

CHANGES IN FAMILY RELATIONS REFLECTED IN THE DINING TABLE

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF "THE FAMILY THEATER THEORY"

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1. THE FAMILY AS A UNIT THAT EATS TOGETHER

Since the Second World War – and especially since 1960 – the Japanese economy has undergone remarkable growth resulting in a richer and more affluent lifestyle for all Japanese. On the other side of the coin, however, the Japanese family has been, and continues to be, severely shaken. The grouping known as the family is by no means a self-evident institution any more. We can cite two major reasons for this.

The first is that many functions of the family unit now exist outside the family. Formerly, the family unit exercised all manner of functions constituting a "tiny, self-contained cosmos" for its members. Today, however, economically productive functions have shifted completely to the office or factory, thereby transforming the family into a solely consuming unit. The protective function of the family, the job of defending its members from natural dangers and social threats, has been surrendered to the police and local communes. In the same way, educational functions are now the domain of schools, religious functions are exercised by institutionalized religious groups, recreational functions are handled by the leisure industry, and the list goes on. Many of the functions once considered inherent and inseparable from the family unit, have shifted in fact to outside groups.

Internally, from the perspective of individual family members, these functional shifts have acted to greatly reduce the relative psychological importance of the family unit. The question that comes up is whether or not the family is still an indispensable institution worth preserving, as it once was, with one's life. Even the Japanese housewife, traditional pillar of the family institution, has begun to waver in her resolve.

The second reason for the changing role of the family unit has to do with its downsizing. According to the National Census, the average pre-war household size of five persons has been whittled down to three persons at present (see Figure 1). The percentage of single person households

is on the increase, as well. In 1970 it topped 10% and by 1990 it had topped 20%. The size of the family is rapidly decreasing.

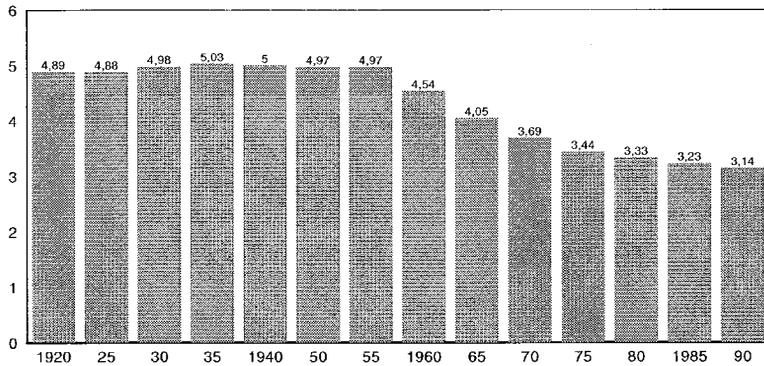


Figure 1: Trends in the average number per person per household

Source: National Census

The changes being observed are by no means strictly quantitative, either. Qualitative changes are also extremely prominent. For instance, in prewar Japan it was quite normal for families to have unrelated (i.e., not blood related) persons, including servants, living with them. This phenomenon is all but completely gone now in Japan. The family has been pared down to a small unit of strictly blood-related persons. In fact, the reduction process is so dramatic that the definition of family threatens to converge with that of the individual.

Can the family continue to exist as we know it? Can it continue to function as the fundamental unit of social life?

In light of the above, it's no wonder that we have begun today to re-evaluate the significance of "the family as a group that takes meals together". This is because the only place where the members of the family gather together daily is at the dining table.

If we identify the dining room (or space) as the stage on which the daily drama of the family unfolds, then the most important prop on that stage is none other than the dining table. The members of the family sit around the table and share a meal. It's a relaxing time in which family members have a chance to reconfirm their connection to each other. In other words, the meal taken around the table is tantamount to a ritual necessary for mutual reconfirmation of family identity.

