economy) have played a key role in the institutionalisation of the latter.⁵⁵

⁵⁰Ochiai 1989, 2014, 2019.

⁵¹Giddens 1990, Beck 1992, Poulain and Corbeau 2012.

⁵²Poulain and Corbeau 2012, Poulain 2017b.

⁵³Ishige 1998–1999, 2003–2009.

⁵⁴Ishige 2015b, p. 14.

⁵⁵Poulain 2017a, 2017b.

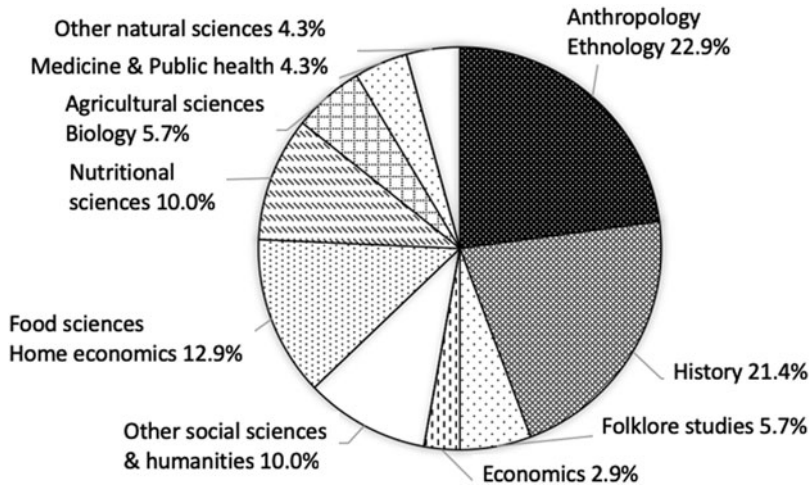


Figure 3. Disciplinary distribution of food culture studies in Japan.
Source: Developed by the author based on the *Food Culture Series*.¹⁰⁵

Sociological and economic conditions

To relativise Ishige's contribution, it is worth discussing the socioeconomic conditions that facilitated such institutionalisation. The first such condition was post-war economic development and the subsequent rise of nationalism. Thanks to rapid economic growth from the 1950s to the 1970s, the automobile and semiconductor industries achieved the highest amount of production in the world, and the Japanese economy enjoyed its "Golden Age" in the 1980s. Nationalism prevailed, and numerous publications emerged in the field of *Nihon-Jin-Ron* (日本人論), or cultural theories of "Japaneseness," which created the ideal conditions for the emergence of the political idea of the "Japanese" dietary pattern. The Japanese dietary pattern has been defined as "a combination of the traditional dietary pattern based on rice, vegetables, fish and soybeans, with an increased intake of meat, dairy products, eggs, oils and fruits."⁵⁶ Japanese public officials became aware of the side effects of the Westernised diet (e.g. lifestyle-related diseases) and proposed a new dietary norm that harmoniously combined the Westernised diet with the "traditional" rice-based diet supplemented by fermented soybean-based products.⁵⁷ It can be argued that Ishige's proposition of rice culture and *umami* culture in the early 1970s anticipated this political discourse.

Another condition was the collapse of the modern family system from the 1980s onwards. The modern family system refers to the standardisation of the modern family model, which divides labour according to gender, with the husband as wage-earner and the wife as homemaker, during the period from the 1950s to the 1970s.⁵⁸ It is under this family system that familistic dietary norms, such as the importance attached to family meals and eating together with family members, were standardised; Japanese sociologists call this the "post-war Japanese eating model."⁵⁹ Social changes since the 1980s, notably women's transition away from being housewives, made it difficult to sustain the modern family system. Despite this, the Japanese government has chosen to fixate on and reinforce the modern family system under a familistic policy, which has delayed the necessary social restructuring and resulted in currently the largest gender gap among high-income countries.⁶⁰ This peculiar situation is true to the post-war Japanese eating model, and it has created a strong contradiction between

⁵⁶ Agricultural Policy Council 1980, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Ueda 2024.

⁵⁸ Ochiai 1989.

⁵⁹ Ueda 2024.

⁶⁰ Ochiai 2014, World Economic Forum 2022.

dietary (familistic) norms and actual practices.⁶¹ Partly due to his sociological naivety, Ishige's view of cooking and conviviality as human nature was in a dangerous relationship with the anachronistic social discourse of the same period.

