The Globalization of Asian Cuisines

Transnational Networks and Culinary Contact Zones

Edited by James Farrer
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Chapter 1

Introduction: Traveling Cuisines in and out of Asia: Toward a Framework for Studying Culinary Globalization

James Farrer

Asia’s Cuisines and Globalization

In an age of “traveling cultures”—of peoples, objects, and ideas on the move across borders (Clifford 1997)—it is not surprising that culinary cultures are also traveling beyond their traditional territories, sometimes achieving worldwide popularity. At the same time, even these “traveling cuisines” are usually still identified through place names and are re-grounded in new settings, through indigenization, rebranding, and other processes of adapting to local circumstances. An age of globalized, placeless cuisines has not arrived. The essays in this collection share the task of characterizing these simultaneous processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in the production of Asian cuisines (Tomlinson 1999, 106). We also may challenge how some readers might still perceive Asian cuisines in an era in which Asian cuisines are traveling abroad and other cuisines are traveling to Asia. So, I start with a few commonsense notions about Asian cuisine and our ways of questioning them.

First, though we often hear that Asians (or more specifically, Chinese, Japanese, Malaysians, etc.) are fiercely loyal to the foods of their home regions, the chapters in this collection challenge this
We learn that what people consider local Asian culinary traditions are often recent inventions, borrowed traditions, or the outcomes of recent culinary politics (see chapters by Assmann, Cheung, Rath, Ray, and Wank). We also learn that Asian consumers are becoming enamored with non-Asian cuisines (see chapters by Farrer and Sawaguchi), while Asian chefs are becoming some of the most esteemed producers of these “foreign” cuisines, including Japanese chefs making Italian cuisine in Italy as well as in Japan (see chapter by Sawaguchi). We find that some of the agents most responsible for promulgating Asian cuisines across borders are themselves migrants producing cuisines that are not “their own” (see the chapters by Cheung, Duruz, and Wank and Farrer). In short, the chapters in this book call into question what is an Asian cuisine and show that the relationship of Asians to various cuisines is not as simple as that suggested by the nostalgic image of Asian people savoring time-honored local dishes.

Similarly, it is still most common to identify cuisines through place names, implying that culinary traditions remain largely place-based. But here in these chapters we find that many Asian cuisines are now produced in transnational culinary fields, organized at the high end in networks of culinary stars migrating between global cities (see chapter by Imai) and at the low end in networks of migrant entrepreneurs extending out to small towns and rural areas (see chapter by Wank and Farrer). Of course, we also find strong evidence of local culinary traditions and also local culinary innovations, but in general Asian foodways are less and less circumscribed by regional geographies that define ways of cooking and eating.

A third question concerns the historical timeline of culinary globalization in Asia. It is often assumed that culinary globalization is a recent, perhaps twentieth-century phenomenon, or perhaps that it is identified with the earlier rise of European empires. Krishnendu Ray’s chapter, in particular, challenges both narratives, pointing to the long-term flows of culinary products and ideas along the coastlines of the Indian Ocean. Through his essay we can see that culinary globalization is indeed an ancient and unending process that neither began nor ended with European colonization. At the same time, other chapters support a story of a recent qualitative deepening of culinary exchanges that are only made possible by the increasing cross-border mobility of both elite chefs and ordinary cooks. In short, culinary flows are ancient, but we now seem to be in a new era of intensified culinary globalization in and out of Asia.
Finally, our focus on Asia itself is best understood not as a regional designation but rather as taking an Asian-Pacific perspective, as a counter to the Euro-Atlantic perspective that long dominated studies of food globalization, and global studies more generally. Beginning with world systems scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein (1984), global history has long been dominated by a five-century narrative of Western expansion that begins with European colonialism and ends with American global hegemony. Similarly, the usual narrative of culinary globalization focuses on the establishment of an “Atlantic system,” beginning with the Columbian exchange, followed by European plantation agriculture, and ending in American fast-food hegemony. Sidney Mintz’s (1985) classic study of sugar showed how food economies were linked to imperialism, slavery, and industrialization. However, such studies tended to ignore alternative regional centers of globalization. In recent publications in global food history, this Atlantic bias has been corrected with an emphasis on the history of culinary globalization centered in Asia (Dai 2002; Farrer 2011; Kratoska et al. 2008).

As Asia has risen in economic importance, the societies in the region have a growing influence not only on global tastes, but also on global food systems. Theodore Bestor’s (2004) study of the Tsukiji fish market describes the central role of Japan in the global supply chains for high-grade fish. Several academic collaborations have been published emphasizing the transnational development and globalization of Asian cuisines (Cheung and Tan 2007; Cwiertka and Walraven 2002; Farrer 2010a; Rath and Assmann 2010; Wu and Cheung 2002). This Asian perspective is an acknowledgement of Asia’s increasing centrality in the transnational food economy, and it also points to a reorganization of the hierarchies of global high cuisine in which Asian flavors are more highly regarded than ever.

Of course, in this short book we only cover a small and very unrepresentative sample of writings on traveling Asian cuisines, or on cuisines traveling into Asia. This is more of a “lunchtime set” (heavy on Japanese morsels) than a full “à la carte menu” of what Asia has to offer. Still, we offer this collection as a contribution to redefining the meaning of Asian cuisines in the age of globalization, while providing readers and researchers with some substantial ethnographic and historical case studies of the production and enjoyment of transnational “Asian” cuisines. In this introduction, I would like to frame this discussion by presenting a tentative and partial framework for investigating culinary globalization, largely based upon the chapters in this volume but
supplemented with some additional evidence of the politics of Japanese cuisine. The questions that motivate this framework are simple: how do cuisines travel, and why do some travel better than others? In answering these questions, I suggest we must look not only to the transnational processes and networks that make cuisines mobile, but also to those local processes and face-to-face settings that allow for culinary innovations and intercultural exchanges. To begin, I feel we must first engage with the questions of what we mean by “cuisine.”

Cuisine and the Formation of Culinary Fields

Described generally, cuisine is symbolic communication, the “code that brings food into the social order” (Ferguson 2006, 2–3) or a “particular way of talking about cooking” (Ray 2008, 289). To borrow from Foucault (1978), cuisine is a type of discourse, a way of labeling and organizing the various bodily pleasures and sensations associated with food consumption and food preparation. By extension, the symbolism of cuisine is also a field of power relations exercised through discourse.

The cuisines in contemporary societies involve a great range of discursive registers, from the elaborate and arcane to the folksy and trite, reflecting varied marketing strategies but also culinary identity politics and social stratification (Jurafsky 2014). However, we should not take this to mean that cuisine is only present in writing or in literate societies. As Ray’s contribution to this volume points out, cuisine is also present in everyday language and in the “corporal sensory experience” of foods that preexist elaborate writing about food. Palatal taste remains part of the symbolic structure of cuisine, no matter how elaborate its verbal or visual representations. Cuisine is thus a symbolic practice that encompasses talking and writing about food, but also eating itself as a form of social communication through sharing tastes.

Read sociologically, a highly differentiated culinary code is an expression of a hierarchal social structure (Goody 1996). Whether directly through the palate or through recipes, menus, food shows, or other symbolic practices, cuisine is a vehicle of social distinction, a way of representing mastery of the social world through the organization of the dinner table. “Taste” is, we see in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu (1985), a manifestation of class habitus, the dispositions, acquired over a lifetime of socialization, through which we make judgments about desirable and undesirable activities and objects. According to the logic of embodied habitus, there is a close relationship between actual sensual experience, of “taste” on the tongue, and “taste” in the
larger sense of being able to make appropriate judgments and statements about “high” (or “low”) cuisine. A taste for fine cuisine is an organizing practice that makes distinctions not only among dishes and their flavors but also among the people who make and consume them. Cuisine constitutes a stratified field of tasters, things tasted, producers of tastes, and other actors with a stake in determining these tastes.

We can thus think of cuisine as symbolic communication within a field of social relationships that define what is edible, how it’s cooked, and what constitutes good tastes, or a culinary field. As a world of distinctive symbolic and social practices, this culinary field is not simply a reflection of, or a subset of, underlying class relations. The world of cuisine can be considered a social field sui generis with its own cultural repertoire, hierarchies of value, established actors, and forms of capital. Position in a modern urban culinary field depends on the judgments of numerous actors including reviewers and consumers as well as cooks themselves. The accumulation of culinary capital—the skills, knowledge, and symbolic resources that bring status in the field—is the result of long socialization into the cognitive schema and habitus particular to the field (Leschziner 2010; Naccarato and LeBesco 2013). By situating cuisine in a culinary field, we can more clearly outline the actors, rules of the game, and sources of social status, or field-specific capital. Cooks, as we see in many of our chapters, are key players, but so are consumers, food writers, scholars, businesspeople, and government officials.

The research presented in this volume suggests that we take a broad historical and institutional approach to the study of culinary fields, looking at how states, business networks, culinary media, and individual networks interact to produce and support the development of culinary fields. In particular, culinary fields seem to be going global in the current era, with a greater importance played by border-crossing social media, international businesses, and other transnational actors. Transnational fields of cuisine also involve institutionalized pathways of cross-border mobility. Keiichi Sawaguchi, in this collection, shows that the development of a culinary field of Italian cuisine in Japan was not only a response to changing consumer tastes, but also the outcome of an institutionalized system for training Japanese chefs in Italy. He uses organizational sociology (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) to explain how a transnational field of Italian cuisine arose in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s through the activities of chefs, culinary school owners, regulators, restaurateurs, suppliers, and other actors.

Similarly, in our coauthored chapter, David Wank and I document the creation of an immigrant-dominated culinary field of mainstream
Japanese cuisine in the eastern half of the United States, supported by an organizational substructure of job agencies, transportation companies, kinship ties, and food suppliers. These empirical studies point out that “tastes” for certain types of dishes do not simply emerge within the kitchen or upon the table but are products of larger institutionalized social arrangements that structure participation in the culinary field. “Authentic” Italian foods became part of the Japanese culinary repertoire through the advent of institutional training for Japanese chefs in Italy. Hybrid creations like the “dragon roll” became the taste of American Japanese food, partly through the historical coincidence of mass Asian immigration with the rapid growth of a North American Japanese culinary field.

As these examples show, culinary fields are influenced by larger external events such as economic growth spurts and migration policies. In his research on the field of fine-dining restaurants in New York City, Krishnendu Ray shows how reviewers and food writers create a status hierarchy among ethnic cuisines in the culinary field, but also how these ratings and reviews are influenced by migration trends, with an increase in migrants from an ethnic region usually negatively affecting the culinary reputation of that ethnic cuisine (Ray 2007). In this volume, David Wank and I discuss how historical factors such as the revaluation of the yen, US immigration policies, and broad market trends created the conditions for a rush of Chinese migrants into the emerging field of Japanese cuisine in the United States.

Like other fields of work, culinary fields are also stratified by race, nationality, and gender, and in ways that may vary locally. Among the popular culinary fields, such as the inexpensive American Japanese cuisine restaurants Wank and I visited in small-town America, an elaborate résumé and training may matter less for the self-presentation of a chef than forms of ethnic or social capital, such as simply looking Asian or having family ties. Even in fine-dining culinary fields (as chapters by Farrer and Imai show), the ethnic background of a chef still may be a component of professional culinary capital, though experience cooking in famous restaurants generally matters more. A sociological approach to cuisine therefore must try to account for the varied local and transnational influences that produce status hierarchies within the organizational field of culinary work, including such factors as ethnic or racial stereotyping and the organization of transnational career pathways.

In short, we can conceive of a culinary field as a stratified (and often disputed) taste culture that is shaped and supported by a stratified (and
competitive) organizational field that includes chefs and line cooks, consumers and critics, suppliers and competitors, as well as regulators and politicians. The culinary field both shapes consumer preferences and defines the types of culinary capital that chefs and other professional actors value. Although not all of the chapters explicitly evoke the concept of a culinary field, it provides a useful basis to discuss the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that are at the heart of our discussions.

**Deterritorialization and Transnational Culinary Fields**

Globalization has transformed culinary fields through multiple “food globalizations” (Inglis and Grimlin 2009), ranging from industrial food-production systems to informal networks of artisanal producers and even the transnational politics of cuisines, such as the “slow food” movement (Assmann 2010; Ceccarini 2011; Watson and Caldwell 2005). All of these processes point to what can be called the deterritorialization of culinary fields, or the delinking of cuisine from place (Tomlinson 1999, 106). While the naming and marketing of cuisine still rely greatly on geographic distinctions—particularly the shorthand labels of well-known national cuisines—in reality French, Italian, Chinese, and Japanese and some other “national” cuisines are already globalized, with some of the most important innovations occurring outside of their national “homelands.” The careers of elite chefs are increasingly transnational as well, as they build résumés and acquire culinary capital by working at famed restaurants around the world (Ferguson and Zukin 1998). Deterritorialization, however, is not a smooth process. As Imai argues in her chapter in this collection, Japanese chefs still claim authenticity through ties to Japan, even as the field of elite Japanese cuisine has become increasingly delinked from Japan.

Underlying this deterritorialization of cuisine, culinary fields in the contemporary era have become increasingly transnational in their social and economic organization. Food studies have long been concerned with what Arjun Appadurai (1986) calls “the social lives of things,” the complex transnational chains that bring a product through multiple hands from producers to consumers. In this collection, for example, Sidney Cheung traces the “social life” of the North American crayfish as it travels from the rivers of Louisiana in North America, to streams of Japan, to the farm of China, where it becomes part of local regional cuisine. This type of transnational flow
may be more localized than the term “transnationalism” suggests. As Ceccarini’s research on Japanese and Italian pizzaoli shows, there are very particular connections between places, such as between Naples in Italy and restaurants in Japan (Ceccarini 2011). We can thus speak of a “translocal” field of Italian cuisine connecting some particular places in Japan and Italy.

Other essays in this book point to different aspects of the transnational organization of Asian cuisine. These range from the transnational politics of gaining global recognition for Japanese national cuisine as intangible culinary heritage, to the transnational business and migration linkages that make possible the spread of a relatively unknown regional cuisine from China to Japan (see chapters by Assmann and Wank). The actors include governments, businesses, and international migrants, with the latter being not only celebrity chefs, but also ordinary cooks, investors, food writers, and also, very importantly, consumers. These transnational culinary fields produce, as Imai’s research shows, global taste cultures that promulgate discourses, such as umami (or savoryness), the celebrated sixth taste in Japanese cuisine. Through these transnational connections, Japanese cuisine, once seen as esoteric and forbidding, has perhaps become the most globally celebrated of Asian cuisines in the field of urban fine-dining restaurants.

**Reterritorialization and Culinary Contact Zones**

In addition to the idea of deterritorialization, with its accompanying metaphor of networked “flows” of people and ideas, a micro-level analysis of transnational processes also must focus on the processes of reterritorialization and the particular social dynamics within the spaces into which global flows are locally channeled (Tomlinson 1999, 140). As cuisines and the people producing them move across borders, the spaces of food production and consumption become culinary contact zones, or spaces of cultural friction and creativity, including physical settings such as kitchens or virtual spaces such as online communities.

Mary Louisa Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Pratt 2007, 4). Building on Pratt, Masakazu Tanaka argues that the study of contact zones has changed with the transition from relations of colonialism to relations of globalization, producing contact zones within major cities (Tanaka 2007). Studying sites of food production
and consumption—particularly restaurants—as culinary contact zones focuses our attention on interactions and power differences among different levels of producers, and on inequalities between producers and consumers. Relations of power may even be part of what is consumed when consuming the culinary “other,” including orientalist representations of ethnic cuisines in which the exotic element is partly on the plate and partly in the setting, extending to the racially marked staff serving meals (Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002). My research on Western kitchens in Shanghai in this volume suggests that restaurants in large cities in Asia are best investigated as culinary contact zones that are characterized by very unequal social relations both in production and consumption. European staff enjoy a dominant position in the multi-ethnic kitchen, but they also are part of the exotic occidental atmosphere consumed by wealthy Chinese customers out in the dining room.

There are several types of culinary contact zones under discussion in this volume. One is the space of culinary writing described by Jean Duruz. She reveals culinary writing to be not the solitary activity of a celebrated individual food writer, Charmaine Solomon, but instead a social process involving a set of actors, including the eclectic network of Solomon’s family members who have contributed to producing iconic representations of hybridized Asian cuisine for Australians. Another example of culinary contact zone is given by Eric Rath, who outlines the interactions among researchers and government agents who constructed the idea of local cuisine in Japan in the twentieth century. Another type of culinary contact zone can be found in the cooking schools attended by Japanese chefs in Italy, as discussed by Keiichi Sawaguchi in his chapter.

The most obvious example of the culinary contact zone is the restaurant itself. The restaurant is not merely a space of consumption but also of work, and restaurant work is professionally stratified, competitive, and conflict-ridden (Fine 2008). Because of the stress and relatively low pay of culinary work, restaurant kitchens in cities around the world are increasingly staffed by young migrant workers. Especially in large cities, restaurant owners and head chefs are also often migrants, and in the touristic and financial centers of these cities so are many of the big-spending patrons, with the urban restaurant serving as a microcosm of the highly stratified social order of the global city. As the chapters in this volume show, however, the culinary contact zone of the restaurant is not merely a site of economic inequalities and cultural misunderstandings, but it is also a space for cultural exchanges and opportunities for acquiring culinary capital. A successful kitchen is also a school and a space for productive intercultural exchange.
CULINARY POLITICS AND CULINARY NATION BRANDING

The politics of cuisine extends beyond the kitchen, and includes the efforts of local, regional or national governments to shape the development of the culinary field. Several of the chapters in this collection focus on these broader culinary politics. Sidney Cheung describes how merchants and local officials conspired to make the “spicy little lobster” (actually a crayfish) the local cuisine of a small Chinese city, even though the main ingredient in fact was an invasive species from North America and the spicy recipe itself likely originated in the cooking styles of migrants from other Chinese regions. As Cheung’s analysis illustrates, one common motive for state participation in culinary politics is the promotion of national, regional, or urban reputations through supporting food cultures associated with a place. The term “culinary soft power” has been used, for example, to describe the growing popularity of Japanese cuisine globally and its usefulness for promoting Japanese culture more broadly (Farrer 2010b).

Culinary soft power can be defined as the acknowledged attractiveness and appeal of food culture that adheres to a nation, region, or locality. Asian governments seem to have become particularly conscious of national culinary soft power. In this volume, David Wank presents a compelling case for the culinary politics of Shanxi Province, both in defining its “traditional” cuisine and then promoting it within China and abroad. With an eye on the global success of Japanese and Thai cuisine, the governments of both Malaysia and Korea have funded projects for increasing the international appeal of the national cuisines. In addition to such export-oriented projects, however, regions and cities also promote culinary traditions or culinary tourist zones locally. And especially for cities, this promotion is not limited to local culinary traditions; it also may involve attracting star chefs from abroad, facilitating the development of a city’s cosmopolitan culinary reputation (Farrer 2010b).

Japan provides perhaps the best case in Asia for active, and by some measures successful, state-led culinary politics, which can be traced to a larger push for nation branding and cultural diplomacy. Beginning in 2003, the prime minister’s office established a new set of policies and working groups focusing on the promotion of cultural diplomacy, cultural “content” exports, and the “Japan brand.” Subsequently, in July 2005, the cabinet’s Cultural Diplomacy Promotion Working Group (2005) identified culinary culture as one of the important contents of cultural diplomacy along with pop culture and fashion, arguing
that such cultural exports have a synergistic influence on the formation of positive public opinion abroad about Japan. In April 2009, the government-created Japan Brand Liaison Group (2009) issued a report that included Japanese food culture along with other cultural industries as forms of “soft power industries.” Significantly, the report remarks, “Promoters of the Japan brand do not have to be Japanese, rather, it is important to encourage people from Asia and other parts of the world to become the promoters” (ibid, 7).

Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), in cooperation with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), has also become increasingly active in promoting Japanese cuisine abroad. A METI presentation titled “Towards Nation Building through Cultural Industries” (METI 2010) suggests that cultural industry can serve as a nation’s “soft power” resource. The report emphasizes the importance of exporting agricultural crops, processed food, and tableware together in the marketing of Japanese cuisine, in order to carry with it elements of Japanese culture. In the face of Asian competition, emphasis is put on spreading “authentic” Japanese food so that their cultural messages can be communicated “truly.”

In implementation, not all of these efforts went smoothly, particularly when the emphasis was on certifying and monitoring the authenticity of Japanese culinary culture abroad. Despite the recognition of the role of “foreign” promoters of Japanese cuisine, some government officials pushed more narrowly nationalist definitions of Japanese culinary soft power, revealing tensions between nativist and more cosmopolitan visions of culinary diplomacy. In November 2006, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) introduced the Japanese restaurant certification system to spread authentic Japanese cuisine by certifying restaurants abroad. This type of attempt to monitor the authenticity of Japanese food abroad was criticized both internationally (Zimmerman and Ueno 2006) and domestically (Ikezawa 2008) as a clumsy attempt by the government to define culinary authenticity, and it became known as the “sushi police” incident. In reaction to this “sushi police” criticism, MAFF later changed the name to “recommendation” instead of “certification.” In March 2007, the ministry gave up on the certification system and transferred the project to a nonprofit organization called the Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad (JRO) (chaired by Yuzaburo Mogi, the president of Kikkoman) to create a more flexible recommendation system instead (JRO 2007).

As this example shows, not all of Japan’s culinary soft-power policies unfolded smoothly. Still, usually in collaboration with industry,
many national governments and regions, including Japan’s, have been actively promoting national and regional cuisines, both to stimulate culinary exports and to attract culinary tourists. Finally, as Stephanie Assmann explores in her chapter, nationalist culinary politics can also have a domestic audience, and can be a way of disciplining the citizenry, such as school children, through campaigns to properly appreciate the national cuisine.

**What Makes a Cuisine Travel?**

As a way of summarizing this discussion, we might consider how this framework can help us to understand variations in culinary globalization. Put simply, cuisines travel, but some travel better than others. Based on the preliminary framework laid out above, it might be possible to consider some of the factors that lead to global culinary “success” or that further the institutional spread of cuisines across borders. I would list four types of factors: intrinsic culinary appeal, the institutionalization of transnational culinary fields, cosmopolitan culinary contact zones, and inclusive culinary politics.

In considering these factors, I focus on the situation of Japanese cuisine by drawing on the relevant chapters in this volume and some further details on Japan in particular. Japanese cuisine has enjoyed unparalleled global success in the broader market as well as in more rarified culinary circles, and thus it may serve as a model of a “well-traveled” Asian cuisine. Japanese cuisine was ranked the most popular “foreign cuisine” in a 2013 survey conducted in seven countries (MAFF 2013). Among high-cuisine Western chefs that I interviewed in my research in Shanghai, Japanese culinary concepts are second only to French culinary training in influencing the dishes they produce.

**Intrinsic Culinary Factors**

The success of Japanese food globally has been attributed to many factors inherent to the cuisine itself: its association with health and low-fat ingredients, its unique aesthetics and association with style and fashion, and its simplicity and adaptability (particularly of sushi) (Ishige et al. 1985; Issenberg 2007). I would suggest, however, that such traits are common in many cuisines and do not alone explain the recent global success of Japanese cuisine. Consumers, chefs, and food journalists all have a stake in emphasizing the intrinsic qualities of a cuisine. Consumers want to eat well, chefs want to be known for their artistry, and food writers want to write about good food. That being
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said, the framework above would suggest that the transnational spread of a cuisine—as with any cultural phenomenon—is best explained by looking beyond its intrinsic qualities and focusing on the larger social context of its production and reception (see Griswold 2013, 15). While tasty, easy to prepare, and healthy food can be found practically everywhere, not all of it is picked up and carried along in the global culinary trade winds. To explain these differences, I suggest we look to the additional three institutional and political factors.

Institutionalization of a Transnational Culinary Field

As the discussion above indicates, cuisines are produced, consumed, and evaluated within a culinary field sustained by a host of actors including distributors, food producers, culinary schools, culinary media, and many other actors. For a cuisine to succeed in new contexts, simply having willing cooks and consumers usually is not enough. Rather, we must also have a network of supporting institutions to sustain this culinary field.

Japanese cuisine, for example, has benefited from the early development of a worldwide supply chain for distinctive Japanese products as well as from the establishment of specialized food processing and agricultural production by Japanese abroad. Some of these supply chains date back to the early twentieth century, while others emerged only with the advent of jet travel (Ishige et al. 1985). Sushi has become the signature dish of Japan, but without Japanese rice varieties grown in California (Ujita 2008) and sophisticated supply networks for raw fish products (Bestor 2004), there could not have been a global sushi boom. Large Japanese corporations have long played a role in spreading Japanese cuisine. In the postwar era, one of the first Japanese companies to go global was Kikkoman, which not only supplies products such as its famous soy sauce but also promotes the “Japan brand” worldwide through food culture research and promotion (Kikkoman 2005).

More recently, Japanese restaurant chains have been expanding globally as well. For example, Ajisen, serving Kumamoto ramen, opened their first restaurant abroad in Taiwan in 1994, and by July 2011 they had 652 outlets, which was six times the number of domestic outlets at ninety-eight (Ajisen 2011). Gyudon chain Yoshinoya opened an outlet in the USA in 1975 as their first foreign shop (Yoshinoya Co. Ltd 2011). The company’s US homepage claims, “Yoshinoya’s food is a combination of two cultures. It’s traditional Japanese cuisine, served in an American fast food environment.” Following suit, Sukiya is also
expanding globally, as their owner Zensho’s stated business goal is to become the world’s number-one food provider (Zensho Co. Ltd 2011). By 2011, the Zensho group as a whole owned two hundred outlets abroad, focusing on Brazil and China. Such fast-food chains are not typically associated with the spread of Japan’s famed “artisanal” culinary culture, but they are important players that provide entry-level dishes for consumers to learn about Japanese foods.

### Cosmopolitan Culinary Contact Zones

As described above, the restaurant tables of the world’s cities form culinary contact zones in which customers learn about cuisines from around the globe. At the same time, kitchens are also contact zones in which cooks learn about tastes, ingredients, and techniques from other chefs. They are the primary training grounds in which culinary skills are acquired and transferred across borders. One of the ways in which French cuisine has prospered globally has been through the vast numbers of foreign chefs training in French restaurants. Likewise, the highly acclaimed kitchen of Ferran Adrià’s restaurant El Bulli in Barcelona became the epicenter for the global spread of molecular gastronomy, as well as a status symbol for a modernized Spanish national cuisine. The openness of such elite kitchens facilitates a form of global knowledge transfer that also perpetuates reputations within a culinary field (Svejenova et al. 2007).

Japanese cuisine has also become a global cuisine through the training of non-Japanese chefs in Japanese restaurants, especially in countries where English is used. Multi-ethnic New York Japanese kitchens have become an important culinary contact zone in which new migrant talents may be absorbed into the Japanese culinary field, cultivating culinary stars, who in turn produce critically acclaimed hybrid creations (see, for example, Wells 2015). As David Wank and I have found in our research interviews with sushi chefs in the USA and in Europe, Japanese restaurants in major cities such as New York and London have clearly served as important contact zones for transmission of Japanese cooking techniques.

In contrast, in a restaurant kitchen that is largely mono-ethnic or where entry is closed by religious, linguistic, or other barriers, the culture of that kitchen will spread in a more limited fashion. Arguably this is case in Chinese kitchens, in which non-Chinese cooks are less common, making it less likely that non-Chinese will master more intricate Chinese culinary techniques. (Chinese kitchens are often characterized by insiders as closed shops protective of recipes.) In any
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In case, multicultural kitchens that foster culinary exchanges among various migrant and local culinary workers may be one general condition for successful culinary diffusion and the elevation of the reputation of a cuisine beyond the label of “ethnic” cuisine.

Inclusive Culinary Politics

Most nations and many regions within countries have established policies to promote their cuisines abroad: to further agricultural exports, for tourism promotion, or as a form of cultural diplomacy. It is difficult to assess these efforts at a glance, but one factor seems to stand out: the degree to which these policies are designed to include non-nationals in the culinary field. In some cases, in which nations clumsily attempt to police the authenticity of cuisines, these efforts may backfire, as described above in the case of the “sushi police” incident. Kosaku Yoshino also describes a failed case of culinary promotion in the example of the Malaysian government’s attempts to promote Malaysian cuisine through state-supported restaurants in Tokyo. In this case, the micromanagement of authenticity in culinary offerings also may have contributed to the problems the showcase restaurant encountered as well as the government’s failure to sustain the project (Yoshino 2011). In other cases, such as the Chinese case described by Sidney Cheung in this volume, the local officials seem effective in both defining and promoting a cuisine without too much concern for local authenticity. However, as the Japanese and Italian discussions in this volume show, transnational culinary politics are most effective when they actively cultivate “foreign” agents of culinary globalization.

In the case of Japan, we can see evidence of both exclusive and inclusive approaches to culinary politics. More inclusive approaches include efforts supporting Japanese restaurants abroad. JRO, for examples, organizes activities introducing Japanese culinary techniques and ingredients to foreign culinary producers, including a VIP event at the London Olympics to introduce one hundred top London chefs to Japanese ingredients, a pavilion devoted to sake distilling at the Hong Kong food expo, and Japanese cuisine courses offered in culinary schools in Holland and France (MAFF 2013). Some efforts show a mix of inclusiveness and culinary boundary maintenance. For example, a “Sushi Skills Institute” (2013) was introduced by the Japan Sushi Association (a nonprofit organization recognized by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) in January 2011, aiming to educate and certify Japanese and non-Japanese sushi chefs abroad. In these cases, we see a concerted attempt to keep state-sponsored
institutions (and food suppliers) at the center of an expanding transnational Japanese culinary field, while actively recruiting foreign chefs to participate. It is difficult to assess these particular policies, but as they show, some government officials act as though a more open-ended, but still “Japanese,” culinary field can be shaped by including non-Japanese producers in the field.