In the title of her 1979 novel, *The House without a Dining Table*, author Enchi Fumiko adroitly suggests the plight and the sentiments of the dis-jointed family. The dining table is the prop around which the family, 'the

unit which eats together,' can be produced and, as such, it is the symbol of "familial togetherness."

As we will discuss below, over the course of the last century, the Japanese dining table has undergone three major changes in form. Corresponding to these changes in the dining table, the table manners connected with the foods and meals arranged on the dining table have changed significantly, as well. It is here that the changes in human relations inside the family are tellingly reflected.

The way that family members behave when they gather around the dining table should be the best indicator of the nature and emotional content of family relations. In spite of this fact, however, the view of the family as the unit that eats together has been continually neglected in the field of conventional family research.

The purpose of this study is to elucidate some of the changes in family relations that have occurred in postwar Japan, drawing some comparisons with the prewar period in the process. To achieve our purpose, we will focus on changes as they have occurred in the family dining space, and, above all, in the Japanese dining table.

2. TODAY'S RICH AND VARIED JAPANESE DIET

Japanese generally divide the foods at the table into two main categories: staple (*shushoku*) and side dishes (*okazu*). Historically, the staple food, of course, has been rice. The importance of rice in the Japanese diet is revealed by the fact that the word for rice in Japanese, *gohan*, is synonymous with 'food' or 'meal'.

The term 'side dish' (*okazu*) encompasses all other food at the table. In Japan of the 1930's, rice was at the heart of every meal. A child who quickly consumed side dishes yet ate sparingly of rice was known as *okazukkui* ('side dish hog') and such behavior was viewed as reprehensible and even "immoral" (Tsurumi 1984).

In the midst of the Second World War, food was exceedingly difficult to obtain. Rice distribution was handled by a national management board and strictly rationed. For many Japanese, white rice was rarely if ever seen at the dining table. Rice, now unavailable, had to be substituted with things like *suiton* (soup with wheat flour dumplings) and steamed potatoes or taro.

For some time after the end of the war, food remained in short supply and hunger was a reality for most Japanese. This was especially true in the war-scarred cities where starvation and destitution were at their very worst. In the fall of 1947 there was the shocking case of a Tōkyō District

Court judge who died suddenly of malnutrition. It turned out that he had been subsisting only on the food rations he received.

Within ten years of the war's end, food supplies had improved greatly and the family diet began to undergo tremendous changes. First of all, the white rice that people had only been able to dream about during the war, was once again available for everyone. Ironically, just as rice was once again being restored as the staple food, the move away from rice as the main staple began.

Incidentally, based on the Supply and Demand Index published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (*Nōrinsuisanshō*), the only foodstuffs whose per capita consumption is actually going down are rice and tubers (potatoes, taro, sweet potatoes, etc.). At the same time, consumption of side dishes such as meat, eggs and milk products are increasing prodigiously (see Table 1.). In other words, Japanese have begun consuming less rice (staple food) and more side dishes. Generally speaking, we've become a nation of *okazukkui* ('side dish hogs').

	Rice	Wheat	Tubers	Vegetables	Fruits	Meats	Eggs	Milk products	Fish	Sugar	Edible oils
1946	254	40	166	151	19	3	1	4	26	2	0
1960	315	71	83	273	61	14	17	61	76	41	12
1980	216	88	47	302	106	62	39	170	95	64	38

Table 1: Trends in the per capita consumption of important food groups (per person per day)

Source: Nōrinsuisanshō [Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries]: Shokuryō jūkyūhyō [Foodstuffs Supply and Demand Table]

Among Japanese, the two traditional categories of staple and side dish are still a reality. However, the old and time-honored power relations attached to staple and side dish have changed radically. Furthermore, considering the fact that meals with bread have increased, we can conclude that Japanese have gradually given up the iron-clad notion that "staple food equals rice."

Second, foods that formerly were only available on special occasions are now available to everyone at regular meals. Every day has become a special day, so to speak, a continual special occasion meal.

