

# Gendered Practice of Cooking: The Norm of Modern Housewife in Nineteenth-Century British and American Cookery Books

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## Abstract

This study explores the way in which the representation of cooking was genderised in British and American cookery books in the nineteenth century. Previous research has revealed that some of them affected the contents of textbooks introduced for home economics in women's school education during the Meiji era. By investigating the titles and texts of cookbooks and related literature for women, particularly domestic housewives, the study identifies the quality of cooking expected from modern housewives, to whom the role of culinary preparation was crucially passed down. The survey results illustrate that many of these books embrace the same kinds of epithets in the title which could be applied to the nature of women's cooking in modern Japanese society. The text analysis also affirmed that 'beauty' or 'elegance' in 'economy' can be traced back to nineteenth-century western domestic cookery books.

## Keywords

Gender and Cooking, Housewife, Cookery Books, Nineteenth-Century Britain and America

## Introduction

The heavy burden of household chores on women has always been a huge controversy in Japanese society. Although cookery books and domestic magazines feature timesaving, corner-cutting, and fuss-free recipes, it does not necessarily mean that they help busy housewives reduce the time and effort required for food preparation. Based on the 'Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities' by the Statistics Bureau of Japan (2016), in the context of unpaid work, Japanese females spent the most amount of time on 'Management of meals'; this accounts for half the time they use for the entire amount of housework and over one hour longer than the time men invest in the same. To solve this issue, many sociological approaches have been employed, though a central point is not discussed as often: why were domestic duties, particularly those involved with culinary activity, exclusively performed by women? There seem to be fewer studies on the historical background of when and how gender discourse on cooking has been shaped in modern society.

It is worthwhile to examine the subject by looking back to the nineteenth-century British and American cookery or household books which had a huge impact on their Japanese counterparts. As previous surveys such as Yahata (2001) discovered, some textbooks of home economics used in Japanese schools in the Meiji

era were directly translated from some of the Western books. Western works delivered not only recipes, culinary practices, or tips for other domestic duties, but also the ideology of separate spheres of activity for the genders which had become pervasive in the nineteenth century. As Neuhaus (2013) remarks, cookbooks uncover ‘how foods, food preparation, kitchen labor, gender, class and race have intersected...Cookbooks most vividly demonstrate the way that food preparation and gender seem hopelessly intertwined’ (1-2). Thus, the nineteenth century Western cookbooks could provide clues to how domestic cooking had been genderised.

### **History of Cooking**

I present an overview of history of cooking in Western society which strengthens the case for why this research targets the nineteenth-century. In Europe, culinary activities have been somewhat disdained since ancient times, specially slaughtering and carving animals for food due to its association with blood. In addition, cooking certainly reminds people of gluttony, which is one of the seven cardinal sins in the Bible. Except for haute cuisine restaurants, food preparation was inescapably distributed to lower-class labourers, many of whose physical condition deteriorated due to the harmful steam, smoke, and pollution in the kitchen.

The situation, however, gradually improved with the reformation of sanitation, the invention of new kitchen appliances, and the division of labour by gender roles since the late eighteenth century. In the UK, the public-private dichotomy which encouraged women to bear the entire responsibility of managing household duties led to the emergence of housewives in the next decades. At this time, most mistresses in the middle and upper classes still did not need to engage in cooking themselves, and their initial role involved ordering their housekeepers to do so appropriately. We can speculate that practical cookery or household management books would have been a conducive tool for both housewives and their servants to assist their daily chores. In fact, since the late eighteenth century, many of British cookery books were intended for particular social groups such as experienced chefs, housekeepers, and housewives with advanced class divisions (Higashiyotsuyanagi, 2014, 20-21). Later, with the growth of the advertising and publishing industry, these books extensively circulated around the world to regions including America, and then Meiji Japan. Therefore, it would certainly be possible to clarify how the notion of modern housewives was widely spread by identifying the depiction of domestic cooking in nineteenth-century British and American cookery books.

