On October 11, 1945, Japan’s first postwar movie, “Gentle Breeze” (Soyokaze), starring popular actress Namiki Michiko, blazed across screens. The title song, “The Apple Song” (Ringo no uta), shot to number one almost immediately. Top-selling hits about food are unusual but indicative of something significant, symbolizing in Japan something more like feminine ripening and innocent yearning. The implication in the film of scenes in which a cute young woman sings about fruit was surely lost on no one. “The apple can’t say anything but I understand how it feels,” she sang. “Apples are cute! Apples are cute!” “That girl is a good girl, she’s good-natured like the apple, she’s a cute girl.” Red apples embodied the sense of hope bursting forth after a long decade-and-a-half of war.

Politics in postwar Japan was intensely focused on food. It was slightly more complex than the “bread and circuses” of Roman times, but not by much. Any leadership that failed to provide the defeated nation with a robust food program would eventually face resistance.

In some ways it was ironic that consumers would spend their hard-earned cash being entertained by a song about fruit rather than actually eating it, but dreaming about food was probably almost as good as digesting it, especially when there was precious little of it around.

The early postwar era (1945–1955) introduced new thinking about national cuisine and new ideas about Japan’s identity and place within the international hierarchy. Analyzing how changes in Japanese foodways regenerated ramen in the early postwar period illuminates three major points about modern Japanese food history: 1) Tasty and nutritious food psychologically equated with the concept of a new, strong nation, and generated pride that somewhat blunted the psychological and political trauma of military defeat; 2) Japan started to positively and proactively incorporate Chinese influence into Japanese cuisine, in contrast to the imperial era when the Japanese people and government made efforts to reduce or even denigrate such effects; and 3) Japan enlarged its concept of national identity through the incorporation and promotion of these new food products.
Figure 38. The postwar playbill for the song, “The Apple Song.”