In traditional Japan, every family clearly differentiated between special occasion and regular meals. The menu for regular meals taken in the family was fairly fixed. Providing there was no special occasion or change of season, people generally ate pretty much the same things at meal times. This explains the specialness and excitement associated with meals taken on special occasions and foods that came to be closely identified with the

different seasons. Green house agriculture and frozen foods have changed all this. You can now get any food you want during any season.

As the lineup of foods at the dining table has become more varied and elaborate, it has reached the point where family menu decisions have become confusing. The family's daily fare has become a constant source of anxiety for housewives. Furthermore, as instant foods requiring almost no preparation have become popular, housewives have felt a compensating need to spend time on cooking and make things from scratch. This development has sparked a need to bring cooking information from outside into the household. In this sense, the title of the NHK television program, "Today's Meal," which has been on the air since November 1957 is truly symbolic of this trend. This analysis certainly helps explain the long-standing popularity of books, magazines and television programs about cooking.

Third, opportunities to dine outside the family have increased tremendously. Formerly, dining out was a privilege reserved mainly for urban men. That is to say, the patrons of high class restaurants and exclusive Japanese-style dining establishments (*ryōtei*) were limited to the economically affluent class of people who owned businesses and factories. They were followed in the postwar period by those employees of large companies with expense accounts for entertaining clients. Laborers and students did their eating out in humbler small restaurants. Recently, however, the emergence of women as restaurant goers has been notable throughout Japan. Groups of housewives dining out together are now an extremely common scene. With the popularization of the family car throughout the country, scenes of families dining out together have also become typical.

In general the whole Japanese view of dining has changed from "the meal as a means of satisfying one's hunger" to "the meal as a form of enjoyment." Or, as another author has put it, there has been a shift from "mealtime as an expression of abstinence and denial" to "mealtime as an expression of pleasure" (Ishige 1989). In former times, it was only a very small group at the top of the social ladder that had the means to enjoy meals and mealtimes. Today, however, anyone with a desire to do so, can approach meals and mealtimes with a sense of pleasure and enjoyment.

3. CHANGES IN THE FORM OF THE DINING TABLE

Looking back over the last 100 years, we observe that the Japanese dining table has undergone three basic changes in form.

The first of the three forms is the separate tray for each diner (*meimeizen*).

During the period in which this system was prevalent, each member of the family received his meal on what was called a *hakozen* (literally 'box tray'). The *hakozen* is a box with a cover measuring 30cm in width, 30cm in depth and 20cm in height. Inside it contains a full set of eating utensils for one person: rice bowl, soup bowl, small plate(s) for side dishes and chopsticks. When in use, the cover is turned over to form a small tray table upon which the utensils are arranged.

The second form is the *chabudai* ('tea table'). Depending on the region and the family, this piece of furniture was known by several different names including *handai* ('meal stand') and *shippokudai* ('meal stand'). For our purposes here, the *chabudai* will represent this whole class of tables. The *chabudai* is a small group dining table customarily placed on the *tatami* mat flooring of a Japanese-style room. It may be either circular or rectangular in shape. Normally it is outfitted with four short legs which can often be folded to facilitate storage.

The third form is the western-style table designed to be used with chairs. To accommodate the growing number of families who prefer to take their meals at a western-style table seated on chairs, the flooring of the dining room has had to change accordingly from *tatami* mats to hard-wood or tile.

The *chabudai* is said to have become prevalent during the first two decades of this century mainly in the families of urban office employees. It later became a popular piece of furniture in agricultural and fishing villages, as well. The popularization of the western-style table and chairs is said to have coincided with the sale of three room apartments (including a separate kitchen/dining room) by the Japan Public Housing Corporation in 1955. However, according to an interview survey we conducted with elderly informants (1983), the transition period from *meimeizen* (separate trays) to *chabudai* and from *chabudai* to western-style table and chairs was not necessarily the same for everyone (compare Ishige and Inoue 1991).