In conclusion, culinary globalization involves transnational processes and cross-border institutions, as well as face-to-face intercultural contacts within spaces such as restaurants and cooking schools. The discussion here only identifies some of these processes, institutions, and spaces of interaction. Naturally, the diverse contributions to this volume do not strictly employ the vocabulary sketched out in this introduction. However, this framework is drawn from conversations with these authors and from close readings of their empirical studies. Although each chapter emphasizes a different part of the story in the globalization of cuisines in and out of Asia, as a whole they point to the formation of transnational culinary fields, interactions within cosmopolitan culinary contact zones, and state-led culinary politics as key factors in the globalization of Asia’s cuisines.

Notes

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2. The focus on Japanese cuisine in this essay, and in this volume as a whole, reflects our team’s heavy Japan-based composition and the fact that the papers came from a conference held at Sophia University in June 2013 in Tokyo. See http://icc.fla.sophia.ac.jp/html/events/2013-2014/130622_Traveling_Cuisines.html.

References


Part I

Transnational Pathways of Asian Cuisines
C H A P T E R  2

CULINARY SPACES AND NATIONAL CUISINES: THE PLEASURES OF AN INDIAN OCEAN CUISINE?¹

Krishnendu Ray

INTRODUCTION

Palatal taste can be fruitfully interrogated as an embodied archive of long-term, pre-Eurocentric globalization, especially where durable documentation is rare. Taste can also reveal the limits of the ubiquitous presumption of national cultures. But first we have to unthink modern Western formulations that have trivialized literal taste. Western philosophers have long denied aesthetic legitimacy to taste on the tongue while theorizing about taste in general (Korsmeyer 1999; Dickie 1996). This chapter seeks to recover literal taste and corporeal sensory experience to contest the idea of national cultures by deterritorializing good food. I do that by taking apparently trivial comestibles—such as curry leaf and betel leaf—to show the importance of transnational and transoceanic connections, the depth of premodern globalization, and the folly of presuming bounded national tastes and terroir. In mining the recently robust historiography of the Indian Ocean, I undermine the naturalization of the nation-state as the only legitimate domain of thinking about taste.

In their cultural history of Italian cuisine, Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari note how pizza and pasta have become the most recognizable signs of Italy the farther one goes from Italy (Capatti and Montanari 2003, xx). In closing, they cite Prezzolini’s question in
1954, “What is the glory of Dante compared to spaghetti?” Instead of insisting on the distinctions between palatal taste and taste in literature, they underline the point of contact between mundane practice and high art, where, “In fact, without realizing it, when we eat spaghetti we also ingest something of Dante” (ibid.). Capatti and Montanari flatten the aesthetic hierarchy set in place in early modern Europe. Aesthetics was born in European philosophy as a discursive field in the eighteenth century, when it was argued that literal taste is unconscious, subjective, and too intimate to allow rational elaboration. We are finally turning the corner from this anthropocentric anti-materialism that has dominated much of continental Western philosophy. Finally, the arts of cooking and thinking can be brought together, and palatal taste can be recovered as a legitimate site of aesthetic engagement.

**Curry Leaf and the Indian Ocean**

The curry leaf opens up the flavors of the vast reaches of the eastern Indian Ocean that hints at long-established transactions in trade, taste, and comestibles that predate European empires of trade that have been vastly underestimated by Eurocentric history writing. Alongside such staid dishes as lamb curry with coriander and garam masala and mixed raita, Chef Suvir Saran, in his gorgeous book titled *Indian Home Cooking*, springs upon us the fiery “South Indian-Style chicken with Curry Leaves and Black Peppercorns” (Saran and Lyness 2004, 123). In particular, the curry leaf (*L. Murraya koenigii*) brings us tantalizingly close to the edge of the Indian subcontinent, as it is closely associated with peninsular India. We also find it in Cambodia, where the Khmer toast the leaves in open flame or roast them to a crunch, crushing them into a sour soup dish called *maju krueng*. According to the Indonesian chef William Wongso, the closest substitute to the *daun salam* leaf (*L. syzygium polyantha*), used in Indonesian dishes such as spicy minced beef in banana leaf packets and Central Javanese beef soup (*taoto*), is the curry leaf. It is used in Burmese cooking and called *pyi-naw-thein* and in Malay *daun kari*, or *karupillay*.

What Chef Saran merely touches on, Chef Floyd Cardoz develops decisively in *One Spice, Two Spice*, moving outward from the peninsular subcontinent, rather than taking the typical trajectory toward the heartland (Cardoz 2006, xiii). It is rife with recipes that evoke the palatal memory of networks traversing the Arabian Sea that predate European colonialism. Chef Cardoz asserts, “What’s known in the West as fusion food—different cultures together on a
plate—started for me in the cradle, because fusion was, quite simply, a way of life for our family” (ibid.). While making a chicken curry for his father, at the age of twenty, he “recklessly added [. . .] rosemary from the farmer’s market and part of a bottle of Riesling. The fragrance and heat of the rosemary connected with that of ginger in the sauce and turned into something marvelous. The wine smoothed and rounded out the flavors in a way he hadn’t imagined. ‘And my father declared it the best thing he’d ever eaten,’” he says (ibid., xiv). In mixing Mediterranean products such as wine (although the Riesling itself pulls the Mediterranean fruit to its temperate limit) and rosemary in his chicken curry, Cardoz was retracing what Tamil poets had already commented upon almost eighteen hundred years ago. Southern Indian court society was the destination of Greek and Roman ships packed with amphorae filled with Mediterranean wine and holds full of gold coins (Davis 2009, 11; Chakravarti 2007).

This recovery of durable connections in the premodern era corrects the tendency to overaccentuate the current phase of globalization. Furthermore, literal taste challenges our temporal analytics in refusing to let the last two hundred years of Indian history overwhelm the rest of it. Many contemporary Indian tastes, such as the ubiquitous one for tea with cream and sugar, or for Scotch whisky, would not have been established without British colonialism, but that sits on top of much longer currents, especially where the domestic cookery of peninsular India is concerned, home of the curry leaf, with its robust, citrusy aroma that works beautifully as a counterpoint to pungent mustard oil.

**The Long Cycle of Trade and Taste**

Drawing attention to long-distance, long-term connections is a useful way to remind ourselves that globalization has a long lineage. In her presidential address at the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies in 2006, Barbara Watson Andaya proposed that such connections are a useful pedagogical tool to think more sharply about globalization (2006). Framing it within a more specific time period, Prasenjit Duara (2010) avers that since at least the thirteenth century, we have had densely interlinked networks of trade from the Red Sea to the South China Sea, held together by the port city of Malacca and fed by monsoon winds that brought in seasonal traders from Persia, Arabia, and India (Abu-Lughod 1989). Representing those connections in a recent analytical map, Philippe Beaujard connects a wide archipelago
of cities, from Rome and Syracuse to Petra and Aden to Tamralipti, in interlocking networks of trade (Beaujard 2005; 2010).

For me, the radical insight that a civilization could be named in the spaces between territories is Fernand Braudel’s, who taught my teacher Immanuel Wallerstein. Arab geographers of long ago were aware of the relationship between different oceans and the Bilad al-Islam. But that conception of the connection between the sea and the people who lived around it was eroded, until Braudel’s work reconstructed it through painstaking research in over a dozen scattered archives around the Mediterranean, which allowed him to grasp the meaning of transnational sedimentation in the slow glacial movement of everyday life. The relative smallness of the Mediterranean and its closed nature turned out to be advantageous compared to the much bigger oceans. That was in 1949, with the publication of The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Vol. 1 & 2 (Braudel 1996 reprint). Half a century later, this provoked K. N. Chaudhuri to ask if the historian of the Indian Ocean must ask himself “whether the period from the rise of Islam to the mid-eighteenth century has the same coherence as the reign of Philip II chosen by Braudel” (1985, 1). Subsequently, that question has produced a whole school of historians, from Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2011), Pius Malekandathil (2010), Sugata Bose (2006), Thomas Metcalf (2007), and Ranabir Chakravarti (2007) to numerous others. In anthropology, Engseng Ho’s powerfully evocative work The Graves of Tarim narrates the movement of an old diaspora of Hadrami Yemenis across the Indian Ocean over the past five hundred years. They became locals in southwest, south and southeast Asia and yet remained cosmopolitans with vital connections across the ocean (Ho 2006).

That sets up the need for a sensory history of the Indian Ocean littoral. We find hints of such a possibility in Andaya’s suggestion to follow the edible Holothuria (sea slugs or teripang), tracked by locals across long distances, while rejected by Europeans as repulsive (Andaya 2006, 675). Based on research on the flow and counterflow of Hadramis, Shimalis, and the Muwalladin traveling through networks along the Swahili coast of East Africa and Southern Yemen, Iain Walker finds them quintessentially cosmopolitan, in belonging partially to two or more cultural ecumenes, “slipping effortlessly from Swahili to Arabic, drinking coffee in Dar but tea in Seiyun, eating muhogo wa nazi [coconut cassava] in Tanga but ruz wa dajaja [rice and chicken] in Tarim . . . Chewing a little qat in Shibam, quietly sipping a beer in Nairobi, assuming a tribal name in the wadi but becoming plain Awadh Salim on returning to Zanzibar” (Walker 2008, 54).
Indian Ocean cuisine awaits its Clifford Wright, who did such an exquisite job of superimposing recipes, ingredients, techniques, technologies, palates, and aesthetic judgment on Braudel’s work in *A Mediterranean Feast* (1999). We see the beginnings of sensorily rich culinary work in Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid’s *Mangoes & Curry Leaves* at one end and Charmaine Solomon’s *Complete Asian Cookbook* at the other end (Alford and Duguid 2005; Solomon 2012). Yet the east coast of Africa, the edges of the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian littoral, and much of peninsular India are missing in those culinary archives.5

**Globalization, Thick and Thin**

Ancient linkages crisscrossing the Indian Ocean allow us a theoretical point about globalization, especially its temporal depth and density. Akhil Gupta points out in our recent book *Curried Cultures* that “premodern globalization, much of which took place before the fifteenth century, was not a ‘shallow’ phenomenon” (Gupta 2012, 35). Food preparation and consumption, as the most intimate, everyday household activity, is a very useful metric for the depth of globalization. If we account for the depth of a shared palate, for instance, for betel nut, coconut, tamarind, dates, and curry leaf, we can forge the connections that we can obviously hear in the prayers of a devout Indonesian Muslim or a Balinese Hindu. Research in inter-Asian trade and taste also underlines the extracolonial foundations of this postcolonial moment. By attending to food and foodways at the margins—at oceanic zones and frayed territorial borders, between nations, and below national scales—research can recast the cultural domains of identity that have eclipsed the density and depth of inter-Asian taste trajectories.

Take for instance rice and fish, considered the archetype of Bengali national cuisine. About 250 kilometers north of Kolkata, the Farakka Barrage has been a source of conflict between India and Bangladesh partly because of water rights, but equally because it is alleged that West Bengalis appropriate more than their fair share of *ilish* (*Tualalosa ilisha*). Conventionally identified with East Bengalis, the fish travels upstream from the Bay of Bengal, laying eggs in Indian waters, but by the time they are grown and ready to be eaten, they are trapped behind the barrage, depriving Bangladeshis of their share of the fatty fish. The *ilish* is a delicious fish that is often preferred just plain pan-fried, or with the delicate hint of mustard and dried red chilies in *teljhol* (fish curry). The secret is to eat it with piping-hot, plain steamed rice. Similarly, the kinds of rice grown in northern and eastern India
underscore the dispersal of varietals that ignore national boundaries (Fuller 2011). In the cases of rice and fish, agroecological, linguistic, and culinary maps exceed national domains and are worth attending to, so as to balance the emotional, spiritual, and administrative energies we pour into state containers.

Food insinuates itself sometimes even between hostile national communities. Assertions of innate national differences are always fragile, contentious claims laced with acrimony, especially against those who might pass and cross over. Such narratives mobilize and challenge the idea that taste culture must be contained within the nation and has to be bounded at the borders. National taste is always constructed, often against the very neighboring regions that are gustatorily proximate but ideologically distant. In fact, Bengali palates as much as Punjabi tastes violate the idea of an Indian cuisine. It is worth rattling national and religious cages in the name of language, taste, and agroecology.

**Paan and Public Orality**

To open up that discussion even further, and to deepen it, we can return to the Indian Ocean and take a closer look at the quarter between China and India, attending to an intriguing packet of betel leaf (*Piper betle*) and areca nut (*Areca catechu*). Here the instigation came from the work of one of my doctoral students, Jackie Rohel. It underlines the otherwise obfuscated link between East Asia and South Asia that echoes the pathways of dispersal of coconut, sago palm, certain yams, and probably green chilies. Many of these flows and counterflows predate Western imperial interventions. These are often extracolonial links hiding in plain view as ubiquitous everyday practices. Paan chewing is rampant in India, as rampant as tea and whiskey drinking. But the latter are clear products of British imperial influence on the Indian palate, through hierarchy, emulation, propaganda, and advertising, while paan is decisively not a product of British imperial design. In 1331 the Berber traveler Ibn Battuta, writing in Arabic, chronicled its usage in various parts of India and in Mogadishu (cited in Lunde 2005; Dunn 2012, 124). Yet paan is ignored in most academic work on South Asia, other than in the domain of public health (Pant [2011] is one recent, although still minor, exception).

Paan is as important to the South Asian economy, politics, and culture as coffee is to Europe and America. Scholars such as Jürgen Habermas (1991), Benedict Anderson (2006), and Wolfgang
Schivelbusch (1993) have written eloquently about the coffeehouse and the bourgeois public sphere, where the very idea of the public was born. Coffeehouses and cafés in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were masculine deliberative spaces where policies were debated distinct from the state and the home. That is where newspapers were born. Modern literature, art, and aesthetics were critiqued in journals exchanged in such spaces. Then the teahouses emerged that gathered the women excluded from the masculine, bourgeois domain of coffeehouses. Working-class men seeking respite, and sometimes in response, built their own public houses, which we call “pubs” for a reason. That in turn provoked female temperance movements, which in themselves were a singular catalyst for women’s suffrage. Notwithstanding the radical contraction that I am forced to undertake here for reasons of space, it is worth thinking about where the Indian polity would be without the paan shop (where conical betel leaf packets stuffed with betel nut, spices, and sometimes tobacco are sold, usually along with loose and packaged cigarettes). The public of the politician, the public of Bollywood, especially a masculine public, could exist no more than the European public could be constituted without coffee and the coffee shop. Yet there is no scholarly work on the paan shop as a social institution. There is work to be done on paan and paan’s connection to Indian publics, the production of gender and sexuality in modern India, and the place of extracolonial transactions in trade and taste between peninsular India and Southeast Asia, which is the circulatory span of betel leaf and curry leaf.

**Food and Territory**

The dominant modern frame of constituting gustatory identity has been in the name of territory, with nation as its preeminent center and province as its conjoined, peripheral twin. As soon as we begin the discussion on nation and cuisine in the modern West, the French in the eighteenth century become the paradigmatic case of food and identity. That is the by-product of dominance of a certain kind of institutional French food, in a new kind of urban space that we have come to call a restaurant, driven by newly constituted professions of chefs and gastronomic journalists (Spang 2001; Ferguson 2004; Sonnenfeld 1987; Pitte 2002). In this story both restaurants and cuisine are presumed to be French inventions.

Pascal Ory shows how a claim of the superiority of French cuisine “implies the superiority of French ‘civilization,’” which was probably some recompense for military and diplomatic humiliation (1997).
Thus in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the target of French and Francophile gastronomes was almost always English food, or the food of their dominant economic, military, and political neighbor. By the early nineteenth century, as the state acquired increasing power and penetrated deeper into its own society, the French belief in their culinary superiority “spread beyond the milieu of chefs and men of letters, becoming henceforth the common property of all classes of society” (ibid.). Predictably, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the national contest turned east from the Channel, Black Forest meatballs came to be described as “heavy, thick, and dense, like German thought, literature, and art,” while “quiche Lorraine, the foie gras of Périgord, and the bouillabaisse of Marseilles . . . contain all the refined riches of France” (Ory 1997, 444).

Kolleen Guy underlines that perspective in her acute analysis of a popular late nineteenth-century French story, “The Burgermeister in the Bottle” (Guy 2002). The story is about Ludwig and Hippel, who travel through the vineyards of the Rheingau region of Germany making various judgments about national palates and moral characteristics (ibid.; Guy 2003). Sojourning at numerous inns and vineyards, they drink German wine, and as a result they are assaulted by bad dreams. That turns out to be predictable, given that their unspecified doubts about German wines had prompted their journey in the first place. Their drinking tour merely confirms what they already knew: good wine that is good for your soul can only be French, because only the French have terroir, which is both a particular kind of territory and a propensity for a kind of rooted soul. French identity as a sophisticated one is built at the expense of the German burgermeister (mayor), a national contrast, as it usually is in matters of taste at the end of the nineteenth century. The burgermeister of the title is “described as large and flabby, with grey eyes, large nose, and thin, tightly pursed lips. He appears ‘heavy, thick, and dense,’ attributes assigned equally to ‘German thought, literature, and art,’ and ‘Black Forest meatballs’” (Guy 2002, 44).

Such narratives mobilize the idea that culture must be contained within the nation and has to be bounded at the borders, notwithstanding persistent extensions such as Alsace and Lorraine between Germany and France, Punjab between Pakistan and India, Mexico and New Mexico in North America, or Bengal spread out between Bangladesh and India. Examples can proliferate from almost every border region of the world, once we take really existing societies and actual food into consideration.
After more than twenty years of fieldwork, Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella noticed that Keralites (residents of the southern state of Kerala in India) sometimes build their gustatory identify facing outward to the Arabian Sea. The obvious implication is unavoidable: “Everyone in Kerala . . . is within easy reach of the coast,” and “fresh fish is delivered daily throughout the state and is a core item in most diets”; and freshly grated coconut, green chilies, and curry leaf are ubiquitous and considered quintessentially Keralite (Osella and Osella 2008). The economic and cultural connections between the hinterland and urban centers on the coast are obvious in the historical record in the spaces of pepper production and distribution from the sixteenth century, and its relationship to the flow of bullion and especially copper in the opposite direction to forge temple bells and bronze utensils of elite families and the feeding centers of large bhakti temples, linking the interiors and edges of the subcontinent via a circulation of commodities, bankers, coppersmiths, pilgrims, proselytizers, cooks, and traders (Malekandathil 2014). Of course not everyone chooses to think of himself or herself as living near the sea, but in habits and everyday practice, the land and the sea pulls people together, sometimes in spite of themselves. Communal and national rewriting of one’s identity has been successful only through the last century’s folly of imagining cultural homes with hearts, as in “heartland,” and the unrelenting mass media-driven national propaganda that has left us all pointing toward the Indo-Gangetic Valley’s centrality to Indian civilization. That is only a part of the story.

The time has come to inhabit the edges of continents—the skin, so to speak, versus the heartland—as the precise point of contact, and of flows, of people, of culture, of cuisine, where the New World chili meets the littoral coconut, and the curry leaf materializes a culture not merely as metaphor but as real curry: hot, spicy, and aromatic, with its seductive citrusy hint. The basic tools of cultural history and demographics have been so nationalized that they have repressed the centrality of connections between neighboring regions. Similarly, we ignore the evidence of material cultural exchanges between the port cities of the littoral. A new history of oceans and renewed visibility of transnational circulation are reinvigorating discussions of cultural domains that exceed the nation-state. The inaudible world of taste and trade in comestibles opens a window into this stifled science of the space between nations. That is what I have tried to recover here—a few instances of the cuisine between nations, to shift our focus from the tired curries of the heartland.
Instead of heartlands and national wholes, we may have a more productive mapping of taste and place in the Hindustani saying, “Kosa kosa per pani badle, chara kosa per vani”—every two miles the water changes (where water is a metonym for taste), and every four, the language. It puts the subject in the middle of both the discussion and the landscape that extends incrementally in all directions, which of course shows a much better grasp of local reality than the edges, borders, and boundaries that appear in the four-colored maps of modernity that have come to colonize our minds. Only with such reconceptualization can below-the-nation spatialization of taste be connected to transnational and oceanic scales above them. Here I have suggested that we could use the oceans and comestibles such as curry leaf and betel leaf to open our minds and analytical frames (i.e., the space-time of our analysis) to other cultural possibilities, not as limits to territories, but instead as the medium for the meeting of peoples, comestibles, flavors, and techniques of everyday life. Routes of dispersal are equal in importance to roots in human cultural ecumenes.

Notes

1. A different version of this essay was first published in Studies in Western Australian History no. 28 (Ray 2013).
3. The use of curry leaves is described in early Tamil Sangam literature dating back to the first centuries of the Common Era. Its use is mentioned a few centuries later in Kannada literature too.
5. Tansen Sen critiques Duara’s construction as excluding Africa, stopping at the thirteenth century for no good reason, and only attending to oceanic connections (2010).
6. Kenneth R. Hall (2006; 2010) argues that Southeast Asia’s “maritime communities have been inadequately considered in discussions of pre-1500 Indian Ocean trade.”

References


Chapter 3

The Travels of Kitty’s Love Cake: A Tale of Spices, “Asian” Flavors, and Cuisine Sans Frontières?

Jean Duruz

Visiting her Aunt Connie in London in 1979, Charmaine Solomon carried a sentimental gift. This was a traditional Sri Lankan love cake, made according to her mother’s exacting recipe (semolina, zest of lime, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg, rosewater, brandy, honey . . .) (Solomon 1998, 241). However, while cakes and other sweet treats might be imagined as significant motifs for a life story of baking, Charmaine’s reputation as a food journalist and cookbook writer hardly rests on these. Acknowledged as a much-celebrated home cook who, in the second half of the twentieth century, substantially changed Australia’s culinary landscapes, Solomon occupies a distinctive position within this history (Karnikowski 2010). With the publication of The Complete Asian Cookbook (1976), Charmaine Solomon achieved iconic status. Popularly hailed as “Australia’s Spice Queen” and “the Queen of Asian cooking in Australia” (Harris 2001, 212; O’Meara 2008), Solomon was to receive, in 2007, the award of the prestigious Medal of the Order of Australia “for service to the food media, particularly as the author of Asian cookery books” (Australian Government Honours 2007, my emphasis).

In other words, Solomon has played a crucial role in the culinary imaginary of an intersection society like Australia. This is a nation that sees itself both as part of Asia and apart from Asia—a multicultural, multiracial society that is located in the Asia-Pacific region but has a Western colonial settler heritage. In fact, colonial relations, especially
in regard to indigenous communities, are not simply “heritage” but continue unabated in the present (Moreton-Robson 2003, 37–38). Viewed in this way, Australia is a culinary contact zone, a space of culinary politics and transnational culinary flows, both within and outside of Asia. And, as we’ll explore in this chapter, Solomon’s family background itself reflects a history of hybridity and transnational border crossings—with such movement and “mixing” of people and food a particular focus of recent work in cultural geography, cultural studies, and sociology (Elliott and Urry 2010; Parkins and Craig 2006; Crang, Dwyer, and Jackson 2003). As well, we’ll see that this same family background produces its own complex constructions of “Asian.”

Much has been written of Solomon’s achievements (more than thirty cookbooks in forty years) in the popular press, though Solomon has received little attention from food scholars (Symons 2007; Santich 2012). For a collection focusing on traveling cuisines and one with “Asia” as its nodal point, I am most intrigued by the attribution of “Asian” to Solomon, her cooking, and her cookbook production and to the significance of spices in framing narratives of twentieth- and twenty-first-century “modern” Australian food (Santich 1996, 11–18; Ripe 1999, 72–77). In this so-called Asian Century, I wonder, has Australia, culinarily speaking, come of age (Australia in the Asian Century Task Force 2011; Ripe 1993)? With Solomon’s 2011 revision of The Complete Asian Cookbook, and with recent successes of younger “Asians” as chefs, restaurateurs, and television celebrities in the Australian food scene, it certainly would seem so (Kwong 2007; Nguyen 2009; Poh 2010; Liaw 2011). Nevertheless, more than twenty years after the original publication of The Complete Asian Cookbook (and many cookbooks later for Solomon), Charmaine Solomon’s Family Recipes (1998) appears to chart a slightly different course.

My project here is to unravel, for a particular postcolonial moment, meanings of “Asian” food, sugar, and spice from this later cookbook. These meanings, in turn, become ways of reflecting on intersections of “Asian” and “Australian” cooking and eating; on global culinary flows in and out of Asia; on hybridizations of dishes, ingredients, and flavors; and on intimations of a vernacular, sensorily grounded cosmopolitanism. There will be more of this later. In the meantime, Charmaine Solomon’s own voice emerges as a strong one throughout this analysis. In the selection of recipes, photographs, and stories for a family album, and in her commentary on this, Solomon implies the complex interactions of “mixed” culinary roots and a serendipitous journey to “Asian” cooking. The voices of her family too constitute resonant ethnographic fragments, questioning tendencies to
homogenize cuisines on behalf of a pervasive national/regional imaginary, whether “Asian,” “Australian,” “Western,” or something else.

As such, Solomon’s “album” and its framing culinary cultures might be construed as a “soft” political challenge to essentialism—as an Australian family’s claim to “mixed” heritage and mobile identities for the Asian Century or as a family’s personal challenge to the imagined borders of nation itself. It echoes Sidney Mintz’s discussion of cuisine as emotional relations of people, food, and place rather than ones dictated by projects of national mapping for political expediency (Mintz 1996, 94–98). There is also a subtext that haunts this cookbook—one of comfort and care, memory and nostalgia, and of the gendered allocation of work involved in emotional maintenance.

In other words, I want to read this cookbook not simply as a family album (as it certainly is) but also as a document that tentatively raises questions about the shaping of national and transnational identities, and questions about the politics of intercultural exchange in a world of global flows—of information, goods, people, and, critically, food (Cook and Crang 1996). In the intimacy of Family Recipes’ everyday practice, then, I might find hints for reworking relations of food, place, and identity—and hints, perhaps, for imagining “Asia” differently. These imaginings might inscribe culinary futures and identifications with meanings of cosmopolitanism—meanings that are quite ordinary, yet deeply sensed, embodied, heartfelt, and, in fact, “visceral” (Nava 2007).

“Mixed” Families . . . and Not Knowing How to Cook

Charmaine Solomon’s Family Recipes is as much about people as it is about food. This cookbook begins with a genealogy traced in cooking—generations of family members who influenced Charmaine’s own culinary sensibilities from an early age. Born in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1930, Charmaine grew up as “a pampered only child and only grandchild” in predominantly matriarchal households. From the age of seven, following her parents’ divorce, Charmaine lived with her mother. Later, during the war years, she lived with her father, the household being managed by four unmarried female relatives, collectively known as “The Aunts” (Solomon 1998, 4, 12–14).

These households in Sri Lanka provided landscapes of gastronomic complexity and diversity, their influences later extending to Charmaine’s own homemaking in Australia and her travels elsewhere. In Sri Lanka, Charmaine’s mother, Kitty, we are told, “loved making rich desserts, cakes and candies,” while Charmaine’s father, Willie, was a
fastidious purchaser of market produce (which he would hand over to the family cook to prepare) (Solomon 1998, 8–9). Charmaine’s paternal grandmother, Grandmother Julia, apparently was an imperious figure in the Sri Lankan household as she supervised the servants in the preparation of the traditional Christmas food; while Nana Alice, Charmaine’s maternal grandmother, is remembered fondly for coming to Australia in the 1960s to help Charmaine as a young married woman with three young children, and for producing, every evening, “yet another delicious meal” (Solomon 1998, 10–11). Memories of “The Aunts” and their cooking are legion too: Elva, who “came late to . . . mixing and baking”; Claribel, who passed on Grandmother Julia’s brass preserving pan to Charmaine; Muriel, who “smelled of vanilla”; Millie, renowned for her meticulous backup labor “when the other Aunts . . . prepared their famous chutneys”; Connie, for her memories of Burmese food (Charmaine’s parents were born in Burma) and her “steamed steak and kidney suet pudding” in England in the 1950s (Solomon 1998, 13–15). Meanwhile, Reuben Solomon, “born to a prosperous Sephardic Jewish family living in Burma” and fleeing the Japanese to Calcutta during the Second World War, came from London to Ceylon in the postwar years to take up a post with the orchestra of a five-star hotel. Courting Charmaine, he wooed her with chateaubriand with Béarnaise sauce and pommes soufflés, bouillabaisse à la Ceylon, and French pastries—all from the kitchens of the Colombo hotel where he lived and worked (Solomon 1998, 5–6).

