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## Changes in People's Eating Habits in Geihoku (Northwestern Hiroshima Prefecture) : Before and after Japan's High Economic Growth Period

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In the mountainous areas of the Geihoku region before around 1955, people's staple diet consisted mainly of barley plus a small amount of rice; daikon-meshi (rice or barley rice cooked with Japanese radish) or jôbu-meshi (rice or barley rice cooked with Japanese clethra leaves). At that time, homemakers were judged by their ability to cook appealing food that contained a minimum amount of rice. There were normally three meals daily (breakfast, lunch, and supper), but there was also a custom of having light meals, called *ocha*, between main meals. People had four meals during the slack part of the farming calendar and ate five to six times during the busy season. In contrast to the frugal daily meals that contained only small quantities of rice, people ate special meals on celebrative occasions (*hare-no-hi*). For example, they ate white rice on New Year's Eve and white rice or *zôni* (Japanese soup containing glutinous rice cakes), of which the rice cakes were made of just white rice, from the first day to the third day of the New Year. From the fourth day of the New Year, instead of white rice and white rice cakes, people ate *yomogi-mochi* (rice cakes made with mugwort leaves) and *tenko-mochi* (rice cakes made of miscellaneous cereals and containing mugwort leaves). The words of a folk song say, "How delightful to eat the New Year meals and those of the second and third day, but how sad to eat *tenko-mochi* on the fourth day." In those days, rice consumption was strictly limited in spite of it being a rice farming area, since rice was the only cash crop.

In other words, rice was the only valuable product that could be sold to obtain life's essentials (food, clothing, and shelter) and for acquiring other daily goods. Historically, rice had been the most taxed product, and this continued to burden the farmers' lives. Behind the instinct called '*kome-daiji*' (respecting the value of rice), was an accumulation of people's wisdom and methods of utilizing a range of wild and natural ingredients in their daily diet. The country-wide changes in eating habits that occurred during Japan's high economic growth period (1955 - 73) were dynamic and even swept away regional differences and unique local characteristics all around Japan. With the spread of large-scale shopping malls and freeway networks, eating habits in the Geihoku region have also become more urbanized, as in other parts of Japan. However, what is of interest in this region is the continuity of people's love of ingredients and foods that were popular before 1955. Techniques for preparing foods that have been eaten for hundreds of years are still being passed down, and people still enjoy edible wild plants, mushrooms, *ohagi* (rice cakes covered with soybean jam), *shibamochi* (rice cakes containing soybean jam and covered with greenbrier leaves), and seaweed and dorados brought from

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the Hamada fishery harbor. Despite the increasing uniformity of eating habits throughout Japan, the love of traditional regional ingredients and foods is still passed down in some parts of this region, even though there have been some changes in how these foods are prepared. It is worth noting that eating habits are also a part of ‘transitions and traditions.’

Key words: a small amount of rice, white rice, ‘*kome-daiji*’, the uniformity of eating habits, ‘transitions and traditions’