

Symposium Submission – WERA-TERA 2026

East Asia’s School Food Education: World-Leading in Fostering Sustainability and Students’ Well-being?

Panel Chair: Jeremy Rappleye, University of Hong Kong (formerly Kyoto University)

Panelists:

- (i) Seulgi Son, University of Seoul (Assistant Professor), JungHo Park, Yonsei University (Associate Professor)
- (ii) Chialin Huang, Douceur Network (Taiwan-based Non-Profit) (Secretary-General)
- (iii) Jeremy Rappleye, University of Hong Kong (Professor and Director Comp Ed Research Center)
- (iv) Wan-Yu Wang, National Taiwan Normal University (PhD student)

Discussant: Yoko Mochizuki, Former: UNESCO (Paris, New Delhi) and United Nations University (Tokyo), Current: Associate Professor at The Education University of Hong Kong

Panel Proposal:

Sustainability and students’ well-being are increasingly prominent global research themes. However, much of the globally recognized, English-language educational research that pursues these topics remains firmly bound within long-standing assumptions that education is primarily about cognition, knowledge, and text. This starting assumption gives rise to policies seeking to address sustainability and well-being by raising levels of numeracy and literacy (SDG 4), increasing students’ awareness of the science of climate change (PISA 2025), and/or measuring well-being through self-reported evaluations of individual life-satisfaction (UNICEF, OECD). Yet, this panel aims to think differently, in line with the 2026 WERA-TERA conference theme: by Bridging Cultures and Co-Creating Knowledge, we seek to offer the ‘Local Innovations’ of East Asian school food as a potential new ‘Global Vision’.

Concretely, scientists have confirmed that the surest path to sustainability indeed lies in changing global food consumption (Poor & Nemecke 2018). At the same time, global rates of obesity have soared over the past three decades, with youth obesity far outpacing adults, making students arguably *the* central piece of this ‘epidemic’ ([Lancet, 2024](#); see also [Financial Times, February 2024](#)). At the forefront of the obesity frontier are many of the Anglo-American countries that championed neo-liberal policies over the past few decades, most prominently the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. In privatization of school kitchens, cost-cutting in menus, corporate farming-turned-school lunch, and reduction in government nutritional oversight (Rappleye et al., 2024), these cases underscore that decades of neo-liberal school food have *accelerated* the obesity epidemic, and – at the same time – done little to teach the next generation how to live more unsustainably via what they eat.

Simultaneously, many East Asian systems - but particularly Taiwan, South Korea and Japan - have highly developed school food systems that offer clear alternatives. From Korea’s organic and free lunches to Japan’s well-developed pedagogical materials to Taiwan’s vigorous grassroots, civil society-led campaign (and 2026 announcement of free school lunch policies), East Asia’s “local”

innovations are leading the way globally. This Symposium thus seeks breaks new ground by spotlighting all, as a means of think very differently – *creatively* – about how to address the challenges of sustainability and improving students’ well-being.

By focusing on school food, the deeper academic importance is challenging the taken-for-granted assumption that schooling is primarily about the mind (cognition, knowledge, and text). The panel argues that this assumption has long-prevented educational research globally from recognizing food as an integral part of education. In turn, this lacuna has prevented educational researchers from making the rather obvious links between sustainability, well-being, and education, as we have roughly sketched above, and – simultaneously - prevented the world from learning from East Asia’s systems. Potentially, school food is the category that severs ‘education’ from its exclusive focus on symbolic mastery, and (re)balances it with somatic interdependence, as well as becomes the venue where East Asian approaches come to recognized as distinct and important. This rebalancing and reconnection are necessary prerequisites for developing new educational thinking and practice attuned to a post-human Anthropocene. Moreover, despite deep philosophical potential, a focus on school food is simultaneously highly tangible and operationalizable: policies can be changed, new pedagogical menus developed, and curricular categories remade. School food thus provides myriad possibilities, across all levels of research, policy, and practice.