From these fragments alone, it is obvious that Charmaine’s food knowledge, from childhood years onward, is drawn from diverse sources. However, it is not simply the case that Charmaine was blessed with intergenerational family networks of competent cooks with a variety of skills and a passion for eating well, even in hard times (Solomon 1998, 4; see also Wong 2009, 57–89). In ascribing an “Asian” identity to Solomon and to her cookbooks, readers are also presented with representations of her “mixed” ethnic background. Charmaine describes this briefly at the beginning of Family Recipes but later, in Hutton’s The Food of Love (2007), teases out the question of ethnic background in more detail, using the motif of “fruit salad” as a way of simplifying a complex family story:

When I lived in Ceylon I would have given the answer “Dutch Burgher,” as that would have explained where I fitted into the jigsaw puzzle of the many races which occupy the island . . . [M]y father’s family landed in Zeilan [Ceylon] . . . in 1714, having sailed from . . . the Netherlands. My mother’s . . . paternal grandfather was born in Ireland, joined the British army and went to India where he married an Anglo-
Indian lady whose father was British and mother South Indian. Mother’s maternal great-grandfather was an English sea captain who had married a Dutch Indonesian woman... One of their children... was Mary Young, my great-grandmother, who married Alfred Garner of Goan and French descent. So now you can see why it is easier to say that I am “fruit salad”! (Love 2007, 26)

Perhaps, then, the “Queen of Asian cooking in Australia” is not really “Asian” after all—that is, if one accepts that ethnic identification and family background are critical in contributing to the title of “Asian.” Certainly, Charmaine herself does not regard herself as “Asian” in that unproblematic sense—“Asian” as a homogenized identity defined against other homogenized identities (as in “Asia” versus “Australia” or “the West,” for example). Here, I am reminded of Ien Ang’s injunction, “The predominant definition of Asianness in Australia still depends on the lumping together of all of ‘Asia’ as if it were a monolithic entity, on a process of racial/cultural othering” (Ang 2000, xviii). Charmaine’s historical story above, with its traceable effects of colonization, army service, travel, trade, “mixed” marriage, and adaptation to the local in her family’s history, is much more complicated than that (Solomon, 2007). Global movements, of course, are not always free-flowing and freely chosen; Jacques Derrida’s discussion of the pressing need for “cities of refuge” at a time of enforced migrations and diasporic relocations is a salutary reminder of this (Derrida 2001, 22–23). In fact, there are times when, for Charmaine, it was expedient to rework the story of her background as that of “non-Asian”: early in their marriage, in response to the volatile political situation in Ceylon, she and Reuben hastily migrated to Australia. It is indeed an irony for the future “Queen of Asian cooking in Australia” that to gain entry into Australia in 1959, Charmaine was obliged to emphasize the Europeanness of her heritage: “The White Australia Policy was still in place and I had to prove to authorities I came from Dutch Burger stock and was not Sinhalese, which seems incredible to me now” (Solomon 1998, 5; see also Batrouney 2002, 42–51). And thanks to the meticulous records kept by the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon (an organization still in operation today), Charmaine’s immigration application was successful, her “whiteness” safely established (Solomon 2005, 66).

It seems that Family Recipes challenges, to some extent, assumptions of Charmaine’s “Asian” background as undifferentiated and attached to “Asia” as a homogenized landmass. Instead, this cookbook presents a nuanced portrait of a cosmopolitan Eurasian family: one characterized by high status in the community, with household management supported by faithful servants—a family benefiting from
colonialism, marked by interracial marriage and following “localized”
practices in everyday life (Hutton 2007, 8, 10, 12–17; Tan 2011,
8–9). For example, Charmaine describes such “localizations” in the
pattern of her own family’s daily meals:

Josie [the Sinhalese cook] cooked the family’s meals every day . . . [M]
most often the day started with Sinhalese food . . . “hoppers,” bowl-
shaped pancakes cooked in a special pan . . .[or] “string hoppers”—little
lacy doyleys pressed out through a fine mould onto bamboo mats and
steamed, and then served up with coconut milk and sambol, or else a
piece of jaggery (palm sugar) . . . [With instruction from my aunts]
menus were varied enough to allow for [a European-style] soup and a
light main course at night. Lunches were more “native,” shall we say?
We enjoyed the spicy curries. (Solomon 2007, 27–28)

If the story of Charmaine’s “Asian” background is more complicated
than one would think, so too is the story of her learning to cook and
the seeming miracle of her publishing achievements. In interviews
and in her contribution to Hutton’s book, Charmaine was to declare
that, before coming to Australia with Reuben and their two daugh-
ters, she had never needed to learn to cook (Solomon 2005, 66; see
also Brittan 2002, 72–73; Solomon 2007, 27–28). Reuben agrees:

[In Colombo] the orchestra lived in luxury in the hotel. Charmaine and
I had our own suite, a nanny for our two daughters . . . no housework,
no cooking . . . It was a huge culture shock arriving in Sydney in 1959.
We’d grown up in privileged families, never cooked or cleaned, now we
had to do everything for ourselves. Charmaine had to teach herself to
cook. (Reuben Solomon, cited in Hawley 2002, 11)

Charmaine is quick to qualify the now mythic story of not being able
to cook:

I had always been surrounded by . . . [food and cooking]. My family are
really good cooks. But then they never had to cook three square meals
a day. It was only the fancy stuff. The “lady of the house” just made
cakes and pastries and desserts and had a wonderful time. And that’s
exactly what I did. And when I came to Australia I found you can’t feed
a family on that. (Solomon, cited in Britain 2002, 73)

In the above quotation, the gendered and racialized content of colo-
nial relations is unmistakable. A different version of class and gender
regimes (and a different twist on colonial relations in terms of strategies
of guarding the “purity” of the mainstream) certainly awaited Charmaine on her arrival in Australia. However, while she might have learned everyday cooking the hard way, it is not at all surprising that Charmaine did become a good, even celebrated, cook. All the signs are there—a family’s complex food culture that allows a young child to learn by osmosis—by “hanging out,” learning both from servants and from relatives, and later, when a young woman, by direct instruction (Charmaine is indebted to her Aunt Muriel for an apprenticeship in baking skills and the development of a sweet tooth) (Solomon 1998, 14; see also Giard 1998, 151–53). In fact, Charmaine’s culinary heritage was such, and so well known in late 1940–1950s Colombo, that as a young woman, working as a reporter for the Ceylon Daily News, she was asked to write a cookery column for the paper and to revise the first cookbook published in Ceylon, written by Charmaine’s father’s cousin, Hilda Deutrom. Despite Charmaine’s protestations to the editor (“I can’t cook”), she successfully completed the cookbook’s revisions, in consultation with her Aunt Hilda. As for the cookery column, once again Charmaine was able called on familial resources: “I had the right kind of family. I could go to Aunty This One and Aunty That One and get advice and then go home and try the recipes myself” (Solomon, cited in Britain 2007, 72). A supportive community of knowledgeable women is the thread that unites these remembered fragments.

This coming-of-age story is mirrored in the production of Charmaine’s most celebrated cookbook—The Complete Asian Cookbook (1976). Rejecting the publisher’s project initially (“no book is ever complete”), Solomon set out to deconstruct both “Complete” and “Asian,” presenting an indication of the infinite variety and complexity of regional and national food cultures, and often doing battle with the publisher for sufficient page space (Britain 2007, 78). Charmaine readily admits she had much to learn and that she set about building up her knowledge of “Asia” through travel, local interviews with expert cooks (for example, in Singapore, Charmaine interviewed Mama Lee, the mother of Lee Kuan Yew—the Singapore republic’s first president—and author of the now-legendary Mrs Lee’s Cookbook; in Australia, Solomon talked with Cambodian refugees, since travel to Cambodia was not possible), and, of course, through consultation with members of her family—this is the point where Aunt Connie’s memories of Burmese food become so pertinent (Solomon 1976, 240, 320–21; Solomon 1998, 15). After all, the supportive community is not only knowledgeable, but it is also a community that remembers. As well, Charmaine acknowledges the usefulness of her own training in journalism, together with an ever-present determination to make
sure every recipe was clearly written and foolproof: “I don’t think you can tell someone else how to do something unless you’ve actually done it yourself” (Solomon, cited in Britain 2007, 74).

“Not being able to cook,” then, clearly is not necessarily a disadvantage for cookbook production. Of course, this is providing one is willing to learn, to draw on others’ accumulated knowledge of food cultures and the memories associated with these, and to hone one’s own skills—ethnographic, culinary, or food-writing ones—in the process. However, there is another essential requirement that I would like to include here: that of respectful border crossing. Much has been written about cultural commodification—about the politics of appropriating other cultures as “exotic” to enhance the sense of one’s own feelings of “distinction” and cosmopolitan “style” (Bourdieu 1984). bell hooks, drawing on spice imagery, is, of course, memorable and much-quoted for her criticisms of such appropriation (“ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up a dull dish that is mainstream white culture”) (hooks 1992, 21). Lisa Heldke (2003, xi–xvi), in her turn, questions food adventuring as a form of commodification, whereby dominant social groups greedily consume the heritage of (usually “ethnic”) others. Could the same criticism be leveled at Charmaine in her search throughout (sometimes) unfamiliar territory—a search for a never quite complete but rich and differentiated “Asian” culinary imaginary?

When questioned about the authenticity of her recipes, Charmaine says,

[You] don’t have to grind up your spices and all that for every curry you make . . . If you love curries don’t ever bother making a curry paste for one meal, make it for the next six curries . . . and it will keep well. Because you’ve got to be practical. [But] I don’t throw in things that shouldn’t be there . . . [If you’re experimenting with fusion cookery] sometimes if the person who is doing it doesn’t really have a deep understanding of the cuisines he [sic] is trying to fuse it can end up as confusion . . . [b]ut many of the young chefs . . . here in Australia . . . seem to have a good instinct and feel about what will work and what won’t. (Solomon, cited in Britain, 2007, 74–75)

“[W]hat will work and what won’t,” in Charmaine’s terms, implies a respect for the integrity of a dish or a specific cuisine, an understanding of flavor combinations and how these work, from historical, cultural, and perhaps biochemical perspectives. It is this “deep understanding,” born of her own upbringing within hybridized culinary cultures, together with acknowledgment of changing tastes and current health concerns, that dictates the degree to which one can experiment—in ingredients, in methods, in quantities—and when one should hold the line. For
example, a recipe for breudher (a Dutch cake traditionally eaten at New Year) appears in both *The Complete Asian Cookbook* and *Family Recipes*, though in the latter, Charmaine not only calls on her memories (“our first taste of the new year—a slice of [yeasty] breudher accompanied by thin slivers of sharp Dutch Edam”) but also comments on her adjustments to the inherited family recipe (from twenty egg yolks to five whole eggs) in the interests of health and economy (Solomon 1998, 232). In a similar fashion, a typical Sri Lankan recipe using thirty dried chilies would be modified by Charmaine for Australian home cooks, as “it would have blown people’s heads off” (Solomon, cited in Negus 2003).

Culinary cultures clearly are not static, but at the same time, “a good instinct and feel” is necessary for creative and respectful border crossing.

And it is this “good instinct and feel” that seems to me to be compatible with Sidney Mintz’s understandings of cuisine, mentioned earlier. Discussing the impossibility of a “national cuisine,” Mintz (1996, 95–96) says,

> [T]he foods of a country do not, by themselves, compose a cuisine. Cuisines, when seen from the perspective of people who care about the *foods*, are never the foods of a country, but the foods of a *place*. The place might be quite large . . . [but its] size will be determined partly by social and not geographic considerations [original emphasis].

Following Mintz, I suggest that Charmaine’s alterations to classic recipes hardly constitute fusion for fusion’s sake—mixing or changing ingredients for the purpose of playfulness, “style,” or novelty. Instead, these adjustments appear to represent decisions based in social understanding and caring—memories of, and affection for, the place left behind, together with an awareness of the changing tastes of the new home, the adopted community. The passage of breudher from the Netherlands to Colombo to Sydney, then, outlines connections across oceans and through layers of generational and gendered memory. As Krisnendu Ray suggests in Chapter 2 of this volume, such remappings no longer assume the “four-colored maps of modernity that have come to colonize our minds” or the primacy of national cuisines. Instead, something more grounded in kitchen cultures but, contradictorily, more elusive is happening here (Chambers 2008, 130–31).

**AN “ASIAN” FAMILY COOKBOOK FOR AUSTRALIANS?**

If the stories of Charmaine’s “Asian” identity and of her cooking prowess are far more complicated than at first they seem, so too is her representation of “family” and “family cookbook”—her geographies
of family place-making and of family culinary cultures. When questioned by media personality George Negus about her own eating patterns and whether she eats only “Asian food,” Charmaine replied, “Oh no, I like to eat my way around the world,” as if this were simply a lifestyle choice (Solomon, cited in Negus 2003). However, in *Family Recipes*, in a section devoted to “Asian flavours,” Charmaine presents this preference as a more rooted attachment:

Since Reuben grew up in Burma (now known as Myanmar) and I in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), it would be surprising if our favourite family recipes did not feature Asian dishes . . . When we came to Australia in 1959, cravings for the food we had left behind had to be met by home cooking . . . The subtleties of spices had not been explored by the majority of Australians. To most people, “spicy” was synonymous with “hot.” (Solomon 1998, 130–31)

What, then, should be expected of a cookbook devoted to a particular family—especially one written *about* this family, rather than simply *for* families in their everyday meal preparation? Is this to be a cookbook that encompasses eating “around the world” in an attempt to challenge stereotypes of what is an “Asian”/cosmopolitan gastronomic outlook on life? Alternatively (or perhaps as well), should this cookbook challenge meanings of “Asian” from within cultures of particular tastes, ingredients, recipes, and dishes, to contest the reductionism of “Asian” food to the excessively “spicy” and “hot”? Reflecting on these issues, I now want to dip briefly into the remainder of *Family Recipes*—into the recipes themselves. It is here that we find most strongly the presence not only of the ancestors but also of Charmaine and Reuben’s immediate family—their children, in-laws, and grandchildren, and their individual voices as they cook and eat. With Charmaine and Reuben’s home as the epicenter of this family’s festive occasions and music-making (a suburban Sydney house that Charmaine lived in continuously for over fifty years), it seems pertinent to ask: What would a cookbook look like for members of such a family? How do their continuing conversations about food, embedded histories and evolving lives, together with the particularities of time and space in which these lives take place, shape its production? What sense of “other” worlds, multiple meanings of “Asia,” and border crossings pervades everyday eating here and the documentation of this?

*Family Recipes* in some respects looks like a quite conventional cookbook, with its sections dominated by predictable headings, such as “Breakfasts and Brunches,” “Starters, Dips and Pâtés,” “Pasta and
Noodles,” “Pastries and Pies,” and so on. What is different from the usual is the mix of recipes in each section and the annotations that accompany each of the recipes. “Breakfasts and Brunches,” for example, includes Reuben’s Sri Lankan hoppers (crisp-edged crêpes of rice flour) as well as traditional European favourites, such as Swiss bircher muesli, eggs Benedict, and French toast. Annotations position the recipes within the context of family history and preferences (“One of the things I look forward to in the Christmas to New Year Period is having an excuse for a brunch featuring this over-the-top version of ham and eggs,” Charmaine’s daughter Deborah says of eggs Benedict) (Solomon 1998, 23). Here such “family stories” emerge not as continuous narratives about aunts or grandmothers and their artful ways with pastry-baking or pickle-making but instead as fragments that together form a cultural and culinary pastiche. If this is an Australian family’s cooking, it looks like a very mixed bag of offerings indeed. Furthermore, it successfully overturns any rigid expectations of what an “Asian” cookbook in Australia might look like, and what “Asian Australian” families are meant to eat and do.

There is only space here for a few more glimpses. While Charmaine, for example, includes many recipes from her childhood days (Kitty’s love cake, breudher, Aunt Muriel’s chocolate velvet cake, Aunt Elva’s date cake, and so on), she also recalls when she and Deborah took classes in pastry-making at L’Ecole Lenôtre in France in 1983. To such classes Charmaine is inclined to attribute her skill in making puff pastry (Solomon 1998, 208). Here, the title of “Asian” is sufficiently elastic to embrace the tastes and textures of French patisserie . . . or perhaps meanings of “Asian” need to be reworked entirely?

Deborah, in her turn, selecting and annotating a number of recipes, displays, like Charmaine, moments of childhood memories, an eagerness to learn about the food of others, and the skills of a trained food professional, having worked in both French and Australian hotel kitchens. So a recipe for slow-baked tomatoes evokes childhood memories of family visits to Paddy’s Market in Sydney each week (“the cacophony of voices yelling the prices of their produce drowning out our pleas [to parents] to slow down”); a recipe for hazelnut strawberry tartlets is improvised from memories of tarts eaten while on a backpacking holiday in Switzerland; a recipe for Vietnamese beef soup recalls Deborah’s first meeting with her future husband when he attended her Asian cooking classes at a Sydney technical college (Solomon 1998, 157, 216, 132).

Meanwhile, pasta recipes also claim an important place in family history. Nina, Charmaine’s older daughter, has a reputation in the family
for cooking pasta—easy dishes to prepare for the uncertain hours of professional musicians. Accordingly, the “Pasta and Noodles” section draws on Italian favorites such as ravioli, pesto, gnocchi, and lasagne and then segues into noodles, including the distinctly Burmese-tasting kaukswe kyaw of Charmaine’s childhood and the soup noodles of her travels through Thailand (Solomon 1998, 57–68, 70–72). Such border crossing—through memory, exigency, travel—continues throughout the whole collection.

Cooking in this family is not confined to women. Glimpses of sons and sons-in-law occur throughout Family Recipes, but the most solidly defined male figure is that of Reuben, Charmaine’s husband. Reuben calls on his Jewish heritage—but one distinctly shaped by its localization in Burma (the family’s cooks were Indian)—for his contributions to the collection. Hence, murgh (“a lightly spiced soup” made from chicken and such other ingredients as onion, fenugreek, and turmeric) becomes Reuben’s comfort food. Meanwhile hameem, a chicken roasted with a rice stuffing, represents poignant memories of his Sephardic Jewish background and his mother’s sabbath cooking (Solomon 1998, 52, 142). Not all of Reuben’s recipes are nostalgic ones, however. Throughout the book, there is reference to his improvisations—his international prawns (“Reuben isn’t afraid of doing a little culinary borderhopping”) or his “nawlins” oxtail stew, remembered from Cajun-Creole cooking classes in New Orleans (Solomon 1998, 93, 136). Occasionally, though, a recipe will refer to a nostalgic imaginary—a past one might have had but didn’t (for example, Reuben’s seemingly inexplicable longing for the matzoh ball soup of an Ashkenazi childhood, when his own childhood was a Sephardic Jewish one [Solomon 1998, 40–41], can be explained, perhaps, in terms of a more generalized longing for “Jewishness” and its iconic foods). Alternatively, such longing might be viewed as a form of “borrowing” dishes that, in turn, become re-historicized for one’s own life story (for example, the enthusiastic adoption of the Peranakan [Straits Chinese] dish laksa by Australian palates [Duruz 2007, 197], or, as James Farrer has indicated, the Shanghainese affection for dacai—old-style Western food available in Shanghai in the 1930s). Incidentally, dacai in the 1930s was a nostalgic cuisine anyway, and it is doubly nostalgic now, as diners remember the hybrid tastes of that city at that time:

In contrast to a simple foreign/Chinese dichotomy, in which Chinese is always the flavor of “home,” the Shanghainese practice of serving western food as nostalgic local cuisine attaches these hybrid tastes to the urbanite’s memories of familiar but cosmopolitan spaces. (Farrer 2014, 101)
Such examples raise questions about “authenticity” and the ways that memory, nostalgia, place meanings, and tastes work together to establish credibility.

Grandparents, parents, husbands and wives, servants, cooks, sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, granddaughters, friends, acquaintances, friends of friends who pass on recipes, even strangers on trains—these all flit throughout this collection, adding to the complexity of the selection and the rich textures of the recipes’ provenance. However, this is not to claim, solely on this basis, any kind of distinction or exclusivity for this particular family. I suspect that if one were to unravel conscientiously the roots of any family’s personal recipe collection, it might prove more “mixed” and varied than first supposed (I think here of my own suburban childhood in Sydney, with my mother’s pickles and curry and rice, alternating with toad-in-the-hole and Lancashire hotpot, on the nightly menu). Instead, I wish to emphasize that the significance of *Family Recipes* lies in its ease of culinary border crossing and the acceptance of different meanings of “Asian” than stereotypes might suggest—a multifaceted and non-exclusionary “Asian” that, from the spiciness of Kitty’s love cake to the comforts of a childhood chicken soup, begins to resemble forms of cosmopolitanism, particularly those vested in the “rooted,” the “vernacular,” and the everyday while shaped by global flows (Werbner 2008). As well, as I’ve suggested earlier, this is a cookbook that disavows “Asian” as simply the excessively “spicy” and “hot”—the subtlety of spices, and their fieriness, continue throughout the collection as a source of conversation and debate. This is a mobile, rather than a fixed, food culture, drawing on the many possible influences of an engaged culinary citizenship, and it is one open to invention (or resistance), according to what constitutes “a good instinct and feel.”

This mobility, of course, extends across borders, both within Asia and beyond. Travel, in fact, lies at the heart of Charmaine’s writing together with the labor of cooking, caring, and remembering. In this particular family album, Kitty’s love cake travels across time, space, and generations: from Colombo to London to celebrate the birthdays of a favorite aunt and the aunt’s youngest daughter; with Charmaine, who carries the memory of the cake’s distinctive flavors as she sets out for a new life in Australia and later includes its recipe in her cookbooks; with Kitty herself—Charmaine’s mother—as she arrives in Sydney, the love cake recipe firmly established in her culinary repertoire (Solomon 1998, 241). The movement of this cake (quite literally, or as a recipe, as a taste memory, as a family bonding ritual, as a gesture of comfort and belonging) across oceans and continents in Charmaine’s lifetime
is hardly surprising, given the love cake’s already hybrid history of ingredients, places, and ethnicities. Michelle Burns (2008) explains,

The Love Cake, in its current form, originated in colonial Ceylon but takes its influences from around the globe. Like the concept of “Eurasian,” the recipe is a product of the vibrant cultural exchanges that occurred at the intersection of East and West. Although no one knows its exact origin (some say Dutch, most say Portuguese) similar cake recipes can be found in both European and Asian culinary traditions. The cake incorporates a mix of ingredients from other Portuguese cakes such as semolina, with local Sri Lankan spices such as nutmeg, cinnamon and cardamom. Added to this is the Arabic influence of rosewater that is found in many cakes from Portugal and Spain dating from the Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. It is highly likely that the Love Cake and the similar Eurasian Sugee Cake are closely related (the former uses cashew nuts and the later uses almonds), one being adapted from the other, using more readily available ingredients depending on location. For example the Love Cake uses the cashew nut, a crop that is specific to the tropics, is easily grown and therefore widely available in Sri Lanka.

Kitty’s love cake might appear then as a textbook case for globalization and localization, mirroring the politics of global movements and occupation (the Moors in Spain; Dutch Burghers in Ceylon; Eurasians in Penang and Malacca) intersecting with indigenization—the ingenious substitution of local ingredients. While questions of ownership of iconic foods, dishes, and ingredients might become a continuing preoccupation for food-savvy publics (Eckhardt and Hagerman 2013), the more interesting question, perhaps, is how such ownership both might be contested (as in the debate surrounding love cake and sugge cake that Burns unravels) and fluid, its fluidity opening up possibilities of belonging beyond the immediate confines of ethnic identification or beyond the borders of nation. The recipe for Kitty’s love cake within the pages of Family Recipes then becomes a trope for multiple places of belonging and movements between—for national, regional, or transnational identifications within the politics of everyday cooking, eating, and remembering. It is also a “grounded,” palatal reminder of movements between the intimacy of kitchens and spaces seemingly sans frontières, such movements a disruption to conventional conceptions of political boundaries and to assumptions that “cuisine” and “nation” are synonymous. And finally, the love cake’s recipe and the travels of the cake itself contain a further subtext, written in the micropolitics of the everyday, and in who cooks for whom. In these stories of nurturing within and across borders, the gender of the provider,
together with generational changes to the labor of care, should not be forgotten.

**Pot Roast Cosmopolitanism**

On Reuben and Charmaine’s fortieth wedding anniversary, their daughters and sons organized a surprise party at home. Guests, Charmaine remembers, included cousins, neighbors, work colleagues, friends from Sri Lanka, “and so many others . . . who have been an important part of our lives.” To celebrate the occasion, Andrew, the youngest of the Solomon siblings, cooked beef *smoore*, a traditional braised beef dish, described elsewhere by Charmaine as “a spicy version of Pot Roast” and one of Dutch Burgher ancestry. Typical spices and flavors are present—onion, garlic, lemongrass, curry leaves, ginger, cinnamon, Ceylon curry powder, fenugreek seeds, preserved lime, turmeric, chili powder—and simmered with the beef in coconut milk (Solomon 2007, 93, 95). The cooking of this dish represented a fitting tribute to the central characters of a narrative of “mixed” family origins and diverse, flexible culinary cultures. As well (or so it seems to me), Andrew’s culinary gift contained the ghosts of other narratives—narratives of (shifting, to some extent) gendered labor relations, nostalgia, and comfort, for example.

It is easy, perhaps, to be celebratory—to echo the toasts to “the Queen of Asian cooking in Australia.” Nevertheless, this chapter has set out to challenge some of the popular myths surrounding Solomon and her not inconsiderable place in Australian and “Asian” culinary history—to unravel more complicated narratives than the seemingly transparent ones in current circulation: the Queen of Asian cooking in Australia does not only cook “Asian,” for example, and may excel in French patisserie as well; the same Queen, while acknowledging the significance of family roots and a deep culture of family cooking, may, in the same breath, nominate Julia Child, Elizabeth David, and Jane Grigson as her mentors (all of whom reflect bourgeois and traditional rural French culinary cultures in their own approaches to home cooking) (Britain 2007, 77–78; see also Humble 2005, 172, 179–80, 195–96); the so-called Spice Queen seeks subtlety and complexity in flavor rather than overwhelming heat (and, in fact, has an extremely sweet tooth herself) (Harris 2001, 212); the Spice Queen’s Australian family shows an openness to diverse people, influences, and places—whether gained through professional training or a casual conversation with a stranger on a train. In fact, with a global sense of movement, migration, and intersecting culinary traditions and a local sense of flavors that “belong,” this family, viewed through the “album” of Charmaine’s
recipe collection, collectively poses for its own portrait of cosmopolitanism, and one firmly rooted in the everyday. It is not simply a case of “eating around the world” but a deep feeling in the gut (literally and metaphorically) of ways that different people and places connect through food. This feeling is both intensely intimate (as Kitty’s love cake attests) and far-reaching (a global consciousness shaped by the colonial opportunism of ancestors, and by not-so-distant personal histories of war and flight, migration and struggle, and so on). This gut feeling (or, in Charmaine’s words, “good instinct”) in some ways, I suggest, contains intimations of Nava’s “visceral cosmopolitanism”—a conception I choose to borrow here for a tentative conclusion.

Nava, responding to a “gap” in the literature of cosmopolitanism, which she claims is the result of a tendency to focus on global issues and human rights, sets out to trace “the cosmopolitan imagination and its vernacular expression in popular, political, cultural and emotional life” (Nava 2010). This is what Nava calls “visceral cosmopolitanism”—a sense of relating to difference at the gut or instinctive level, particularly (but not always) from within forms of erotic relations, as in, for example, “mixed” marriage. The important point that Nava makes, at least for my argument here, is the ordinariness of this cosmopolitanism—the everyday acceptance of its normality, rather than a focus on its strangeness. She reflects on evidence of cosmopolitan sensibilities emerging in Britain today, particularly in urban landscapes:

Cosmopolitanism in postcolonial postwar Britain—in London especially—has taken a very specific form, one of fusion, hybridity, mongrelisation, not just co- or parallel existence . . . “Mixed-racedness” has become more and more ordinary . . . Multiple national origins and languages are the norm . . . “Otherness” is no longer very different of remarkable. Nor . . . is merger or “fusion”—ie inter-racial and inter-cultural sexual partnerships and offspring. Difference these days is becoming as normal in the bedroom as it is on the streets in many parts of urban UK. (Nava 2010)

Nava, however, is quick to reassure the skeptical that she is not arguing that discrimination, racism, and xenophobia no longer exist in contemporary Britain. Instead, she claims that “repudiation and hostility, although usually dominant, have co-existed in tension with a counter tendency, with the allure of difference, with aspirations to be cosmopolitan, to go abroad, to be hospitable to foreigners. On the whole this mood or structure of feeling has constituted an alternative culture of modernity” (Nava 2010).

If we accept this version of “visceral cosmopolitan”—this instinctive gut feeling for the everydayness (and the rich rewards) of difference, Charmaine Solomon’s Family Recipes begins to look like a manifesto
(though a mild one) for forms of rooted yet outward-looking cosmopolitanism. Through its understated acceptance of how we might live and eat together across boundaries of difference (whether sexual, gendered, generational, ethnic, class, or differences of other dimensions), it suggests that cross-cultural and cross-culinary relations are a normal part of everyday life. At least, the route forward looks like a delicious one. Ingesting foods, flavors, and cosmopolitan meanings is important training in embodied, sensual acceptance, providing this constitutes respectful border crossing (Gabaccia 1998, 231–32). This “light-touch” approach to culinary politics (Wise and Velayutham 2009, 2) is one that I suggest Family Recipes offers; or, in Ash Amin’s words in another context, this cookbook, as a collection, illustrates “small practical accommodations that work their way around, or through, difference, rather than any conscious attempt to shift . . . cultural identities and practices” (Amin 2002, 970).