Finally, the post-war development of the food industry was the other factor that supported the institutionalisation of food culture studies. As mentioned in the background paper regarding the Japanese dietary pattern, in the 1970s, agricultural policy was required to expand its scope to include food industry policy that can respond well to the increase in the use of processed foods and out-of-home eating.⁶² Since the 1980s, the Japanese food system has been increasingly integrated into the global free trade system, thus compelling the Japanese food industry to increase its international competitiveness by obtaining in-depth insights about food cultures in its potential markets (mostly in Asia). In this context, food companies shared a mutual interest with food culture scholars. For example, Ishige's research on East Asia received support from food companies eager to expand overseas, including Ajinomoto, Nissin (Chinese noodle culture), and Calpis (dairy culture). Ishige's success in drawing out this economic capital laid the foundations for the subsequent development of food culture studies in Japan.⁶³

Expanded institutionalisation in Asia

Although this paper focuses primarily on Japan, I shall also briefly overview the institutionalisation of food culture studies in neighbouring East Asian countries. In South Korea, pioneering research was conducted by researchers in home economics and agronomy as early as the 1970s, but it is Lee Seung-Woo (1928–1992) who, as highlighted by Cho, “has played an important role in understanding Korean food culture in East Asia.”⁶⁴ Lee's interaction with Ishige at a joint symposium in 1981 (the output of which was published as *East Asian Food Cultures*) as a Korean representative was the background to this thematisation. Lee established the Korean Food Culture Society in 1984 and the East Asian Food Culture Society in 1991, establishing the foundation for food culture studies in South Korea.

In China, food culture research was impossible during the turbulent period from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 until the end of the 1970s during the Cultural Revolution, and Chinese food culture studies progressed mainly in Japan. As mentioned above, the leading figure in this field was Shinoda Osamu, who had an enormous influence on Ishige's research into East Asian food culture. From the late 1970s, Chinese food culture studies also emerged in the West, based on the legacy of Shinoda and other pioneers.⁶⁵

From the 1980s, Zhao Rong-Guang (1948–) finally enabled the institutionalisation of food culture studies within China. Zhao began lecturing on food culture in affiliated universities in the 1980s, and in 1997 he founded the China Food Culture Research Institute, producing a large number of books and journals. Furthermore, the Asian Food Study Conference was established in 2011, with the China Food Culture Research Institute as the main player, and since then it has played a unique role as a platform for food culture researchers based in Asia. In this institutionalisation process, Zhao has retained close ties with Ishige, and the two pioneers have had mutual influence.⁶⁶

In Taiwan, Taiwanese history studies were long discouraged under the governance of the Chinese Nationalist Party. During this period, some historians and economists researched food cultures in Taiwan, but their focus was limited to the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945). It was not until

⁶¹Ueda 2022a, 2023, 2024.

⁶²Agricultural Policy Council 1980.

⁶³For example, Ajinomoto, the largest funder that has supported food culture studies from the very beginning, has expanded the Asian market, and as of 2024, its business profit from Asia (46.2%) currently exceeds that of Japan (41.3%) (https://www.ajinomoto.co.jp/company/jp/ir/financial/ifrs_segment.html).

⁶⁴Cho 2015, p. 67.

⁶⁵Chang 1977.

⁶⁶Zhao 2015.

democratisation in the late 1980s that food culture studies in Taiwan were officially initiated. Sanshō, a major food company in Taiwan, established the Foundation of Chinese Dietary Culture in 1989. The Foundation has edited the scholarly journal *Chinese Dietary Culture* since 2005, and this journal has become a crucial platform for both domestic and international scholars of Taiwanese food culture. Nevertheless, the institutionalisation of food culture studies in Taiwan has experienced more of a delay than in other East Asian countries.⁶⁷

Ishige's food philosophy

The food philosophies behind processing and incorporation were always a central question in East Asian food culture studies.⁶⁸ However, it is now clear that Ishige did not conduct an extensive study of this philosophical aspect. Food has long been excluded from the philosophical realm, but, some Western philosophers have recently pioneered approaching food as a legitimate philosophical topic.⁶⁹ Although the equivalent discipline has yet to take form in Japan, in the meantime it would be worthwhile to explore the food philosophy of Ishige himself, who spent many years engaging in food culture studies in Japan and other parts of Asia.

In exploring Ishige's food philosophy, special attention needs to be paid to his monograph, *Food Civilisation*, published in 1982, which presented Ishige's distinctive food philosophy. As he remarked, "The book is about my current thoughts on food [...] I focus on philosophical matters rather than specific foods."⁷⁰ Although the monograph was first published before he had conducted an extensive study of Asian food cultures, Ishige did not feel the need to revise it until the latter period of his career because his argument was based on a macroscopic view of civilisation.⁷¹ Interestingly, little attention has been paid to this monograph, and it thus awaits critical evaluation.