This Symposium seeks to pursue these themes through a comparative lens, fielding a collection of papers from ‘leading’ educational systems across East Asia. The broader aim of comparison, of course, is not competition but instead collaboration: an initial step towards forming a network of researchers globally who, through comparative contrasts, contemplate new possibilities and co-create new categories for thought. A high-profile Discussant – world-leading expert on Education and Sustainability who worked for UNESCO for almost two decades – provides insights on how these local innovations interface with contemporary Global Visions, including the post-2030 global agenda.

Organization: We request a 90-minute dedicated Symposium sessions, comprised of 4 papers and a Discussant (15 minutes each + 10 minutes for Discussant + 20 minutes of Q&A (all questions taken at the end).

Korea

Title: Beyond Nutrition: The Material and Symbolic Roles of School Food in Sustainability

Seulgi Son University of Seoul (Assistant Professor) and JungHo Park, Yonsei University (Associate Professor)

As a global leader in public school meal programs, South Korea has made significant strides in expanding free school lunches. As of March 2025, the majority of municipalities mandate free school lunches for elementary and middle school students through local ordinances. Seoul, the capital city known for its innovative school meal initiatives, has successfully extended the *Universal, Free, Eco-friendly* School Meal Program (UFEF) to high schools, building upon its

initial implementation in selected elementary schools in 2011. Over the past decades, South Korea's school food policies have undergone major paradigm shifts: (a) Witak Geubsik in the 1990s, which outsourced school meals to commercial providers; (b) Jik-yeong Geubsik in the 2000s, which introduced direct school-run food services; and (c) the most recent transition since 2010 to universal free school meals prepared from scratch using locally sourced, sustainably grown ingredients. These transitions reflect an evolving governmental perspective on the importance and role of food in education.

This paper examines the content and politics of school food programs through a document analysis of policy and educational materials used in classrooms, alongside fieldwork involving participant observation and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. It argues that school food policies increasingly frame food not only as a material necessity but also as a symbolic tool for addressing risks associated with capitalism and neoliberalism, such as food price volatility, safety concerns, and disparities in access to healthy food. Recent initiatives emphasizing environmental sustainability, urban-rural linkages, and public health (e.g., physical and mental well-being), for instance, highlight efforts to rebuild *lost or forgotten* connections between urban and rural communities, particularly in the context of rural decline. By fostering students' understanding of the farm-to-table process and helping them envision these connections as an *imagery* of local food pathways, such initiatives support rural revitalization while reinforcing the broader social and personal benefits of consuming *local, healthy* food. The South Korean case provides valuable insights for policymakers and educators worldwide, demonstrating how food can serve as a vehicle for sustainability education and informing policy design and implementation in educational settings.

Taiwan

From Theory to Practice: How to Make School Food part of Education? Critical Insights from Taiwan

Chialin Huang, Douceur Network (Taiwan-based Non-Profit) (Secretary-General)

This study draws on a decade of practice by the Douceur Network Association, a Taiwan-based non-profit organization, to reconceptualize school lunch as an educational field that links sustainability and student well-being. Through initiatives such as national school lunch competitions, teacher training, and international exchange, the association has aimed to transform school meal provision into an action platform addressing food and agriculture education while serving as a support hub for educators.

However, Taiwan lacks a dedicated School Lunch Act, and school dietitians remain constrained by administrative structures, limited staffing, and ambiguous educational roles—systemic challenges identified through the association's sustained practice and advocacy. In response, the association employs cross-national comparison—particularly

with Japan and South Korea—as a strategic practice to foreground and critically examine structural limitations in Taiwan’s school meal system.

Within Taiwan’s multicultural context, the association further integrates Southeast Asian languages and food cultures into pedagogical tools. This approach offers practical insights for neighboring countries facing declining birthrates, labor shortages, and increasing reliance on migrant workers.

