

Taste of Civilization: The Acceptance of Beef Appeared in *Aguranabe* in the Early Meiji Era*

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Introduction – Why *Aguranabe*?

In the early Meiji period, the Japanese government implemented strong reforms aimed at strengthening military power as well as economic development to imitate the advanced systems of Europe and the United States. This movement to introduce modern Western culture is termed “civilization” and has had a great influence on the daily lives of the Japanese.¹ However, in order to establish such a contemporary society, it is necessary to cultivate a social order that is suitable, along with an “individual body” that plays a leading role in the society. For this reason, the Meiji government actively and systematically intervened in the diet of its citizens to establish a modern food culture by utilizing advanced Western studies such as nutrition, public health, biology, and the theory of social evolution.² Therefore, the adoption of a modern food culture was a very important matter in the modernization process of Japan, and in particular, it is essential in understanding Japanese modern society.

The Edo military government which was inherited by the Meiji government was a feudal hierarchical society, in which the shogun 將軍 of the military government and each lord of a “Han 藩,” a type of manor, were held at the top of the hierarchy, and those that followed were classified as samurai, farmers, artisans or tradesmen (士農工商). In this class system, individual freedom was not allowed, and an individual’s ability and personality were not respected. Therefore, in such a society,

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¹ Ayu Majima, “Eating Meat, Seeking Modernity: Food and Imperialism in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Japan,” *ICU Comparative Culture* 34 (2002), 111.

² See, Kim Sung-Hee, “Research on Western-style acceptance methods in modern Japan- Focusing on military diet regulations, standard food, and national health food- 근대일본의 서양식 수용방식 연구-병식규정·표준식료·국민보건식을 중심으로” (Ph.D. Thesis at Hanyang University, 2015), 1-5.

it was crucial to conform to social order rather than individual desires. The feudal class system was a device to maintain this social order.³ In feudal society, there was discrimination against language, food, shelter, and occupation according to class status. Therefore, with the exception of the ruling class, the other classes, especially that of the “peasant,” were forced to live in accordance with the social order, regardless of their ability, personality, preference, or poverty level.⁴

The Meiji government attempted to dismantle this feudal society and establish a new order. The dilemma of introducing meat into the culture was a central aspect of this institutional reform. The Meiji government encouraged its people to eat meat as an important policy in introducing a modern food culture, which centered around beef. However, as stated prior, it was not easy to cook and eat beef in ordinary households because Japanese society had a taboo and aversion to meat for about 1,200 years under Emperor Tenmu’s “Meat Ban Order” in 675. Therefore, not only the government but also enlightened intellectuals such as Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 took an active lead in promoting meat eating. The meat eating campaign was conducted in two stages. The first stage was to remove taboos related to meat and the other was to spread culinary knowledge about meat. Enlightened intellectuals emphasized that meat is a nourishing food which improves vitality, and exhorted the people to consume milk and meat to be able to compete with Westerners. However, introducing western meat recipes was not as easy as they hoped. As seen in Fukuzawa’s *Western Food, Clothing and Shelter* 西洋衣食住 (1867), it was necessary to explain the concept of a knife and fork to cut meat, never mind a recipe.

During this time, there was a certain author who wrote about meat recipes along with ordinary dining out experiences. His name was Kanagaki Robun 仮名垣魯文 (1829-1894), whose original name was Nozaki Bunzo (from here forth I will mention him as Robun). Born as a son of a fishmonger in the Edo Era, Robun became an apprentice clerk at a large store, but after hearing that he could become a great novelist, he participated in writing classes such as haiku and rakugo. He wrote the *Western Cookbook* 西洋料理通 (1872), *Seiyodochuhizakurige* 西洋道中膝栗毛 (1870-1876), which depicted his departure for the London Fair, and *Aguranabe* 安愚楽鍋, which depicted the dining out scene of ordinary people. In addition, he is known for his various activities, which included publishing newspapers which dealt with topics such as gossip about the theatrical world, entertainment, and social issues. In particular, *Ushiya Zatsudan Aguranabe* 牛店雑談 安愚楽鍋 (known as *Aguranabe* since), is a significant work which had its first and second pieces published in 1871 and its third piece in 1872.⁵ *Aguranabe* is composed of twenty-four pieces in total

³ Murakami Junichi 村上淳一, *History of the Law* 法の歴史 (University of Tokyo Press 東京大学出版, 1998), 14-15.