If we examine the rise and fall in the popularity of the three forms of dining table in Japan over time, what kind of curves do we come up with? Figure 2 shows the computer generated curves recording the gradual transition from one form of dining table to another based on the results of our interview surveys. The horizontal axis is the time line and the vertical axis indicates the distribution of the form of dining table at any given time among the 284 respondents. Although the numerical data should be viewed as approximate, Figure 2 points up some very interesting facts.

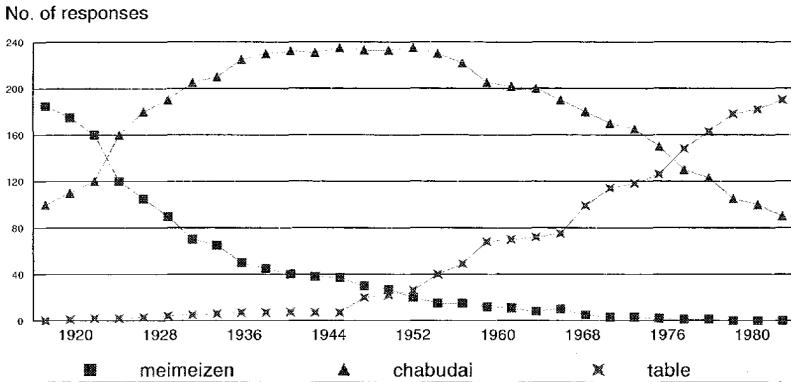


Figure 2: Changes in the form of the dining table

First of all, it appears that the transition from *meimeizen* (separate trays) to *chabudai* took place right around 1925. From the decade of the 1920's into the 1930's there was a surge in the popularization of the *chabudai*. At the same time and in reverse proportion, *meimeizen* was in steady decline. In fact, as of the mid-1920's the rising curve of the *chabudai* and the falling curve of *meimeizen* form a reverse image. It must not be forgotten, however, that even after 1945 there were farming families in the provinces which continued to use *meimeizen*.

Second, it appears that the shift from *chabudai* to western-style table and chairs took place some time around 1971. In other words, the popularization of western-style table and chairs took place in the 1960's and early 1970's. Coming into the 1970's, the age of the western-style table and chairs had begun in earnest. The mirror-image statistical curves observed with the waning of *meimeizen* (separate trays) and the rise of *chabudai* were repeated this time with reduced use of the *chabudai* and the rise of western-style table and chairs. In the course of this second cycle, moreover, *meimeizen* disappeared completely from the Japanese household.

Third, the era of the *chabudai*, sandwiched between *meimeizen* and western-style table and chairs lasted barely 50 years. In fact, the *chabudai* may be viewed as having played no more than a stopgap role between *meimeizen* and western-style table and chairs. This certainly makes sense in structural terms. If we view the *chabudai* as having consolidated the dispersed tray surfaces into a single surface and then raising that surface off the floor by means of four legs, then the western-style table and chairs can be seen as having completed the transition process by further lengthening the legs of the *chabudai*.

Unlike *meimeizen*, however, the *chabudai* is still a viable, widely used

piece of furniture in the Japanese household. Although still losing ground to western-style table and chairs, it remains a tenacious presence. In fact, coming into the 1980's the downward trend of the *chabudai* showed signs of braking. This is undoubtedly because the *chabudai* is an indispensable piece of furniture for living on *tatami* mats. As long as *tatami* mat flooring endures in Japan, the *chabudai* will endure.

4. TABLE MANNERS

Compared to standards of etiquette in many other areas, table manners at home are generally quite strict. These are summed up in homilies such as "No talking at the table," "Don't spill any food," "Sit properly while eating," etc. In many households, it has been the custom to keep children under intense scrutiny at every meal. Is this still the case?