By examining institutional bottlenecks alongside the potential of international collaboration, this study argues that empowering educators is a critical pathway for advancing sustainability in school food systems.

Chinese:

本研究以大享食育協會此一非營利組織自 2016 年十年實踐為基礎，探討學校午餐為連結永續與學生福祉的教育場域。透過舉辦臺灣學校午餐大賽、教師培力與國際交流等活動，我們企圖將供餐系統轉化為回應食物教育、在地農業與飲食文化學習的行動平台，成為教育工作者支援資源樞紐。

然而，臺灣缺乏學校午餐專法，學校營養師角色受限於行政體制、人數不足且教育任務模糊等制度問題，在協會持續調查與推動中浮現。以日本與韓國制度為對照，我們發展比較基礎的行動策略以探索鬆動結構的可能。另一方面，面對多元文化與勞動轉型，本會結合東南亞語言飲食主題轉譯為教學工具，對日韓少子化、勞力缺乏及移民移工挑戰或可提供跨國借鏡。本研究分析制度瓶頸與國際合作效能，提出教育工作者賦權作為強化校園永續的關鍵路徑。

Japan

Japan’s School Food Educators: Strengthening *Shokuiku*, Sustaining the World?

Jeremy Rappleye, Hikaru Komatsu, Suzuka Nishiyama

Abstract: For over twenty years, Japan has educated and utilized a ‘new kind of teacher’ to lead its school food education (*shokuiku*). Today, these School Food Educators play a key role in strengthening Japan’s long-standing tradition of *shokuiku*, and transitioning the system toward environmental sustainability. Herein, we detail the role School Food Educators play in schools, before turning to describe how they are educated, both pre- and in-service. Highlights include a close look at the menus and explicit pedagogical materials they produce which show deep

coherence and polish, and how the curriculum and content of School Food Educators is much more cultural, educational, and aesthetic than scientific. In comparison with even the ‘leading’ school food education systems in Europe (Finland, France, Italy), Japan’s School Food Educators and efforts to explicitly teach about food stand as suggestively salutary. Even if these features of the Japanese system are not replicable in other contexts worldwide, these may serve as a counterpoint to dominant notions of teacher education, those which largely continue to ignore links between school, food, and sustainability. The Japanese contrast may help us unlearn our ‘usual’ ways of thinking about what teachers do, how they are trained, and perhaps even the mode of ‘being’ human we seek to educate.

Taiwan

Cultural Citizenship Beyond the Plate: A Practical Study of Southeast Asian Food Education in School Lunch Programs

Wan-yu Wang, National Taiwan Normal University (PhD Candidate)

According to Ministry of the Interior statistics, the population of new immigrants in Taiwan has reached nearly 600,000, accounting for approximately 2.5% of the total population and constituting Taiwan’s fifth-largest ethnic group. This demographic shift has fundamentally altered Taiwan’s culinary landscape. While the proportion of “new second-generation” students in schools has risen, the campus catering system often prioritizes local sourcing and standardized nutrition, which can occasionally conflict with the requirement for imported ingredients in foreign cuisines. Consequently, Southeast Asian flavors are typically limited to easily prepared dishes—such as stir-fried minced pork with basil or fried spring rolls—or reserved for occasional “Multicultural Food Week” events.

While local governments have attempted to compile Southeast Asian recipes and conduct chef workshops to integrate these dishes into school menus, the non-governmental organization Douceur (大享食育協會) has introduced a more holistic approach. Their production of *The Little Theater of Southeast Asian Flavors*—a series of radio dramas and companion books covering 20 dishes from five Southeast Asian nations—seeks to integrate sound, text, and taste. This initiative aims to break free from the traditional constraints of school lunches and conventional food education.