⁴ Kodama Shinta 児玉幸田, *History of Modern Rural Life* 近世農村生活史 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Koubunkan 吉川弘文館, 1957), 201.

⁵ Kanagaki Robun 仮名垣魯文 (1872-3), *Ushiya Zatsudan Aguranabe* 牛屋雑談 安愚楽鍋 in *A Collection of literature during the Meiji Era (1)* 明治開化期文学集(1) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo 筑摩

and details the dining out scene of the time by drawing from the conversation of guests and examining how they ate beef. Although the literary content is not of high quality because this work does not evaluate the psychology of the patrons,⁶ it is nonetheless a very valuable material in cultural history that documents society in the early Meiji period.⁷ From this perspective, it can be observed that the beginnings of the modern Japanese period grew out of the enlightened Meiji period, well documented in the beef hot pot restaurant experiences in *Aguranabe*.⁸

However, the point of view of this research essay should be discussed. Previous studies have attempted to analyze this subject from the perspective of the ‘acceptance of meat’ in society. In other words, previous studies commonly reference that “Kegare 穢れ”⁹ was an obstacle to the acceptance of beef and that the government tried to solve this predicament by promoting it from the perspective of “Western civilization.” The analysis from this point of view is very meaningful, but this alone is insufficient in discussing the value of the work *Aguranabe*.

What then is the solution to the problem caused by such a research method? There are likely varying opinions on this point, but it is more important to understand the positions of the individuals during that period and the resulting changes in society. Undoubtedly, the method utilized in this study has the following limitations. It is difficult to fully grasp how individual consciousness, when in relation to food, changes form and direction in society. This is due to the fact that the act of eating food belongs to a very private area, and in some cases, appears as a complex social phenomenon. Simply speaking, people have different subjective experiences depending on the kind of food they eat, when, where, and with whom. In addition, there is no clear objective conclusion when observing these situations. Therefore, it is highly difficult to capture the individual’s subject experiences of this phenomena. However, some may agree that the subjective experiences of individuals when consuming food and the objective reality of observing others consuming food resonate with one another in forming a new social order. Yet in the case of previous

書房, 1960).

⁶ Go Young-Ran, “*Aguranabe* and its temperament-consideration of personality type 『安愚楽鍋』と気質物—人物像の類型性に関する考察—,” *The Japan Studies* 日本研究 9 (2008), 148.

⁷ Yanagida Izumi 柳田泉, “Part of the Meiji New Government's Bungei Policy 明治新政府文藝政策の一端,” in Waseda University’s Research on Humanities and Science 人文科学研究 所 ed., *A Collection of literature during the Meiji Era* 明治開化期文学集(1) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo 筑摩書房, 1966), 401.

⁸ The first beef hot pot restaurant in Japan is known as Isekuma 伊勢熊, which opened in Yokohama in 1862. It was cooked with deer and boar in soybean paste soup using nabe, but as beef was recommended, they were replaced with beef, and these beef hotpot restaurants were in charge of accommodating Western dishes (beef) by ordinary people instead of expensive Western restaurants.

⁹ “Kegare” is unclean conditions that seem abhorrent; caused by death, plague, sexual intercourse, etc., believed to cause abnormalities in the community and avoided. Referred from Sansheido, *Daijirin Dictionary* 三省堂 大辞林, <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%A9%A2%E3%82%8C>.

studies, they failed to analyze the above theory. That is, previous studies overlooked that *Aguranabe* dealt with ‘the social change’ that appeared in the process of the acceptance of “meat food” in the Early Meiji Era.

In *Aguranabe*, individuals with various professions appear in the work without discrimination between men and women of all ages as well as the lack of importance given to the four classes; that is, samurai, farmers, artisans and tradesmen. In the limited space of a beef hot pot restaurant, those individuals discussed their social interests as well as the new food, beef. This phenomenon was a rare scene in the Edo period. Social culture was different depending on the status of people in the rigid Edo period. Therefore, the changes in people’s social interests and the culture of eating beef can be seen as a very meaningful phenomenon. The recognition of the ‘individual’ in the modern sense had begun to materialize.