### **Methodology**

This study conducted a bibliographical research on British and American cookbooks for housewives published in the nineteenth century. The list was compiled by searching the British Library, Leeds University Cookery Collection, Wellcome Collection, and Library of Congress via online catalogues. Due to the large number of cookery books available, the research narrowed down the focus on books whose titles included the term ‘housewife’ or ‘housewives’, which meant that the targeted readership were domestic housewives. Henry Notaker, the author of *A History of Cookbooks* (2017), recognises the significant role of cookbooks’ titles in terms of the delivery of their contents. He emphasises the essential functions of titles, mentioning the

idea of paratexts presented by French literary theorist Gérard Genette. Paratexts, according to Genette's explanation (1996), is 'empirically composed of an assorted set of practices and discourses of all sorts and of all ages', which 'is not uniformly constant and systematic' (262). That is, paratexts would reflect the cultural background or social upheaval in which they were written. Notaker (2017) illustrates the pattern of titles taking note of epithets in European and Western cookery books; although, his findings were limited to 'prudent' or 'frugal' for housewife, while 'sensible,' 'experienced,' or 'wise,' were used on the books for the cook or housekeepers (Notaker, 132). In this paper, therefore, the adjectives in the titles of books are more closely examined to clarify which kind of quality was espoused in nineteenth-century domestic books.

In addition to the literature search, this study examines the text of some British or American books whose translation or abridged passages were adopted for Japanese textbooks on home economics education in the Meiji era. The study chose the following three influential works, edited by iconic figures of household books.

- Catharine Beecher and Harriet Stowe. *Principles of domestic science: Applied to the Duties and Pleasures of Home. A textbook for the use of young women in schools, seminaries, and colleges* (1870).
- E. F. Haskell. *The Housekeeper's Encyclopedia of Useful Information for the Housekeeper in All Branches of Cooking and Domestic Economy* (1861).
- Isabella Beeton. *The Book of Household Management* (1861).

### **Result and Discussion: The Features of a Modern Housewife's Cooking**

The following list (Table 1) shows the results of the survey which extracted 51 titles in chronological order. The revised editions of the same titles were combined. The abridged version of the titles is displayed in the list because of space limitations. As an example title, note *The Young Woman's Companion: Or, Frugal Housewife, Containing the Most Approved Methods of Pickling, Preserving, Potting, Collaring, Confectionary, Managing and Colouring Foreign Wines and Spirits...* (No. 2); the long titles were characteristic of cookery books before the nineteenth century, which gradually became shorter towards the end of the period. Many of the books on the list target middle- or lower-class housewives, but there were some works which targeted niche groups of the society, such as *The Anglo-Indian Housewife's Daily Companion* (No. 39).

No.	Title	Author	Publisher's Location	Publication Year
1	The New Practice of Cookery, Pastry, Baking, and Preserving: Being the Country Housewife's Best Friend.	Mrs Hudson and Mrs Donat	Edinburgh	1804

2	The Young Woman's Companion: Or, Frugal Housewife,...	Anon. (By a Very Distinguished Lady)	Manchester	1811, 1813, 1816
3	The Husbandman and Housewife: A Collection of Valuable Recipes and Directions, Relating to Agriculture and Domestic Economy.	Thomas Green Fessenden	Bellows Falls	1820
4	The Housewife's Cookery Book, Containing Directions for Roasting, Boiling, Frying,...	Anon.	Falkirk	[1820], [1860]
5	The Complete Economical Cook, and Frugal Housewife: An Entire New System of Domestic Cookery,...	Mary Augusta Fox Baroness Holland	London	[1823-25], 1824, 1825, 1829, 1843, 1853
6	The Frugal Housewife; Or, Experienced Cook:...	Susannah Carter	London	1823, 1826
7	The Housewife's Directory: Being the Most Complete System of Domestic Economy,...	John Edward Watson	London	1825
8	The Housewife's Guide: Or, a Complete System of Modern Cookery Particularly Adapted to the Middle Class of Society,...	Anon.	Belfast	1825, 1833
9	The Cook and Housewife's Manual: Containing the Most Approved Modern Receipts for Making Soups, Gravies, Sauces, Ragouts,...	C. I. Johnstone	Edinburgh	1826, 1827, 1828
10	The Housewife's Guide: Or, a Complete System of Modern Cookery: Containing Directions How to Roast and Boil Every Thing Necessary for the Table; To Cure Hams, Bacons, &c....	S. W Stavelly, J. E. Thomas, Anon.	Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Otley	1827, 1829, 1830, 1831, 1833, 1836, 1838, 1840
11	The Cook and Housewife's Manual: A Practical System of Modern Domestic Cookery and Family Management,...	C. I. Johnstone	Edinburgh, London	1829, 1833, 1837, 1842, 1847, 1849, 1862, [1885]
12	The Frugal Housewife. Dedicated to Those Who Are Not Ashamed of Economy.	Lydia Maria Child	London, Boston, New York	1830, 1832, 1834, 1835, 1850

