

# Serving the Nation

The Myth of *Washoku*

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Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH04

## Abstract

In December 2013, 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year' was inscribed on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This chapter explores the rise of *washoku* (lit. 'Japanese food' or 'Japanese cuisine') to the status of cultural heritage and analyses the major motives behind this process. It argues that *washoku*, as it is currently being promoted, is a myth constructed for the purposes of the UNESCO inscription, whose propagation ultimately aims to solve the problems faced by the Japanese authorities since the beginning of the post-bubble era: Japan's declining competitiveness in the global marketplace, the Japanese population's poor opinion of their country's achievements, and the country's low food self-sufficiency ratio.

**Keywords:** Japanese food, *washoku*, UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage, gastrodiploamacy, food self-sufficiency

## Introduction

On 4 December 2013, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage inscribed fourteen new elements on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.<sup>1</sup> One of those elements was 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year' (*Washoku; Nihonjin no dentōteki na shokubunka – shōgatsu o rei to shite*). Following the inscription, the word

1 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8-representative-list-00665>, accessed 29 July 2016.

'washoku' was transformed from an ordinary noun with the comprehensive meaning of 'Japanese food' into a brand name denoting 'traditional Japanese cuisine' and began to attract worldwide attention. For example, in 2014, the term featured four times in *The New York Times*, which was nearly as many as in the previous ten years put together.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, *The Japan News* – a leading Japanese newspaper published in English (prior to 2013 known under the name *Daily Yomiuri*) – featured the word 55 times between the UNESCO announcement on 4 December 2013 and the end of 2015. The word appeared in the paper's headlines on nine occasions in these two years. In contrast, before the announcement, over the course of 24 years, the word washoku had featured in the newspaper a mere twenty times, of which just seven times were in headlines: five times in 2013 in anticipation of the UNESCO announcement, once in 2012, and once more eight years earlier.<sup>3</sup>

The exposure in the English-language media does not even compare to the 'washoku fever' that infected the Japanese-language media following the UNESCO inscription. In 2014, 'washoku' featured in the headlines of 66 articles that appeared in the leading daily newspaper, *Asahi Shinbun*. Just ten years earlier, in 2004, 'washoku' appeared in the headlines on only nine occasions; twenty years earlier – in 1994 – the term featured just twice in the entire year.<sup>4</sup> This trend has not been restricted to the mass media, but has also been reflected in the publishing industry. According to the records of the National Diet Library (NDL), as of the end of 2015, a total of 631 books with the word washoku in their titles had been published in Japan since the establishment of the library in 1948. These included cookbooks, restaurant guides, and gastronomic essays, as well as more serious publications on Japanese culinary history. The NDL is the leading Japanese library, which, like the British Library in the United Kingdom or the Library of Congress in the United States, contains a copy of all the books published in the country, with a small number of exceptions.<sup>5</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the two years following the UNESCO inscription saw a surge in such titles – 128 books on washoku published between January 2014 and December 2015 are on file at the NDL. More astounding is the fact that 95 per cent of all the books on the topic have been published in the last 25 years: 100 throughout the 1990s and 496 between 2000 and 2015.

2 Reuters 2014a, 2014b; Phanner and Yang 2014; Robinsons 2014.

3 Yomidas Rekishikan Database, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/database/en/>, accessed 27 October 2016. The full-text database of *The Japan News* starts in 1989.

4 Asahi Kikuzo Database, <http://database.asahi.com/library2e/>, accessed 27 October 2016.

5 The books can be searched for through this URL: <https://ndl.opac.ndl.go.jp/F/1G85M7DDV5H46SITY9F4UIJQBRFUR63TITYRRILYDKP86YNC3D-3756i?func=find-b-o>, accessed 27 October 2016.

In contrast, a measly 34 books appeared before the 1990s: 25 in the 1980s, five in the 1970s, and two each in the 1960s and 1950s. The logical conclusion that can be drawn from these data is that the concept of washoku clearly gained popularity during the post-bubble period. This chapter argues that the timing of this development was far from accidental.