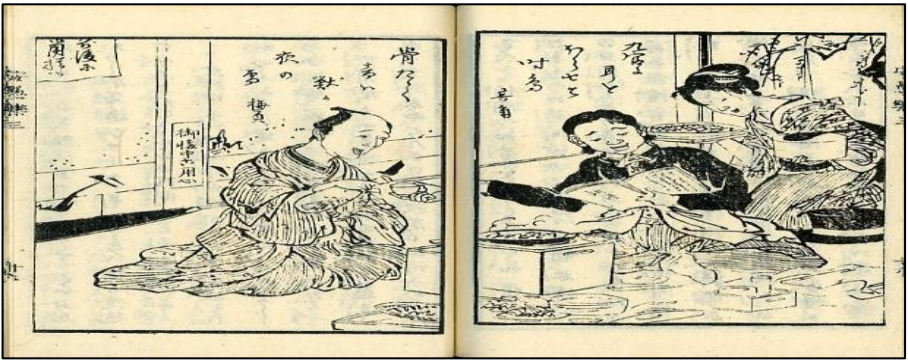


Figure 1. Scenes appearing in *Aguranabe*, 165.

The emergence of a new dining space and form of communication

(1) The Meiji Society examined through the characters

In *Aguranabe*, we can witness scenes of customers from various classes appearing and talking over a beef hot pot.¹⁰ Their occupation, their way of eating beef, and the topics of conversation are summarized as follows;¹¹

¹⁰ The first and second part of this work was published in 1871 and the third in 1872, each part consisting of six chapters, a total of 18 chapters.

¹¹ The table above was prepared by referring to Jian Xiao Yu 簡孝羽's thesis. Jian Xiao Yu, “Various Aspects of Acceptance of Beef in Modern Japan-Chiefly on Kanagaki Robun’s *Aguranabe*-日本近代における牛肉受容の諸相―仮名垣魯分の『安愚楽鍋』を中心に―” (Master Thesis at National Chengchi University, 2015), 100-110. Jian Xiao Yu introduces in detail the appearance and

Table 1. The seven characters in *Aguranabe* (the first piece)

	Gender (age), the number of people	The way of eating beef	The topics of conversation
A man without a job (a man who likes the West)	Male (34-5 years old), one person	Boiled with green onions	They said, "We are grateful that we can eat precious beef, which was only eaten by kings and nobles in the West in the past, thanks to civilization. Those who say that eating beef is a nuisance to God are people who don't know the reason for things." They also said, "The West uses various technologies of things to make steam trucks, telegraphs, and steamboats and use them in daily life."
A comic storyteller	Male (24-5 years old), one person	Boiled with green onions	It was a story about one's visit to a prostitute.
A samurai	Male (about 30 years old), one person	Boiled with green onions	They praised beef as not only a delicious food but also a nutritious one, which was suitable for the age of enlightenment.
An unskilled geisha	Male (32-3 years old), one person	Boiled with green onions	It was about an errand at the request of the brothel's owner.
Lowly carpenters	Male (about 40 years old), two people	Boiled with green onions	The carpenter talked to his colleague about how different he was from his boss in terms of status and economic power.
A popular painter	Male (31-2 years old), one person	Boiled with green onions	He said that since he has a busy day, he prefers a beef hot pot restaurant, where he can drink calmly, to a noisy grilled eel restaurant.

belongings of each character, as well as the recipes and eating methods of beef (including alcohol) introduced in the illustration.

Table 2. The nine characters in *Aguranabe* (the second piece, the first/second part)

	Gender (age), the number of people	The way of eating beef	The topics of conversation
Prostitutes	Female (24–5 years old), two people	A beef hot pot with wasabi soy sauce or sancho sauce with green onion cut in the sashimi style	In front of the beef hot pot two women, beside a sliding door, talked about how they were badly treated by customers.
An unemployed person	Male (34–5 years old), one person	Boiled with green onions	In front of the beef hot pot, a man said that commercial law became a priority in society, leaving old fashioned men behind.
Geishas	Male and female (28-9 years old), two people	Boiled porridge with carrots, cooked beef hot pot with green onions and carrots, eaten with Sancho sauce, and ordered with Tsugemono alongside	The woman praised not only the hot pot but also the porridge made of beef and carrots, saying that if you don't eat beef for three days, you won't feel well.
Self- employed	Male (about 40 years old), one person	Sukiyaki	It was about Rakugo.
A rickshaw puller	Man (unknown age), one person	Beef hot pot	He said yesterday was a very difficult day.
A samurai and merchant	Male (about 40 years old), two people	Beef hot pot	The samurai suffered from a serious disease and came to eat at the recommendation of a Western doctor. The merchant also said that he could not forget the taste because they ate beef thanks to civilization and enlightenment. They agreed that although there is a difference in status, they should actively study Western culture. They also talked about the nutritional content of beef and the cow epidemic.