13	The Housewife's Complete Guide, Or, an Economical System of Modern Cookery....	Anon. (By a Lady)	Preston	[1830]
14	The Housewife's Guide, Or, an Economical and Domestic Art of Cookery:...	Deborah Irwin	London	[1830]
15	Family Receipts or Practical Guide for the Husbandman and Housewife.	H. L. Barnum	Cincinnati	1831
16	The Housewife's Guide: Or, a Complete System of Modern Cookery: Containing Directions How to Roast and Boil Every Thing Necessary for the Table; How to Make Gravies, Sauces, Fricassees,...	Martha Taylor	Derby	[1831]
17	The Housewife's Receipt-Book: Being a Collection of the Most Useful Domestic Receipts,...	Anon.	London	1837
18	Cookery and Domestic Economy, for Young Housewives. Including Directions for Servants.	Anon. (By the Mistress of a Family)	Edinburgh, London	1838, 1877
19	The Frugal Housewife, or Housekeeper's and Servant's Guide, Being a Carefully Selected Assortment of Useful Family Receipts,...	Monsieur Durant	Liverpool	1840
20	The Housewife's Complete Guide, Being a New System of Domestic Cookery,...	S. W. Stavelly	Derby	[1840]
21	The Cook's Guide and Housewife's Directory: Compiled from Morrison's Domestic Cookery....	Anon.	Troy, New York	1846
22	A New and Valuable Book, Entitled the Family Companion: Containing Many Hundred Rare and Useful Receipts, on Every Branch of Domestic Economy:...	Wells, J. R.	Boston	1846
23	The Carolina Housewife, or House and Home:...	A Lady of Charleston (Sarah Pinckney Rutledge)	Charleston	1847

24	The Modern Housewife or Ménagère: Comprising Nearly One Thousand Receipts for the Economic and Judicious Preparation of Every Meal of the Day,...	Alexis Soyer	London	1849, 1850, 1851, 1853, 1856, 1858, 1861
25	The Skillful Housewife's Book: Or Complete Guide to Domestic Cookery...	L. G. Abell	New York	1852
26	Domestic Library. The Modern Housewife's Receipt Book.	Matilda Marian Pullan	London	1854
27	The Practical Housewife, Forming a Complete Encyclopædia of Domestic Economy,...	Robert Kemp Philp	London	[1855], 1860, [1890]
28	The Young Housewife's Book: Or, How to Eke Out a Small Income.	Anon.	London	1856
29	The Housewife's Reason Why: Affording to the Manager of Household Affairs,...	Robert Kemp Philp	London	[-1857], [1859]
30	A Shilling Cookery for the People: Embracing an Entirely New System of Plain Cookery and Domestic Economy.	Alexis Soyer	London, New York	1855, 1858
31	The Economy of Cookery, for the Middle Class, the Tradesman, and the Artisan;...	F. Volant and J. R. Warren	London	1860
32	The National Cook Book by a Lady of Philadelphia, a Practical Housewife.	Lady of Philadelphia	Philadelphia	1863
33	Peterson's New Cook Book; Or, Useful and Practical Receipts for the Housewife and the Uninitiated,...	T. B. Peterson	Philadelphia	[1864]
34	Cre-Fydd's Family Fare: The Young Housewife's Daily Assistant,...	Cre-Fydd	London	1864, 1866, 1871
35	The Reason Why: Domestic Science: Affording Intelligible Reasons for the Various Duties Which a Housewife Has to Perform.	Robert Kemp Philp	London	[1869]
36	The Young Housewife's Counsellor and Friend: Containing Directions in Every Department of Housekeeping, Including the Duties of Wife and Mother.	Mary Mason	Philadelphia	1871