The monograph has a broad range of themes, ranging from rice-based meal patterns (Chapter 1) to the pleasure of eating (Ch. 2), conviviality (Ch. 3), religions (Ch. 4), the medical and nutritional sciences (Ch. 5), the "democratisation" of food cultures (Ch. 6), table manners (Ch. 7), the evolution of eating (Ch. 8), and family meals (Ch. 9). Thus, *Food Civilisation* can be viewed as a summary of (or a research proposal for) his extensive works.

It must be noted that Ishige's use of the term "food philosophy" is not exactly equivalent to the way the term is used in the philosophical literature.⁷² Rather, *Food Civilisation* is about his philosophy of food civilisation, but it is also about food modernisation. Although this article has confirmed the former feature by examining his series of studies on food culture, in *Food Civilisation*, Ishige provides self-criticism regarding the food civilisation-based approach (Ch. 8):

Before modernisation, the world can be categorized into several civilisations with unique characters. However, modern civilization [...] has transcended the existing categories of great civilisations and now encompassed all cultures of the world. Today, it seems meaningless to speak of civilisations in terms of their places of origin, such as Western civilisation or European and American civilisation, and we must call it world civilisation.⁷³

In effect, Ishige is dismissing Umehao's comparative civilisation theory as meaningless when it comes to analysing modern societies. However, does this criticism also apply to Ishige's theory of food civilisation?

⁶⁷Recently, a complete modern food history of Taiwan, with a particular focus on the emergence of a Taiwanese national cuisine, was published. See Chen 2020.

⁶⁸Ishige 1981, 1985.

⁶⁹Korsmeyer 2002; Sweeney 2018.

⁷⁰Ishige 1982, pp. 11–12.

⁷¹Ishige 2016, p. 188.

⁷²Korsmeyer 2002; Sweeney 2018.

⁷³Ishige 2016, p. 146.

Of the three basic needs – food, clothing, and shelter – Western clothing has spread all over the world, and concrete buildings with similar appearances have been constructed in cities worldwide. However, food has retained a strong cultural uniqueness. [...] Food and cooking are conservative in maintaining their cultural distinctiveness, and tastes ingrained in us during childhood resist change and often evolve slowly over generations. On the other hand, human behaviours not tied to specific ingredients – such as using knives, forks, and spoons on the table and the practice of eating three meals a day – are more likely to adopt the foreign civilisations.⁷⁴

Ishige further supports his argument for the conservative nature of food cultures by highlighting the Japanese rice-based meal pattern: despite modern Japan's eagerness to embrace foreign food cultures, "foreign dishes can be integrated stably only if their association with rice is established."⁷⁵

In this way, although being aware of the general constraint inherent in civilisational approaches, Ishige views its true potential as lying specifically in the analysis of food cultures. Ishige has applied the term "detour" to his approach to food culture studies in order to highlight the ambiguity of his stance.

My work will receive criticism for its near ignorance of contemporary global food issues. I need to endure such criticism, because of my limited expertise, say, in economics and agronomy, to analyse these food problems [...] However, it is also true that these contemporary issues cannot be solved without historical and civilisational insights [...] it is in this detour manner that my work can make some contribution.⁷⁶

It is also important to investigate how Ishige understood food modernisation. In his monograph, he recorded a multitude of dietary changes since the modernisation of Japan, such as the prevalence of eating three meals a day, eating out, eating together with family members, and the Westernisation of dish components. Ishige's observation of food modernisation could be regarded as the updated, post-war version of that of Kunio Yanagita's, the founder of folklore studies in Japan. Yanagita was the first scholar to offer a comprehensive examination of emerging modern diets in Japan.⁷⁷ Among various features of Ishige's monograph, I focus on the three modern dimensions of Ishige's analysis.

Family and conviviality

As outlined above, family and conviviality are two of the recurring themes in Ishige's food philosophy (Chs. 3 and 9). He confirms the origins of family and conviviality first by mobilising primatological and anthropological evidence. According to the evolutionary theory of Imanishi, Umesao's mentor, when humanity's ancestors became carnivorous, males became hunters, and a new relationship was established in which they shared prey with specific females and their children, which led to the breakdown of social units from herds into family.⁷⁸

Furthermore, anthropological studies comparing the activities of hunter-gatherers around the world, studies which Ishige himself was also involved in, have made it clear that all tribes more or less share a lifestyle based on the gender-based division of labour, with men hunting and women gathering plant-based foods and engaging in childcare and housework. From this evidence, Ishige derives the universal thesis that "[h]umans are animals that eat together. Family is the most basic unit of human groups that eat together and share food."⁷⁹

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 149–51.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 170.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁷Yanagita 1931.

⁷⁸Imanishi 1966.

⁷⁹Ishige 2016, p. 61.

After applying his civilisational view over a long time span, Ishige witnesses the eventual individualisation of eating. In the 1980s in Japan, during the country's late stage of economic growth, mealtimes, and meal contents became increasingly individualised, a trend accelerated by the development of restaurants and food industries. This social change led to what is often called the “collapse” of the family, which was originally the unit for distributing food. Ishige's assessment of this social phenomenon is neutral: he is neither a restorationist who insists on a return to the traditional family nor a liberal who unconditionally defends individualisation. Rather, his approach is one of conservatism grounded in his civilisation-based understanding of dietary evolution.

Meals at home, the most crucial space for human relationships, will continue to exist despite, or perhaps because of, the outsourcing of family functions and the growth of the restaurant industry. [...] Family used to be defined as a group of members who eat together and share food; now, however, eating together has become the act of sustaining the family. [...] In our modern society, the family as an institution exists as fiction. Nevertheless, it is our humanity, which distinguishes us from animal behaviours, that allows us to sacrifice ourselves for this fiction.⁸⁰

As mentioned above, in the 1980s, when he first wrote this monograph, familistic food discourse was dominant in Japan, moralistically judging the family (particularly women) for its weakened role in preparing meals at home.⁸¹ Against this backdrop, Ishige was one of the rare intellectuals providing a careful evaluation of the individualisation of contemporary eating.

Nevertheless, due to his sociological naivety, Ishige's universal thesis of family and conviviality was in a dangerous juxtaposition to this familistic ideology. More importantly, family sociologists and historians of the Annales School have opposed such a universal view of convivial eating with family members. In Japan, it was not until the post-war period (1950–1970s) that this practice was standardised and became a dominant social imaginary.⁸² Despite his view being a balanced one in the context of his time period, Ishige's objectification of food modernity was half-complete.

Food inequalities

Another consistent approach throughout *Food Civilisation* is Ishige's critical observation of inequalities in contemporary eating (Chs. 2 and 6). This observation began with his concept of the “democratisation of food.” Ishige defined this concept as referring to “a society in which there are no significant social disparities in the distribution of food quantities and types, in which, except for the finest cuisine, the general public can enjoy the taste of food prepared by professional chefs when dining out, and in which there is no unequal distribution of dietary information.”⁸³

Economic research also supported Ishige's observation that the 1980s was exactly the period when, as result of rapid economic growth, income disparities regarding purchased food disappeared due to increased purchasing power and the development of the current food system.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Ishige did not praise the democratisation of food unconditionally:

Class disparities regarding food have disappeared within Japanese society, but the international inequalities still remain large. The democratisation of food has been achieved by gathering food from starving countries of the world.⁸⁵

Having said that, I do not consider increasing food self-sufficiency to be the fundamental solution. [...] If Japan were to achieve self-sufficient by halting food imports, it would have a

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 181–82.

⁸¹Ochiai 1989, 2014; Ueda 2024.

⁸²Ueda 2024.

⁸³Ishige 2016, p. 113.

⁸⁴Tokoyama 1990.

⁸⁵Ishige 2016, p. 52.

ripple effect on the world economy, potentially causing a recession and exacerbating starvation in already vulnerable countries.⁸⁶

As we can see from Ishige's words, the dominant discourse on Japan's food policy in the 1980s was to increase food self-sufficiency. However, Ishige disagreed with this idea, which he viewed as simplistic, and advocated for understanding the complex interrelationships between food cultures under the umbrella of globalised food systems. In other words, Ishige pursued solutions to cope with the rapid acceleration of food modernisation and its side effects, rather than attempting to reverse it.