Table 3. The ten characters in *Aguranabe* (the third piece, the first/second part)

	Gender (age), the number of people	The way of eating beef	The topics of conversation
Merchants	Male (31-2 years old), two people	Boiled and eaten	They said, “The maturity of the meat determines the taste (Fresh meat for beginners. Matured meat for regulars is delicious). The cow meat is tender.”
Entertainers	Men (unknown age), two people	Boiled and eaten	After he didn't go to the geisha house, he appreciated the efficacy of beef.
An oriental doctor	Male (about 50 years old), one person	Boiled and eaten	He realized that he was inferior to Western doctors, so he said that he should look for another job.
An entertainer for Rakugo	Male (22-3 years old), one person	Sukiyaki/Soboro minced and eaten	He said some of his colleagues were reluctant to eat meat, but finally, they had access to the hot pot restaurant.
Illegal prostitutes	Females (18-22 years old, about 50 years old), two people	Boiled and eaten	It was a conversation between a woman who ate meat before Westernization and a young woman who met her foreign husband and ate it with him.
Unemployed people	Men (unknown age), two people	Large cuts of fillet part, boiled with mirin and soy sauce	In addition to the contents of Western studies from childhood, newspapers are needed to broaden one's knowledge.

This work consists of eighteen scenes and features a total of twenty-six people, including their companions. What can be gathered from these people is that most of them were common people, such as rakugoists 落語家, country samurais 田舎武士, a male geisha 芸者 of no talent, carpenters, painters, rickshaw pullers, and prostitutes, revealing the intermingling of professional groups in the Meiji period. This is very telling, and it can be said that most of the customers who came to eat beef at that time were lower class people who were relatively free from the scrutinizing eyes of the public. It is likely that these were similar types of customers that frequented Momonjiya ももんじや, which sold deer or wild boar meat, the predecessor of the Gyunabe 牛鍋, which sold similar meat. The guests who attended these establishments were of similar disposition and status; particularly, those who went

to Momonjiya in Osaka were students or rogues, who were not conscious of the eyes around them, which could be seen in Fukuzawa's *Hukuonjiden* 福翁自伝.¹²

However, even though these types of customers were the norm, “change” was being emphasized at that time and thence the owners were forced to modify their businesses according to the current trends. As a result, new occupations also appeared. In that respect, we can discover several differences from the past. In summary of the tables above, the conversations the patrons shared consisted of eight people discussing beef, six people discussing the changing reality and sorrows of work, two people conversing about a brothel, two people deliberating about new cultural properties such as the telegraph, the equator, African people, and newspapers. Lastly, one person lamented upon their impoverished life.

Classifying the contents of the conversations are largely divided into two categories. The first category are the stories relaying past events up to the present time, and the second category are speculations about the future related to civilization and enlightenment. In other words, the tales about one's occupation or nightlife activities are connected to traditional lifestyles. Discussions regarding new cultural assets such as beef, telegraphs, and steam locomotives reflect a societal shift in thought regarding the future.

Therefore, the primary point of interest here is that it was not only intellectuals who practiced and drove the meat eating movement, but included the marginalized in society, such as the characters in *Aguranabe*. This is an issue that has been overlooked thus far in academia. The acceptance of beef, which the government recommended, did not begin with western food which included cooking utensils or recipes largely inaccessible to the general public, but with a beef hot pot, which was relatively easy to access. Beef could be easily added to the hot pot instead of the typical deer or wild boar. In addition, a beef hot pot offered a familiar atmosphere in which individuals could have casual conversations.

(2) The space to eat beef hot pots

First of all, a standardized cooking method does not appear in *Aguranabe*. Instead, in it you can find various cooking methods. Those include hot pot methods, raw fish styles, and dice-shaped cuts and grilling methods. A beef hot pot is a method of cooking beef inside of a hot pot, and according to the customer's request, the beef can be grilled or enjoyed with soy sauce or soybean paste. Moreover, *sukiyaki* is a *yakiniku* 焼肉-style dish that boils meat in a hot pot, indicating that it is a variant of a beef hot pot.¹³ Furthermore, it is believed by many that the beef hot pot was a

¹² This is an autobiography written in colloquial style in Fukuzawa Yukichi's later years.