37	The Lady's Every-Day Book: A Practical Guide in the Elegant Arts and Daily Difficulties of Domestic Life.	Robert Kemp Philp	London	[1873-74]
38	A Housewife's Opinions.	Augusta Webster	London	[1878], 1879
39	The Anglo-Indian Housewife's Daily Companion.	G. Allewellyn	Allahabad	1879
40	The "Little Housewife," or, Domestic Economy for Schools, and Classes in Cookery,...	William Elgar Buck	Leicester	1879
41	Household Hints to Young Housewives: With the Arrangements and Receipts for Forty Dinners &c.	Martha Careful	London	1880
42	The Economical Housewife. A Complete Practical Guide to Domestic Management for the Use of Both Mistress and Maid,...	Anon.(Ward, Lock & Co.)	London	[1880]
43	The Thrifty Housewife: Or, Plain Fare for Plain Folk:...	Andrew Stewart	Dundee	1882
44	Domestic Cookery; Or, Housewife's Guide,...	Anon. (J. Cameron)	Glasgow	[1883]
45	The Modern Housewife; Or, How We Live Now.	Annie Thomas	London	[1883]
46	The Housewife's Friend and Family Help;...	C. W. Alexander	London	[1888]
47	Soups, Savouries, Sweets. With a Chapter on Breads. By a Practical Housewife.	Helen B. Taylor	London	1889
48	Chambers's Cookery for Young Housewives: A Work of Plain Practical Utility.	Annie M. Griggs	London	1890, 1894
49	The Housewife's Manual of Domestic Cookery: With Special Reference to Cooking by Gas.	H. M.Young	London	[1895]
50	The Housewife's Handy-Book. Three Hundred and Fifty Useful Everyday Recipes.	Charles John Samuel Thompson	London	[1896]
51	The Housewife's Referee. A Treatise on Culinary and Household Subjects.	Harriet Anne de Salis	London	1898

Table 1. The List of Cookbooks or Household Books Including the Term 'Housewife' or 'Housewives' on the Title Published in the Nineteenth-Century Britain or America.

The results of the bibliographical research indicates that similar adjectives were used in the titles. For example, as Notaker asserts, ‘frugal’ was a commonly used word. Furthermore, ‘domestic’ was found to be the highest appearing word, followed by ‘complete’, ‘economic/frugal’, and ‘modern’. Notably, ‘domestic’ and ‘complete’ are not introduced to represent ‘housewife’. ‘Domestic’ fits well with ‘cooking’ or ‘economy’. ‘Complete’ signals to the type of books, which provide detailed knowledge for household management such as ‘guide’, ‘encyclopaedia’, or ‘system’. Even though completeness is not used with the word ‘housewife’, in cookbooks it is described as the quality housewives must have. This view is presented in the following preface of *The Housekeeper’s Encyclopedia* by Haskell (1861).

In our grandmother’s time, no greater praise could be spoken of a lady, than to say she was a perfect housekeeper; while in the present generation, woman is taught too much to look on the happiness, health, and comfort of her family....The more intelligent the woman, the more perfectly should she perform the several duties of her station....Our grandparents enjoyed their pork and beans as well, no doubt, as we now do the more elaborate cooking of the present day.  
(iii-v)

Here, housewives were depicted as a complete and intelligent housekeeper to protect the family’s mental and physical happiness in the domestic sphere; such an ideological figure of modern housewives became palatable in the cookbooks. Further emphasis is laid on ‘elaborate cooking’. In fact, ‘elaborate’, ‘beauty’, or ‘elegance’ had been a key term to represent domestic cooking by housewives since the eighteenth century. For example, the following descriptions of carving fishes and bantam, and a recipe for fondue are cited from *The Book of Household Management* (1861) by Isabella Beeton.