It was once widely believed that the human act of consuming food was connected in a fundamental way with a deity. Mealtimes were originally viewed as an act of communal food consumption in front of the deity and mealtime was regarded, accordingly, as an extremely sacred and strict ceremony. Considering these historical roots, it's no surprise that standards of behavior associated with family mealtimes should be very rigorous.

At some point in time, however, the connection between the deity and mealtime receded and it has been a very long time indeed since it disappeared from people's everyday lives. Religious associations at the dining table are all but completely gone. Nevertheless, mealtime manners have remained strict. This is because, though separated from its original meaning and associations, the behavior itself has persisted on its own.

Like everything else in the world, behaviors also change with the times. Let's take as an example the homily "No talking at the table." Though this dictum was formerly strictly observed and enforced, in recent times, as mealtimes have come to be seen as a rare opportunity to express and build family solidarity, the reverse is now true. People are encouraged to communicate with each other at the table. This tendency for all kinds of qualitative and quantitative changes to occur is predictable.

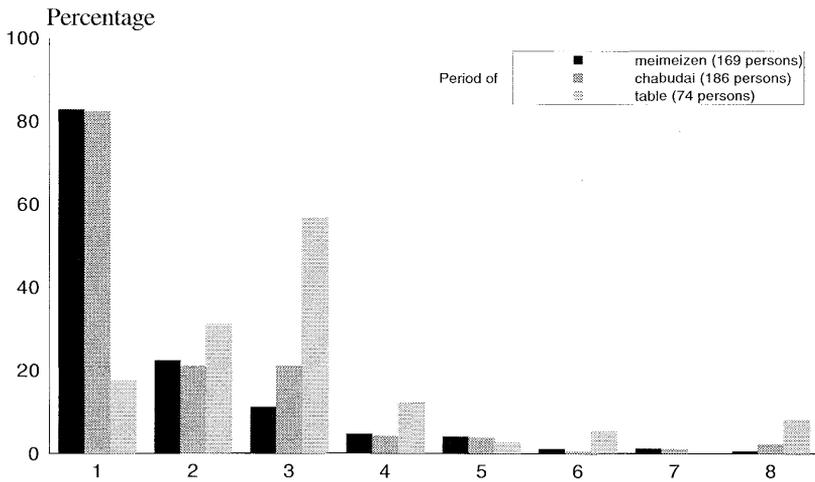
How have traditional Japanese table manners changed over the past 100 years? Using our comparison of shape changes in the dining table as a starting point, let's concretely examine attitudes about conversation and posture during mealtime.

In terms of posture while eating, *seiza* (literally 'proper seating,' a kneeling posture with legs folded under the body) can probably be considered the basic posture. Sitting properly in front of the dining tray or *chabudai* is traditionally synonymous with *seiza*. During the periods when

meimeizen (separate trays) and *chabudai* were most prevalent, the rules of etiquette were unusually strict about sitting properly in the *seiza* posture. The overwhelming significance of *seiza* becomes even clearer when you consider that the next most important postural rule, namely, “keep your back straight” is a far second, indeed.

The good manners of seating were destined to change radically with the introduction of the western-style table and chairs. To make a long story short, western-style seating made the *seiza* seating posture completely meaningless.

As Figure 3 shows, with western-style table and chairs, the issue of “sitting properly” is now less than 1/4 as important in terms of etiquette as it was during the age of *meimeizen* and *chabudai*. As compensation, we observe that the issue of “not putting one’s elbows on the table” has become much more important in this age of table and chairs. It looks as though the longer the legs of the dining table become, the more importance is accorded to “not putting one’s elbows on the table” as a point of etiquette.