¹³ Sakai Ken 坂井健, “What kind of pot was ‘Gyunabe’ - centered on *Aguranabe* 「牛鍋」はどんな鍋だったかー「安愚楽鍋」を中心にー,” *The Journal of Kyoto-Language Writing* 京都語文 9 (2002), 225.

Western food eaten by civilized people of the Meiji period. Nevertheless, excepting that beef was used as a food ingredient, it can be seen that all the methods of cooking and eating followed traditional Japanese cuisine.

The guests appearing in *Aguranabe* are divided into two categories: those who discreetly came alone and those who were accompanied with a dining companion. In addition, there are various reasons as to why the populace started to eat beef. In one case, “Kegare” consciousness naturally eroded, and in other cases, individuals ate beef according to the trend of the times and the recommendations from the people around them. Among those who were recommended to eat beef, most men say that they naturally came because of their doctor’s or colleagues’ recommendation. Moreover, all five female characters were active meat lovers, and two of them were described as having come into contact with foreigners. In particular, a foreign interpreter working at the Western Hall explained to one woman, “Meat is not unclean,” whereas the other woman who was a local wife of the British consul confessed that she had never been recommended by anyone to eat beef, but rather she voluntarily asked for it when she saw someone cooking it, and she began consuming beef herself. Nevertheless, a paper sliding door was located in the women’s seating area, shielding them from other men’s view and preventing them from openly consuming beef.

As such, *Aguranabe* describes the reality of the Meiji period, which is different from what most scholars have reported thus far. He first notable difference is that the public’s negative association of meat (=Kegare), especially of beef, in the early Meiji period was stronger than expected. As mentioned above, the abhorrence of beef was noticeable in the early Meiji period. The most crucial difference is that the underprivileged in society were the practical driving force behind the government’s meat-eating campaign, which was focused on supplying beef to the public at that time. Expressly, the public’s strong desire to eat meat was the basis for the acceptance of beef as a familiar food, veering away from the inbuilt disgust of meat handed down from generations prior.¹⁴

However, at the root of the public’s appetite is the element of “taste and nourishment.” Western admirers and country samurai, who appear in part one and three of the First Chapter, said, “Beef is so delicious that if it spreads, we would not eat deer or wild boars,” and “Why haven’t we eaten it so far?”¹⁵ and “It’s not only extremely delicious but it is also a food of enlightenment,” and “As we are now living in the enlightened era, we can eat it.”¹⁶ The Meiji era had slowly moved away from Kegare, which can be seen from the expositions in *Aguranabe*, which disproves that society at that time still regarded beef as a taboo.

¹⁴ Noma Mariko, “Analysis of Meat Acceptance Process in Modern Japan - street vendor, Gyunabe and Western Cuisine 近代日本における肉食受容過程の分析,” *The Journal of Agricultural History 農業史研究* 40 (2006), 85.

¹⁵ Robun, op. cit. 139.

¹⁶ Ibid, 141.

In spite of any remaining Kegare, the government, as well as the imperial family, who reigned as the traditional heirs, openly introduced the Western formal food culture to be an evangelist of enlightenment. According to *The Newspaper Magazine* 新聞雑誌, the emperor officially abolished the long-held meat taboo by giving a French dinner to Ministers on January 24, 1872. In addition, the Ministry of Finance established a cattle company to distribute the production of meat and dairy products, and imported seed bulls to lay the foundation for beef production. This industry contributed to job creation by allowing livestock farming or the opening of milk shops to the former samurai class who became unemployed due to the abolition of outdated administrative districts and the abolition of the salary system. Additionally, the revision of the Family Register Act 戸籍法 had provided an outcast class in feudal Japan, who could now become commoners with the opportunity to have a certified job related to livestock, including operating butcher shops.

In light of this trend, beef consumption proceeded in two different directions, the traditional nabe 鍋 cooking method and the Western style. *Aguranabe* introduced scenes of ordinary people eating beef in a traditional way, and Robun's *Western Cookbook* 西洋料理通(1872) and Keigakudo Shujin 経學堂主人's *A Guide Book for Western Food* 西洋料理指南 (1872) introduced western cuisine.¹⁷ They emphasized that in order to be regarded as equals with civilized countries in the wake of civilization and enlightenment, they needed to understand and adopt the Western diet. Robun's *Western Cookbook* consists of eight chapters: Chapter 1-soup, Chapter 2-fish, Chapter 3-soupy dish, Chapter 4-roasting dish, Chapter 5-cooking time and the amount of ingredients and spices needed for each dish, Chapter 6-cooking methods, Chapter 7-vegetable recipes, and Chapter 8-dessert recipes. Unlike previous cookbooks, which mainly centered around banquet foods, it recommended daily meals such as breakfast, lunch, and dinner, emphasizing the importance of each meal. Robun showed himself to be eager to introduce western food, which can be seen in his efforts to assist with the cooking process by listing the amount of food ingredients and cooking times.