### What's in a name?

In the UNESCO nomination, washoku is described as a 'social practice based on a comprehensive set of skills, knowledge, practice, and traditions related to the production, processing, preparation, and consumption of food. It is associated with an essential spirit of respect for nature closely related to the sustainable use of natural resources.'<sup>6</sup> This definition is a surprisingly imaginative interpretation of a common noun meaning 'Japanese food' or 'Japanese meal', which, for decades, has been used interchangeably with the term *Nihon ryōri*. The major difference in the grammatical use of both terms was that the word washoku implied a 'Japanese meal', while *Nihon ryōri* indicates a 'Japanese dish' or 'Japanese dishes' (Masuda 1989: 1225, 1950). Both can be translated into English as 'Japanese food', 'Japanese cuisine', or 'Japanese cooking'. Some Japanese-language dictionaries offer more nuanced definitions, by specifying the meaning of *Nihon ryōri* as exclusive restaurant cuisine, while linking washoku more generally with the daily food of the common people, with home cooking at its core (Shibata and Yamada 2002: 1042). This distinction has been emphasized in the UNESCO nomination and echoed repeatedly in the statements of its prominent advocates, such as Kumakura Isao, the chairman of the Washoku Japan Foundation (Washoku Bunka Kokumin Kaigi) and former chairman of the Investigative Commission for the Nomination of Japanese Food Culture on the List of World Intangible Cultural Heritage (*Nihon Shokubunka no Sekai Muken Isan Tōroku ni Muketa Kentōkai*) (Kumakura 2012: 5, 2013: 10).<sup>7</sup> However, in the popular use of the terms – at least up until the UNESCO inscription – the difference between *Nihon ryōri* and washoku was not clearly distinguishable, as the analysis below confirms.

6 See Nomination file no. 00869, p. 3, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8-representative-list-00665>, accessed 5 October 2017.

7 <https://washokujapan.jp>, accessed 27 October 2016. 'Washoku Japan' is not the correct English translation of the Japanese name, but the name that the foundation chooses to use.

**Figure 4.1** Pork cutlet (*tonkatsu*) is one of several Western dishes introduced to the Japanese diet during the early decades of the twentieth century



Photograph by Jurre van der Meer

Firstly, it needs to be clarified that ‘washoku’ is a relatively new word, created in the late nineteenth century, when similar neologisms with the prefix ‘wa’, meaning ‘Japan’, ‘Japanese’, or ‘Japanese-style’, emerged in response to the encroachment of Western culture (Yanagita 1957; Jansen and Rozman 1986; Yumoto 1996). Everyday objects, such as food and clothing, which had not previously needed any particular designation, now had to be specified as Japanese or Western (Fig. 4.1). For example, the word *wafuku*, meaning ‘Japanese-style clothing’, emerged in response to the trend for wearing Western clothing, which was called *yōfuku*, with the prefix ‘yō’ indicating a Western origin. Similarly, the term *washoku* emerged in response to the phenomenon of *yōshoku* (Western food), and has consistently been used as its counterpart.

Very little information on the etymological trajectory of the word *washoku* is available. No trace of the word can be found in monolingual, Japanese-language dictionaries before its appearance in the 1981 edition of *Nihongo daijiten* (Comprehensive dictionary of the Japanese language) (Shōgaku tosho 1981: 1883, 2516). This fact by no means implies that the word had not been commonly used earlier than this. ‘Washoku’ gradually began to enter common usage from the late nineteenth century. However, it did not appear to connote home-cooked food, as indicated above, but precisely the opposite: food enjoyed in a restaurant setting.

The reasons behind such usage are very logical. As a novelty at the time, Western food (*yōshoku*) was primarily served in restaurants, and since

washoku functioned as its counterpart, the two words were frequently used in reference to the restaurant scene. For example, from the 1920s onwards the word appeared alongside *yōshoku* on the menus of restaurants in Japanese department stores. Both terms also turn up in restaurant advertisements in newspapers. As early as 1892, for example, the term washoku features in an advertisement from the NYK (Nippon Yūsen Kaisha) shipping company, informing prospective passengers on the Kobe-Otaru ferry about the prices of the Japanese and Western-style meals served on board. The NYK line was famous for its exquisite cooking.<sup>8</sup>