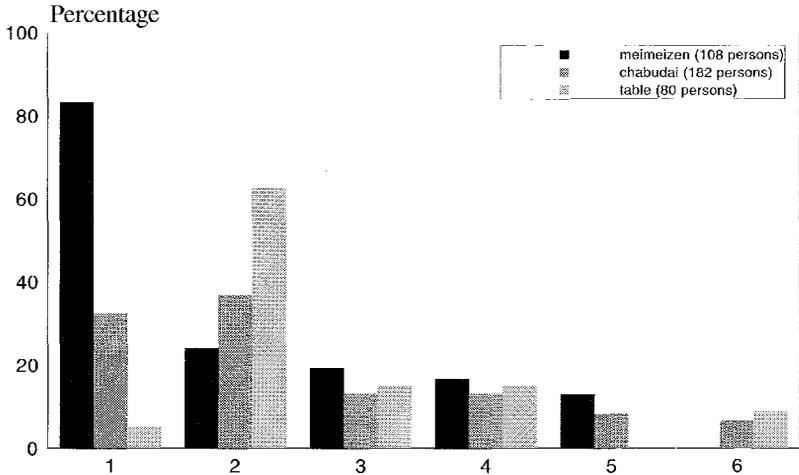
Legend:

- 1 = Proper kneeling posture (*seiza*)
- 2 = Keep the back straight
- 3 = Don't put your elbows on the table
- 4 = Keep your legs aligned together
- 5 = Don't stick out your elbows
- 6 = Keep your left hand above the table surface
- 7 = Do not recline right after eating
- 8 = Don't put your mouth to the plate

Figure 3: Manners relating to posture

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of responses in that category

After *seiza*, the most strongly emphasized point of etiquette during family mealtimes is “talking.” Based on a number of responses from non-survey respondents, we’d like to go on to examine “talking” as a point of etiquette from several different perspectives.



Legend:

- 1 = Talking strictly forbidden
- 2 = Talking is OK
- 3 = Talking is OK if done quietly
- 4 = Talking with food in your mouth
- 5 = Talking is only permitted when necessary
- 6 = No vulgar or unpleasant talk

Figure 4: Attitudes about talking at the table

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of responses in that category

According to Figure 4, during the period when *meimeizen* was in use, an overwhelmingly large 83.3% of those surveyed reported that “talking” was strictly forbidden during mealtime. Coming into the *chabudai* period, we observe that the strict no talking rule relaxed considerably. 36.8% of those surveyed reported that “talking is OK [at the table],” while 32.4% continued to be bound by the strict no talking rule. The existence of roughly equal sized groups on both sides of this issue indicates considerable ambivalence in society-at-large. Considering the fact that the *chabudai* is still in use today, results of this kind are probably natural. At any rate, the *chabudai* period is still far away from modern ideas of family togetherness and “the happy family circle”. This is especially true of the prewar family where meals were still taken in silence.

With the coming of the age of western-style table and chairs, most injunctions against talking at the table disappeared. The number of families in which "talking is strictly prohibited [at the table]" has fallen to a very low 5.0%. Two-thirds of survey respondents (62.5%) answered that "talking is OK [at the table]." The fact that no respondents in the table and chairs category answered that "only necessary conversation is permitted at the table" is highly suggestive. It indicates that the concept of mealtime as an occasion when family members can come together around the table to form a "happy family circle" has become generalized in society.

5. MEALTIME AND THE "HAPPY FAMILY CIRCLE"

Unlike *meimeizen* (separate trays), the *chabudai* is a single surface around which the whole family can sit to take meals. It is only with the introduction of the *chabudai* that the possibility existed for the family to form a "happy circle."

As Sakai Toshihiko (1979) points out, intellectuals of the period were quick to see the implications of the introduction of the *chabudai*. They touted ideas about the "happy family circle" and had high expectations with respect to the social changes to be wrought by the *chabudai*. Their objectives were highly ideological in fact. They equated *meimeizen* with the family system organized around patriarchal principles. By abandoning separate dining trays and replacing them with the *chabudai* around which the whole family would sit together, they believed the family would move closer to becoming a more egalitarian "happy circle." Sakai (1979: 104) had the following to say:

Scenes of the so called 'happy family' are most often observed at mealtimes. That's why meals should be consumed by the family at the same time and around the same dining table. Regardless of whether it is round or square, the family should gather around a single surface, whether that be called a table or 'shippokudai'. At any rate, we believe that the traditional tray dining system should be abandoned.