However, as seen from *Aguranabe*, there were limited opportunities to obtain Western utensils and experiment with western cooking methods, and the people instead chose to accept beef into society by the traditional means of a "hot pot." In other words, ordinary citizens simply replaced wild pork or deer, which were familiar meats, with "beef" in the stew. The new hot pot bowls were also very similar to those previously used. In addition, *Aguranabe* revealed that people were eating beef by choosing established recipes such as thinly sliced raw meat like raw fish or diced beef. It can be seen that spices such as green onions and soybean paste were also included in the beef hot pot. Therefore, it is evident that the cooking and consuming method of beef presented by *Aguranabe* was implemented in a way that was simpler and more familiar than the Western style presented in the cooking books.

¹⁷ Keigakudo Shujin has been known only as a high-ranking official.

From “Kegare” to a Taste for Civilization

It is clear that beef hot pots are very meaningful in *Aguranabe*. As mentioned above, the common people’s sense of Kegare about meat was presumably still strong, and if they prepared dishes made of red beef chunks, there was likely considerable resistance. Therefore, at that time, the most important factor to consider in developing a menu was how to reduce this resistance.¹⁸ Thus, the food that was considered most suitable was the hot pot. The hot pot is a cooking instrument that was used in the Momonjiya establishment, and it has been widely known since the Edo period that it was boiled together with green onions and miso (Japanese soybean paste), alongside wild game such as boar and deer meat. In the Edo period, the Oumi region (now Shiga-Prefecture) was an area where visitors from Baekje 百濟 and Silla 新羅 settled and raised a good breed of cattle; furthermore wild pork was called “Botan” while beef was called “Black Botan.”

As mentioned prior, the beef hot pot that appeared in this work substituted wild boar or deer meat, which ordinary people were accustomed to, with beef. However, the main place where beef was consumed in this work was at a beef hot pot restaurant. The question can be asked as to *why* in that particular space. There are a number of reasons for this. Foremost, there was no environment for eating beef in the home at that time. The ban on consuming meat was lifted in the Meiji period, but in the early years, meat rarely appeared on the tables of ordinary people. Tetsu Okada, cited the following four factors:¹⁹ ① The pungent meat that had been shunned for nearly 1,200 years couldn’t be accepted so simply. ② Expensive Western dishes were hard to access. ③ The Western cooking style was unfamiliar. ④ They were afraid of being defiled by eating meat. Therefore, it is believed that in the early Meiji period, the tradition of Kegare and the acceptance of “civilization” and “nutrition” intersected in the act of eating beef. This can be seen in that the characters in *Aguranabe* ate beef despite the uncomfortable gaze of others.

The final reason was that there was no suitable space and kitchen utensils to cook beef. For these various reasons, a beef hot pot restaurant that the average person could easily access was popular. However, one noteworthy element to add is that the characters in Robun’s work did not eat beef together in a large open setting, but enjoyed meat alone or together in a closed space. This is deeply related to Okada’s Kegare influence. However, the subject of Kegare does not only concern beef. Cooking utensils, including pots used in the process of preparing food, were likewise the subjects of it. It was typically easier to use existing meat cooking utensils than to accept new ones. Thus, although the ban on meat was officially lifted, there was

¹⁸ Katarzyna Cwiertka カタジーナ・チフィエルトカ, “Acceptance of “Western” in Modern Japanese Food Culture 近代日本食文化における「西洋」の受容,” *The Journal of Japan Cooking Science Association* 日本調理科学会誌 28:1 (1995), 77.

¹⁹ Okada Tetsu 岡田哲, *The Birth of Pork Cutlet とんかつの誕生* (Tokyo: Kodansha 講談社, 2000), 38.

still a negative view surrounding meat consumption in the consciousness of the common people. That is why it was enjoyed secretly rather than in an exposed, external space.