Nevertheless, Family Recipes is not simply a case in point for reworking one’s own familiar life as “exotic” to gratify mainstream audiences. This cookbook does not constitute a collection of recipes and memories seeking to promote a fashionable “multiculturalism,” with diversity itself, set loose from its roots, an object of consumption. Here, instead, the provenance of recipes is acknowledged, and the recipes themselves are deeply embedded—quite viscerally—in personal relations. Whether we cook beef smoore or spaghetti bolognaise from Charmaine Solomon’s Family Recipes, we partake in imaginaries of the ordinariness of “mixed” nations for this new Asian Century and the ordinariness of connections beyond the national. In the process, we might even experience a sense of global belonging from locations within, and beyond, that place we call “Asia”—a sense of belonging in which affective bonds are significant and difference is valued for its own sake, and not simply—as hooks cautioned—as the added “spice” of the other (hooks 1992, 21).

In short, Charmaine Solomon’s own heritage, life, and work serve as a resonant example of the complex culinary politics of border crossing. Not only drawing on reworked meanings of “Australia,” “Asia,” and “cosmopolitanism” in Family Recipes, Solomon produces nostalgic narratives of pleasurable eating together and culinary exchange, among and between affective communities. And it is the valuing of border crossings such as these, and the valuing of their practice in everyday life, that lies at the heart of transnational Asian foodways.

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Chapter 4

Umami Abroad: Taste, Authenticity, and the Global Urban Network

Shoko Imai

Introduction

From February 9 to 11 in 2009, “Tokyo Taste: The World Summit of Gastronomy 2009” was held at Tokyo International Forum. Many celebrated top chefs from around the world were invited to this event to discuss, demonstrate, and share their skills and knowledge, with participants coming from eight countries, including Japan, France, Spain, and the United States. US-based Japanese chef Nobuyuki Matsuhisa (“Nobu”) was one of those invited to this event, along with other globally famous celebrity chefs such as French chef Joël Robuchon and Spanish chef Ferran Adrià. Nobu has been recognized as having made an impact on haute cuisine all over the world. He was introduced to the audience as a leading figure in drawing American and other international attention to Japanese food and contributing to the eventual spread of Japanese cuisine around the world. Nobu met up and created networks with the other leading celebrity chefs at the forum. They interacted and discussed the trends of the culinary world to explore beyond the cuisines in which they had been trained and currently practiced. Intriguingly, Nobu was invited as a representative of North American cuisine.

This Tokyo Taste event raises questions about the geographical positionality and spatiality of Japanese food, especially in relation to
the concept of authenticity. The fact that Nobu represented North American cuisine is significant, because conventionally authenticity in relation to culinary techniques and skills has been defined by reference to the ethnicity or nationality of the cuisines or chefs. It is thus strongly connected to the notion of an original place and location where the cuisines or chefs are understood to have come from. At the 2009 event, Nobu and “Nobu-style” were still defined based on location, as he participated in the event as a representative of the United States. However, the event organizers were flexible enough to freely associate him with the place where he had established his pivotal business center: they recognized that although branches of his restaurant are scattered all over the world, he has only one branch in Japan, and his main businesses are located in the United States.2

In relation to the issue of authenticity in the case of Chef Matsuhisa, I have discussed elsewhere the special significance of his case from cultural and geographical perspectives (Imai 2010). His approach to cooking “Nobu-style” is based on his initial training as a sushi chef in Japan followed by his wide experience in various locations in South America and North America. Furthermore, his primary restaurants are located in major world cities including New York, Los Angeles, London, and Tokyo, creating culinary networks that have those cities as their nodes (Sassen 1991; Castells 2000 [1996]). His case, therefore, cannot be analyzed simply in terms of a single-place-based notion of authenticity, even though place-based authenticity is assumed in many studies of food cultures, which tend to emphasize a single place of origin (Cook, Crang, and Thorpe 2000; Heldke 2003; Cook et al. 2008). In contrast, in constructing the concept of “Nobu-style” in relation to spatial networks, I have argued that his authenticity is embedded in a world city network geography strongly inflected by the consciousness of class or social status represented by Hollywood celebrities, cosmopolitans, and global elites (Imai 2010). Thus, Nobu’s case enables the novel notion of agent-based authenticity, something that we can see emerging as we look at the flows and agencies involved in his restaurant enterprise. By means of this global world city geography, he has contributed to the dissemination and recognition of his own cuisine and the globalization of Japanese food around the world.

The notion of place-based authenticity has inevitably been problematized in an era in which globalization is driven by the networking activities of a dispersed collection of actors, or agents. Today, in the globalized world of haute cuisine, culinary authenticity is established
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and sustained more in terms of agent-based authenticity than place-based authenticity. However, with regard to the phenomenon of the current popularity of Japanese food culture, the concept of location-based authenticity is still so fundamental that it causes some contradiction with the network-based expansion of Japanese culinary culture. This provides us with an opportunity to rethink the issue of authentication in our contemporary global society. Furthermore, looking at this the other way around, we can also use the concept of authenticity to contemplate the complexity of globalization from a cultural perspective.

This chapter attempts to refine our understanding of the globalization of Japanese food culture by reference to the socially and cognitively constructed notion of authenticity. In order to do this, I would like to focus on the sense of taste, and in particular on umami as our fifth basic taste. Taste is fundamental because it directly relates to our perceptions as we experience the external world through our bodies. The sense of taste also helps us to differentiate between and appreciate particular kinds of value, eventually enabling the embodied practices of connoisseurship.

Umami is integral to the current image of Japanese food culture, as it is related both to definitions of culinary authenticity and to the most recent phase in the globalization of Japanese cuisine. I consider umami to be a crucial key case for the analysis of the complexity of the current situation of Japanese food culture. I examine dashi and miso in particular, both of which are popular Japanese food products and staples containing significant umami elements.

The last part of this chapter contributes to a geographical critique of place-based authenticity as opposed to more spatially complex networks. Chef networks help demonstrate how the practice of place-based authenticity can be questioned and, as a result, complicate our understanding of globalization. The issues of taste, umami, and chef networking closely relate to each other, especially in terms of agent-based authenticity. Essentially the knowledge of umami plays a key role in shaping the notion of authenticity in Japanese cuisines among chefs’ culinary networks.

The Sense of Taste as Bodily Experience

In examining the globalization of food cultures, firstly I would like to aim at the literal sense of taste: what’s happening on our palate. Taste relates to a cognitive sensory system and is strongly connected to sensory desires that are involved with our judgment of what is
pleasant or unpleasant (Korsmeyer 1999). Taste is a fundamental system governing sensory contact in our vernacular life. However, there is another aspect of taste. Taste is also greatly affected by social settings, especially under the current wave of the globalization of food cultures. Taste can also set criteria for discrimination in foods, because of the way in which it can so easily display political, social, or cultural positions with regard to practices or beliefs relating to eating or the refusal of eating (Strong 2011). The sense of taste is important because it provides us with a complex space within which we can try to negotiate what is necessary for survival both socially and biologically.

Since taste influences greatly our notion of authenticity, it is also worth paying particular attention to the sense of taste in order to investigate how the transition of people’s preferences regarding taste has occurred in terms of accepting new and unfamiliar foods in this globalized era. Humans tend to be rather conservative when it comes to the choice of food, a tendency that has been understood as an instinctive reaction that functions to protect us physically and emotionally from danger in the environment to which we belong as living creatures (Heldke 2003). For instance, the image of eating fish raw has in the past, outside Japan, been connected to the concept of savagery (Douglas 1984; Takaki 1989). However, in the last two decades or so, sushi and sashimi have become popular and even common foods in Europe and the United States; and the cultural meanings attached to eating sushi or raw fish have changed to the extent that it has become recognized as a healthy and culturally sophisticated thing to do among cosmopolitans (Ishige et al. 1985; Bestor 2005; Issenberg 2007; Ray 2007).

The idea of globalized taste or globalized food items tends to suggest something plain, simplified, or less sophisticated, since globalized food items are generally thought of as mass-produced with a standardized process of creation. In terms of aesthetics and quality, among “foodies” or “hipsters of food” who have connoisseurship, those standardized food items and franchised restaurants are not primary subjects for admiration and discussion in food reviews on online social network sites (Johnston and Baumann 2010). Despite this image of mass-produced, standardized foods, the globalized food scene contains an essential paradox in the sense that although food manufacturers and restaurateurs try to penetrate a larger market by standardizing, inventing, and producing more familiar tastes and acceptable tastes for a wider audience, at the same time they often celebrate and highlight diverse food cultures and ethnic specialty tastes (Gabaccia 1998;
Heldke 2003; Haden 2011). Furthermore, Roger Haden describes how “classic connoisseurship went [and can go] in both directions—democratization and elitism.” He explains how we have come to regard taste as a “thing” or commodity that can be quantified, controlled, stored, manipulated, and transported by food science firms and food production industries.

For consumers, a palate can be inculcated and developed, enabling participation, self-improvement, or sophistication, a process that can afford competitive social advantages as well as the maximization of the gustatory pleasure in the intake of flavorful food items. Thus, taste can be knowledge as pleasure, something used to differentiate ourselves from others, especially using the concept of places of origins (Strong 2011). Therefore, this transition and flexibility of taste has to be investigated through the analysis of the concept of authenticity as an experience involving the body and feelings. Such a study would make a significant contribution to discussions of food geographies in relation to globalization. Understanding taste as a complex event within networks of multiple relations will help us to think through the discovery of umami by Western chefs.

**Umami as the Fifth Basic Taste**

In this section, I will focus on umami, defined as the fifth basic taste. I’ll provide an overview of the concept of umami, narrate the discovery of umami, discuss its relation to the globalization of Japanese food culture, and then focus in particular on dashi and miso. The discussion of the discovery and construction of the concept of umami will reveal how it has been perceived and narrated through geographical experiences. The recognition of complex and sophisticated tastes in Japanese cuisine has recently been increasingly emphasized by chefs and clientele, especially outside Japan. The role played by umami in the representation of Japanese food culture is complicated and integrated, as it is mixed up with the concept of authenticity in the globalized networks of celebrity chefs.

While umami has started to draw the attention of many chefs worldwide and is currently the subject of extensive experimentation, the legitimacy of the discovery of umami and what umami actually is still seems to be debatable even among food scholars (Fitzgerald and Petrick 2008; Ducker 2011; Strong 2011). Nevertheless, umami has been increasingly recognized in recent times, not only by Japanese chefs, but also by a wide variety of celebrity chefs from all parts of the world.
Nowadays, taste is generally considered to have five basic elements: salty, sweet, sour, bitter, and umami. The taste of umami, meaning close to savory, meaty, and broth-like in English, is provided by glutamate, or 5′-ribonucleotides such as disodium inosinate and disodium guanylate. A possible receptor for umami was discovered in 2000, followed by the discovery of an amino acid receptor on our palate, as reported in *Nature* in 2002.³

Umami was first discovered by Dr. Kikunae Ikeda at the Tokyo Imperial University in 1908. Ikeda claimed that the amino acid glutamate provided the distinctive taste of traditional Japanese soup stock dashi, made from dried *konbu*, a kind of seaweed kelp. Although food that contains a large amount of umami substances can be found all over the world—tomatoes, Parmesan cheese, meat, porcini mushrooms, and morels being just a few examples—the development of Japanese cuisine in particular has depended on dried or fermented food items and seasonings that contain a fair amount of umami, such as soy sauce and miso paste. The map below (Figure 4.1) shows there are many kinds of seasonings containing umami. However, umami-based food items are pervasive and widely available not only in Asian countries but also in Europe as well as Latin America and Africa.

In this map, a single umami-based food product represents each country; for example, ketchup for the United States, Bovril for the UK, and Vegemite for Australia. It is obviously very shortsighted simply to analyze people’s taste preference in terms of the countries where they are from. However, narratives articulating located preferences for a particular product are common in advertising and newspapers.⁴ The map emphasizes the wide availability of umami all over the world, introducing local products and familiar foods and flavors. While in the East umami products are made of fish, vegetables, and grains, in the West dairy products, meat, and tomatoes are the sources of umami. And yet the possibility of the transnationality of umami and the universality of its flavor still seem to be questioned by this map, because at the same time that it indicates universality, it also seems to emphasize the peculiar and distinctive origins of each product in each region and country. This makes it harder to see the products as a collective group, even if they are categorized in the same basic human taste of umami.

Some of the products in East Asia, such as Chinese and Korean soybean products, Thai *nam pla* and Vietnamese *nuoc mam* (both made of fish), and Malay *belachan* (made with prawns), involve processes of fermentation. While Bovril is made of beef, the UK also has a yeast extract product similar to Vegemite, called Marmite. Although
Many different traditional seasonings and foodstuffs can be found around the world. Most have been processed in some way to preserve them, either by fermentation, drying or salting. These processes boost umami substances such as glutamate, creating food rich in umami.

Here is a selection of umami foods that continue to be regional flavor.

Figure 4.1  Traditional foods around the world and umami

Source: Umami Information Center (NPO)
Marmite and Vegemite are both yeast extracts, familiarity and preference regarding flavor and texture seem to depend on the country.

**The Discovery of Umami**

Although the nature of umami is still often considered culturally and spatially self-contained and something that only the Japanese would learn, through experience within their own food culture, umami can be understood as a geographically extensive phenomenon. On a different scale, umami is about ubiquitous chemical reactions happening on the human palate. In fact, behind the discovery of umami, there was a crucial geographical experience.

Dr. Ikeda’s discovery of umami was brought about by his individual and transnational experience. I would like to argue that it was Dr. Ikeda’s agency, initiatives, and action, specifically his spatial mobility, that led to the discovery of umami. And it was his agent-based activity and related spatial events that led to the establishment of a basis for the agent-based authenticity of umami. When he was studying in Germany, Dr. Ikeda first noticed the possible existence of another element besides the four existing basic taste elements. At a time when he was having German-style home-cooked dishes, typically featuring sausages, steak and cheese, he was surprised by how different and how large German body sizes were compared with those of Japanese. He immediately theorized that the difference came from how and what they ate—with their meals containing a fair amount of meat and dairy products, rich in protein and fat. At the same time, however, he also perceived a nostalgic taste that reminded him of the taste of home cooking in Japan. After he came back to Japan, when he was eating *yu-dofu* (a simple hot-pot dish of tofu cooked in dashi stock made of *konbu*) with his family, he sensed the fifth element of taste differing from the other four tastes (NHK Enterprises, Inc. 2008; Kamiyama 2011). The nostalgic taste he had sensed in German food was the taste of umami.

This fifth taste seemed crucial to him, because he wanted to improve Japanese nutrition and physical strength in order to allow Japan to compete with the great powers of Western Europe such as Germany, of which he had personal experience. In 1908, Dr. Ikeda’s attention was drawn to Dr. Hiizu Miyake’s article that argued “delicious taste would improve the digestion of food.” Ikeda set as his goal the detection of the tasty element he had come to recognize while in Germany. Devoting himself to the study of umami, Dr. Ikeda succeeded in developing a method of producing seasonings consisting
of glutamate, the element of umami that he had discovered to be its main substance.

Ikeda’s geographical experience with umami expanded rapidly as he worked in cooperation with entrepreneur Saburosuke Suzuki. His invention eventually contributed to the mass production of chemically composed umami seasonings (monosodium glutamate, MSG) by the Ajinomoto company (ajinomoto meaning originally “source of taste” in Japanese) (ibid., 163). The chemical seasoning MSG was widely introduced to other Asian countries including Taiwan and China, and then to the United States, where a negative image was created in the late 1960s, which eventually led to the so-called Chinese restaurant syndrome (Sand 2005; Ku 2014). Dr. Ikeda’s transnational experience, as well as the examples of umami products from all over the world, might suggest the universality of umami. Through the stress on umami by today’s leading celebrity chefs, the distinctive characteristics found in the traditional ingredients and cooking methods, Japanese food has started to be recognized more worldwide. Although this recognition took time and many challenges had to be overcome, the appreciation of umami has greatly changed the geography of Japanese cuisine as a whole. The next section will look more carefully at the globalization of Japanese food culture through the analysis of umami.

**Umami and Globalization of Japanese Food**

Although the popularity of Japanese food is not so new, it is a recent phenomenon that umami has started to be recognized all over the world. Isao Kumakura, a food scholar working on Japanese food history, points out that the recognition of umami around the world has coincided with the rising popularity of Japanese food. Umami has gradually become a topic of general discussion through the increase in the general appreciation of Japanese cuisine. Indeed, until relatively recently, just a few decades ago, the concept of the fifth basic taste (umami) was not really recognized in academic studies either. It had been put in a subordinate position, partially because, again, umami had been considered something very specific, only locally recognized in Japanese cuisine (Kumakura 2013a). I would like to argue that umami has emerged as a useful catalyst to give Japanese food culture a wider appeal to a transnational audience.

Umami was until recently never considered as an independent element of taste but just as a “flavor potentiator,” although the fact that monosodium glutamate (MSG) enhances deliciousness in food was already well established. Yet as Kurihara points out, one of the
causes of the worldwide Japanese food wave has been that the taste of umami has begun to be accepted as a new flavor within the international culinary market (2010, 7). Likewise, I argue, the process works the other way around. The increased cultural sense of proximity to Japanese food in general (such as soy sauce, teriyaki, and sushi) has reinforced the acceptance of umami flavors. This has had a major impact on consumers’ sense of taste given that the increased proximity to umami and Japanese food plays an important role in upgrading their sense of connoisseurship, which in the globalized era is often portrayed as an “omnivore” attitude toward food tolerance (Pollan 2007). This attitude has affected consumer consciousness of food—not necessarily of Japanese food only, but also of food in general—as consumers have become more aware of the taste and quality of food items with the knowledge of umami, especially represented by dashi and miso. The Japanese have empirically established their culinary techniques mainly around what would be suitable to serve with their staple food, white rice. They have developed ways to condense umami elements in food items by the processes of preserving with salt, smoking, or fermenting in advance. And once the basic ingredients such as dried bonito, miso, and soy sauce have been prepared, they have been able to extract flavors deriving from the umami contained in the preserved basic items relatively quickly (ibid.). In contrast to Western-style cuisines, with their complex mixtures of many different flavors, it is relatively easy to directly taste the flavor of umami itself in Japanese cooking, because there is a simpler usage of ingredients and seasoning with a fair amount of sodium, which chemically enhances the extraction of the flavor of amino acids (Kurihara 2010, 6). With umami gradually attracting more attention lately, not only in the academic context, but also within elite global culinary cultures introduced by celebrity chefs, articles about this taste concept have been appearing more frequently in the mainstream English-language media along with the recent popularity of ramen, for instance.5

In the United States, umami has a strong connection with the current popularity of ramen (Solt 2014). For example, Ivan Orkin, who was born and raised in New York City and now owns the ramen restaurant Ivan Ramen in Setagaya, Tokyo, recently opened another branch in New York City. In an interview with Bon Appétit, he explains the secret behind the popularity of ramen in terms of the idea that ramen is “a perfectly balanced umami bomb” (Ton 2013). The crucial element of the characteristic ramen soup is derived from combinations of different kinds of dashi and umami-rich seasonings such as soy sauce
and miso. By introducing the flavors as well as the concept and history of ramen as part of Japanese traditional food delicacies, ramen restaurants have significantly contributed to the wide recognition of umami in the media and on our tongues.

**Umami, Dashi, and Miso**

Certain flavors of food such as fat and sugar have a very strong and common impact on human palates, giving most of us the feeling of “tastiness” in some way. Dashi and miso have both been attracting international attention these days, and some celebrity chefs have worked on their own creations with dashi and miso to pull out the flavors of umami in food ingredients, reflecting on their own geographical insights. For many Japanese, who gradually experienced and learned the smell of dashi from the earliest stages of their perception development, a preference for umami seems to be naturally cultivated and enhanced (Fushiki 2012). Studies indicate that infants show a strong interest in dashi soup, with its flavor of umami. This is not surprising, as human breast milk contains a high amount of umami elements. This suggests that people from many different cultural backgrounds are all potentially familiar with the taste of umami (Kumakura and Fushiki 2012, 250). However, the cultural associations of Japanese food with umami have often suggested that it is most notably a specific aspect of Japanese cuisine.

In addition to the relatively simple sense of taste, its combination with the more complex sense of smell plays a crucial role in enhancing the flavor of dashi. *The Science of Dashi*, published in 2012, provides an overview of dashi stock in terms of its close relations to Japanese conventional eating habits and culinary culture. According to the book, the savory dimension of any kind of dashi stock found in the world consists of two elements: taste (umami) and flavor that passes from the mouth to the nasal cavity. Our sense of smell helps memories of the taste to endure (Fushiki 2012).

Besides dashi, miso and soy sauce are other examples of significant seasonings that have begun to be recognized overseas. Non-Japanese professional chefs have taken up the trend of using miso creatively. The *New Yorker* magazine featured the story of celebrity chef David Chang’s umami project in January 2013. Chef Chang’s aim was to invent what he calls “a microbial spice” (spice made of microbes), infused with the umami concept and greatly influenced by Japanese miso (fermented bean paste), something really original based on his culinary experiments at his laboratory in the East Village.
in Manhattan, New York City. His goal was to create something that tastes like the East Village, or a “New York umami.” This story is intriguing because it raises the issue of the universality of the taste of umami, locally materialized. That David Chang seems particularly conscious of the significance of locality is suggested by his identification of his favorite clientele: “Our local clientele, the East Villagers as an aggregate whole and all the cooks that support us” (Kramer 2013, 20). In fact, one of my informants, a Japanese sushi chef who has been running his own restaurant in Manhattan for more than three decades, mentioned that recently he has been teaching established chefs practicing French cuisine in New York City how to make miso (Suzuki 2012).

While the concept of umami, originally strongly associated with the sense of place of Japan through the exotic sound of the word, is the fifth element of taste and one in which a chemical reaction is really happening on our tongues and in our brains, there are still questions about its authenticity to be explored in the context of its geographical associations. In the next section, I will explore these issues by focusing on cookbooks and chefs’ networks.

**Agency of Umami in Cookbooks**

These examples of the geography of umami suggest that the issue of culinary authenticity sits at the center of discussions of legitimacy and the validity of communicating Japanese food culture from Japan to the world. In order to explore this issue, I refer to geographical literature and examine chefs’ interactions and knowledge sharing, seen in cookbooks and culinary events. I focus on an assemblage of leading chefs who are stirring up the culinary world as they globalize Japanese food within their networks. I would like to argue that transnational chef networks, which are based on face-to-face relationships of respected chef-agents who are passionate about promoting Japanese food as they penetrate national boundaries, end up paradoxically reinforcing a place-based authenticity focusing on Japan as the imagined true home of Japanese tastes. This is because of the essentially self-contained nature of “Japanese” food. The location-specific nature of this version of Japanese food works in the interest and to the benefit of the nation and the national food industries when it is introduced to wider audiences as a cuisine with a specific national origin but a universal appeal, one that can be enjoyed everywhere, worldwide. This is paradoxical because the idea of place-based authenticity is to some extent contradicted by the realities of
globalization, exemplified in this case by global chef networks, which undermine the conventional way of associating tastes and foods with particular locations. The concept of place-based authenticity is complicated by our understanding of the process of the globalization of Japanese food when we take into account the appeal of universally appetizing umami. The purpose of the following section on authenticity is to suggest a more complex way of understanding globalization that allows for this paradox.

In 2012 Japanese chef Yoshihiro Murata, who specializes in traditional Japanese kaiseki cuisine and who used to run the restaurant Chrysan in London, published the cookbook *Salad*. This book provides us with an interesting example of how much emphasis is put on umami in the appreciation of Japanese culinary culture found in its globalization process. While Chef Murata claims that the authenticity of umami is deeply connected to “authentic” Japanese culinary culture, the book emphasizes the universal and non-location-specific appeal of umami so as to promote “authentic” Japanese cuisine to the world.

*Salad* was conceived as the application of the foreign concept of salad to the traditional kaiseki cuisine, resulting in a reconstructed form of kaiseki. In the foreword, British chef Heston Blumenthal specifically explains that umami has had a significant impact on Western cooking in recent years and that it has helped him explore and experiment with Japanese cuisine. In his introduction to the book, Chef Murata explains the functions of umami in Japanese food: “amongst global cuisines Japan may be the only country to have developed its cuisine based upon umami” (Murata 2012, 9). He claims that umami is a unique entity, specific to Japanese cuisine. His cookbook features more than a dozen recipes, the descriptions for which specifically use the word “umami” to explain their flavors. The reader is alerted to the umami-rich ingredients found in several other dishes.

This cookbook project seems to suggest one new direction for Chef Murata, as he sees this book as his attempt at a “second opening of Japanese cuisine to the world, [to] end its national isolation.” For Murata, the essential purpose of authentic Japanese cooking is “to focus on the pure taste of the food” (ibid., 9). While Chef Murata seems to have a clear idea about the authenticity of Japanese cuisine and the food items he discusses here, which are firmly based on location-based authenticity or a notion of Japan as the only authentic homeland of umami, he emphasizes at the same time that this discussion of umami becomes a new vehicle for a globalization of Japanese cuisine.
Koku, Richness of Flavor

Chef Murata’s illustration of Japanese cuisine in his cookbook, as well as his strategies to promote “authentic” Japanese food and its taste, is conceptualized in terms of location-based authenticity and seems to correspond well with Toru Fushiki’s understanding of the significant concept of koku (Fushiki 2005). This word is often used to describe Japanese people’s taste preferences, meaning thick and rich, or “having a body” in Japanese. The appreciation of koku has three layers: the first layer of koku regards the richness of flavors made of sweetness and fat. The appreciation of those two elements, energy sources necessary for survival, is inherent in all humans; the second layer of appreciation responds to umami, thickness, and textures; and the third layer of koku, which very much depends on our perceptions and impressions, responds to those metaphorical and emotional aspects of flavor that result from contemplation and imagination. Even though this third layer is the most subtle, it seems to be the most critical when it comes to umami being understood by people who have not been exposed to Japanese eating habits culturally and geographically. Understanding this concept is useful in understanding how chefs like Murata strategize in educating curious chefs, customers, and cookbook readers overseas on the authenticity of Japanese food. The colorful and aesthetic presentations and decorations of Japanese dishes greatly help establish an image of Japanese food as a sophisticated cuisine dependent on the elaborate techniques and dexterous skills of Japanese chefs (ibid.). In this respect, the authenticity of Japanese food can be detached from any geographical engagements with the place of origin. However, the strategies used by Japanese chefs in increasing the appeal of Japanese culture still depends on the fixed idea of Japan as an imagined location.

Tim Waterman explains the close association of taste with the concept of location, even in this globalized era, through the idea that “local preferences, even in a globalized market, may still be the result not just of local acculturation (nurture), but of a direct relationship with soil, air, climate, and vegetation of a place (nature),” and this seems to be applied in particular to wine (Waterman 2011). In the field of wine connoisseurship, the assessment of the quality of wine still refers to its imagined local characteristics. These characteristics help wines achieve global recognition and distribution. This emphasis on the actual location of production, however, cannot be so simply applied to the case of Japanese cuisine as a whole, especially in a global context, partially because there are so many varieties of Japanese cuisine, if we look closer
by regions or cities, compared to the case of wine, which tends to be more attached to the concept of particular location.

As long as Western chefs accept the values of overall Japanese culture supported by positive perceptions based on nuanced images of Japan, or more vaguely images of Asia, the evaluations of the tastes of Japanese food in general can be enhanced, even though those images are often inevitably simplified (Cook et al. 2006 and 2008; Cresswell 2009). Those images do not necessarily originate from actual experience or any particular events happening at a specific location. Not only the experience of traveling to Japan and working there, but also media coverage and images, such as TV shows and cookbooks and food magazines featuring Japanese food, play essential roles in fixing the image of Japan.8

Collaborations with other chefs create interplays of these practices and learning processes. By looking at the process of knowledge production regarding Japanese food within chef networks, we can see a more complex situation in terms of maintaining its authenticity. I will illustrate the spatial complexities stirred up by those chefs who depend on place-based authenticity when they actually practice their initiatives and actions and exchanges of knowledge within transnational networks.

**Authenticity in Chef Networks and Creativity**

In this final section, I would like to explain more specifically what chefs recognize as authenticity. I argue that networks provide a crucial space within which chefs are able to create and maintain agent-based authenticity. According to Vanina Leschziner, chefs make culinary choices based on their “self-concepts” and “field positions”—in other words, what they stand for in culinary politics (Leschziner 2010). Globally well-known top chefs tend to sustain their mutual face-to-face relationships and utilize them to make decisions and perform globally in the restaurant industry.9 For example, examining El Bulli’s celebrated Chef Ferran Adrià for their case study, Svejenoca et al. illustrate how crucial new ideas are for institutional entrepreneurs like chefs in terms of four key themes: creativity, theorization of their art, reputation and recognition among chefs and renown among cosmopolitans and the general public, and eventual dissemination of their work through the media, publications, and demonstrations (Svejenoca et al. 2007). New ideas are shared, circulated, and disseminated within the networks the chefs have established.