However, as the responses to our surveys (see Figures 3 and 4) show, in reality, the Japanese family was not necessarily enjoying mealtimes as a close-knit "happy circle" in a convivial atmosphere. The popularization of the *chabudai* had little to do with ideology and a lot to do with simple convenience. In fact, it was not until right after the war with the introduction of western-style table and chairs that the concept of "the family as a happy circle" began to come up in daily life.

In the postwar period, particularly in the decade of the 1960's, the

family's dining space underwent a tremendous change. The traditional room for taking meals, the Japanese living room (*cha-no-ma*), was replaced by the combination kitchen-dining room characteristic of modern Japanese housing. In the process of the kitchen-dining room becoming the principal family space, public and 'special occasion' space disappeared altogether from the home. The room for receiving guests, *kyaku-ma*, typical of traditional Japanese houses, is gone and the Japanese household has become for all intents and purposes 100% private space. The Japanese-English term *mai hōmu* (meaning 'my home', coined in the 1970's when family happiness as No. 1 came in vogue) has come to be taken very literally indeed.

The introduction of the western-style table and chairs brought about corresponding major changes in table manners. The days of excessively strict table manners typified by the rule of kneeling *seiza* at mealtime are over. Along with the more relaxed posture acceptable at mealtimes, members of the closed nuclear family gather in a well-lighted space to partake of a rich variety of meal menus. The conditions for enjoying meals in a harmonious and friendly atmosphere have certainly been met.

Without a doubt, the leading character in the dining space and 'my home' as a whole is the housewife. Although it might perhaps look as if the "happy family circle" philosophy of Sakai Toshihiko and others like him became a reality, quite unexpectedly, mainly through the agency of housewives, this was a momentary phenomenon which amounted, in the last analysis, to little more than a housewife's "happy circle fantasy." Using what could be called the "TV paradox" as a clue, let's look at this issue a bit more concretely.

There is a particular genre of Japanese television program known as the "home drama", which, as its name implies, draws on situations from everyday family life. It flourished particularly in the 1960's and 1970's. In these "home dramas," happy family circle scenes with members gathered around the dining table were extremely common. Such scenes in the television production were probably viewed as a necessary means for juxtaposing the different characters with their relative strengths and weaknesses. It is also an indication that the dining table is the only place in the household where all members assemble on a daily basis.

It goes without saying that housewives formed the group that most enthusiastically followed these "home dramas." Unconsciously, it seems as though housewives were using the scenes they were viewing on television as a basis for judgment and beginning to observe closely what was going on at their own dining tables. Taking this a step further, they were then compelled to try to press their own lives into the "happy family circle" mold they saw unfolding on the screen.

In order to realize the "happy family circle," all members of the family have to gather around the same dining table. In Japan, particularly, this gathering is normally limited to the evening meal. According to an interview survey conducted by the NHK Broadcasting Public Opinion Survey Center in 1981, among persons living with their families, 66% reported that they gather with other members of the family to have dinner "almost every day" (actually, 76% in provincial and rural areas and 56% in Tōkyō and Ōsaka). Furthermore, at least 8 out of ten persons reported that they gather together with the whole family for dinner at least every other day (Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai Hōsō Yoron Chōsajo 1983).

If the same survey were to be repeated today, the resulting percentages would probably be lower than those quoted in the previous paragraph. In fact, according to a comparative survey conducted in Tōkyō, New York and Paris by the Tōkyō Gas Urban Living Research Center (*Tōkyō Gasu Toshi Seikatsu Kenkyūjo*) in 1990, while approximately 60% of Parisians sit down with their families to dinner each night, less than half of their Tōkyō counterparts, a mere 30%, dine with their entire family each night (Akuto et al. 1992). The problem here is that it is becoming more and more difficult to get the whole family together for dinner on the weeknights.