From the above considerations, there are various phenomena related to the acceptance of beef in the early Meiji period, such as beef hot pot restaurants, the “hot pot” itself, and the private act of eating the beef hot pot alone or with one other companion. Those phenomena were mostly related to Kegare. In addition, women, who were more active in advocating for meat than men, were also depicted as eating beef wearing blindfolds.²⁰ This demonstrates that women had a stronger sense of Kegare than men. All of these people were admirers of beef, and a prime example of this is the story of a man who was 34-5 years old who was a Western admirer in *Aguranabe*’s work.

“Don’t you think beef is the most delicious food?” “If you eat this beef, you can’t eat wild boar or deer meat anymore.” “Why didn’t we eat clean food until now?” These were some of the quotes from the Western-loving commoner. In the West, people started to eat beef about 1,600 years ago, but in Japan, commoners could not eat beef if they were not noblemen like Karo 家老, Daimyo 大名’s minister of plenipotentiaries, because the king had supreme authority. For the man in this example, it was very advantageous that now he could eat meat in Japan because of civilization and enlightenment. Nevertheless, he continues by saying that those who have not yet been enlightened call it the custom of barbarians. He further explains that those kinds of people tell ridiculous stories that if they eat meat, they cannot gather their hands to the gods or the Buddha, and their bodies would be unclean. He(A man without a job) suggests that those men should read Fukuzawa’s “Meat-Eating Theory 肉食之説.”²¹ (emphasis added)

Fukuzawa’s Meat-Eating Theory, which the man mentioned, is a piece of propaganda written by Fukuzawa, taking advantage of his experience drinking milk and recovering when he had typhoid fever. It emphasizes that “beef or milk is not unclean, but beneficial for the body.” Fukuzawa’s opinion on meat was the official position of the government at the time, and Robun evokes Fukuzawa’s message through the man in the above example.

At first, the man in Robun’s example praises beef by simply asking if it is the most delicious food. He then explains that beef is a clean food and that it even eliminates the differences in status of the four classes. He insists that it is undignified to insist on using Kegare as an excuse, and that they should read Fukuzawa’s book and have a proper sense of civilization. What is interesting is that the Shinto 神道, which was pointed out as the epicenter of the bad custom, also agreed with Robun’s opinion through a new interpretation of “uncleanness.” In other words, uncleanness defines

²⁰ Robun, op. cit., 146.

²¹ Ibid., 149.

not touching excrement, decomposition and other rancid objects, as well as avoiding touching things that everyone hates because they are visibly disgusting. The Shintōists 神道家 said, “There is then no ‘uncleanness’ in food.”²²

This new interpretation defined meat to be related to “cleanness” and “uncleanness”, and those who rejected meat on the ground of “uncleanness” were considered as not enlightened.²³ Robun went one step further from Fukuzawa’s praise of meat by affirming the Geisha’s enlightened rhetoric that “If you don’t eat beef for three days, you won’t feel well.”²⁴ As such, beef had become a symbol of enlightenment and civilization, which circulated about in the population.

The Expansion of a Civilized Society

As mentioned earlier, the Meiji government made it a priority to break down the feudal order of the Edo period and establish a modern civilization. It is controversial whether the policy had been implemented as intended, but it is clear that their aim matched the core values of modern European civilizations and could not be conceded for any reason.

From the above point of view, each character’s perception and utterance of himself and society described in *Aguranabe* is sufficient to attract attention. If you look at this work you will find that almost all citizens of every age, (except children) regardless of occupation or gender talked about their social interests and life stories in the space of a beef hot pot restaurant. This is something that could not have been seen in a closed society, such as in the Edo period. In this period, the factor of utmost importance was the birth of the “individual,” albeit in its early form. In this regard, the following points can be concluded. First, men were able to dine together without regard to their social status. This is revealed in the workmanship in Chapter 5, and it began by sharing the story of Oyagata,²⁵ whose status was “as different as heaven and earth” from the others. The status and poverty of the working men revealed through their “meals made of barley, beans, and radish because there is no rice,” which contrasted sharply with Oyagata’s status. What alleviated these differences was eating a beef hot pot together. Therefore, the sharing of beef hot pot meals is closely related to historical and social factors by creating intimate relationships between classes, and furthering the concept of beef as a delicious food.²⁶

²² Translation by Huji Yuichi 藤祐一講, “Civilization and enlightenment 文明開花,” *Complete collection of Meiji culture* 明治文化全集 20 (Nihon Hyoronsha 日本評論社, 1928), 13.