Within the framework of the 108 Curriculum (12-Year Basic Education), multicultural education is embedded in the core competencies of “Social Participation” and “Multicultural and International Understanding.” Emphasizing that competencies should be practiced in daily life, the introduction of Southeast Asian cuisine and radio dramas during lunch hours disrupts traditional pedagogical boundaries. Through informal learning during school lunch, students can effectively translate complex knowledge of spices, culinary techniques, and food cultures into everyday common sense. Using Douceur (大享食育協會) as a case study, this research highlights the organization’s role as a “knowledge intermediary.” By acting as a bridge between nutritionists and students, and between new immigrant teachers and schools, the NGO provides the resources and

training necessary to transform cultural knowledge into practical life skills, thereby achieving the goal of respecting Southeast Asian food culture and implementing cultural equity.

This study employs a textual analysis of the radio dramas and books published by Foodiedu, supplemented by interviews with three categories of key actors: new immigrant teachers who co-authored the recipes and scripts, NGO members, and school nutritionists. The research objectives are three-fold:

Knowledge Transformation: To explore how NGOs utilize audio and text to transform complex culinary knowledge into feasible educational resources.

Cultural Intermediation: To discuss the role of NGOs as intermediaries between the government and schools, shifting the perception of Southeast Asian culture from "exotic sampling" to "everyday knowledge" through workshops and culinary experiences.

Systemic Inclusion: To argue that these food education initiatives foster cultural identity among Taiwan's new second-generation students and establish an inclusive, equitable food supply system within schools.

By shifting the analytical framework away from traditional food education perspectives—such as nutritional hygiene and behavioral change—this study aims to center ethnic culture within the discourse of school meal programs.

Chinese:

跨越餐盤的文化公民：於學校午餐推動東南亞食育之實踐研究

根據內政部統計，臺灣新住民人口已接近 60 萬人，占總人口約 2.5%，已然成為臺灣第五大族群。隨著新住民的人口移入，飲食文化也隨之改變。校園中的「新二代」學生比例也較以為增加，不過學校供餐系統多追求在地與營養，與需進口的異國飲食抵觸。除了打拋豬、炸春捲等較易準備食物會出現在學校午餐作為一道菜色外，學期間的多元美食週會有學校午餐供應異國料理。

地方政府雖嘗試編製東南亞食譜並辦理廚師研習，企圖將食譜活用為學校午餐東南亞菜色。民間組織大享食育協會發行的《東南亞的滋味小劇場》廣播劇與文字書，涵蓋東南亞五國共 20 道料理，在此脈絡下，試圖透過聲音、文字與味覺五感整合，跳脫學校午餐與食育既有的窠臼。

在 108 課綱中，多元文化教育顯現於核心素養中的「社會參與」與「多元文化與國際理解」中，並強調素養應在生活中實踐，因此當東南亞料理與廣播劇進入午餐時間，既打破了傳統教學之局勢，又學生透過學校午餐的非正式學習，能更有效將複雜的香料、料理與飲食文化轉化為生活常識。民間組織已大享食育協會為例，在此食育推廣行動中扮演「知識中介者」角色，在營養師與學生間擔任橋樑的角色，提供教學資源及研習課程，使學校營養師能活用教材；以及在新住民老師與學校間，將知識轉化為實用的生活常識，並使學生達成習得並尊重東南亞飲食文化的學習目標，進而落實文化平權。

本研究以大享食育協會所發行的廣播劇與文字書等教材作為分析文本，並訪談三類參與食譜與劇本編寫的新住民老師、民間組織成員與學校營養師等關鍵行動者。首先探討民間組織藉由聲音與文本，將複雜的食物知識轉化為具可行性的教育資源；接著討論民間組織作為政府與學校之間的文化中介者，透過研習、飲食體驗等活動，將東南亞文化從嘗試異國料理轉向為生活中的日常知識；最後申論此一食育行動能建立台灣新二代學生的文化認同，更於校園中建立了一套具包容性的文化平權供食體系。希冀透過此研究，跳脫以往飲食教育以營養衛生、行為改變等觀點的研究框架，將族群文化納入討論中。