Food critic Malinda Joe has described how Japanese chefs and Western chefs have been exchanging information and influencing each other to a significant extent in the last decade. Western chefs are
fascinated not only by the food ingredients and techniques in Japanese cuisine but also by the philosophy behind that food and cuisine (Bloomberg 2013). Some chefs that I interviewed in fact mentioned this point as the reason behind the growth in appreciation of Japanese cuisine, suggesting that people tend to be attracted to the spiritual aspect of their perception of Japanese culture (Suzuki 2012). Japanese and Western chefs perform their agencies strategically to maintain good relationships with each other and to learn new skills and techniques by communicating their “authentic” experience and knowledge of Japanese cuisines. As their culinary networks depend on personal contact-based interactions, their relations are relatively exclusive. Within the space of networks, they establish agent-based authenticity by interacting with each other and disseminating the knowledge and skills of Japanese food within that group. Chefs often get together at events such as the Tokyo Taste event, and they are sometimes introduced to each other by PR representatives for food manufacturers like Ajinomoto. The PR people normally help the chefs with publicity and networking with other chefs. Often it is their introductions that enable chefs to visit each other’s restaurants to communicate and exchange information on trends, ideas, and cooking techniques. This seems to work effectively to maintain their businesses and to improve their own skills and extend their knowledge.

Umami is considered to be, and narrated as, the most essential aspect of Japanese cuisine and the key thing in helping connect chefs who practice Japanese cuisine. In contrast, the essential Japanese concept of umami will inevitably be affected by factors and input from outside Japan through interactions with Western chefs. Japanese celebrity chefs who recognize the universal appeal of umami are deliberately introducing umami as a new global project to non-Japanese chefs and to a potential clientele who have not yet discovered the existence of the receptors of the hidden fifth basic taste on their palates. This indicates that umami can be appreciated transnationally, regardless of the consumer’s origin, contradicting the idea of a location-based authenticity of umami, as it is used particularly to promote umami to a wider audience. In addition, in introducing umami-inspired dishes and ingredients, Western chefs have positively projected the exotic image of Japanese cuisine, a conjecture based on location-based imaginative authenticity, to endorse and legitimate the quality of their dishes. The information, knowledge, and skills associated with umami have been circulated and authenticated by actor-agents, celebrity chefs, through face-to-face contacts within their rather exclusive networks. Chefs serve dishes to a wide range of clients, including people who
are conscious of taste as cosmopolitans, and constantly travel in every aspect of global settings (Elliot and Urry 2010). The authenticity of umami and Japanese food, originally based on place-based authenticity, is now being performed through the authenticity of agent-based chef networking activities as well as through those of their clients. Within the networks created by the interactions of celebrity chefs, food scholars, entrepreneurs, and clientele—as well as by nonhuman agents such as capital, food ingredients (including umami), information, and knowledge—circulate to create a space of flows. The authenticity of umami is one of the critical flows constituting the networks of the Japanese culinary world. The different kinds and levels of authenticities, an imaginary authenticity based on place, the whole image or emotions of sophisticated Japanese cuisine, and chefs’ agent-based authenticity are intricately combined with and conflict with each other in the process of preparing and serving dishes.

**Conclusion**

The emphasis on place-based authenticity I have observed in the promotion of umami and Japanese food among chef networks in globalized environments helps illuminate how the actual practices of place-based authenticity within the networks contradict the idea of place-based authenticity itself. At the same time, the concept of place-based authenticity complicates how we contemplate the globalization of food cultures. Introducing umami to an international audience within networked spaces is crucial to the dissemination of Japanese food culture, even though it is often assumed to come from a single place of origin. This emphasis on origin eventually begins to conflict with the nature of the agent-based network culinary politics, where so many ideas and so much knowledge is exchanged within networks to develop innovative ideas and creative dishes. The globalization of Japanese food culture is continuously questioned by the very place-based authenticity on which the culinary networks depend.

The Japanese Culinary Academy (JCA), a nonprofit organization led by Chef Murata, essentially made up of network-based, face-to-face knowledge-based interactions between chefs, is promoting the notion of place-based authenticity for its own national interests, even though promoting the concept of umami might be beneficial universally. In this sense, the notion of place-based authenticity is excessively emphasized within the context of globalizing Japanese food culture. This can easily overlook the rich embodiments of the culinary networks that help to constitute the sense of authenticity. As we have
seen, neither introducing Chef Nobu as a representative of Japan nor as a representative of the United States works to precisely reflect what is happening in the current culinary world. In December 2013 it was announced that UNESCO was adding Japanese food to its Intangible Cultural Heritage list thanks to the great efforts by the JCA. Isao Kumakura points out that in achieving this goal, the internal intention of the JCA was to make the Japanese themselves recognize once again the significance of their own food culture in a globalized era, in the context of which they could be easily influenced by other kinds of cuisines and give up on their own culture (Kumakura 2013b). Kumakura’s belief is that before the Japanese should be allowed to introduce their food culture to other people, they should learn to appreciate their own culinary traditions that have been handed down from their ancestors. Interestingly, and controversially enough, this point seems not to be emphasized very much by the media when it comes to the reporting of the world heritage status. Rather, the narratives of the Japanese media mainly focus on discussing the consequences of a Japanese self-realization of the importance of their own food culture that has resulted from the worldwide popularity of their cuisine. They emphasize that Japanese food culture has a high potential to appeal to international markets as an intangible form of culture that can be exported from Japan. That would encourage the Japanese food industry to export its products overseas.

The opinions of the media sound more or less reasonable as long as their only aim is to increase national income. Yet the fact that Japanese cuisine was accepted as a world heritage raises interesting cultural questions once again with regard to the ways in which the authenticity of Japanese food can be discussed: for example, whether it should be recognized as a universally accepted cuisine with a tolerance for creative ideas and variations of dishes invented elsewhere in the world. Thanks to the increasing dissemination of the concept of ubiquitous umami, could Japanese food emerge as a global hybrid cuisine beyond the location-fixed concept of origin? While these are challenging questions to answer, at least closer analysis of the sense of authenticity of umami and Japanese food culture may well provide us with new ways to think about the future of the globalization of food cultures.

Notes

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1. Eight countries are Japan, France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, and the United States (Tokyo Taste: The World Summit of Gastronomy 2012).

2. As of January 2015, he has been running more than thirty restaurants in the world plus several hotels (Nobu Restaurants 2015).

3. It is important to note that besides the reference to a specific chemical reaction, the term in Japanese also has a sensual meaning of “tasty,” so the word “umami” itself can be confusing for native Japanese speakers.

4. According to an article in the Guardian, the chemical compositions of the distinctive smell of Vegemite were detected as a combination of flowers, chicken broth, leather, and old people (Webster 2013).

5. The British newspaper the Guardian published an article on umami titled “Umami: Why the Fifth Taste Is So Important” (Fleming 2013), which introduces umami not as a phenomenon happening in Japan but instead as a universal commonality that we could find in many food items available in Western Europe and elsewhere. Although the author sounds quite dubious about the reality of the fifth sense, there was a strong response from readers, including former and current residents of Japan, below the line in the comments section. In the New York Times since 2000, articles referring to umami have appeared. When the Danish restaurant Noma, in Copenhagen, was named the World’s Best Restaurant 2012, the head chef René Redzepi was featured in the NHK program (Redzepi 2013). In the program, the head of laboratory chef mentioned the importance of being aware of umami during an interview.

6. The restaurant has already closed down because of some unfortunate managerial issues in May 2013 (interview by author, August 20, 2013).

7. Chef Heston Blumenthal (1966–) is a renowned British celebrity chef running the Fat Duck, a three-Michelin-star restaurant, in Bray, Berkshire. He has published many cookbooks and appeared in numerous culinary TV shows and events.

8. Japanese chef Masaharu Morimoto, at the time head chef of Nobu New York, was quite influential when the original Japanese version of Iron Chef started in 1999. Eventually Food Network purchased the right to replicate the format of the program, and it has produced the Iron Chef America series since April 2004.

9. For instance, in the 2013 Tribute Dinner for the South Beach Wine and Food Festival that celebrated Nobu Matsuhisa in Miami, the dinner was prepared by Chef Daniel Boulud from New York, Thomas Buckley (chef at Nobu Miami), and Yuji Wakiya and Yoshihiro Murata, both from Japan and who often work collaboratively. Yuji Wakiya is a celebrity chef in Japan, practicing Chinese cuisine. He runs four restaurants in the Tokyo and Yokohama area and tried to extend his business to Gramercy
Park Hotel in New York City in 2008, although it was not very successful (Wakiya 2014).

10. This can be analyzed as an example from the perspective of actor-network theory (ANT) where nonhuman umami itself acts as an agent. See Latour (2007) and Murdoch (2005).

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In the new millennium, Japanese cuisine has become a truly global cuisine (see Cwiertka 2001; Imai in this volume). Alongside French, Italian, Thai, Chinese, and Mexican cuisine, Japanese restaurants are ubiquitous on every continent. Megalopolises such as Shanghai, Jakarta, and New York each have close to one thousand Japanese restaurants, while smaller cities such as Copenhagen, Pittsburgh, and Cape Town have over a hundred each, and they are even proliferating in more rural hinterlands. According to a report by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the number of Japanese restaurants outside of Japan has roughly doubled over the last decade, reaching fifty-five thousand globally in 2013, including seventeen thousand in North America (MAFF 2013).

Though Japanese entrepreneurs and chefs led the initial boom in Japanese cuisine abroad, in recent years this dynamic growth has been driven by non-Japanese businesses and culinary workers, a pattern also found in other studies of the recent globalization of Japanese culture (Favell 2010). They include restaurant corporations of various national registrations, entrepreneurial immigrants of many Asian ethnicities, and indigenous restaurateurs from countries in which the restaurants operate. The specific actors in any locale vary, as implied in the idea of “glocalization”
as the simultaneous presence of globalizing trends and localizing processes (Robertson 1995).

This study examines the entrepreneurship of Chinese immigrants from Fujian Province in southeastern China who are establishing Japanese cuisine restaurants throughout the United States. Since migrating to New York City in large numbers in the 1990s, Fujianese have gone beyond their immigrant enclave in the city to start Japanese restaurants, with sushi as the centerpiece, all along the East Coast and into the Midwest. While not the first to open Japanese restaurants outside of major metropolitan regions—others to do so include Japanese, Vietnamese, and Korean immigrants in the 1980s—they have dramatically expanded the availability of inexpensive Japanese cuisine in smaller cities and towns, and they have introduced it to rural regions for the first time. As they do so, the Fujianese restaurateurs have also pushed innovations that are furthering the development of a transnational field of Japanese cuisine, though one aimed at the American dining mainstream rather than at a culinary consumer elite (for the latter, see Imai in this volume).

The argument implicit in this paper is that the spread of Japanese cuisine is carried upon the backs of these entrepreneurial immigrants. This becomes especially apparent in our data from the more rural regions that we studied. Here the Fujianese are not only introducing Japanese cuisine to new populations but also challenging their very conceptions of what is edible. Therefore, we have chosen to focus this paper on the immigrants and their activities. We first give a brief sketch of the history of the Japanese culinary field in the United States to highlight the opening for the Fujianese migrants and the institutions that have let them take advantage of it. Next, we examine the experiences of the entrepreneurs and their staffs in operating restaurants. Third, we examine the cuisine that they purvey, which embodies various adaptive innovations, such as pan-Asian and Asian-American fusion cuisines. Finally, we examine the disruptive aspects of the cost-cutting practices of the Fujianese-run establishments that are a controversial aspect of their operating style.

Our study is grounded in fieldwork in small cities and their suburbs and outlying rural regions where Fujianese have come to dominate the Japanese restaurant industry. We focused on Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Asheville, North Carolina, two small, relatively affluent cities that are the urban core of regions with populations of about half a million people and are known for tourism and distinctive cuisines based on produce from local farms. Although not noted for their Asian cuisine, each city, with its surrounding suburbs, has roughly two dozen
restaurants that feature Japanese cuisine. At least a third of these are Fujianese-owned ones that compete with existing Japanese restaurants in the urban cores and are bringing Japanese cuisines farther into outlying rural areas. Therefore, these two regions offer a window on the rapid proliferation of Fujianese-run Japanese restaurants in small-town and rural America. Our approach in this chapter is ethnographic, with several theoretical implications suggested in the conclusion.

Fieldwork consisted of participant observation and interviews conducted in 2011–2013 with owners, employees, and customers from roughly thirty Japanese restaurants in these two regions. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and English. We tried to visit the restaurants in the mid-afternoon when there were few customers, so that the personnel would have time to converse with us. For some of the interviews, we arranged a time and recorded them. This was especially necessary for the owners and managers, who were very busy; for example, during one forty-minute interview with an owner-manager, he received five telephone calls and stopped three times to speak with staff. We have changed the names of people, restaurants, and smaller towns to protect informants’ privacy.

The Rise of Fujian Chinese in the Japanese Cuisine Restaurant Industry

The first Japanese restaurant recorded in America was opened in San Francisco by Japanese immigrants in 1887. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Japanese immigration to the United States centered on Los Angeles, and by 1900 that city had 40 shops serving Japanese dishes, including the first sushi shop, which opened in 1906 in Little Tokyo. Early in the twentieth century, many Japanese migrants also entered the Chinese restaurant business: the reverse of the pattern that we are reporting a century later in this chapter. The internment of Japanese Americans in World War II decimated the Japanese-run restaurant business in the United States, and even by the 1950s there were only five or six operating in Los Angeles (Ishige et al. 1985, 28–33).

The 1960s saw the first boom in Japanese cuisine in the United States driven by new consumer groups. One was the formation of expatriate communities of Japanese businessmen in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and other commercial centers whose patronage drove the opening of restaurants serving traditional Japanese food. These establishments caught the attention of food critics, such as Craig Claiborne, whose 1963 review of the newly opened restaurants Nippon and Saito for the New York Times alerted readers to the rise of
Japanese restaurants (Grimes 2009). The 1960s counterculture also embraced Japanese cuisine, seeing the macrobiotic diet as a healthy alternative to mainstream American food. As a result, miso, bean curd, soy sauce, and other Japanese foods started to become widely available in the United States, first in health food stores and, then in supermarkets. Yet another trend was the teppanyaki steakhouse. Invented in Japan after World War II for American military personnel who could not stomach regular Japanese fare, the first Benihana steakhouse was established in New York in 1964. They featured joke-telling chefs who prepared meat at customers’ tables in virtuoso displays of whirling knives and flaming foods. As a new type of fine-dining experience for Americans, Benihana contributed to an image of Japanese cuisine as highly performative. Over 40 Benihana restaurants opened in larger cities, with cheaper imitations following in smaller ones (Ujita 2008, 183–85), including Lancaster and Asheville. These trends were supported by a growing infrastructure of importers and domestic producers of Japanese food products (Ujita 2008, 163–89).

This growing popularity of Japanese food created an avenue for Japanese chefs trained in Japan to work in the United States. Some of them in Los Angeles created innovations that laid the basis for the later global boom in Japanese cuisine. Partly to appeal to customers who did not want to eat raw fish, restaurateurs invented the California roll that used cooked crab, mayonnaise, and avocado. (Scholars differ on the timing of this invention, with Ishige et al. dating it to 1962 [1985, 239–41] and Ujita to 1971 [2008, 171–75].) Another invention was the inside-out roll that placed rice outside the nori to overcome the strangeness of biting into the paper-like dried seaweed. Such innovations started a now global pattern in which restaurants distinguished themselves through highly localized versions of sushi rolls, such as the Philadelphia roll that used cream cheese, the British Columbia roll made with grilled or barbecued salmon skin, and the Mexicano roll featuring jalapeno peppers (Issenberg 2007, 79–107).

The second, much larger Japanese food boom started in the 1980s. Leading this trend was the association of Japanese food with “lightness” and “healthiness” and featuring these localized sushi innovations on the menus. With growing number of Japanese restaurants, there were not enough Japanese chefs to meet the demand. US work visas for chefs could take two to three years to process (Ujita 2008, 185). Moreover, the rapid appreciation of the Japanese yen made working in the United States to earn dollars less attractive for Japanese chefs. This created an opening for new restaurateurs and chefs in the Japanese cuisine industry. Partly because they could pass as Japanese,
Vietnamese, and Taiwanese immigrants began running teppanyaki steakhouses and sushi restaurants. These Asian migrants had begun coming to the United States in large numbers from the late 1960s due to the abolishment of racial quotas in immigration policy and resettlement of refugees from Vietnam. Growing competition among the restaurants in major urban areas, increasingly led immigrants to set up Japanese restaurants in smaller cities where it was cheaper to do business. By the 1990s even small cities such as Lancaster and Asheville had restaurants run by non-Japanese immigrants that served sushi.

Chinese from Fujian are the most recent Asian immigrants to fill this Japanese cuisine niche. They began coming to the United States in large numbers in the 1980s. By 2013 there were almost one million Chinese migrants in the greater New York area, with a third of them speaking the dialect of Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian Province along the coast of the Taiwan Strait. These are not wealthy or student migrants but often working-class and rural migrants from several contiguous semi-rural prefectures around the capital. When we asked them why they had left China, they tended to mention their lack of ties (guanxi) to local government officials—widely seen as essential to getting ahead in China. This lack of ties, in combination with the long-entrenched view in that part of China that the best route to wealth lies in opportunities abroad, has spurred the huge outflow of migrants from the area. Much of this immigration has been through such illegal means as fake marriages and human smuggling by “snakehead” gangs.

The flood of Fujianese immigrants spurred intensive competition in New York City’s Chinese restaurant industry. By the late 1990s, operators of Chinese restaurants searching for new products expanded their menus to include Japanese cuisine. This proved profitable because consumers considered it healthier than Chinese food, which was increasingly seen as oily and full of MSG, and thus were willing to pay a premium for something labeled “Japanese.” Some Chinese restaurants installed sushi bars to attract patrons through the performative aspects of food preparation. As competition intensified further, restaurateurs moved their establishments outside the city to adjacent suburbs, and then to smaller cities and towns, and finally to rural areas far removed from New York City. In some cases these entrepreneurs purchased Chinese restaurants in these areas through advertisements in overseas Chinese newspapers and then expanded the menus to include Japanese cuisine. Once established in an area, a Fujianese restaurateur would typically save money to open other restaurants locally. After a decade or more of hard work, a successful restaurateur could be running several restaurants.
These restaurateurs display the entrepreneurial spirit often associated with Fujianese migrants. One characteristic is a strong desire to “be the boss,” which values running one’s own business as opposed to a professional career requiring time and money invested in education. A second characteristic is heavy reliance on family in running the business; family and close relatives hold such key positions as cashier, and they can be designated as managers of newer restaurants. Third is a keen eye for profitable business niches, such as the opportunities that lie in Japanese cuisine, and the willingness to change the product to suit consumer tastes and lower costs. Fourth, we see a pattern of copycat businesses, such that successful practices are rapidly adopted throughout the immigrant community, causing a constant search for new opportunities. A fifth characteristic is reinvestment of profits in new business. Thus, a restaurateur’s enterprise group could have a mixture of Japanese and Chinese cuisine restaurants, each calibrated to the tastes of specific groups in a local market.

The spread of this Fujianese-run hybrid Chinese-American-Japanese culinary field has depended on several key institutions. One is the chain migration of entire extended families to New York City. New immigrants can immediately find work through kin who are already working in restaurants. Here they can learn the skills of the restaurant trade, while those who are industrious can observe the sushi chefs to acquire these skills. Also, the presence of entire families enables the younger immigrants to work long hours while entrusting child care to their elderly parents.

Another institution is the Chinese-run employment agency. Many Fujianese staff found their jobs through two dozen Chinese-owned employment agencies clustered around Manhattan Bridge on East Broadway. Restaurateurs all along the Eastern seaboard and deep inland send requests for cooks and servers by Internet or telephone. The employment agencies post these job notices, which often include housing, and transmit them via Chinese text message services to job seekers who are registered with them. This makes for an extremely efficient market of itinerant restaurant labor. “Without leaving East Broadway, a fisherman fresh from a Chinese village could get a job washing dishes in Arlington, Va.; Poughkeepsie, N.Y.; or Flushing, Queens. He could also find a bus to take him there, and an apartment to share with six other men from his hometown” (Dolnick 2011).

The mention of the bus points to the third institution, namely the Chinese-owned intercity bus company. This first emerged with the Fung Wah Bus Company in 1998 that operated along the Northeast
Corridor between New York and Boston. Fung Wah and other companies subsequently expanded routes to Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and other major cities in the South and Midwest, stopping at smaller cities and towns along the way. Buses are fast and cheap, enabling workers to travel long distances to their jobs, departing and returning to Chinatown in New York. They often stop at supermarket parking lots and other places just off highway exits to load and unload passengers, thereby avoiding time-consuming trips to inner-city bus stations.

A fourth institution is the large wholesale seafood company (Bestor 2001; Issenberg 2007) that delivers fresh sushi-grade fish directly to the doors of restaurants. For our informants, a major purveyor of this fish was True World Foods, owned by the Korean-based Unification Church, which also sells glass display cases, specialty knives, and other equipment geared for a sushi restaurant. Others are locally owned seafood firms that have expanded to selling sushi-grade fish, an example being Samuels & Son Seafood in Philadelphia. In the next section we examine how these historical and institutional contexts are implicated in the backgrounds and experiences of Fujianese owners, chefs, managers, and servers active in the Japanese restaurant business.

**Careers of Fujianese Restaurateurs and Their Staff**

All the Fujianese we interviewed in Asheville and Lancaster had acquired Japanese culinary knowledge on the job in New York restaurants. This included a few with prior restaurant experience in China after graduating from Chinese culinary institutes. More typical, though, were those who came to the United States without any previous experience and started working as dishwashers in New York restaurants.

We begin with the restaurateurs—entrepreneurial owners who saved money to open restaurants. Tim Wang is the owner of a small restaurant group in Lancaster. He was born in 1972 in Lianjiang County, Fujian Province, to a family that had been fishermen for generations. He has 11 brothers. Upon graduating from middle school, he too began working as a fisherman. In 1990, at the age of 18 he came to New York City, where his uncle introduced him to a restaurant job. When another uncle saved up money to open a Chinese restaurant in Lincoln, Nebraska, Tim went there to work. He missed the Fujianese community in New York City, over a thousand miles away, but he discovered the ease of saving money and doing business in smaller cities. So he next sought a job in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a small city that
was closer to New York City but with low cost-of-living and real estate prices. In 1997 he opened a Chinese restaurant called China Diner in the downtown of nearby Lancaster. He served Chinese fast food, such as noodles and stir-fried rice, at low prices. In 2005 he opened a Japanese restaurant next door that he named Tokyo Cafe. The two restaurants share the same kitchen and some of the same dishes, but Tokyo Cafe has a bigger and more expensive menu that features sushi and also serves Chinese dishes, fusion dishes, and other Asian cuisine dishes. The lunchtime customers are mostly locals working in the downtown while dinner draws in more diners from the suburbs. Business was poor until Tim realized that the patrons expected better décor and service when eating the more expensive Japanese cuisine. In 2014 he opened an upscale Asian fusion restaurant named Hana near a local college. This catered to the well-heeled college community, including the visiting parents of students. He also owns a Chinese restaurant in a poorer neighborhood that serves spicier deep-fried dishes to a largely Hispanic clientele. His business is a family affair; three of his brothers work as his cooks and managers, while his wife is the cashier. He lives in a Lancaster suburb and sends his children to local schools but regularly travels to New York for weddings and other major family events.

A restaurateur from Asheville is Kathy Chen, who runs Sushi Master. She moved to the United States from a small town near Fuzhou in 1993 to join her brother who had already received a green card. She lived in New York City for several years before coming to Asheville to run a Chinese restaurant. She quickly found an opportunity to buy a Japanese restaurant that had been started by a Fujianese compatriot who lacked the family members to help run it. Her younger brother, who studied Japanese cooking in Japan, created her menu. Most customers at Sushi Master are local residents rather than tourists. To remain profitable in the competitive local restaurant industry, she appeals to locavore culinary ideals by sourcing her vegetables locally, as well as seafood, including trout, a favorite in the region. She now owns two Japanese restaurants in Asheville, including a teppanyaki grill, a genre more popular in the southeastern United States than sushi. Despite her business acumen, she said she moved to Asheville in order to raise her children in a better environment. While she considers New York convenient for adult immigrants, she fretted that her children would spend their days unsupervised in its Chinese community and not learn good study habits or even proper English. Like many of the Fujianese restaurant owners in western North Carolina, Kathy describes herself as part of the local community, and she has not visited New York for several years.
Next we consider the position of sushi chef. The preparation of sushi—rolls, sashimi, and nigiri—was an especially marketable skill, and good sushi chefs were valued by the owners. Alan Liu, the sushi chef at the Fuji Diner in Lancaster, is a professionally trained and highly skilled chef. He was born in 1978 in Changle County, Fujian, in a semi-rural town. Although he has only two older sisters, he is from a large family, as his parents have 16 siblings between them. His father ran a small private factory that made hardware and toys. Alan studied in Fujian to become chef, and he qualified for the highest chef ranking in the province. Alan cooked both Chinese and Western food in a hotel restaurant in Fuzhou but disliked the low wages, so at the age of 18 he came to the United States. Through an introduction by his uncle, he began working as a server in a Chinese restaurant. In a few years, he got a job in a top Japanese restaurant in New York, where he learned to make sushi by observing the Japanese sushi chef. In 2000 he went to work in a restaurant in Des Moines, Iowa, newly opened by his uncle. After two years he returned to New York, working in a variety of restaurants, including Mexican and French. Then in 2009 his friend, the aforementioned Tim Wang, opened a restaurant in Lancaster and asked him to work there. Alan now lives in Lancaster, in housing around the corner provided by the owner, but he travels to New York once or twice a month to see his wife and young son. His wife works as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant there while his mother looks after their son. Some evenings he goes to the Bensalem Casino near Philadelphia to gamble, hoping to strike it rich so that he can fulfill his dream of opening his own restaurant.

Next we examine the managers, who tend to come from Chinese groups speaking dialects other than Fuzhou patois. This reflects a control strategy, common among Fujianese restaurateurs, to cope with two cultural situations in running a business. One is the strong obligation to involve family members in the business. However, restaurateurs are concerned that a family member who is a poor manager or is lazy due to feelings of entitlement cannot be fired, precisely because they are family. They avoid this problem by hiring a non-family member as the manager. The other situation is that a manager from the same dialect group might collude with staff against the interests of the owner. Restaurateurs try to prevent this by hiring managers who do not understand Fuzhou dialect and therefore cannot establish the emotional closeness that comes from speaking the same dialect, which might lead to collusion. Given these situations, it was not surprising to encounter Chinese from other Chinese provinces or overseas Chinese communities serving as managers in the Fujianese-run restaurants.
An example of this trend is Meg Huang, who manages the Tokyo Café in Lancaster. She is a middle-aged overseas Chinese from Myanmar who immigrated to the United States as a 28-year-old to join her mother. She speaks good Mandarin and English. She got her first job at a Japanese restaurant in suburban New York City owned by a fellow countryman. Her next job was as a server in a Burmese-Thai-Indian restaurant on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, where she worked her way up to manager. Carefully saving her money, she moved to a medium-sized city in Florida, where she used networks from her Buddhist sect to buy a Chinese restaurant that she converted to a Burmese one. When a hurricane tore off the roof of the restaurant in 2005, Meg moved to suburban Washington DC to work in another Chinese restaurant. But the living expenses were too high, so she responded to an advertisement in an overseas Chinese newspaper to manage a Japanese restaurant in Lancaster. She got the job and moved in 2009, along with her husband, who works as a waiter.

Finally, we consider the servers. The different situations of the two servers described below, one working in small town outside of Lancaster and one in a small town in North Carolina, illustrate effects of their respective distance from New York City. Amy Zheng works at Arigato in the small town of Maple Grove, amid the rolling farmlands of Lancaster County. She is in her mid-twenties and is from Changle County. Her entire family—parents, three brothers, and sister—immigrated to the United States and now live in New York. They all work in the catering industry, with her mother staying at home to look after the children. After several years working as a waitress, Amy found the commute in New York too tiring, so she used a Chinese employment agency to find the job at Arigato. In Maple Grove she lives in a house owned by the restaurateur that is within walking distance of the restaurant. She has more free time but finds the rural location boring. The positive side is that there is nothing to spend her money on, so she can save for her child’s education. Despite having worked at Arigato for two years, she has never visited the city of Lancaster, which is less than ten miles away. Every few weeks she goes back to New York for several days to visit her husband and daughter.

Nancy Fang is a server at Little Osaka in the town of Evergreen, located in a scenic mountain valley in North Carolina, about seven hundred miles away from New York City. Originally from Changle County, Fujian Province, she is a lively high school tenth-grader living with her parents, who own and operate the restaurant. Her mother took over the restaurant from her brother, who owns two other restaurants in the area. As in all the smaller Fujian-owned restaurants we
visited, both parents worked at the restaurant, with the husband in the kitchen and the wife up front, operating the cash register. Nancy helps in the restaurant after school and works almost full-time during the summer. Her younger siblings hung out at the restaurant after school, doing their homework. She said that her parents were too busy to look after the children and that, lacking family members nearby, she and her siblings were all sent back to China to stay with her grandparents until they got older. Nancy had only returned to the United States two years ago but was rapidly learning English. Despite the beautiful surroundings, she said she preferred New York, which she had visited several times with her parents. There were only two other Asians in the local high school, Chinese-Americans who had no ties to China and ignored her. However, in the near future, she planned to stay in the area by attending Appalachian State University, which is considered a top option among her classmates. Her parents, who were relatives, have adapted to the easy-going, friendly atmosphere of small-town Southern life, and they were open in sharing their family stories with strangers. Photos of the family in front of their Evergreen and Changle County homes were arranged next to the cash register.