²³ Narusawa Akira 成沢光, “Social Order in Modern Japan,” in *Contemporary Japanese Society* 現代日本社会 4, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo 東京大学社会科学研究所 ed. (University of Tokyo Press 東京大学出版会, 1991), 63.

²⁴ Robun, op. cit., 149.

²⁵ Ibid., 143.

²⁶ Hukuda Ikuhiro 福田育弘, “Food and Drink as a structure-From Robun’s *Aguranabe* to Ogai’s

Furthermore, this culture of sharing meals regardless of status gave rise to the birth of the “individual.”

Another essential aspect is that the characters talked about ways to improve their lives and how to develop themselves. An unemployed man in the first piece was proposing to use various Western technologies in his daily life. A samurai and a merchant in the second piece believed that they should actively study Western culture regardless of their status. In this way, the beef hot pot restaurant was a limited space, but it revealed not only a sense of psychological liberation but a new way of life. They revealed their psychological liberation through their acceptance of beef that “cannot fit into the mouths of commoners” and overcame the differences in life by “using technology” and “reading newspapers and expanding knowledge.”

Conclusion and Prospects

As described above, through Kanagaki Robun’s *Aguranabe*, we looked at how human groups of various classes overcame and accepted “Kegare” surrounding beef hot pots, what kind of daily concerns they had in the changing social atmosphere, and how the status differences in the four social classes were eased, conceiving the idea of the “individual.” Based on *Aguranabe*’s contents, the following features can be observed.

First, it has been commonly stated that the government led the reform of the Meiji Era, but it should be acknowledged that the common people who grasped this trend and participated also played an essential role. In particular, it can be seen that women came more enthusiastically to beef hot pot restaurants than men. In addition to the people accepting that beef is a “nutritious food,” they recognized and accepted that eating beef was a natural trend of the time. Appearing in the newly introduced cookbook, three nutritious meals a day along with Western cuisine were proposed as a new custom. Additionally, the beef hot pot that was introduced during this period was easily assimilated into home cooking. Since then, the beef hot pot has numerous versions under the name of Nabe cuisine and has been the particular favorite of housewives who want a simple, stylish dish to decorate their table.

Lastly, through *Aguranabe*, we can find that a new individualistic space was being built beyond the differences of the rigid four class structure. Namely, it can be seen that the new societal structure, particularly in the realm of hot pot restaurants, provided a “physical space” for many people to meet, and similarly formed a new “psychological space,” beyond the differences in class and occupation that the Meiji government intended. Furthermore, this work suggests that life during the Meiji

period was transformed into a new culture. This is evident through the concept of the individual being born, which began to disassemble the traditional social classifications of samurai, peasant, artisan and tradesman.

Abstract

This study is to examine through Kanagaki Robun's *Aguranabe* how beef, which was considered a symbol of civilization, was accepted and what changes were made in society as a result in the early Meiji period. At the time of the publication of *Aguranabe*, Japanese society was implementing Westernization policies with the aim of "civilization enlightenment" and "national prosperity and defense" along with rapid changes in the political system. The primary elements discussed in *Aguranabe* are as follows. First, *Aguranabe* details the process of resolving the "Kegare," which was considered to be a hindrance to the acceptance of beef. In the beginning of the Japanese Westernization campaigns, the government and educated individuals introduced beef in terms of a "new civilization," which can be said to have been somewhat successful. The characters in *Aguranabe* testify that beef is a symbol of civilization as well as a healthy food product to consume. The second element in *Aguranabe* describes the irony in how the government and the highly educated at the time insisted on accepting a Western diet for those in power, however, the general public was also participating in this movement through consuming a beef "hot pot." This point seems to have been overlooked thus far. It is also noteworthy that the beef hot pot that the general populace consumed was in a form that was more acceptable to them, rather than adopting the unfamiliar foreign cooking method and utensils. The third element that *Aguranabe* delineates is the perception of the "individual" that appeared in the space of a beef hot pot restaurant. The consumer experienced a sense of liberation by eating beef, overcoming status differences and becoming on par with those present. In particular, the Japanese populace predicted the birth of the individual that the Meiji society was constructing by their insistence of utilizing Western technology and expanding knowledge through newspapers.

Keywords: *Aguranabe*, acceptance of meat, food culture, Kegare, taste of civilization