IN CARVING FISH, care should be taken to help it in perfect flakes, as, if these are broken, the beauty of the fish is lost. The carver should be acquainted, too, with the choicest parts and morsels;...(174)

Since the introduction of the Bantam into Europe, it has ramified into many varieties, none of which are destitute of elegance, and some, indeed, remarkable for their beauty. All are, or ought to be, of small size, but lively and vigorous, exhibiting in their movements both grace and stateliness....(470)

#### TO MAKE A FONDUE.

1643. INGREDIENTS.—4 eggs, the weight of 2 in Parmesan or good Cheshire cheese, the weight of 2 in butter; pepper and salt to taste.

*Mode.*—Separate the yolks from the whites of the eggs...Pin a napkin round the tin or dish, and serve very hot and very quickly. If allowed to stand after it is withdrawn from the oven,



the beauty and lightness of this preparation will be entirely spoiled...(818)

Beeton is trying to render cooking as a skillful and exquisite art rather than being a shabby and tedious act, by focusing on the 'beauty' and 'elegance' of ingredients, dishes, and the process of preparation. This is a crucial shift in the way domestic cooking is being viewed. Since ancient Greece, cooking has been merely based on experience and practice rather than art or technique (Notaker, 14–15). This trend can be seen in another famous American book, *Principles of Domestic Science, as applied to the Duties and Pleasures of Home. A textbook for the use of young women in schools, seminaries, and colleges* (1870) by Catharine Beecher and Harriet Stowe.

THERE are but a few things on which health and happiness depend more than the manner in which food is cooked. You may make houses enchantingly beautiful, hang them with pictures, have them clean and airy and convenient; but if the stomach is fed with sour bread and burnt meats, it will raise such rebellions that the eyes will see no beauty anywhere. (148)

Catharine Beecher and Harriet Stowe emphasised the significance of food preparation in maintaining a household's happiness and a family's health. Like other domestic duties, it is expressed as a practice of creating 'beauty'. Furthermore, 'beauty' or 'elegance' had been often connected with economy of the kitchen. The passage from *The Housekeeper's Encyclopedia* clearly represented how elegant and economical cooking could be compatible.

ECONOMY in cooking does not consist in the use of very little of what are called the necessaries, but rather in always getting up, even the most common dishes, in such a manner, as not only to relish, but also to present, at table, a good appearance. (7-8)

We can see that it is necessary to maintain a certain degree of quality and appearance of dishes, even if economic decisions are appreciated. In fact, both 'economy' and 'elegance' in cooking did not suddenly appear in the nineteenth-century. Preceding research suggests that cookbooks in the eighteenth century tend to adopt the term 'elegance', 'frugality/prudent', and 'plain/easy' (Higashiyotsuyanagi, 19). Taking over the trend, the main feature of nineteenth-century cookbooks seems to combine economy with 'beauty/elegance' rather than 'plain/easy'. This was supported by the domestic ideology, especially of the middle class who needed to maintain their respectability. Mentioning *Modern Cookery for Private Families* (1845) by the famous contemporary writer Eliza Acton, Higashiyotsuyanagi explains that 'beauty/elegance' were indispensable elements of cookery books for the middle and labour class (23-24). It can be said that this is the dawn of 'modern' cooking. The kitchen was thus represented as a place for housewives to address not only their technique of cooking, but also class and gender awareness.

## Conclusion

Nineteenth-century cookery and household books delivered a certain notion of an ideal modern housewife. Some of them used similar adjectives to create gender norms in the domestic sphere. These adjectives were also employed to admire a women's culinary activities in modern Japanese society. 'Beauty', 'elegance', and 'economy' were the key terms to represent the domestic ideology of the modern housewife. However, this research could not examine in detail how the use of epithets changed during the nineteenth century. Future research should be undertaken to discuss to what extent the books reflect the reality of the kitchen of authors and readers. Nonetheless, they provide clues to speculate how women would tackle the duties of domestic chores. Cookbooks hold the promise of revealing the details of women's hidden lives and desires in the kitchen.

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