However, it is worth mentioning some limitations regarding Ishige's view of food-related inequalities. First, the disappearance of food inequalities in material aspects has concurrently led to inequalities in non-material aspects of food, such as the opportunity to eat together as a family or to eat out in restaurants. In sociological terms, Ishige was not aware of "relative deprivation," which refers to the lack of freedom to lead a lifestyle that is deemed normal in a given society.⁸⁷ Second, there are various forms of food inequalities other than economic inequality. As Ishige himself mentions several times in *Food Civilisation*, the existence of housewives is a typical example of gender inequality in relation to the burden of preparing family meals. Third, these multi-faceted inequalities have expanded in Japan since the 1980s, and various social indicators highlight Japan's detrimental situation, including its possessing the largest gender gap and the highest rate of relative poverty among high-income countries.⁸⁸ It is unfortunate that in the 2016 revised version of *Food Civilisation*, by which time such inequality issues were evident, Ishige did not address them.

Nutrition philosophy

The democratisation of food simultaneously raises issues regarding the pleasure of eating as a national interest, a topic closely tied to nutritional sciences, which is the third recurring theme in this monograph (Chs. 4 and 5). A similar, more detailed discussion can be found in Ishige's two articles in *Food Philosophy and Eating Behaviour* (as part of the *Food Culture Series*): one on the philosophy of the pleasure of eating and one on the philosophy of nutrition.⁸⁹

Ishige provides an overview of several world religions (including Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam), observing that "all of the world religions that have influenced civilisation have been negative toward the pursuit of alimentary pleasure."⁹⁰ In contrast, he continues, in modern society, "what most effectively regulates people's pursuit of the pleasure of eating is medicine, physiology, and nutrition."⁹¹ However, Ishige critiques the nutritional sciences as having "forgotten the brain":

We do not choose nutrients, but food and dishes. What determine whether to incorporate a certain food into the digestive system are sociocultural factors and personal preferences, rather than nutritional choices. [...] These sociocultural food choices and singles from sensory organs are all processed in the human brain. [...] Nutrient-centred nutritional sciences have forgotten the role of the brain. [...] What drives eating behaviours is not nutrition but food cultures.⁹²

In sociological terminology, the reductionist nature of nutritional sciences, criticised by Ishige in *Food Civilisation*, is known as "nutritionism."⁹³ Ishige's practice of food culture studies can be viewed as a

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 117.

⁸⁷Townsend 1979.

⁸⁸World Economic Forum 2022, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2022.

⁸⁹Ishige 1998a, 1998b.

⁹⁰Ishige 2016, p. 84.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 101.

⁹²Ishige 1998b, pp. 192, 205

⁹³Scrinis 2008.

reaction to the nutritionistic leanings of contemporary food discourse. If so, this raises questions regarding how different civilisations and cultures have responded to the pleasure of food.

In Europe, the hedonistic Latin civilisation is contrasted with the ascetic Northwest European civilisation. [...] In terms of ideological aspects, these two civilisations roughly correspond to hedonistic Catholicism and ascetic Protestantism.⁹⁴

In East Asia, when comparing China and Japan historically, China was hedonistic and Japan was ascetic. In the *Analects*, Confucius made various statements about cooking and food from a hedonistic perspective. Mencius also acknowledged that ‘appetite and lust are human nature’, and mainstream Chinese thought has openly affirmed the pleasure of eating since ancient times. [...] Historically, Japan has made relatively few comments about food as a society. Influenced by the moral code of the samurai of the Edo period, an ascetic view of food, in which it was considered indecent for men to criticise food, was dominant in Japan until recently. In the making of Japan as a modern nation-state, the Meiji government standardised samurai ethics as a national culture.⁹⁵

According to Ishige, nutrition as a “national science”⁹⁶ contributed greatly to the creation of national culture, and this national asceticism towards food was born as a compromised product of samurai morality and nutritional sciences. He went on to highlight the problem that such asceticism is still at the root of contemporary nutritional sciences and Japanese food culture, even in the modern era in which the pleasure of food has been democratised.

Ishige’s critical view of nutritionism and his perspective of food civilisations and cultures as playing a role in the reconstruction of food ethics has broad implications. Nevertheless, his argument contains some simplification and optimism. First, under the apparent hedonistic outlook, the Latin civilisation also attached great importance to the moderation of any corporeal pleasure.⁹⁷ Second, Confucius’ and Mencius’ positive attitudes towards food were also conditional because their main argument about food was regarding the importance of *li* 礼 (proper conduct) and *bu ren ren zhi xin* 不忍人之心 (the heart of not bearing the sufferings of others; in this case, the killing of animals).⁹⁸ Third, in the case of Zen philosophy and its associated tea ceremony culture in Japan, the apparent asceticism of these phenomena conceals the fundamental inner pursuit of pleasure. This challenges the analytical potential of the hedonism–asceticism dichotomy, as current research in the sociology of food aims to appraise the multi-dimensionality of alimentary pleasure.⁹⁹

In summary, Ishige’s food philosophy was to objectify food modernisation. His long-term civilisational perspective brought an important insight to the social debate while carefully distancing himself from the dominant familistic and nationalistic discourse of his time. However, as we have confirmed in this article through the themes of conviviality, inequality, and nutritional philosophy, there were limitations in thoroughly objectifying food modernisation, partly constrained by the disciplinary structure of food culture studies, which lacked certain humanities and social sciences.