A detailed analysis of the databases of two Japanese daily newspapers – *Yomiuri Shinbun* and *Asahi Shinbun* – reveals that, over the course of the twentieth century, the use of the word washoku was initially reserved to indicate Japanese-style food in a very broad sense. For example, in 1941, *Yomiuri Shinbun* announced that washoku had been a big favourite at the banqueting table on the Nanking-Kobe cruise.<sup>9</sup> In 1968, *Asahi Shinbun* reported on how instant miso soup and pickles – referred to as washoku – were being sent to Mexico City to serve as ‘restorative remedies’ (*kitsuke gusuri*) for the Japanese athletes competing at the Mexico Olympics.<sup>10</sup> In 1986, the same newspaper proudly announced that Princess Diana liked washoku and was practising using chopsticks in preparation for her visit to Japan.<sup>11</sup> A 2005 article referred to the popularity of Japanese-style fast food in China, also using the term washoku.<sup>12</sup> Thus, this analysis reveals that the word washoku was not used in the mass media to refer to home-cooked food, but instead was utilized to refer to any type of food of Japanese origin, from innovative products of the food-processing industry to banqueting dishes served to royalty.

## The UNESCO nomination

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, commonly referred to by its abbreviation UNESCO, was established in 1945 with the aim of facilitating ‘the building of peace [...] and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information’.<sup>13</sup>

8 *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo edition), 7 October 1892, p. 6.

9 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 16 June 1941, p. 3.

10 *Asahi Shinbun*, 25 September 1968, p. 12.

11 *Ibid.*, 18 April 1986, p. 12.

12 *Ibid.*, 4 October 2005, p. 3.

13 ‘Introducing UNESCO: What We Are’, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/introducing-unesco/>, accessed 28 July 2016.

The organization is perhaps best known for its World Heritage List – an inventory of world heritage sites that form part of the global cultural and natural heritage and are considered to have ‘outstanding universal value’. At present, the list contains over a thousand sites, ranging from the Statue of Liberty, Vatican City, and the Great Wall of China, to the Grand Canyon National Park and Mount Fuji.<sup>14</sup> In 2003, UNESCO came up with a new initiative, the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which aimed to enhance the visibility of the world’s intangible cultural heritage and awareness of its significance. In 2008, the first elements were inscribed on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and it now includes such diverse entries as Argentinian tango, Chinese calligraphy, and Indonesian batik.<sup>15</sup> UNESCO defines ‘intangible cultural heritage’ as ‘practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces [...] – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’.<sup>16</sup> Although no direct reference to food and drink is made in the text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, it is today considered the most prolific instrument of international law used to protect culinary traditions (Maffei 2012: 248). The first three inscriptions that focused specifically on culinary culture – ‘Gingerbread craft from Northern Croatia’ (Inscription 5.COM 6.10),<sup>17</sup> ‘Gastronomic meal of the French’ (Inscription 5.COM 6.14),<sup>18</sup> and ‘Traditional Mexican cuisine – ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacán paradigm’ (Inscription 5.COM 6.30)<sup>19</sup> – joined the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010, a year after an expert meeting had been organized (in April 2009) specifically to discuss the role of culinary practices in the implementation of the convention (Maffei 2012: 232).

So far, the year 2013 has been the most abundant in terms of culinary inscriptions – five out of the total of 25 newly inscribed elements focused on consumable heritage: ‘Ancient Georgian traditional Qvevri wine-making

14 The full list is available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>, accessed 28 July 2016.

15 The full list is available at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00559>, accessed 28 July 2016.

16 Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention>, accessed 28 July 2016.

17 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gingerbread-craft-from-northern-croatia-00356>, accessed 11 May 2017.

18 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gastronomic-meal-of-the-french-00437>, accessed 11 May 2017.

19 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-mexican-cuisine-ancestral-ongoing-community-culture-the-michoacan-paradigm-00400>, accessed 11 May 2017.

method' (Inscription 8.COM 8.13),<sup>20</sup> 'Mediterranean diet' (Inscription 8.COM 8.10),<sup>21</sup> 'Kimjang, making and sharing kimchi in the Republic of Korea' (Inscription 8.COM 8.23),<sup>22</sup> 'Turkish coffee culture and tradition' (Inscription 8.COM 8.28),<sup>23</sup> and 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year' (Inscription 8.COM 8.17).<sup>24</sup>

Following the UNESCO rules, all these nominations had to be submitted to the UNESCO Secretariat by 31 March of the previous year in order to be screened by the Evaluating Body and be presented for final examination by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee. All successful applications must meet the five criteria specified in the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage:

R.1: The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention.

R.2: Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and encourage dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity.

R.3: Safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element.

R.4: The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent.

R.5: The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Article 11 and Article 12 of the Convention.<sup>25</sup>

The first three criteria concern how the nominated element is embedded in society and the ways in which it is to be protected, while the final two specify the more formal prerequisites to be met before UNESCO's approval.