The employment of Nancy’s white American high school classmate in her parents’ restaurant illustrates how Fujianese restaurateurs are increasingly hiring non-Chinese employees from their local communities. One reason may be that the number of Fujianese coming to the United States has declined, drying up the supply of cheap immigrant labor. Another may be that local servers stay at the job because they do not have family in New York and are not seeking better jobs elsewhere. The Fujianese overcome their concerns of cultural differences by hiring regular customers whom the owners and managers know. For example, Barbara Stauffer, a woman in her early twenties from a fourth-generation Lancaster family, frequented the restaurant Number One Sushi located in a suburban mall with her mother and became friendly with the staff. One day the manager offered Barbara the server job, despite her total lack of restaurant experience. Other local residents seek jobs because of an interest in Asia. For example, an American server at a Fujianese-run restaurant in North Carolina sought the job to keep up his Mandarin language skills, acquired by having lived in China. A third reason why Fujianese restaurateurs have started hiring locales may be their recognition that English-speaking servers from the locale are important in rural markets where locals are unfamiliar with their products; we will elaborate on this point below.
The Cuisine of Fujianese-Run Japanese Restaurants

The cuisine in restaurants run by Fujianese ranges from menus proclaiming “authentic” Japanese cuisine to American/Japanese hybrids, to pan-Asian dishes, and even Chinese fast food that could just as easily be found in China and other Asian countries. The mix and emphasis varies by specific market niches. For example, in the relatively affluent and cosmopolitan cities of Lancaster and Asheville, many urban patrons either are familiar with Japanese cuisine or are acquiring a taste for it. In contrast, the Fujianese-run restaurants in more rural towns and villages often serve food that experienced diners might consider as Chinese fast food that has been relabeled as Japanese. We will first describe the cuisine of the Japanese restaurants in the urban contexts of Lancaster and Ashville, then in rural outlying areas.

Japanese Fare in Asheville and Lancaster

Sakana is a Fujianese-owned restaurant in downtown Asheville that touts its “authentic” Japanese cuisine. It is owned by two brothers from Fujian who immigrated via New York City, where both had worked in a Japanese restaurant, one preparing sushi and the other managing the hibachi grill. Then they came to Asheville and started a teppanyaki steakhouse that drew customers away from the sole Japanese-owned restaurant in town. After this success, the brothers opened Sakana, the first full-service sushi bar in downtown Asheville; it has been voted the best sushi restaurant in Asheville on several culinary websites. Their homepage features a recommendation from the cast of a major Hollywood movie that was filmed near Asheville.

They receive deliveries four times a week from a major Japanese seafood supplier out of New York. This frequency, double that of any others that we found in our sample, attests to both their high customer volume and their concern to have the freshest fish for sushi. The manager boasted that Sakana gets bigger and better cuts than smaller restaurants. “Like we may get a big slice of the whole fish while they get just a little piece from the tail.” They also distinguish themselves from other local Japanese restaurants by focusing on such shellfish as conch, sea abalone, clams, and live lobsters. The manager said that sushi chefs do not like working with shellfish, because it involves more work, but the boss trains them to do it.

His clientele even includes groups of Japanese businesspeople. The manager boasted to us, “Some of them said that this is better than..."
Chinese Immigrants and Japanese Cuisine

the sushi they have in Japan . . . We give such bigger pieces. In Japan you only get little pieces.” This emphasis on quality (or quantity or pricier ingredients) is reflected in their prices; at an average of $30 per person for dinner, it was among the most expensive of the restaurants we surveyed.

The other Fujian-owned restaurants that we surveyed in Asheville and Lancaster eschewed authenticity claims, as they strove to satisfy a less persnickety palate. This is reflected in their menus, which are pan-Asian encompassing Japanese, Chinese, and other Asian cuisine. Many of the items are accompanied by descriptions of the main ingredients so that customers can understand the offerings. In these mid-range restaurants, roughly half the menu is devoted to sushi, including rolls, nigiri sushi, and sashimi. Rolls, which use nori (seaweed paper) to bind together fish and other items, are the most popular items. Classical rolls and hand rolls, which use fewer ingredients, are similar to those in Japan. However, these rolls can be served with either cooked or raw fish, and with brown or white rice. Signature rolls are fusion rolls featuring catchy names and multiple ingredients, including sauces. The listing of these rolls usually occupies an entire page because of the need to describe all of their ingredients. Here are some examples from one of the restaurants in Lancaster with their prices in 2013. Among the cheapest is the $10 Dragon Roll featuring eel, cucumber, avocado, and masago and served with eel sauce. The $13 Lancaster Roll mixes seaweed salad, eel, avocado, and eel sauce. At the higher end, the $16 Untouchable Roll has spicy king crab, mango, and crunchy cucumber and is topped with fresh salmon and wasabi mayonnaise. Nigiri and sashimi are usually listed together on another page. Both emphasize single pieces of fish, the difference being whether it is served on a small bed of hand-squeezed rice, as in the case of the former, or simply the fish, in the case of the latter. The selection of fish on the menu is narrower than that found in Japan and emphasizing those with a less “fishy” taste (such as tuna, bonito, and salmon) that appeal to the palate of American customers. These restaurants tended to order fish deliveries twice a week, spacing them on Sunday and Thursdays, in order to have supplies for both the weekday and weekend clientele.

In addition to offering what is essentially a pan-Asian menu, the Fujianese have made changes to the Japanese cuisine to accommodate the American palate, most notably the use of sauces for the sushi and sashimi. All of the sushi chefs use five basic sauces—spicy mayonnaise, ponzu, Chinese eel sauce, soy sauce, and Vietnamese hot sauce—on the fish. The actual amount of sauce used depends on the chef. For example, one chef uses the five sauces sparingly on the nigiri sushi (the
classic sushi with vinegared rice on the bottom and a slice of raw fish on top) and not at all on the sashimi (slices of raw fish with no rice). At the other extreme is a chef with a repertoire of 50 sauces that he mixes himself and liberally splashes on everything he makes from the nozzles of the plastic containers in which he stores them. Another innovation is the visual theatricality of the sushi service. To enhance the visual colorfulness of the sauces on the sushi, it is often served on large, white, Japanese-style plates as a backdrop. Some restaurants serve “Love Boats,” a combination of maki rolls, sushi, and sashimi arrayed on a wooden model of a traditional Chinese junk ship that requires two servers to carry to the table. One restaurant even served sea urchin (uni) in its shell on a bed of ice with pastel-colored LED lights under it.

The rest of the menus are non-sushi Japanese cuisine, Chinese cuisine, other Asian cuisines, and Asian-American fusion entrees. The Japanese non-sushi dishes include hibachi, teriyaki, udon noodle dishes, and bento box meals that usually contain a maki roll, as well as other dishes. Chinese dishes were such standards as fried rice, lo mein, General Tso’s chicken, Kung Pao chicken, and dumplings. The kind of other Asian cuisines on the menus varies depending on the backgrounds of the chefs. For example, in Lancaster, the menu of the Tokyo Cafe has many Thai dishes, including pad Thai and green and red curries, because one of the chefs learned these dishes while working in Thailand before coming to the United States. At Blue Pacific, the menu includes some Indian and Malay dishes because the owner-chef is an overseas Chinese from Malaysia.

The move to fusion dishes is usually a search by the restaurateur for dishes with higher profit margins. They mix ingredients familiar to American customers with Asian ingredients and names and sell the dishes in the $20–$30 range. Some examples that we encountered are Double Delight ($30), consisting of sea bass with orange miso sauce and lobster with sour chili sauce; Filet Mignon ($25) that includes deep-fried mashed potatoes and asparagus served with yakiniku barbecue sauce; Asian Style Seabass ($22) served with black bean sauce; and Wasabi Yuzu White Tuna ($20), made from seared white tuna and asparagus and served with wasabi yuzu sauce.

Underlying these seemingly hodgepodge menus is a shrewd business logic that enables the restaurants to be able to appeal to a greater variety of customers. The presence of non-Japanese dishes on the menu reassures older clientele who are hesitant to try Japanese food and want to stick with familiar stir-fried rice and General Tso’s chicken. The mix of kinds of raw and cooked fish makes the sushi less threatening to sushi neophytes, as described below. The inclusion of
vegetarian sushi and brown rice appeals to people with dietary concerns. The inclusion of other Asian dishes lets the chefs and owners capitalize on the culinary knowledge of their own backgrounds while adding an interesting twist to the menus. The presence of Asian-American fusion dishes adds an upscale element for diners at dinner-time. Also, a range of business practices further enhances appeal to a variety of customers. As noted above, the inclusion of sushi bars and “Love Boats” adds theatricality to the dining experience. A number of the restaurants offer all-you-can-eat options at lunchtime. An example is Best Sushi in Lancaster, where customers can order as much as they can eat from a fixed range of sushi rolls and nigiri for $27. The Tsunami has an $8.95 buffet that is advertised as featuring maki rolls but, aside from the small selection, consists of a dozen Chinese dishes.

### Reaching the Rural Market

In the case of outlying small towns and rural areas, Fujianese entrepreneurs are not only introducing Japanese cuisine to new populations but also entirely new concepts of what is eatable. At the same time, they fill a much broader market niche in these communities as one of only a handful of dining-out options in the vicinity.

This is clearly illustrated in the aforementioned case of Arigato in Lancaster County. It is sandwiched between a Pizza Hut and GNC vitamin store located in a shopping mall amid rural fields, a stone’s throw from a gun shop that crafted long rifles in colonial America. The impact of the restaurant’s sudden appearance in 2007 on local eating habits was vividly explained by its only local and non-Fujianese server, Steve Brubaker. He is a seventh-generation owner and operator of a nearby tree farm who works off-season as a server in restaurants to supplement his income. When Arigato opened, he applied for a job because it was very close to his home, even though he had never tried Japanese cuisine. He said that many of the restaurant’s patrons were from local farming families who first came to Arigato out of curiosity to know what Japanese food was.

Newbie customers are easy to spot; they come in groups and aimlessly page through the menu, trying to figure it out, and they admit to Steve their qualms about eating raw fish when he comes to take their order. He has a way of cajoling these first-time customers to experiment by using the image of the “sushi ladder,” which he likens to introducing a person to wine by starting with simple pinks, then moving onto whites, and finally to more complex reds. He starts them out on rung 1 with a vegetable roll that contains familiar avocado and cucumber. Next
he urges them to rung 2 by trying it with a little wasabi. In rung 3 he
moves them beyond crunchy vegetables to sweet potato roll in order
to acclimate their palates to cold and soft food with rice and seaweed
paper. For rung 4 he encourages them to try cooked rolls by saying,
“Pick the things that you like. You like mango sauce, you like avocado,
and you like white rice. Then there is no reason why you would not like
the Mango Lover roll because it contains cooked shrimp. This is all of
these just rolled into one.” He encourages each member of the table
to try different rolls to share. “More often than not they will think,
‘What’s in my mouth?’ But by the time that they swallow it, they think
that it is really good.” He starts out rung 5 by telling the customers
that, technically speaking, they have not yet tried sushi, because real
sushi contains raw fish. Then he serves them rolls with the same ingre-
dients that that they just ate, but now the fish is raw. Once they have
eaten a roll with raw fish, he will encourage them to climb to rung 6 by
trying nigiri sushi and then they proceed to rung 7 with sashimi.

The impact of Arigato on local eating habits is evident in the many
takeout orders by area residents to buy dinner on their way home
from work. Steve said that most of the restaurant’s business is takeout.

Takeout is big. Li the manager is running back and forth carrying bags
of takeout like a train. Dude, it is amazing. I would not expect to have
these people . . . they are rednecks . . . my people, driving pickup trucks
that get four miles to the gallon. They come and eat sushi like it is pop-
corn. I think to myself, “What turned a switch on in you that made you
want to eat this stuff?” (February 10, 2013)

Families who might once have stopped at a fast-food outlet to buy
burgers or pizza for takeout dinner now order sushi. Takeout sushi is
convenient. An order can be called in ahead of time or made online,
the turnaround time is quick, and the package is compact. Also, the
sushi is healthier than the aforementioned foods. Steve noted that
just before major television events, such as the Super Bowl, the num-
ber of takeout orders jumps sharply. Of course, this culinary progres-
sion from the familiar to the strange is not unique to rural people.
Ishige Naomichi and his colleagues noted a very similar progression of
acculturation to sushi and other Japanese foods in the 1970s in urban
Southern California, with customers beginning with more familiar
cooked items like sukiyaki and progressing to raw and unfamiliar items
like sashimi (Ishige et al. 1985, 134).

However, there are still limits to what rural consumers will con-
sume. In small towns in rural Appalachia, some Japanese restaurants
skipped the sushi altogether. One example is the New Tokyo Restaurant in the small town of Mountville, about an hour from Asheville. It was a simple fast-food restaurant in a strip mall alongside a Dollar General Store, a Mexican restaurant, and a bargain supermarket. It was frequented by working-class people from the vicinity, while the tourists and affluent residents of the nearby resort communities generally passed it by. A few Japanese fans, lanterns, and other generic Asian decorations brought some color to the austere space of fast-food-style booths. The menu was mostly items that could be prepared quickly on a plate grill, including fried noodles, dumplings, and grilled meat. It contained no sushi or other items requiring more complex preparation. Most items labeled with Japanese names could easily be interpreted as variants of Chinese fast food, including fried noodles and dumplings. Locals came to the restaurant not for “authentic” Japanese food but for cheap fast food. The owner explained this as suiting the local tastes of people who are not well traveled. “If you were in a big city, you could have the roast ducks hanging from the ceiling.” When we asked if this was simply a Chinese restaurant with a Japanese name, the Chinese waitress noted several Japanese items on the menu. The favorite Japanese items are Hibachi Chicken and Teriyaki Chicken. The most popular item is the fried wontons that the waitress makes, stuffed with cream cheese and vegetables. The fact that they were fried greatly appealed to the Southern customers.

**Politics of Disruption in the Japanese Culinary Field**

While the sheer numbers of the Fujian Chinese-run restaurants has expanded the market for Japanese cuisine, their cost-cutting practices, which have intensified competition for established Japanese restaurants, are controversial. This could be seen in comments of personnel working in the established Japanese restaurants.

A Vietnamese sushi chef who had learned his craft under Japanese chefs at a Benihana steakhouse in Orlando in the 1980s and now owned his own sushi and hibachi steakhouse criticized the Chinese-run restaurants for not serving authentic Japanese food. As an example, he observed that their rice for nigiri sushi did not contain enough vinegar to offset the taste of the fish. He further explained that properly vinegared rice tastes bad if it sits too long. Traditional sushi chefs solve this problem by constantly making and vinegaring small batches of rice so that it is always fresh. But this is time-consuming, so the Fujianese chefs save time by adding less vinegar to large batches of
rice, enabling it to sit longer without going bad. The result is that their sushi does not have the proper taste.

Another controversial practice is for some Fujianese-run establishments to offer cheaper versions of Japanese favorites. This is seen in the recent introduction, by Fujian entrepreneurs in our field sites, of pan-Asian buffets. The Phoenix Hibachi and Sushi Buffet, which opened in a shopping center in Lancaster in 2013, is one such establishment. It features over a hundred dishes arrayed in around twenty large steamer tables, and it offers an all-you-can-eat lunch for only $8. One table contains low-cost sushi, mainly tamagoyaki (omelet), artificial crab, and nondescript white and red fish sushi. Personnel in the established Japanese restaurants see this as compromising the standards for Japanese cuisine. The manager of a Japanese hibachi steakhouse next door that is owned by a Korean immigrant worried about having to lower the quality and cost of his sushi in order to stay competitive. This kind of concern was also expressed by a waitress at a Japanese-owned restaurant in Raleigh, North Carolina, who said that she would never eat in one of the Chinese-owned places. “I have heard too many things. You do not know what you are getting.” We spoke with some elderly Japanese owners in business for decades who were less direct, simply saying that the Fujianese were offering a different product.

Restaurateurs and staff of established Japanese restaurants also maintained that Chinese restaurateurs used dubious business practices. For example, one teppanyaki chef in Raleigh, North Carolina, said that the Chinese-run restaurants had severed their products from the artisanal skill and deep food knowledge of Japanese chefs. He said that the Chinese chefs foisted oily, overcooked, and soy sauce-drenched foods on their gullible customers. The manager of the Korean-owned Japanese hibachi steakhouse mentioned previously was bitter about what he considered to be the illegitimate actions of the Fujianese owner of the Phoenix Hibachi and Sushi Buffet. One was that the new restaurant was located next door to his, thereby stealing his customers. Also, the new restaurant’s name was deceptive because the restaurant did not use Japanese hibachi but rather Mongolian hot plate, which enabled larger quantities of meat to be grilled. Finally, he noted that despite the word “sushi” in the new restaurant’s name, this constituted only a small fraction of the pan-Asian buffet offerings.

Such views of the Chinese in the Japanese cuisine industry can also be found outside the United States (see Matsumoto 2007). We heard similar complaints during fieldwork in Copenhagen, where Japanese restaurants owned by Chinese, many of whom are from Fujian or neighboring Zhejiang, are estimated to constitute a third of the city’s
180 establishments. A Danish chef who had been running his own sushi restaurant for over a decade opined that Chinese were de-skilling the cuisine. Their restaurants offered low-quality sushi because price concerns overrode any sense of quality. He also felt that the Chinese in the industry had no commitment to the artisanship of sushi. “If they suddenly found they could make more in the construction business, they would go there,” he said dismissively. He noted that he had participated in European sushi competitions and was looking forward to attending an upcoming one in Japan. Would the Chinese chefs, he mused, have this level of commitment to the craft of sushi?

Of course, complaints by those already established in the Japanese restaurant industry can simply be viewed as fear of new competition. Charges that the sushi at Fujianese-run establishments lacks authenticity ring hollow when made by chefs who themselves are serving California rolls and other innovations to customers. Nor can de-skilling of the cuisine through less traditional preparation techniques be blamed on Chinese entrepreneurs. Practices for making mass-produced sushi, such as using less vinegar in the rice, were pioneered in Japan decades ago with the sushi sold in supermarkets and convenience stores. Finally, criticisms of the cost-cutting practices appear to be sour grapes by established restaurateurs at the Fujianese restaurateurs’ discovery of a new market niche for inexpensive sushi. One thus also could see these various complaints and criticisms as echoing prejudiced charges long made against Chinese and other immigrants who profit by very hard work and innovative adaptations to new market niches.

Serendipitous Agents of Culinary Glocalization

When we started this study, we found it incongruous that Fujian Chinese were actors in the globalization of Japanese cuisine. Our view stemmed from the tension between China and Japan regarding World War II, which is expressed in China in state policies, nationalist education in schools, and even in disparaging vernacular terms to refer to Japanese people. However, our attempts to broach these issues in our conversations with Fujianese restaurateurs and staff fell flat. While chefs were passionate when talking about their sushi-making skills, restaurateurs happy to explain the freshness of their fish, and managers to expound on the appeal of Japanese food to American customers, none responded to our conversational gambits and questions about China-Japan relations or their feelings as “Chinese” selling “Japanese” culture. We concluded that running a Japanese restaurant was
simply a business for the Fujianese. Our conclusion is similar to that of Paul Stoller in his study of West African immigrant street hawkers in New York. He came to realize that they saw no contradiction between the ethics of their Islamic religion and their selling of products to non-Muslims, drug dealers, and others, because “money has no smell” (Stoller 2002). Because their concern was to run a profitable business and provide for their families, they did not see the cultural incongruities that Stoller saw in their business activities.

The Fujian Chinese restaurateurs and staff are, therefore, simply another example of an immigrant group appropriating a neighboring cuisine and capitalizing on a physical resemblance to the original purveyors for business purposes. Other well-known examples are Greeks running Italian restaurants in the United States and Australia, and Bangladeshis and Nepalis spreading Indian restaurants throughout the world. In the case of Japanese cuisine, the Fujianese in the United States moved into the ethnic cuisine niche already carved out by other Asian ethnic groups, such as Japanese, Koreans, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese. However, the Fujianese appear to be spurring the glocalization of Japanese cuisine in new directions through creative efforts to fold Japanese cuisine into a locally adapted pan-Asian cuisine with sushi as its centerpiece, and by deepening it in the daily lives of consumers far removed from urban centers.

**Note**

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**References**


PART II

CUISINES INTO ASIA
C H A P T E R 6

SHANGHAI’S WESTERN RESTAURANTS AS CULINARY CONTACT ZONES IN A TRANSNATIONAL CULINARY FIELD

James Farrer

CULINARY CONTACT ZONES AND TRANSNATIONAL CULINARY FIELDS

Just as traditional “Asian” cuisines are no longer limited to Asia, the cuisines of Asia are not limited to traditional “Asian” fare. In various ways, this has long been the case. European products and food preparations have traveled along the coasts of Asia for centuries (see Duruz in this volume; Farrer 2011). Western restaurants in East Asia also date back to the nineteenth century (Cwiertke 2006; Swislocki 2009). Here I narrate the relatively recent reemergence of a transnational culinary field of fine-dining Western (xiéan) restaurants in Shanghai, connected to, but still distinct from, contemporary Western fine-dining scenes from Tokyo to Madrid to Dubai. And within this field, I describe how restaurants are culinary contact zones in which geographically mobile migrant culinary workers and socially mobile urban consumers acquire specialized forms of culinary capital (see also my introduction to this volume for more discussion of these terms).

Fine-dining Western restaurants in Shanghai are not only transnational spaces but also microcosms of the highly stratified social order of China’s global city in which a bill at a table in the elegant front of the house can easily amount to the monthly salary of a migrant cook sweating in the steamy kitchens. Based on over one hundred interviews
with culinary workers and consumers and ethnographic observations conducted in Shanghai from 2005 to 2014, this chapter describes the restaurant as a culinary contact zone for both consumers and producers—a space of stratification and social frictions but also of cultural exchanges among a multicultural cast of actors. For the consumer, but no less importantly for the culinary worker, the urban fine-dining restaurant is a space for the cultivation of a cosmopolitan palate. While wealthy Chinese and foreign customers in the dining room enjoy the tastes produced by the labor of working-class migrants, some of the latter seek to acquire skills and knowledge within the multicultural contact zone of the restaurant workplace. What is cosmopolitan cultural capital for the customer is culinary capital—a form of specialized human capital peculiar to this culinary field—for the ambitious culinary worker (see Leschziner 2010).

At a larger scale, cosmopolitan restaurant venues and mobile chefs are part of the story of the emergence of transnational culinary fields, comprising restaurants, distributors, investors, government regulators, and institutions of culinary training. In a city there may be multiple culinary fields, ranging from the transnational field of elite Michelin-starred establishments peopled by star chefs, to local culinary cultures with only minimal professionalization. Asian cities have witnessed a globalization, or transnationalization, of their culinary fields. In this volume, Sawaguchi’s chapter on Italian cuisine in Japan shows how Tokyo has become a focus for the emergence of a culinary field devoted to Italian cuisine in Japan. Such culinary fields are best described as transnational, or perhaps translocal, since they may tie specific spaces and actors in some cities, such as Tokyo, to spaces in others, such as Naples (see Ceccarini 2011). Moreover, these fields may also take rather different forms in different urban settings in Asian cities. Chefs and other culinary workers are endowed with different types of specialized culinary capital depending on their positions within these transnational fields. Whereas Italian-trained Japanese chefs dominate elite establishments in Tokyo, in this chapter we can see how in Shanghai migrant chefs from Europe and North America have established and still maintain professional dominance in their specialized culinary fields (Farrer 2010).

To illustrate how the restaurant serves as a culinary contact zone, as both a space of cross-cultural frictions and culinary education, this chapter starts with an ethnographic portrait of one popular fine-dining Spanish cuisine restaurant in Shanghai: El Willy. I have conducted site visits and interviews with the owners and culinary workers at this restaurant, including the principal partner and star chef, “Willy,” a
The Restaurant as Culinary Contact Zone

I arrived at El Willy at 5:00 pm one day in March 2014, taking an elevator up to the fifth floor of the 1920s vintage red-brick building on Shanghai’s historic riverfront Bund district. The dining room windows framed a spectacular panorama of the brightly lit Pudong skyscrapers across the Huangpu River, immediately distancing the viewer from the compact and crowded streets more common in the middle of the city. The main dining room was spacious and layered, with a central floor bordered by a balcony of seating that gave every diner a view onto the otherworldly urban nightscape. The naked wood tables created a relaxed bistro feel, and a hand-painted blowfish on glass and other crayon-colored sea creatures signaled a “fun” atmosphere, while referencing the childlike flair of iconic Barcelona artists such as Joan Miró and Antoni Gaudí. The name “El Willy” itself was a play on the Anglicized name of the owner, Barcelona native Guillermo Trullas Moreno, and, according to Willy himself, a tongue-in-cheek homage to the famed Catalan restaurant El Bulli (El Willy 2011). Off in the back corner of the restaurant was a wine bar managed by a Spanish wine importer with a long-term personal and business relationship to Willy.

The larger urban vista brightens the windows and, as a setting, frames the meaning of the interior dining space. The Bund itself is a riverfront row of neoclassical and art deco office buildings, largely built in the 1920s and 1930s by European, American, and Japanese firms and now preserved as architectural heritage from Shanghai’s early twentieth-century incarnation as a semi-colonial city under the control of Westerners and Japanese. Since the early 2000s, many of the buildings on the Bund have been remodeled as shopping, dining, and nightlife venues, and the Bund has reemerged as a nightlife destination, especially for tourists and locals hoping to impress a date or a guest (Farrer and Field 2015, 219). Many of the venues offer a close-up view of the twenty-first-century skyline of towering steel, glass, and light across the Huangpu River in Pudong. The gaudy nocturnal vista of Pudong is one of the major attractions of El Willy, as well as other restaurants on the Bund. Rents, and consequently dinner prices, are high, and the restaurant is increasingly attracting, as one informant
put it, “nouveau riche provincials” (tuhao), or upwardly mobile consumers from around China. A meal can easily cost 300 yuan to 600 yuan per diner, or roughly US $50 to $100.

Performances in the Front

Restaurants, especially in Shanghai, are a young person’s and migrant’s world. When I arrived, the team of two dozen mostly twenty-something Chinese cooks and waiters were noisily chatting over their staff dinner prepared by an older Chinese “uncle” who also helps in the evening with food prep. Almost all the chefs and servers were migrants from small Chinese towns, with only a couple originally from Shanghai. As in most Western restaurants in Shanghai, the staff meal was Chinese food, in this case jiaozi dumplings, a popular favorite among Chinese from the North. In general, most of the Chinese staff in Shanghai’s Western restaurants displayed little enthusiasm for the exotic Western foods they serve every night, and in any case, the imported ingredients were too expensive to feature regularly in staff meals, other than for training purposes. In El Willy, as in most Shanghai Western restaurants, most Chinese chefs and servers were from places in China where Western cuisine in any form was unavailable or still new to the area.

Koen, the Dutch executive chef, said he did occasionally eat with the Chinese team, but for the most part, few of the other four to six European cooks, managers, and waiters at the restaurant regularly joined in the staff meals, where the foods were not necessarily to their tastes either, and the conversations were in a fast-paced Chinese that few could follow, though a few could speak Chinese passably. Differences in language and culinary preferences were salient aspects of the cultural and social gap that characterizes the social world of the Western restaurant in Shanghai, both in the front of the house (the service and dining area) and in the back (the kitchen). This divide between Western and Chinese staff was sometimes a point of friction but also, like an electric potential, the very source of the energy that powered the business.

The two cultures of the restaurant begin at the entrance. When you arrive as a customer, you will be greeted by Daria the petite, cheerful Russian floor manager, or Gary, the slender and formal Chinese manager. (All the Chinese staff in the restaurant use English names.) Although both managers work the floor all the time, Daria usually greeted foreign guests, employing her fluent English or Spanish; Gary greeted Chinese guests. Daria, an attractive, outgoing 22-year-old blonde woman, also added an exotic international flair, as did the tall,
blonde, and effusive Isa, the general manager from Spain. Like Koen, the executive chef, Isa worked among Willy’s five different establishments in the city, meaning that she was not always available at the flagship venue on the Bund. A dozen or more Chinese waitstaff served the front house.

In the mostly Chinese context of the service staff, Gary, who is about 30 years old and not from Shanghai originally, had the most complex job, not only dealing with the dozen or so Chinese waitstaff on a daily basis, but also taking practical responsibility for personnel decisions ranging from hiring to raises. Today, he was reminding a new waitress that she must always serve a drink on a tray, and always present it to the customer by holding the bottom of the glass. He must also watch to see if they are speaking to the customers too abruptly. The desired tone of friendly politeness is difficult for most young migrants to master. It is generally easier, informants pointed out, to train kitchen staff in the ways of cooking than to train waitstaff in the delicate balance of affect and deference required in contemporary Western fine-dining service.

When I arrived in the late afternoon, there were some customers up front lingering over coffee, perhaps a very late lunch. Soon, the first dinner customers, a Chinese couple, arrived. He, in his mid-thirties, was dressed like a businessman. She, in her early twenties, was dressed like an off-work fashion model, in a long, asymmetrical black and white smock, with neon sneakers and a baseball hat jauntily a kilter. Glancing at them, Gary said that such well-off Chinese out-of-towners had become the typical customers in the Bund restaurant, unlike the former El Willy venue far from the riverfront in the less touristic former French Concession, which attracted more Shanghai-nese and more Shanghai-based expatriates.