Conclusion

This article focuses on Naomichi Ishige and traces his three contributions to Asian food culture research in Japan. First, he pioneered Asian food culture research and highlighted common identities among different East Asian food cultures, such as rice culture and *umami* culture. This discovery established today’s knowledge of the topic and served as the most fundamental reference point for agri-food experts.

⁹⁴Ishige 1998a, p. 95.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 94–95.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 102.

⁹⁷Korsmeyer 2002; Sweeney 2018.

⁹⁸Nakajima 2022.

⁹⁹Dupuy 2013.

Second, he provided an impetus for institutionalising food culture studies in Japan and, to a partial extent, neighbouring East Asian countries such as South Korea and China. However, it is important to note that this was not Ishige's achievement alone – there were also prerequisite social conditions, such as the globalisation of the food system and the collapse of the modern family system, that made the development of food culture studies possible. In this sense, food culture studies in Japan and Asia were a kind of counter-movement against the side effects of rapid food modernisation since the 1970s.

Third, most of Ishige's empirical studies about Asian food culture focused on pre-modern issues (the origin and dissemination of specific foods), but Ishige's food philosophy itself was targeted at food modernisation. Just as Kunio Yanagita observed the genesis of new dietary habits during the beginning of modernisation, Ishige carefully recorded modern changes in eating habits, especially during the post-war period, while carefully distancing himself from the familistic, nutritionistic, and nationalistic discourse that became more common from the 1980s onwards. Since the 2000s, new food discourses have emerged in Japan, such as food education and *washoku*, but they still retain the same ideological nature as in the previous period.¹⁰⁰ Given this situation, it can be concluded that the potential of food culture studies came to fruition in Ishige's food philosophy, which offered a civilisational perspective enabling the balanced evaluation of dietary evolution.

Finally, how can we articulate Ishige's contributions from the perspective of Asianisation or the universalisation of Asian studies? Food culture studies consist of self-conscious scholarly activities that aim to explore unique Asian dietary knowledge and identities. As such, food culture studies clearly embody the spirit of the Asianisation of Asian studies. It must be noted that in Japan, the term "Asianisation" also has a contextual meaning. "Asian studies" was previously the label applied to research regarding Asian countries excluding Japan, but in recent years, the need to break away from this traditional view and analyse "Japan in Asia" has gradually been recognised.¹⁰¹ In this regard, Ishige's determination to clarify Japan's place in Asia through the lens of food cultures in the early 1970s anticipated this direction and has implications that are still relevant today.

However, apart from Ishige's early research, food culture research exploring Japan within Asia has not dramatically developed since then. Most food culture research in Japan has continued to be primarily targeted at the histories of specific food items; Ishige initially aimed to overcome this limitation. Theoretically, the Asianisation of Asian studies also requires a shift from a Western-centric view of modernity to a pluralistic view of the modernities unique to each region, or to a reflexive modernity if the scope of analysis consists of the period since the 1970s, during which modern assumptions have been increasingly challenged.¹⁰² Asia's current period of "compressed modernity" has broad implications for testing such pluralistic views of modernisation.¹⁰³

Therefore, it is important that future studies of food culture analyse the reflexive food modernities currently facing Asia. To this end, true interdisciplinarity needs to be established between food culture studies and previously marginalised disciplines such as sociology and economics – fields that have led the discussion of compressed modernity – as well as food philosophy and ethics, which have only recently begun to gain popularity. To identify universal implications from Asian food cultures would be a difficult task, but nevertheless, we need to continue our efforts to universalise Asian logics.¹⁰⁴ Despite its drawbacks, Ishige's portrayal of the parallel evolution of Western European and East Asian food cultures, namely rice culture and wheat culture, was an example of such an effort. It is therefore essential to continue the development of the universalisation of Asian food culture research that Ishige originally aimed for.

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¹⁰⁰Ueda 2022b.

¹⁰¹Sato and Sonoda 2021.

¹⁰²Giddens 1990; Beck 1992.

¹⁰³Chang 2016

¹⁰⁴Jullien 2014; Nakajima 2022.

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