20 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ancient-georgian-traditional-qvevri-wine-making-method-00870>, accessed 11 May 2017.

21 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mediterranean-diet-00884>, accessed 11 May 2017.

22 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kimjang-making-and-sharing-kimchi-in-the-republic-of-korea-00881>, accessed 11 May 2017.

23 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/turkish-coffee-culture-and-tradition-00645>, accessed 11 May 2017.

24 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/washoku-traditional-dietary-cultures-of-the-japanese-notably-for-the-celebration-of-new-year-00869>, accessed 11 May 2017.

25 Quoted from 'Inscription on the Representative List', <https://ich.unesco.org/en/procedure-of-inscription-00809#inscription-on-the-representative-list>, accessed 5 October 2017.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will concentrate on point 4, which requires filed nominations to demonstrate that the initiative is not merely concocted by the governments that file them ('State Parties' in UNESCO's bureaucratic jargon), but enjoys the strong support of the community. In the case of the washoku nomination, the required evidence was provided in the form of consent statements, complete with the names and signatures of supporters. An impressive PDF document containing scans of 1,606 such statements is available to download from the UNESCO website.<sup>26</sup> Alongside individuals and businesses – from local banks to restaurants, food retailers, and food-processing enterprises – support for the washoku initiative was conveyed by the representatives of a variety of grass-roots organizations, such as consumer associations, women's groups, and local committees.

A closer look at the submitted scans leads to quite a puzzling discovery. None of the support statements dated between September and late November 2011 actually refers to the nomination for 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year'. Instead, they support the nomination of 'Distinctive Japanese cuisine with traditional features centred on *kaiseki*'. In contrast, all statements dated after 26 December refer solely to washoku, with a transitional period between late November and late December, when documents using either term can be found. *Kaiseki* refers to a multi-course restaurant meal that could best be described as Japanese *haute cuisine* (Rath 2013).

How can this rather curious mix-up of documents be explained? Firstly, it seems unlikely that the inclusion of statements referring to 'Distinctive Japanese cuisine with traditional features centred on *kaiseki*' to support the application of 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year' was intentional. Rather, it seems surprising that the bureaucrats of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Nōrin Suisanshō; hereafter MAFF), who were responsible for submitting this documentation to UNESCO, allowed such an error to slip in. The dates on the statements suggest that an application that focused on 'Distinctive Japanese cuisine with traditional features centred on *kaiseki*' was the initial intention and that a change of plan occurred in November 2011. The minutes of the meetings of the aforementioned Investigative Commission for the Nomination of Japanese Food Culture on the List of World Intangible Cultural Heritage

26 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8-representative-list-00665>, accessed 5 October 2017. To access the file, scroll down to application no. 8.17 and click on 'Consent of communities'. The file will download automatically onto your computer.

and the timing of the shift provide us with further clues as to the possible reason for this change.<sup>27</sup> The change coincided with the sixth session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which took place in Bali between 22 and 29 November 2011. This was the moment when UNESCO announced its decisions concerning the nominations that had been submitted the previous year for inscription on the list. Among the rejected nominations was 'Royal cuisine of the Joseon dynasty' (Nomination file no. 00476), submitted by the South Korean government. It had already been designated as Important Intangible Cultural Property by the South Korean government in 1972, which covered the last of the five UNESCO criteria mentioned earlier. However, the ICH Committee did not find the information provided satisfactory to meet criteria 1, 2, and 4. The precise wording of the decision was as follows:

R.1: Additional information would be needed to identify more clearly the community concerned with the element and its current social function for them, as well as to describe how the practice is recreated by its bearers and provides them a sense of identity and continuity today;

R.2: The State should demonstrate clearly how inscription of the Royal cuisine of the Joseon dynasty on the Representative List could contribute to ensuring visibility of the intangible cultural heritage and awareness of its significance;

R.4: Although two masters and two Institutes participated in the nomination process and provided their free, prior and informed consent, additional information is needed on the participation of a larger community outside the academic environment.<sup>28</sup>

We can surmise that the negative decision came as a shock, not only to the Koreans, but also to the Japanese authorities who were preparing their own nomination for 'Distinctive Japanese cuisine with traditional features centred on *kaiseki*', which was to be submitted within a couple of months. Apparently, the people in charge of the Japanese nomination assessed that the likelihood of the current application being rejected on the same grounds as the South Korean application was too high, and decided to put together

27 [http://www.maff.go.jp/j/study/syoku\\_vision/kentoukai.html](http://www.maff.go.jp/j/study/syoku_vision/kentoukai.html), accessed 25 October 2016.