Willy said that given the location on the Bund, more customers now were business travelers staying in some of the five-star hotels on the Bund, many choosing the restaurant to impress a client or friend. Many of the Chinese “are incredibly wealthy,” he said, and these were the people he hoped to attract. Chinese customers would order a prestigious bottle of red wine or ingredients such as Brittany blue lobster or Serrano ham to impress a guest. The restaurant has a seafood case at the bar featuring brawny live shellfish, and the otherwise modest wine list ends with a few high-end Spanish and French reds for big spenders. Although extravagant orders of multiple grilled lobsters for a single table have decreased as a result of the recent nationwide anti-graft campaign, the restaurant remains a stage, to show off one’s cosmopolitan taste, one’s new-gained wealth, one’s trendy fashion,
or, especially for Chinese patrons, one’s generosity toward friends and associates. A performance of magnanimity did not require much commitment to the cuisine itself. On two occasions, a chef noted, customers purchased live lobsters in order to release them live (fang sheng) into the opaque waters of the polluted Huangpu River, a practice sometimes associated with Buddhist spirituality. Of course, most costumers came to eat the food they paid for, usually enthusiastically.

At the same time, the front of the restaurant is a stage for those working there. Daria performed as the charming cosmopolitan who could speak several languages fluently with guests from around the world. Gary performed as the suave and expert local manager. The chief performer, however, was Willy himself. Indeed, his small culinary empire had risen on the consistent strength of his quirky showmanship. He generally arrived at the restaurant around 8:30, donning his chef’s garb and quickly working his way through the kitchen and engaging with the staff with a genial and energetic “Hey, bro!” He then took a double measure of conviviality to the front of the house, visiting nearly all the tables, throwing out phrases in Chinese, and frequently twirling one hand above his head with a signature shout of “Whoo!” Willy’s message was about the “fun” of urban dining, as well as playing off the stereotype of the lusty and fun-loving Spaniard.

He also modified his performance to fit the audience, which itself changes over the course of the evening. Chinese diners tended to dominate the first seating, which began around 5:30. North American, Northern European and Japanese diners flowed in a couple of hours later, and the smaller group of Spaniards and other Mediterranean patrons drifted in even later. For Chinese diners, Willy relied as much on body language as his limited Chinese, with a few practiced phrases from the star chef serving to give “face” to the host at each table, while his droll gestures were part of the colorful atmosphere consumed in a “foreign” space. For the Spanish- and English-speaking diners, Willy’s much more chatty performance was an expression of personal concern and expatriate solidarity. With his tongue-in-cheek self-labeling as a “sexy” and “fun” chef, “Willy” had become one of the most valuable and inimitable brands on Shanghai’s international restaurant scene.

The Brotherhood of the Kitchen

While the spacious main dining room served as the public front stage of the house, the kitchen was a cramped, noisy backstage with permanently wet and slippery floors, an obstacle course of scalding pipes, bins of food products, sharp elbows, and moving plates carrying
fastidiously and delicately positioned food items. The design, was in the words of the chefs, “a disaster,” with the aisles around the main cooking island much too small, requiring a coordinated dance among the experienced chefs in order not to collide with each other, spill dishes, or scald an exposed arm. The space was tight, but as Willy explained, in a high-rent city like Shanghai, the moneymaking front of the house was the priority. And it all worked.

Like the front, the kitchen was equally a contact zone between Westerners and Chinese, but it was also, in the words of Koen, the executive chef, a multicultural band of “brothers” who worked together intimately on a daily basis. Still, this was a brotherhood with professional, ethnic, and gendered hierarchies. As in nearly every fine-dining Western restaurant in Shanghai, a foreign chef was always in charge at the main restaurant on the Bund. Sometimes this would be Willy himself, but during this period it more likely it would be Koen, the executive chef, or Álvaro, the head chef. Álvaro would be there every day, with Koen or Willy stepping in for part of every evening to see how things were going, and to work themselves if necessary. El Willy was also the training ground for Willy’s other restaurants, so over the course of the year all of his head chefs and sous chefs would rotate through this kitchen. Álvaro, for instance, would soon move to a new position as head chef at Willy’s new bistro Tomatito.

A single window between the main dining room and the kitchen was the vortex of all activity at El Willy. On the dining room side, Cathy, a two-year veteran from rural Anhui Province, delivered each finished plate to the right server. That early evening, she stood face to face with Álvaro, with him cracking flirtatious jokes in his heavily Castilian-accented English mixed with Chinese. She scowled back at him and retorted with a dismissive “Gan ma!?” (“What the . . . !?”). Despite the chicanery, the fast-paced communication at the window was key to the success of the evening service.

That day the window was monitored by the executive chef Koen, who inspected each dish to his exacting standards. Koen is a masterful and articulate chef with an impressive international résumé that includes a year at the Michelin three-star Taillevent in Paris. He is responsible, with Willy and the various head chefs, for designing menus for all of Willy’s restaurants, systematically charting out flavor pairings that must be matched to the particular identity of each venue, while also considering the costs of ingredients. In the hard-partying, late-night world of Shanghai expatriate chefs, he stands out as a clean-cut, clean-living food geek who has a strong sense of ownership of the restaurant. When Koen is absent, Álvaro, El Willy’s head chef, takes the
post at the window. Álvaro is—in self-presentation, at least—the polar opposite of Koen. Covered head to toe in tattoos, extending to images of vegetables arrayed across his collarbone, he is permanently oscillating between joy and exasperation as the work in the kitchen either goes his way or the wrong way. Álvaro takes visceral pride in his work, and a failed dish unleashes a chain of tragically lilting Spanish invectives.

The head chef at the window is the guarantor of quality. He tastes all the sauces, probes food with needles for temperature, or pats a piece of meat lightly with his finger for texture; then, using a napkin, he cleans the plates of excess fluid from tomatoes or some spilled sauce. Potatoes are fished out to make sure they are thoroughly done, a common mistake of novice Chinese cooks. A number of dishes are sent back to the cooks for more work. Chipped dishes are returned for re-plating. A waiter bringing out a soup in cold bowls is scolded. A sardine appetizer with missing basil is sent back. Puff pastries filled with truffled cream cheese are sent back because the cream cheese has been allowed to warm up. A sardine is refried for crispiness. A young cook is reminded to let the head chef personally serve the expensive lobster soup, to avoid any mishaps. In the age of instantaneous reviews on social media, the head chef at the window is the goalkeeper guarding his team against collective culinary embarrassment.

In the end Álvaro garnishes each dish with a selection of fresh herbs and bright flower petals. Cardamom leaves are a favorite. Shaved truffles are layered on some special dishes: Italian when in season, Chinese otherwise. There is a row of oils and sauces in bottles that must be applied to nearly all dishes. One is the olive oil that goes onto nearly everything savory. The other is a red pepper sauce with olive oil and honey, using xanthan gum as an emulsifier. All of this is applied at the last stage by Álvaro.

Many dishes go out in specialized serving trays designed by Willy’s staff, including his own brother, who designed the interiors of all his Shanghai restaurants. The fried squid emerges in a miniature faux aluminum fryer, the shrimp in garlic aioli in a sardine can. The cream-cheese- truffle-oil-filled puffs topped with salmon appear in a small tray with five indentions so that they can be presented to the customer in a neat row. Some dishes appear in rustic cast-iron pots, others in rough wooden frames. The piping hot bread is delivered to the table in a little brown paper bag. The folksy and artsy designs reflect the “fun” theme of the restaurant; they also reflect a vaguely Japanese aesthetic that is common among all Shanghai fine-dining establishments, but especially at Willy’s restaurants, as he has personal and business ties with Japan, as well as key bar staff and partners from Japan.
The menu was designed to showcase Spanish cuisine and culture but also to appeal to a Chinese palate. It follows what Willy describes as the “yin/yang” principle, or a balance between carbohydrates and savory dishes, and between hot and cold. All dishes are designed to be eaten with spoons, forks, and chopsticks. In keeping with Chinese service tradition, no knives were placed on tables. The tapas concept also was meant to attract Chinese customers who like to share small dishes. Chinese also typically prefer more lightly salted versions of Western dishes, and nearly all dishes are less salty than they would be in Europe. This focus on Chinese clients has been successful. Although Willy started out in 2007 with a largely expatriate customer base in his first location, the El Willy on the Bund attracted a mostly Chinese clientele by 2014.

Within the kitchen, the elaborate dance of bodies and utensils is managed by the cryptic cries of the sous chef Eric, a five-year El Willy
veteran originally from Henan Province. If Willy and Koen are the producers of the menus and Álvaro the overseer of quality, Eric is the choreographer of the nightly culinary dance. He takes in the orders from Álvaro and translates them into terse, coded Mandarin Chinese commands that he sings out to the cooks at their separate stations, his tone indicating the degree of urgency. The team of twelve cooks responds, mostly wordlessly, generating the dishes at their stoves, ovens, cutting tables, or fryers. The men don’t engage much in idle chatter, but they function as a unit.

Koen’s favorite line is “We are all like brothers.” In reality the brotherhood is divided by ethnicity and language, and also by gender, because there were two women among the “brothers.” Eric is the boss of the Chinese and is the chief translator of the commands of the foreign head chef to the young Chinese cooks. Koen and Álvaro generally operate in a different cultural and linguistic space than Eric, interfacing more often with Isa and Daria in the front of the house. Koen, however, also speaks good Chinese and was very active in promoting the team spirit across national lines, including inviting the staff out to drink together, which another restaurant’s chef remarked was quite an unusual practice for the foreign chefs in Shanghai. Koen is the type of foreign chef who can thrive in China precisely because he works on building the team across this problematic divide between Chinese and Western chefs in Shanghai.

Most cooks have a fixed station either at the hot or cold tables. There were, that night, twelve Chinese cooks in the kitchen, ten “boys”—some as young as seventeen and none older than thirty—and two “girls.” One young woman specializes in grilling toast topped with tomato salsa, a dish that all customers receive while waiting for their dishes. Dana, a shy 19-year-old from Zhejiang, makes the desserts. During her downtime, she employs another section of the cold table to cut up the fish for the raw fish dishes. One of these is a “grilled ceviche” made from Japanese sea bass. They clean these fish in the morning, and she takes the filets out of the bags, sniffing each cut for freshness. Then she slices each into small pieces that are layered onto the corn husks and briefly seared in a pepper sauce in the oven. She aspires to become an accomplished pastry chef, she said, which is often a feminized position in Shanghai kitchens. But, as other female informants have noted, it is a hard job being in a kitchen full of men, and the hours are late, even in pastry.

In addition to this team of cooks all in white, there is a team of three backroom staff all in blue and an old “uncle” and an old “auntie” who spend the evening washing dishes. Another “uncle” prepares
the staff meals, but he also does other prep work for the cold dishes, including wrapping up delicate balls of banana and passion fruit in egg roll wrappers. Dana then covers these in white chocolate, and they become flavorful balls that burst in your mouth. Another house specialty I observed her making one night is a purple “dinosaur egg” she blows from globs of molten candy, letting each cool and harden, then filling it with white fruit-flavored cream. The customer is advised to crack the egg at the table with a spoon after making a wish.

When the kitchen is moving fast, harsh words may travel from Willy down to Koen, and down the line to the “boys.” But people are okay with all that, Koen said, because “we are all brothers.” Like other chefs I interviewed in Shanghai, he said the personnel issues are the most difficult issues in the kitchen, just dealing with the conflicts and problems that arise regarding raises, promotions, and other expectations. Eric is not only the daily conductor and instructor of the Chinese staff, but he also looks out for, and conveys, the interests of the Chinese brotherhood in consultations with the foreign managing chefs. Generally, Eric makes recommendations for raises and promotions, and Koen approves.

Making judicious personnel decisions is critical to managing a restaurant in Shanghai. Rising labor costs and rents are the chief challenges for Shanghai restaurateurs. Wages for cooks have quadrupled over a decade (from roughly 1000 yuan a month in 2005 to roughly 4000 yuan in 2015 for a cook with a couple of years of experience). However, keeping labor costs low is risky. The staff must be trained and retained. Shanghai kitchens have a very rapid turnover, as cooks capitalize on their newly acquired culinary capital to move to lucrative positions elsewhere. With so many new restaurant openings each year, cooks at all levels have many opportunities. However, there are effectively two labor markets. Western cooks from abroad are still relatively rare, and they demand a premium in pay, roughly three to four times of that of a Chinese cook (though this is difficult to compare for many reasons, including skill levels, experience, and the position in the kitchen). As will be discussed below, foreign chefs still dominate the Western culinary field in a way that is no longer, or never was, the case in Tokyo, for example (see Sawaguchi in this volume).

Willy the Migrant Entrepreneur

Willy arrived that night from a business meeting, at 8:30. He first did his circuit through the kitchen and then performed a round of visitations among tables on the main floor. After he was assured that
everyone was happily enjoying their meals, we sat at the bar facing
the main dining area, where we opened a bottle of Spanish white
wine and Willy sliced off some cuts of a Serrano ham that had just
arrived from Spain, focusing on the section where umami-laden fat
is marbled intricately in the muscle. We talked about the challenges
and opportunities of making a Western restaurant business work in
Shanghai.

Willy is not only a culinary and comic impresario but also a shrewd
migrant entrepreneur with a transnational résumé. He developed his
fluent English during a year as a high-school exchange student in Min-
nesota, where he also acquired his English moniker. He had worked in
restaurants in Paris, New York, and Barcelona before taking an offer to
go to China with a team from the Torres winery to promote Spanish
wine and food. For a year he traveled the country, producing Spanish
food and learning the ways of Chinese kitchen staff, management, and
customers in multiple hotel kitchens (El Willy 2011).

His big break came in 2007, when a Japanese restaurant owner
sought his help in reviving a flagging Western restaurant situated in
an elegant 1920s villa on Donghu Road in Shanghai’s former French
Concession, an area favored now, as it was in the 1930s, by Shang-
hai’s social and political elite. After negotiating a minority stake in
the business, Willy used his English nickname to create the epony-
mous restaurant. The figure of the celebrity chef was relatively new
to Shanghai. Chinese chefs usually stayed put in the kitchen, labor-
ing anonymously while the owner of the restaurant earned the reput-
ation. David Laris, an Australian chef working on the Bund since
2004, had already shown that the locally based Western star chef
concept could work in Shanghai. The cheeky idea of naming a res-

taurant “El Willy” also attracted the attention of the city’s youthful
expatriates, still the opinion leaders in the Shanghai Western food
scene. Chosen by Willy’s Japanese business partner, a hand-drawn
Iberian pig became another playful symbol of the restaurant. Riding
on the global interest in Spanish food, a Chinese love of dishes that
are easily shared, and Shanghai expatriates’ eagerness for restaurants
with an offbeat style and moderate pricing, the original El Willy was
an immediate success, garnering numerous awards from the expatri-
ate press.

Seizing the chance to capitalize on his successful brand, in 2010
Willy opened a restaurant called Fofo in Hong Kong and joined with
some partners to open a bar on Yongfu Road, which soon became
one of the hottest nightlife streets in the city (Farrer and Field 2015,
233). In 2011, he moved El Willy to the new location on the Bund
and opened a new Mediterranean-themed restaurant called Elefante in the Donghu Road villa that had previously housed El Willy. And in 2014, he opened yet another tapas restaurant and bar in a renovated alleyway in the middle of the city. In all of these fast-moving developments, Willy had a knack for building social relationships with Chinese, Japanese, European, and other partners. All of his culinary ventures were partnerships, and according to Willy, he also included his most valued employees as partners in his new ventures. Although he didn’t phrase it this way, this ability to build relations of trust, or guanxi, might be essential to the success of the migrant restaurateur in China.

According to Willy, “it is important that you realize you are in China and do things the Chinese way.” This included cultivating good relationships with the multiple officials who are in charge of regulating the restaurant business, ranging from food safety, fire, and police to labor officials. A Shanghainese consultant was a key player in maintaining these relationships.

That night in March 2014, after the second service rush had abated and the kitchen was winding down for the night, Willy and I headed to another friend’s restaurant for dinner. This was Goga, a cozy and critically acclaimed eatery presided over by another migrant restaurateur, Brad Turley from the United States. Brad knew that he was cooking for Willy and some other visiting Spanish chefs, and he presented us with a selection of his savory, bold dishes. Fitting his ebullient persona, Turley displayed an adventurous cooking style with a US West Coast flare. One LA-inspired dish featured bulgogi tacos with lettuce wraps. There was also a spicy Thai-influenced ceviche and a savory Mediterranean lamb and bean stew.

Like Willy, Brad had moved to Shanghai as an experienced chef with an impressive US résumé, centered on famed kitchens in Hawaii and the West Coast. After a few years in Shanghai as head chef in the city’s most acclaimed Mexican-themed eatery, he seized the opportunity to launch his own restaurant. In his case, as with many other migrant entrepreneurs, a marriage to a local Chinese woman helped him fight his way through the tangle of local regulations and avaricious regulators. He joined a small group of migrant entrepreneurs who defined the cutting edge of international fine dining in the city. Their stories show that it was possible for international migrants to survive and thrive as key players in one of the most competitive culinary markets in Asia. The next section considers the historical development of this field and some of the reasons for the success of migrants within it.
Migrant Chefs in Shanghai’s Western Culinary Field

Historical Precedents

The culinary contact zones of Shanghai’s Western kitchens, and the institutionalized transnational culinary fields that they are part of, have parallels in other Asian cities and historical precedents in Shanghai itself. However, we shall see that there are also differences in Shanghai’s culinary field related to its peculiar local history. One reason that Western chefs and restaurateurs have had such success in Shanghai is the allure and example of a cosmopolitan culinary legacy associated with the city’s treaty-port past, but another reason for their current dominant position is the opportunity created by a historical rupture in this Western culinary field during China’s Maoist rejection of Western culture.

Shanghai’s first culinary contact zones with the West developed after the first Opium War of 1840–1842, when foreign concessions were established in the city. The first recorded Western restaurant in Shanghai was in Xujiahui in the 1860s, bringing to Shanghai such culinary novelties as beef stew and lettuce (Xue 2003, 320). As in the current era, culinary cosmopolitanism, or the consumption of foreign foods as a way of experiencing urban modernity, became a way in which Shanghai residents simultaneously claimed a sense of urban social status and belonging in the larger world. As Mark Swisloki writes, “The association of Shanghai with Western food culture cemented Shanghai’s status as the vanguard of China’s engagement with foreign culture” (Swislocki 2009, 125).

Like China’s second major treaty port Tianjin, and of course, the former British colony of Hong Kong, Shanghai’s current culinary reputation remains associated with Western dining. As two middle-class, mid-forties Shanghai women explained to me in a March 2015 interview, when guests visit from other Chinese cities, it is common to take them out on one night to eat Shanghainese dishes (benbangcai) and on another for a Western meal (xican), both of which are seen as representative of the city (Farrer 2014).

Dining, at least occasionally, in Western restaurants or cafés became a regular feature of Shanghai life already by the 1930s, even for the middle classes (Chen 2006; Li 1994). Although many earlier restaurateurs were Cantonese, migrant entrepreneurs from the West were important in establishing Shanghai’s Western culinary field. By 1931 when the Western Food Industry Association was founded in Shanghai, there were more than 150 Western eateries in the city centered
on the business avenues of both the International Settlement and the French Concessions. One of the most renowned and enduring was founded by Louis Rovere, an Italian chef who worked and learned his trade at the famed Astor House hotel. Together with his French wife, whom he met while she was a guest at the hotel, Rovere opened Chez Rovere near the French Club in 1935; it became famous for its dishes of baked escargot and mustard-marinated steak. In 1946 they opened a restaurant called Chez Louis Bar on the Ave du Roi Albert (Shaanxi Road). With its bright red exterior, the restaurant became known as the “Red House,” and it was one of the few Western restaurants to survive until the current era (although under state ownership since the 1950s) (Liao 2014).

In 1950 there were still 3,157 people working in 154 Western restaurants in Shanghai (Liao 2014), and we can say that a full-fledged Western culinary field had been established by that time. However, under the new Communist regime, Shanghai’s cosmopolitan culinary contact zone was suppressed in a socialist cultural policy of austerity, massification, and indigenization (Swislocki 2009). By 1963, there were just twenty-one Western restaurants left, all surviving as state-owned enterprises. During the Cultural Revolution, the number dwindled to 13, with all of them changing their names and serving only Chinese food, basically functioning as workers’ cafeterias. In the 1970s we can say that the Western culinary field in Shanghai had effectively ceased to exist. Some Western restaurants survived the Cultural Revolution and were revived in the 1980s, serving indigenized Western fare based on local ingredients and old Shanghainese recipes, but this was effectively a form of local Shanghai cuisine, nostalgic but generally not highly regarded (Farrer 2014). The revival of consumer interest in international Western food from the 1990s onward thus presented migrant (expatriate) chefs from abroad with an open field of opportunities that would not have existed for them without the historic rupture of the Mao period.

Migrant Chefs in an Expanding Culinary Field

Beginning in the late 1980s, contemporary Western cuisine became available in a handful of newly opened foreign-managed hotel chains, including the Sheraton, Hilton, and Okura chains in Shanghai. It was in these hotel kitchens that a new generation of Chinese chefs received their first in-depth training in current Western cooking techniques and recipes under the tutelage of expatriate Western chefs. Still, few
Shanghainese could afford to dine at these hotel restaurants, and they did not constitute a true urban fine-dining scene, serving standard hotel restaurant fare to business travelers. Rather, in the 1990s, it was American fast food that came to represent contemporary Western modernity to Shanghai’s rising middle classes. KFC opened up its first branch in Shanghai in 1988 in the premises of the former Shanghai Club on the Bund, and McDonald’s arrived in 1994 on Huaihai Road in the heart of the former French Concession. Young Shanghainese coming of age in the 1990s acquired a taste for Western cuisine in McDonald’s, KFC, or Pizza Hut, producing a potential generation of consumers for the more sophisticated Western-style restaurants of the 2000s.

By most accounts, the advent of a new culinary field of Western fine dining can be dated to the 1998 launching of the French restaurant “M” on the Bund, the first attempt at international-quality Western cuisine to open outside a hotel. Australian owner Michelle Garnaut, who had already been running a successful French restaurant in Hong Kong, took the risk of opening a pricey French bistro in an old 1920s commercial building on Shanghai’s historic but moribund Bund. “M” inspired a boom in Western and Chinese fine dining along the riverfront. In 2003, a shopping, entertainment, and gallery complex named Bund 3 opened next door to “M” in another 1920s office building that was gutted and completely rebuilt within the shell of the historic structure. Bund 3 involved an investment of over 50 million US dollars and featured globally established restaurateurs, most notably the first Chinese venture by Jean-Georges Vongerichten, whose eponymous Michelin three-star restaurant and several other highly regarded ventures in New York City, London, and Paris had earned him global fame. One floor above Jean-Georges, Australian chef David Laris opened his namesake restaurant Laris in a space of glistening white marble floors and counters. A floor below, Hong Kong-born chef Jereme Leung produced deconstructed versions of traditional Shanghainese favorites at the posh Whampoa Club. Shanghai’s local culture of the celebrity chef was born, and most (if not all) of these celebrity chefs came from abroad (Farrer 2010).

By 2013, the popular consumer-review website Dianping listed 64,815 restaurants in Shanghai, of which 2,560 were labeled as Western restaurants, including 116 French, 271 Italian, 42 Spanish, and 207 steak restaurants. These numbers were dwarfed by the 500 pizza restaurants and 1,083 Western fast-food restaurants. There were also 2,487 Japanese and 437 Southeast Asian cuisine restaurants in the city, showing that Asian cuisine remained more popular than the
more expensive Western alternatives. Except in its Chinese offerings, Shanghai’s fine-dining scene could not yet compete with Hong Kong or Tokyo, but these numbers represented a great leap forward from the nadir of culinary cosmopolitanism in the mid-1970s.

By 2014, the breadth and depth of the Western culinary field was impressive. At the high end, one could dine at Ultraviolet, by Shanghai’s most celebrated French chef, Paul Pairet. Every evening a single table of only ten diners would be bused to a hidden location to savor a degustation menu of intricate delicacies accompanied by a carefully choreographed set of sounds, visuals, and scents, all intended to provide a multisensory pairing with the flavors of the meal. The menu includes items such as “Foie gras can’t quit,” which was an edible “cigarette” of foie gras wrapped in a shining fruit-flavored “paper” and presented in a silver ashtray. Diners dipped the “cigarette” in “cabbage ash” while a projection of cigarette ash swirled around them on screen. Course menus started at 3,000 yuan (roughly US $480) per person, which some restaurant industry insiders still described as a “bargain,” given that twenty-five chefs and waiters entertained ten guests every night (Mo 2012). At the bottom end of the Western dining spectrum, Shanghai youth crowded into the Italian chain restaurant Babela’s Kitchen, where they chowed down on pizza, pasta, and salads for an average cost of only 40 yuan (about US $6.50) per person. In short, by 2014 Shanghainese had once again embraced their long tradition of eating Western fare as part of the cosmopolitan urban identity.

The growing presence of Chinese patrons in these culinary zones was fed by larger macroeconomic developments. A rapid increase in disposable household income in Shanghai drove this growth. From 1990 to 2010, the average per capita consumption expenditures of Shanghai urbanites rose tenfold from 1,937 yuan to 23,000 yuan. Alone, between 2000 and 2010 the per capita disposable income of the highest-earning 20 percent of households tripled from 19,959 yuan to 62,465 yuan. The total catering sector doubled from 15.8 billion yuan in 2005 to 33.6 billion yuan in 2010. (Shanghai Statistical Yearbook 2012). More and more people were able to afford to eat out, and consequently new culinary districts emerged throughout the city.

The rising Chinese middle classes were not the only consumers who shaped the emergence of the transnational culinary field. One of the other factors that distinguish the development of Shanghai’s culinary field from cities such as Tokyo is that at the time of the Western food boom in the 2000s, expatriates were flooding into the city, increasing 10 percent yearly and reaching 173,000 by 2012 (Shanghai Daily,
These affluent, young, and educated migrants were the taste leaders in the Western food sector, especially in the period before the financial crisis of 2008 sent many high-earning expatriates back home. English-language (and to a lesser extent Japanese-language) media aimed at expatriates also served as important gatekeepers, validating Shanghai’s chefs with awards and reviews that restaurants proudly displayed on vestibule walls. Given the importance of the expatriate market, foreign chefs had an advantage in this market that they did not enjoy in Tokyo, for example.

Most recently, the influx of Western chefs was also influenced by poor employment conditions abroad, especially in Southern Europe. By the 2010s, a job in Shanghai might seem more promising than one in Spain or Italy. Having the right ethnic or national background implied culinary knowledge and authenticity in a particular cuisine. Moreover, Shanghai Western kitchens were manageable in English, with the Chinese sous chef acting effectively as a translator. However, not every underemployed Southern European youth could try his or her hand in a Shanghai kitchen. A strong transnational résumé was required for work in high-end restaurants such as El Willy or Goga. Moreover, chefs with foreign nationality could receive a “Z” work visa only if they could produce a culinary school diploma and prove two years of experience in the relevant culinary field.

Beyond their exotic appearance, foreign chefs thus had specialized culinary capital that helped them succeed in their occupational niche. In contrast, Chinese chefs trained in Western restaurants might be regarded as technically proficient in their jobs, but many had little or even no experience with Western food before entering the profession and, crucially, only very rarely had experience abroad. Rather, most were migrants from provincial towns in China where there was no exposure to foreign cuisine of any sort, let alone high-end cuisine. Many foreign chefs, in practice, found knowledge transfer to be a very difficult task, as explained in 2011 by Thomas, a 55-year-old German chef in an account of opening a fine-dining restaurant in Shanghai:

Then there’s a certain aspect missing in Asia—I don’t mean to be racist—of making things a little more difficult than just the cooking. Here we focus on contemporary fine dining which hasn’t existed before. So, of course, you can’t have someone here who can do it because they haven’t seen it before . . . So I tried to break that, giving them an education, teaching them things they don’t need for the menu here, cooking techniques, theory, even international kitchen language, really the scientific side of food, like we learn it in Europe, not just how
to cook it but what the chemicals are of the food, things like that. So then we did two months training here, slowly introducing the dishes and cooking, and it took ages. I remember freaking out because what they were cooking, we couldn’t serve to customers. They did it for weeks and weeks. If you watched them do it, it came out fine, but if you let them do it themselves, it came out terrible. And you’ve repeated yourself thirty times and you really don’t know what else to do. And then suddenly, I think the second day before the opening, they gave me one service, and everything they gave me, I thought I would serve the paying customers, and then we opened up very good, but it wasn’t easy.

In his estimation, which was shared with other chefs, preparing and serving high-end European-style dishes was a very challenging form of knowledge transfer that extended far beyond cooking techniques and included basic knowledge of the tastes of Western foods as well as teamwork and service standards. Learning all of this on the job in Shanghai was a linguistic, cultural, and palatal challenge.

In actual practice, many Chinese chefs who landed jobs in Western restaurants failed to develop much interest in the Western cuisine beyond what they learned at the stove. Most lacked the broader cultural and linguistic capital necessary to accumulate sophisticated culinary capital such as detailed knowledge of Western culinary culture and history. As many informants pointed out, cooking was a denigrated profession in urban China. Consequently, nearly all entry-level cooks in Shanghai were migrants from small towns or villages, often with only a vocational education, if that. These rural-to-urban migrant chefs generally lacked the economic capital to invest in culinary capital. Training in Italy or France was out of the question. Only at the very top end did a chef’s salary provide enough income to regularly sample among Western restaurants in Shanghai, much less travel abroad. In most cases, the linguistic and social segregation of the kitchen was an obstacle to learning new tastes on the job, as were the relatively weak social ties formed between foreign and Chinese chefs, who often lacked a common language beyond simple kitchen English. However, as informants also pointed out, the steamy contact zones of restaurant kitchens also produced some exceptional talents among the Chinese chefs.