This is, for instance, frankly revealed in the differences in the daily schedules of individual family members. Aside from the fact that commuting distances between the home and office are getting longer, the number of families where the husband is a "business bachelor" who lives elsewhere is also increasing. But even where families are living together under one roof, as the children get older they become increasingly committed to their extracurricular school groups which often conflict with normal meal-times. Even among families that would prefer to dine together as a unit, situations that oblige family members to eat by themselves at off-hours or to eat out are on the rise.

The universal order which formerly cemented human relations within the family has weakened and the process of individualization among family members is steadily advancing. If this trend continues unabated, we are fast entering an age in which the existence of the family itself will be in danger. The cherished, almost neurotic, desire of housewives to realize a "happy family circle" is an oblique expression of fear with respect to this impending crisis in the family.

6. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FAMILY AND WHAT IT SHOULD BE

Modern Japan has experienced two diametrically opposed family systems in succession. The first was that enacted in 1898 and characterized by

guiding principles such as patriarchal rule and primogeniture. It was replaced by the current postwar system which categorically rejects the previous system.

According to traditional Japanese concepts, the family is first and foremost the "household" (*ie*) system. The basis of family relations was not the individual but the system of the whole "household." The household itself is a collective of blood-related persons residing together. There are only two ways that new members come into the household: by marrying into it (husband and wife) or by being born into it (parents and child). Furthermore, the most important existential imperative of the "household" is its continuing survival over time (Umesao 1986).

Why is it that in spite of the change in dining table form from *meimeizen* (separate trays) to the *chabudai*, no changes were observed in human relations in the family and table manners? Going back to the metaphor of the dining space as the stage for the family drama, we might conclude that the scenario of the "household" (*ie*) system remained constant in spite of changes in the props, i.e., dining table. Since this scenario was universal throughout Japan, aside from slight variations from family to family, it was inevitable that similar behavior would be observed in virtually every family.

Under a new family system, post-war Japan rejected the old patriarchal system out of hand. If we restrict our observations to family life, the woman (mother) has become the central figure in the family and the image of the pre-war father (patriarch) has been substantially weakened. Having abandoned the system in which the male was the central figure, in spite of changes to the prop known as the dining table in today's dining room-kitchen (the housewife's realm) – and even in families where the father remains arrogant and patriarchal – he has become little more than an "emperor with no clothes."

In the prewar family where everyone was protected by the "household" (*ie*) as a system, it was considered the ideal for family members to be able to "understand each other without talking." In the postwar period, where the existence of the individual began to carry more weight than the "household" system, the situation was completely reversed – "if you don't speak up you won't be understood." Importance was placed on the "happy family circle." Finally, today we are talking about the crisis of the family where "even if we speak up, we are not understood."

This intellectual model, whereby the family (or home) is viewed as a theater and everyday family life as a drama, is what the author calls the 'family theater theory.' If we take the dining space as the stage for this drama, then the scenario in the post-war period has changed in response to national leadership and we live in an age when each family must create

a unique scenario for itself. We ought to be looking at all kinds of family options and trying them on for size.

In our search for the “household with a dining table” (the way a family should be) we have to create our own general scenarios. It is at the dining table that the general stagecraft of family life must be wrought.

We must rethink the stage prop found in every family known as the dining table and create original scenarios that fit the characters (family members). The parents (especially, the mother) are the producers in this family creation process.

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* Note: This article was based on the following works by the author:

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2. *Shokujū kukan to danran* [Dining Space and the Happy Circle]. In: Yamaguchi, Masatomo and Naomichi Ishige (eds.) (1989): *Kazoku to shokujū kukan* [Family Dining Space]. Tōkyō: Domesu Shuppan.