28 Quoted from 'Report of the Subsidiary Body on its Work in 2011 and Evaluation of Nominations for Inscription in 2011 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: Addendum', <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/ITH-11-6.COM-CONF.206-13+Corr.+Add.-EN.pdf>, pp. 57-8, accessed 29 July 2016.

an entirely new application that would safely meet all of the UNESCO requirements. This fact alone suggests that having Japanese food recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was a goal that had to be achieved at all costs, even if that meant tweaking the truth.

### National branding and food self-sufficiency

Among the four characteristic features of washoku specified in the UNESCO nomination is the 'one soup and three side dishes' (*ichijū sansai*) structure of a Japanese meal, with rice at its centre. As I have elaborated elsewhere (Cwiertka and Yasuhara 2016; Cwiertka forthcoming), this assertion is problematic in combination with the claim of washoku being a home-cooked meal, since *ichijū sansai* is the basic structure of restaurant meals, which are largely based on the principles of *kaiseki*. In the remaining part of this chapter, I would like to argue that washoku, as it is currently being propagated, is a myth constructed for the purposes of the UNESCO inscription, and ultimately to solve the problems that the Japanese authorities have faced since the beginning of the post-bubble era: the declining competitiveness of Japan in the global marketplace, the low esteem of the Japanese population about the achievements of their country, and the country's food self-sufficiency ratio of just 40 per cent, one of the lowest in the industrialized world (Assmann 2010: 4).

From the perspective of food security, this high dependence on food imports in the face of an envisaged global food shortage is far from ideal, without taking into consideration the impact of this situation on the ailing Japanese agricultural sector, which is in grave need of revitalization (Van der Meer and Yamada 2005). Ironically, both the economic bubble of the 1980s and post-bubble conditions have contributed to this state of affairs. As Kako Toshiyuki from Kobe University explains, before the first oil shock the rising demand for animal-based food products was the primary reason behind the steady decline of Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio, which had dropped to 55 per cent by 1973 (Kako 2009: 2). Livestock production had made Japan increasingly dependent on imported animal feed – mostly maize and soybeans from the US. The Japanese government imposed low tariffs on imported animal feed with the intention of boosting the Japanese livestock industry. The same rationale was used to justify low tariffs on oilseeds, enabling the production of inexpensive oils and fats, which were also in high demand. However, the main factors responsible for the further decline in food self-sufficiency during the late 1980s and early 1990s – from

53 to 43 per cent – were different (Kako 2009: 6). The first was the rising value of the yen, which led to an increase in imports of livestock products, fish, shellfish, and fruit. Then, after the bursting of the bubble economy in the early 1990s, the rate of growth in food imports decelerated due to the loss of the effect of a strong yen. Despite this, Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio continued to fall, reaching 42 per cent in 1996 and 40 per cent in 2005 (Kako 2009: 7). This time, other factors were at play: firstly, a sharp decline in agricultural production, closely linked to the continuously falling demand for rice; secondly, the rise of the food-processing and restaurant industries, which relied heavily on cheap imports. By 2000, pre-prepared foods and eating-out comprised 27 per cent of the total food expenditure of Japanese households.

The Japanese government has taken a variety of measures to tackle the problem. For example, in 1999, it enacted the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture, and Rural Areas (*Shokuryō Nōgyō Nōson Hō*) (Kako 2009: 11), followed in 2005 by the Basic Law on Food Education (*Shokuiku Kihon Hō*). The latter aimed to counterbalance the high dependency on food imports by encouraging the Japanese public to buy domestic food products (Assmann 2010: 4). This was to be achieved not only through various 'eat local' campaigns, but also by strengthening the consciousness of a distinct Japanese dietary culture as part of the Japanese national identity.

