

How the Japanese Style Diet was Formed, a Cultural Analysis

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Summary

In Japan, our prehistoric ancestors lived as hunters-and gathers until the end of the Jomon period when rice cultivation was introduced from mainland China and spread across the nation. Since then, various foods have entered from the Continent, along with learning, religion and lifestyle. They were blended into the Japanese culture and have resulted in a unique diet, featuring a staple food (steamed rice) with numerous side dishes, typically including a soup. This Japanese style meal easily assimilates foreign cuisine as side dishes. Coastal and inshore fisheries have brought seafood to the Japanese diet and methods of processing and preserving have developed over time. While animal meat was prohibited for one thousand years due to religious precepts and other reasons, our ancestors survived the period by making major recourse to seafood as a source of protein. Continuing to this day, there has been a continuous inflow of foreign foods from the Continent, Europe, and America, which has translated into a wide variety of food on our tables. The idea of having a staple food and side dishes, however, remains unchanged. Perhaps this is a reason why Japanese people have the highest life expectancy in the world. Today's globalization is bringing even a wider variety of foods from all over the world. To maintain a healthy lifestyle, however, I believe that we should continue with the traditional Japanese menu, which is high in carbohydrates, with rice as the staple food and dishes containing large amounts of seafood.