These efforts coincided with the rise of *bunka gaikō* (cultural diplomacy), a catchphrase that sums up the enthusiasm that emerged in 2004 within the Japanese government for employing popular and consumer culture to further national interests. The Japan Brand Working Group (*Nihon Burando Wākingu Gurūpu*), newly established within the framework of the Intellectual Property Strategic Programme (*Chiteki Zaisan Senryaku*), was entrusted with developing a strategy for improving Japan's national image overseas through the propagation of the 'Japan brand' (*Nihon burando*). Three main goals were identified by the experts entrusted with the task: firstly, to foster a rich dietary culture; secondly, to establish diverse and reliable local brands; and thirdly, to establish Japanese fashion as a global brand (Akutsu 2008). Indeed, in the following year, food culture was chosen as one of the assets that was to represent the 'gross national cultural power of Japan' (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 109-10). In October 2006, the MAFF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Gaimushō*) jointly developed a promotional scheme called 'Washoku – Try Japan's Good Food', which consisted of organized events at which Japanese food produce could be sampled at Japanese embassies and consulates all over the world. Roughly 20 such events were organized each year (see Table 4.1), and the promoted produce not only

included food items that could clearly be labelled as ‘Japanese’, such as rice, miso, and seafood, but also ‘ordinary’ agricultural products that are commonly grown elsewhere, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, apples, and peaches.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the definition of the word *washoku* as utilized for the purpose of this scheme could be summed up as ‘all agricultural produce grown on Japanese soil’, which was much broader than the one used for the UNESCO nomination.

**Table 4.1 ‘Washoku – Try Japan’s Good Food’ campaign events, 2006-2011**

Year	Number of Events	Date and place
2006	5	10 October (Japanese Embassy in Finland)
		17 November (Japanese Embassy in Mexico)
		7 December (Consulate General of Japan in Sydney)
		12 December (Japanese Embassy in the United Arab Emirates)
		14 December (Consulate General of Japan in Honolulu)
2007	23	18 January (Japanese Embassy in the Republic of Slovakia)
		30-31 January (Japanese Embassy in India)
		31 January (Japanese Embassy in Croatia)
		18 February (Consulate General of Japan in Dubai)
		12 March (Japanese Embassy in the People’s Republic of China)
		14 March (Consulate General of Japan in Penang)
		2 May (Japanese Embassy in Egypt)
		3 May (Japanese Embassy in Russia)
		7 May (Japanese Embassy in Bulgaria)
		19 June (Japanese Embassy in Norway)
		27 June (Office of the Representative of the Government of Japan to the European Union)
		25 July (Japanese Embassy in the People’s Republic of China)
		17-18 August (Japanese Embassy in Denmark)
		10 September (Consulate General of Japan in Vancouver)
		28 September (Japanese Embassy in the People’s Republic of China)
		31 October-1 November (Japanese Embassy in Ireland)
16 November (Consulate General of Japan in Düsseldorf)		
19 November (Japanese Embassy in Malaysia)		
21 November (Consulate General of Japan in Dubai)		
4 December (Japanese Embassy in Singapore)		
9 December (Japanese Embassy in Kuwait)		
11 December (Japanese Embassy in Brunei)		
13 December (Japanese Embassy in Russia)		

<sup>29</sup> The full list of promoted produce is available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/zaigai/washoku/>, accessed 29 July 2016.

Year	Number of Events	Date and place
2008	24	10 January (Consulate General of Japan in Hong Kong) 23 February (Consulate General of Japan in Dubai) 5 March (Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco) 8-10 March (Consulate General of Japan in Toronto) 10 March (Japanese Embassy in Peru) 11 March (Consulate General of Japan in Boston) 13 March (Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles) 18 June (Japanese Embassy in France) 25 July (Japanese Embassy in Malaysia) 11 September (Consulate General of Japan in Hong Kong) 16 September (Japanese Embassy in the United Kingdom) 16 September (Japanese Embassy in Russia) 22 September (Japanese Embassy in Canada) 24 September (Japanese Embassy in Bulgaria) 11 October (Consulate General of Japan in Guangzhou) 15-19 October (Japanese Embassy in the People's Republic of China) 22-23 October (Japanese Embassy in the Republic of Korea) 13 November (Consulate General of Japan in Düsseldorf) 19 November (Consulate General of Japan in Chicago) 19 November (Consulate General of Japan in Hong Kong) 26 November (Consulate General of Japan in Dubai) 1 December (Japanese Embassy in Oman) 3 December (Japanese Embassy in Russia) 3 December (Japanese Embassy in Singapore)
2009	10	30 June (Office of the Representative of the Government of Japan to the European Union) 20 July (Consulate General of Japan in Sydney) 14 August (Japanese Embassy in Malaysia) 1 October (Consulate General of Japan in Düsseldorf) 4 October (Japanese Embassy in Indonesia) 10 October (Japanese Embassy in the Netherlands) 29 October (Japanese Embassy in Switzerland) 13-14 November (Consulate General of Japan in Guangzhou) 16 November (Japanese Embassy in Oman) 7 December (Japanese Embassy in Singapore)
2010	5	8-9 August (Consulate General of Japan in Chicago) 13 September (Consulate General of Japan in Vancouver) 17 October (Consulate General of Japan in Guangzhou) 1-2 November (Consulate General of Japan in Boston) 3 November (Japanese Embassy in the United Kingdom)
2011	4	23 January (Japanese Embassy in Oman) 25-27 February (Japanese Embassy in Singapore) 5 March (Japanese Embassy in Saudi Arabia) 6 March (Representative Office for Business of Japan in Dalian)

Source: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/zaigai/washoku/>, accessed 30 December 2016

## Conclusion

Food has shaped diplomatic interactions for centuries, but, as the recently coined term 'gastrodiplomacy' indicates, it has lately achieved a far more prominent place in public-policy outreach, and not only in Japan. Gastrodiplomacy is defined as a form of public diplomacy that highlights and promotes the awareness and understanding of a national culinary culture among a foreign public. Simply promoting a food product of foreign origin does not equate with gastrodiplomacy. Rather, gastrodiplomacy denotes a more holistic approach to raising international awareness of a country's edible national brand through the promotion of its culinary and cultural heritage (Rockower 2014: 14). It has been pointed out by scholars of Japanese gastrodiplomacy that in the minds of many Japanese government officials, washoku is yet another form of Japan's so-called content industries, whose products range from Pokémon and other manga and anime, to digital media, fashion, visual arts, and design (Bestor 2014: 60). The 'Japan brand' is now as intricately linked with washoku as it is with Hello Kitty. In other words, Japan's intangible culinary heritage provides a connection to much more tangible issues, such as foreign investment, international tourism, and Japanese agricultural and fishery exports.

From the perspective of the Japanese government, the carefully crafted nomination for the inscription of washoku on UNESCO's Intangible World Heritage List has been a smashing success. Hardly anyone remembers that, according to the purposely fabricated myth, washoku is supposed to be the home-cooked food of the community, needing UNESCO's protection. Instead, it is now being creatively expanded to include exclusive cuisine served in restaurants (Fig. 4.2), as testified by the Washoku World Challenge cooking competition for non-Japanese professional chefs. So far, the competition has been held four times and the fifth round is scheduled for February 2018.<sup>30</sup> The newest initiative in the domain of the washoku business is the Washoku Sangyō Ten (lit. 'Washoku Industry Exhibition'), which is translated into English as International 'Washoku' Show Japan.<sup>31</sup> The expression 'washoku industry' (*washoku sangyō*) – avoided in the English translation of the name – is in itself a contradiction, considering the intangible heritage status of washoku.

Since its inscription on the UNESCO Intangible World Heritage List in December 2013, washoku has been rapidly transformed into a heritage brand name, which is being extensively used by governmental agencies as well

30 <http://washoku-worldchallenge.jp/5th/en/>, accessed 5 October 2017.

31 <http://www.jma.or.jp/washoku/en/index.html>, accessed 25 October 2016.

Figure 4.2 DVD case of the documentary *Washoku Dream: Beyond Sushi* (2015)



Photograph taken by the author

as a variety of businesses.<sup>32</sup> This has considerably affected perceptions of washoku as a concept (Cwiertka forthcoming). It remains to be seen, however, whether the promotional activities surrounding washoku will have an equally powerful impact on the consumption practices of the Japanese population. This brings us back to the classical theoretical discussions on the meaning of food and eating in human society (Mennel, Murcott and Van Otterloo 1992), on how such meaning is constructed and implanted in behaviour, and on how the material and the immaterial are blurred with one another in the course of historical change.

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32 A random sample includes the hotel industry (<http://www.washokukentei.jp/index.php>), producers of kitchen appliances (<http://www.mitsubishielectric.co.jp/club-me/washoku/02.html>), and food-processing firms (<http://www.marukome.co.jp/knowledge/washoku/index.html>); <http://park.ajinomoto.co.jp/recipe/corner/ichijjuunsai>); all websites accessed 27 October 2016.

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