One well-known and respected Shanghainese chef was Elliot Zhou, a hard-working cook who rose through the ranks of Shanghai’s Western kitchens to head the daily operations in the kitchen at Paul Pairet’s restaurant Mr. and Mrs. Bund, perhaps the most highly acclaimed Western restaurant in the city. Pairet had not only personally introduced
Zhou to the highest levels of modern French culinary technique but had also sent him to Europe for further training in some of the top kitchens. But even Zhou pointed out that the name of Pairet, the French executive chef, served as the seal of authenticity for the fine-dining restaurant where he worked; moreover, Pairet was famous for his meticulous management of every detail of the menu, and Zhou had little chance to put his personal imprint on the restaurant.

Although there were some Chinese chefs rising up to head kitchens, foreign-born chefs retained a position of privilege, if not complete dominance, in this culinary field, while Chinese internal migrants remained the demographically dominant labor force in the kitchens and in the front. There was, however, little doubt among Shanghai chefs that more Chinese talents eventually would emerge as Chinese began to study abroad in culinary schools and more local chefs intensively trained in the city’s kitchens.

**Culinary Contact Zones and Culinary Creativity**

This chapter has attempted to present both a micro- and meso-level analysis of the transnational culinary world of Western cuisine in Shanghai, and also to point out how they are connected. At the micro level, the kitchen is a contact zone between Western and Chinese cultures and a space in which specialized culinary capital is reproduced and acquired. At the meso level, the Western restaurant scene is a stratified culinary field in which Western chefs retained many advantages. In my examples, we can also see both the pathways and obstacles to mobility for both types of migrant chefs. Some international migrants, such as Koen and Álvaro, saw their fortunes rising as they capitalized on their cross-cultural linguistic and culinary skills. Chinese rural-to-urban migrant chefs remained at a lower rung in kitchen labor or sought mobility in other professions. A few, however, continued to acquire relevant culinary capital to achieve higher positions in the Western culinary field.

The contact zones of the kitchens are also places of culinary creativity. The descriptions above only hint at the complex flows of culinary influences, as chefs from around the world and throughout China traded techniques and learned how to manipulate new ingredients in Shanghai Western kitchens. Some Western chefs learned from Chinese chefs. For example, most Western chefs in Shanghai made use of the superb, fat-layered Chinese pork (a favorite in Shanghai cuisine). The influences also carried across culinary fields. Many Chinese-cuisine
chefs have now worked in Western restaurants, so many high-end Shanghainese restaurants in the city borrowed Western dishes such as roasted lamb chops and seared foie gras. The front of the house was also a space of intercultural influences. As we can see in El Willy, the sharing of dishes among diners and even the spacing of delivery of dishes to the table typically followed a more Chinese-style pattern than the traditional Western service. In short, the culinary contact zone of the restaurant is both stratified and fluid, a space of tensions but also potentials. As Shanghai’s Western culinary field grows and matures, Chinese culinary artisans undoubtedly will become more prominent; but for now, it appears that foreign migrant chefs continue to play the leading roles.

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**References**


Chapter 7

Japanese Cooks in Italy: The Path-Dependent Development of a Culinary Field

Keiichi Sawaguchi

Japan has gained a reputation not only for excellent Japanese cuisine, but also for a large number of high-quality European-cuisine restaurants, including Italian. This study provides a sociological and historical account of the transnational development of the Italian restaurant business in Japan. Put simply, one of the reasons Italian restaurants in Japan provide cuisine of such high quality that even Italians praise it is that many Japanese chefs have acquired their skills in Italy. It became common from the late 1980s onward for Japanese chefs to travel to Italy to learn the local cuisine. The 1980s was a period in which the interest in Italian cuisine heightened among the Japanese population, and it was also the period in which Italian haute cuisine came into the international spotlight. Afterward, the reception of foreign workers in Italy became more tightly regulated, but the demand for Japanese chefs in the restaurant business in Italy only increased. Rossella Ceccherini (2011) has illustrated the history of Japan’s pizzeria and the migration of food workers between Italy and Japan as the result of “transabroad globalization,” a two-way transnational flow of workers in which the experience abroad becomes a source of human capital for chefs traveling in both directions. O’Brien (2010) similarly focuses on the strategic transnational mobility in the careers of elite chefs. Based on qualitative research in Italy and Japan, this chapter emphasizes the
mobile careers of Japanese chefs of Italian cuisine but also outlines the path-dependent development and organizational context of this transnational flow of culinary expertise.

**The Pursuit of Authenticity**

The Italian restaurant business in Japan has become a wide-ranging industry with an established ecosystem of its own. For many Japanese people, Italian food is the Western cuisine most familiar to them. There are numerous high-end Italian restaurants that satisfy the palate of Italians in Tokyo and other areas, in addition to restaurants and pizzerias that serve popular Italian food at various price levels. Importers of different sizes distribute wine and ingredients from Italy, making it possible to secure virtually any ingredient necessary to prepare Italian food in Japan. Furthermore, several tens of thousands of Japanese people with deep appreciation and passion for Italian food form the workforce that sustains this industry.

Japanese chefs also are a presence in Italy itself. Many Japanese cooks have traveled to Italy and worked in kitchens there to learn the skills and culture of the land. To this day, Japanese chefs can be found even in small Italian villages if there is a renowned restaurant there. For Italian restaurants, Japanese cooks are a valuable workforce with high skills and motivation. There are also some cooks who have settled in Italy for the long term—over a decade or so—and have worked as the right-hand person to eminent chefs. These facts are little known to Japanese and Italians outside of the restaurant business. Thus, Japanese cooks were hidden guest workers in Italian restaurants. So why has such a mutually beneficial relationship been established in the Japanese-Italian restaurant industry?

Prior to the 1970s, Italian cuisine did not have an established status in Japan and was perceived as a branch of Western cuisine, which was largely represented by French cuisine. When it comes to Western cuisine in Japan, French cuisine had established a firm status in the country with the westernization and modernization of Japan, along with the development of the hotel industry (Kimura 1994). Italian cuisine, on the other hand, had only earned a position of being “just another Western cuisine.” That being said, there were restaurants in Japan even before the 1970s that serve as the origin of the present Italian cuisine in Japan.

Firstly, as forerunners to Italian restaurants in Japan, there existed restaurants managed by immigrants of Italian descent, as seen in other countries (Thoms 2011). After Italy surrendered in
World War II, three Italian cooks, who had become permanent Japanese residents after having been incarcerated as prisoners of war in Japan, opened Italian restaurants. These restaurants—Antonio in Tokyo, Donnaloia in Kobe, and Amore Abela in Takarazuka—are still in business. Additionally, while a compatriot of the three named Luigi Fidanza did not have his own restaurant, he went on to become the head chef at Ristorante Hanada in Tokyo. These men went on to train many Japanese cooks in Italian cuisine and were at the core of a network of Japanese individuals who maintained a relationship with Italy. They thus occupied central positions within the Italian network in Japan. Furthermore, Nicola Zapetti, an American of Italian descent, opened Nicolas in Roppongi in 1956 (Whiting 2002).

Secondly, there were also restaurants, albeit few, managed by Japanese people who had knowledge of Italian food. For example, Takayasu Narimatsu, who had connections with those affiliated with the American army after the war, opened a restaurant specializing in spaghetti, Kabenoana. Kabenoana garnered a reputation as a restaurant that served spaghetti arranged in a Japanese style. Kabenoana was a pioneer of the many Italian restaurant franchise stores found in Japan. This restaurant played a significant role in making Italian food familiar to the Japanese public. In contrast, Chianti, an Italian restaurant in Roppongi, became popular as a place akin to a salon where artists and businessmen gathered from the 1960s onward. Chianti was opened by Mr. and Mrs. Kawazoe, who had lived in Italy (Ryouri Oukoku 2006).

Thirdly, there were indeed Japanese chefs, albeit small in number, who had gone to Italy to learn cooking. These chefs brought the prosperity of authentic Italian restaurants later on. For example, Haruko Horikawa traveled to Italy in 1932 as a maid working for the Japanese embassy and while there learned the local cuisine. Afterward, she became a chef for the restaurant Toscana in 1968, contributing to the proliferation of Italian regional cuisines in Japan (Horikawa 2002). Masaaki Honda (the founder of Capricciosa) in 1962, Toshiaki Yoshikawa in 1965 (Capitolino), and Mamoru Kataoka (Ristorante al Porto) in 1968 traveled to Italy. Toshiaki Yoshikawa and Masaaki Honda studied at ENALC, a state-run hotel school in Rome, where they gained the experience of working for hotels and restaurants in Italy. Upon returning home, they contributed to bringing Italian food to Japan.

The chefs who traveled to Italy during the early days made their way to Italy out of their longing to live and work abroad, rather than
from any previous experience of Italian food. For them, authentic Italian food was not something they had any way of knowing about. This period was a time in which the youth were interested in going abroad. Individual travel to foreign countries was liberalized in 1964, and the Tokyo Olympics (1964) and the Osaka Expo (1970) were held in succession.

These chefs who traveled to Italy during the early days and acquired the local culinary arts preached to their protégés the importance of seeing the “real” Italian cuisine. So what does “real” here refer to? What is referred to as “Italian cuisine” itself does not actually exist. Instead, it is said that only an aggregate of regional cuisines from various regions in Italy exists. The tradition and the locality are characteristic of Italian food; as such, cuisine particular to the area exists in each region. The standard menus in restaurants are very similar to homemade food, and there are no major differences in menus of restaurants within the same region.

Another characteristic of Italian regional cuisine is that there are slight differences in recipes, cooking processes, and flavors depending on the region, even with dishes that have the same name. Furthermore, alongside regional differences, there are also differences depending on the restaurant, the home, and the person preparing the food. The gradation in flavors is the substantial characteristic of Italian cuisine.

It is believed that many chefs wanted to see the “real” ingredients and food from local sites. Such pursuit of authenticity in Italian food has been valued highly among Japanese chefs. Among young chefs, it is believed that staying in Italy to learn the language, make friends, and deeply explore the ingredients particular to the region and food culture rooted in tradition were extremely significant experiences.

Up until the late 1970s, there were not many restaurants in Tokyo that served what can be called “authentic” Italian food. Although spaghetti and pizza had become commonplace dishes for the Japanese by that point, these dishes were passed on to Japan through the United States, and they used ingredients found in Japan and were arranged to fit the Japanese palate.

However, the Italian food industry in Japan saw rapid development in both quality and quantity in the 1980s. The Italian food industry in Japan experienced its greatest period of prosperity in the early 1990s when an “Italian food boom” took place. This boom was bolstered by many Japanese chefs who studied diligently in Italy and returned to work in Tokyo and other locations.
The Institutionalization of Overseas Local Training

This section will detail the process by which the labor migration of chefs from Japan to Italy became established. The process through which the local training system was established can be categorized into three phases: (1) the individual exploration period (late 1960s to mid-1980s), (2) the personal network period (mid-1980s onward), and (3) the establishment of a local training system (late 1980s onward).

The Individual Exploration Period (Late 1960s to Mid-1980s)

During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of Japanese chefs enrolled in vocational training schools for Italians, such as the ENALC national hotel school in Rome and the E. Maggia hotel school in Piedmont, where they learned the regional cuisine. After graduation, they found employment in restaurants and hotels in Italy. Furthermore, Shizuo Tsuji, the principal of the Tsuji Culinary Institute, sent young cooks to a Japanese-owned establishment serving Japanese cuisine, Roma Tokyo, organizing their work permits there; later they could go on to learn Italian cuisine in Italian restaurants.

Excluding the few exceptional cases mentioned above, Japanese cooks who wanted to learn the culinary arts in Italy before the mid-1980s normally had to find employment in restaurants by their own efforts. Such cooks, after arriving in Italy, visited restaurants and engaged in direct negotiations for employment. These negotiations were rarely successful, since Italian restaurant owners did not have experience with employing Japanese cooks; nor did the cooks have work permits.

Tsutomu Ochiai, the chairman of the Associazione Cuochi Cucina Italiana, or “Association of Chefs of Italian Cuisine” (ACCI), first went to Italy in 1978 on a side trip from France. Ochiai had studied French cuisine and was deeply impressed by the rustic local Roman cuisine that never seemed to lose its charm, even if eaten every day. From this experience, Ochiai decided to study Italian cuisine at a restaurant in Rome. Despite his resolve to find work in Rome, he found that it was extremely difficult to find a restaurant that would take him on. Finally, through the help of Italian friends, he found an establishment where he was able to work. He became the first Japanese ever to be hired by that restaurant.

Those who traveled to Italy during the early days constantly preached to the young cooks in training at their own restaurants in
Japan about the necessity of traveling to Italy and learning authentic Italian food locally. There are two possible factors behind such emphasis.

First, at that time, during the 1970s in Japan, Italian restaurants did not have easy access to ingredients and condiments used in Italian cuisine. The other factor comes from the characteristics of the cuisine itself. Italian cuisine is an aggregation of regional cuisines, and as such, the regional diversity is extremely rich. Dishes served at restaurants in each region derived from home cooking within that locale, with their recipes and cooking methods being very simple. Since they were dishes created in conditions of relative poverty, subtle but crucial balances of flavors emerged from the limited ingredients. Furthermore, there are subtle variations for the same dishes depending on the area, with people having a particular attachment for their region’s flavor. Therefore, just learning the recipes and knowing the cooking procedures are not enough to master the inherent flavor of the cuisine. The Japanese chefs who learned in Italy during the early days argued that if one does not understand the culture and tradition particular to each region, one cannot claim that they have learned that particular cuisine.

Upon returning to Japan, these chefs struggled to introduce traditional Italian cuisine to customers who had become accustomed to the over-boiled spaghetti that had been popularized before then and the pizzas made prevalent by Italian Americans. Thus, it was a significant task to entice customers to eat short pasta, and not just spaghetti, which the Japanese typically ordered. Additionally, they wanted the Japanese to eat Italian main dishes and not just pasta. The strategy for self-presentation that the first-generation chefs took was to avoid dishes that used pizza and spaghetti, the very food that had become familiar to the Japanese public.

The Personal Network Establishment Period (Mid-1980s Onward)

For Japanese chefs, learning the culinary arts in Europe has been a tradition that was started by the French cuisine chefs. Some chefs who learned Italian cuisine during the early days had gone to Europe to learn French cuisine and then switched to Italian cuisine.

It was during the 1980s that Italian cuisine started to receive drastically improved reviews from restaurant critics within the global market. Chefs such as Gualtiero Marchesi and Ezio Santini were praised for their attempt to reconstruct the traditional regional cuisines by employing innovative cooking skills and modern presentation
methods. Through these initiatives, dishes provided at high-class restaurants in Italy were able to gradually detach themselves from the shackles of tradition and locality.

Although ordinary restaurants in Italy continued presenting traditional menus rooted in the region, top-class restaurants, even in rural areas, added innovations to their ingredients and cooking methods. Furthermore, the cosmopolitan spirit of not being bound to the framework of traditional cuisine started to permeate the Italian cooking circle, with chefs incorporating ingredients and cooking techniques imported from places as varied as Japan and Spain.

During this same period when Italian cuisine saw a number of innovations, training for Japanese cooks in Italy became prevalent. Japanese cooks had high cooking skills and were particularly adept at preparing fish after their initial apprenticeship in Japan. They won the trust of chefs from high-class restaurants in Italy. With the increase of Japanese cooks who trained in Italy, personal networks of Japanese restaurant owner/chefs and Italian restaurant owners began to form around the mid-1980s. Thanks to these networks, some Japanese cooks found their first employment in Italy, through owners of restaurants in Japan where they had worked.

In the late 1980s, personal networks of Japanese cooks started to form in Italy. Japanese cooks kept in contact with each other and started to exchange information on new employment opportunities. In December 1988, the first informal gathering of Japanese cooks in Italy (Nihonjin-kai) was held in Milan. Such meetings were regularly held until 1999.10

Distinctive features of professional cooking include apprenticeship, the portability of the skill, and career mobility on a global scale (Ferguson and Zukin 1998; Leschziner 2007). The Japanese chefs who went to Italy in the late 1980s worked in cutting-edge ristoran-
tes in the country, learning about regional cuisines as they traveled through Italy. They attempted to learn preparation methods of diverse local dishes of each region by going from one Michelin-starred restaurant to the next in a short period of time. For this reason, a normal duration of employment at a restaurant was several weeks to several months.

Yoshimi Hidaka is a typical example of a Japanese cook who traveled to Italy in the late 1980s. After working at a French restaurant, Hidaka went on to serve as a chef at an Italian restaurant, where the owner introduced him to a training position in Italy.11 Hidaka spent three years in Italy working at fourteen different restaurants, many of them with starred Michelin ratings. Between jobs, Hidaka sampled
Italy’s local cuisines on walking excursions in different parts of the country. When Acqua Pazza, the restaurant where Hidaka worked as a chef, opened, it was exclusively staffed by employees with experience working in Italy. The timing of those who returned to Japan coincided with the beginning of the economic bubble period of the early 1990s, and there was a booming demand among young people for restaurant cuisine. Many of these employees became chefs at Italian restaurants in Tokyo and incorporated regional dishes into their menus.

For Japanese cooks, the experience of working at top Italian restaurants was both an attractive opportunity to learn cutting-edge Italian cuisine and a step toward obtaining a favorable position as a chef or owner upon returning home. The cooks who returned from Italy became models of success, and young Italian-cuisine cooks came to see training in Italy as a necessary condition for career advancement. In fact, cooks who have training experience in Italy have been able to obtain higher positions in the kitchen than those with long domestic experience. For these reasons, young cooks who have studied at authentic Italian restaurants in Tokyo have come to plan to train in Italy at an early stage of their careers.

**The Local Training System Establishment Period (Late 1980s Onward)**

In the late 1980s and 1990s, multiple cooking schools were established in Italy that targeted Japanese students. These schools allowed for many Japanese people to participate in yearlong training programs. By doing so Japanese cooks could easily obtain student visas and residence permits (with which they could work for a set amount of time at a restaurant). Although in the 1990s and 2000s, cooks who used their personal networks to go to Italy remained the majority, more than fifty cooks every year have used these training programs. Culinary schools for Japanese people were established in Italy because the needs of the restaurant industry in Japan coincided with the desire for regional promotion in Italy.

In this section I discuss the opening of three such establishments: (1) Bunryu Co. Ltd.’s Italian cuisine school, (2) the Italian Culinary Institute for Foreigners (ICIF), and (3) Italian Culinary Tours (ICT). This story begins in 1987 with Bunryu Co. Ltd.’s establishment of an Italian cuisine cooking school for Japanese in Siena. Subsequently, ICIF was established in 1991 and began accepting Japanese students soon after in 1992. ICT opened training courses aimed specifically at Japanese in 1999.
Nobuo Nishimura established the Bunryu Italian culinary school in Siena in 1987. He studied Italian at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, where he read and was impressed by the writings of Antonio Gramsci. Thereafter, introducing Italian culture to Japan became his lifework. Aiming for more comprehensive cultural exchange, Nishimura founded Bunryu Co. Ltd. Its projects are diverse. In addition to importing books, it creates materials for publication, compiles dictionaries, and so on. Nishimura also has a strong interest in popularizing Italian cuisine. In 1979, he opened Ristorante Bunryu in Takadanobaba, Tokyo, and embarked on a project to introduce Italian cuisine to Japan.

Nishimura began to work on a cuisine training system as a business project in 1969 when he held a one-month training at the ENALC, a national hotel school in Rome. This training program targeted nutritionists, head hotel chefs, and food researchers and was held several times. However, the ENALC Hotel shrank in scale due to Italian educational reforms, and its cooking training gradually stopped. Therefore, the project was halted.

Later Nishimura relaunched the project when Father don Tito, an influential person in Siena, approached him with a local development plan to invite Japanese people to the area. At first, the idea was to invite musicians and artists, but Nishimura proposed to train people in Italian cuisine. In this way, a culinary school was jointly established. When the culinary school in Siena was subsequently closed in February 2004 due to its leader’s old age, the school’s youngest teacher, Gianluca Pardini, continued the project by newly establishing the International Academy of Italian Cuisine in Lucca. To this day, Bunryu continues to send over twenty trainees per year to this school.

ICIF (based in Costigliore d’Asti, Piedmont) is an Italian cuisine training school for foreigners that was established with the support of the Piedmontese government. It accepts primarily Americans, but there are many Japanese cooks there as well, with the first arriving in 1992. Hiroo Nozawa, the Japanese-side manager of ICIF training, says that the organizers on the Italian side established this school with the hope of promoting the area. Costigliore d’Asti is a small township of approximately six thousand people. It reaps considerable economic benefits by accepting many trainees from countries around the world. The ICIF training facility uses an old, renovated castle. Half of the renovation costs were provided by grants from the European Union. The main industry of the area is agricultural products, primarily wine. It is hoped that the training project will contribute to the rejuvenation of the area.
An ICT culinary training school especially targeted at Japanese was opened at Rosmini College (Domodossola, Piedmont) in 1999\(^{13}\). Daniela Patriarca, a former Italian staff member of ICIF, established ICT. The Japanese-side contact is a company represented by Kazuko Nagamoto that recruits Japanese cooks and provides training support. Unlike ICIF, all trainees are Japanese. For Rosmini College, accepting Japanese cook trainees contributes to business stability. While ICIF only accepts cooks with professional experience, ICT is open to trainees without any cooking background.

The school has one-year or half-year long-term training courses as well as short-term ones that are held for less than a month. Normally in a one-year training program, cooking practice, lectures, and language classes are conducted at the training facility for approximately two months. During this time trainees stay at associated lodging facilities. The remaining ten months usually consist of training at one of the many restaurants for trainees throughout Italy. The cost is approximately 1 million to 1.3 million yen per trainee, although there are fluctuations. Since the practice at restaurants is engaged in not as labor but as training, trainees are not paid any wages in principle. Instead, the training restaurants are contractually obligated to provide room and board to trainees.

**Japanese Cooks as Guest Workers**

Before the 1980s, Italian restaurants had almost no experience hiring Japanese cooks. Japanese cooks went to Italy without a visa and remained for long periods, in effect being illegal residents. Normally, trainees lived in shared rooms and had to subsist minimally, without even electronics such as televisions and washing machines. They were forced to work long shifts, of 12 hours or more, in restaurants for wages extremely low compared to those in Japan.

Starting in the 1980s, Italy changed from a country from which people emigrated to one that accepted immigrants. Societal problems due to the acceptance of immigrants became apparent in the country in the latter half of the 1980s. While there were legal regulations before then, they were not necessarily enforced, which provided many loopholes. Japanese cooks could be hired for comparatively low wages as highly fluid workers. Above all, for restaurants in resort areas with a long off-season, Japanese constituted a convenient labor force.

However, starting in the late 1980s, the administrative control of foreign workers was gradually strengthened in Italy. By the latter half of the decade, in large cities such as Milan and Rome, it was already
effectively impossible for foreigners to work unless they had a student visa and a residence permit that allowed them to enroll in school.

In Italy, the management of foreign workers is, in practice, carried out by local police. In small countryside communities, often restaurant owners have strong connections with people affiliated with police and local power-holders. Furthermore, upscale Italian restaurants are more numerous outside of cities. For these reasons, there continued to be restaurants that would accept Japanese chefs in rural agricultural areas.

In the 1990s it became a greater risk for Italian restaurant owners to hire Japanese cooks working illegally. This was because the regulation of foreign workers had gradually become stricter. By 2012, 7.4 percent of the total Italian population was foreign citizens, and they became regarded as taking away job opportunities from Italians amid a high unemployment rate (ISTAT). The government pushed forward with legislation to tighten restrictions on foreign immigrants and came to regulate foreigners more strictly than before. In 1998, the Turco-Napolitano Law (March 6, 1998, no. 40) went into effect, by which systematic acceptance of foreigners was strengthened and infrastructure was put in place to integrate immigrants into society. Furthermore, in 2002 the Bossi-Fini Law (July 30, 2002, no. 189) went into force, and labor by foreigners came to be strictly restricted (Zanfrini and Kluth 2008). The law prescribed fines for business owners who illegally hired foreigners without a work permit.

For this reason, accepting Japanese cooks who went through the training system became very advantageous for restaurant owners as well. Most trainees must return to Japan within one or two years, when their work visa expires. Nonetheless, some cooks who form trusting relationships with restaurant chefs and owners have ended up working in Italy for long periods of over five years while trying to learn traditional local cuisine. This is because they think it is hard to acquire the skills to prepare such food within a short period of time. As a result, the tendency for long-term resident cooks to stay at restaurants in rural or small cities has grown stronger. This is also because restaurant owners in small communities have strong ties to locally influential people and have been able, in various ways, to avoid the strong regulation of foreign workers.

**Diversification of Business Conditions**

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) define the concept of the organizational field as “those organizations which, in the aggregate, constitute
a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (148). The organizational fields of Japan’s Italian cuisine had formed by the end of the 1980s, if not earlier. In 1989, the association of professional cooks of Italian cuisine, ACCI (Associazione Cuochi Cucina Italiana), was founded in order to promote authentic Italian cuisine for Japanese customers. The media attention given to star chefs and restaurants increased sharply. Many journalists who specialized in Italian foods appeared. In the 1990s, import restrictions were finally lifted on ingredients such as prosciutto, porcini, and white truffles. Many importers started businesses involved with Italian cuisine.

In the early 1990s, an Italian cuisine boom took place in Japan. The chefs who had returned to Japan in this era heralded the concept of “authentic” and “genuine” cuisine in special cooking features in the media. In addition to stressing to young cooks the importance of studying in Italy, these chefs conveyed the special characteristics of Italian cuisine to their customers. They explained that there are a variety of short pastas besides the spaghetti loved by the Japanese, and that fresh pasta is eaten traditionally in the northern part of Italy.

These Japanese chefs strongly desired to grasp the essence of Italian cuisine rooted in its native origin. A growing number of cooks stressed not only the appearance and recipes of the food but also the cultural background that created the local cuisine and the importance of interaction with the people who created the food. Although these chefs’ discourses were unable to change the tastes of their ordinary Japanese customers, they made many young cooks realize the importance of fully experiencing every aspect of local Italian cuisine.

The chefs who traveled to Italy during this time and later earned a reputation in Japan took on the following strategy for obtaining cooking techniques. These chefs went from job to job in many of the most reputable and representative restaurants from the northern to the southern portion of Italy. They attempted to learn about Italian cuisine at the most cutting-edge restaurants. During their days off, these future chefs tried foods from the reputable restaurants in various parts of Italy and attempted to gather as many menus as possible from famous restaurants in these regions. They then absorbed the local cooking techniques and ingredient combinations. Upon returning to Tokyo, they offered dishes that combined what they had gleaned with their own arrangements.

As a result, many Italian restaurants in Japan offer menus centered on seafood, dishes that skillfully incorporate Japanese ingredients, and
light dishes that have less fat and salt than the local cuisine in Italy. Furthermore, unlike typical menus in Italy, it became common for Japanese menus to have courses that combined cuisines from different regions.

Due to the economic expansion during the bubble economy, the Italian boom of the 1990s, the relaxation of trade regulations, and the domestic production of Western vegetables, Japanified Italian cuisine prospered in Japan, even after the collapse of the bubble economy. At the beginning of the nineties Italian boom, discussions about Italian cuisine could be seen frequently on television and in magazines. Italian cuisine was portrayed as a simple cuisine that utilized raw materials, was appealing to Japanese palates, and could be treated as a casual cuisine that could be eaten daily. However, Japanese Italian cuisine was simultaneously in the process of distancing itself from actual traditional Italian cuisine. One major influence was the fact that the majority of customers in Japan’s Italian restaurants were women. Japanese women customers tended to look for an extraordinary atmosphere and dishes served in small portions but beautifully. They also did not care for entrails.

Leschziner (2009, 12) noted, “Chefs create their culinary styles and reflexively understand themselves from their particular positions in the field.” Italian restaurant culinary styles in Tokyo underwent changes partly caused by and connected to other changes taking place in regard to the national economic condition and the context of the field. Once the early-nineties boom period passed, the Italian cuisine businesses within Japan entered a period of saturation, and the competition intensified. Businesses began to spiral into a pattern whereby the average number of customers would decrease due to the long recession. Furthermore, capital for starting new businesses declined. As a result, the number of newly opened restaurants that took the form of more casual trattorias and wine bars increased. Simultaneously, in order to avoid price competition and to receive media attention, many shops were required to diversify the dishes they offered. In recent years, restaurants that have strongly promoted special regional flavors such as those of Rome and Tuscany have received media attention.

**Path Dependence and Reciprocal Development**

The development of the Italian cuisine business in Japan was supported by the maturation of the Japanese consumer market beginning in the latter half of the 1980s. The individuals who were supplying Tokyo with this cutting-edge cuisine at this time were the cooks who
studied in Italy from the latter half of the 1980s to the 1990s. The availability in Japan of these cooks who had extensively mastered these culinary skills was the main structural factor supporting the Italian cuisine boom. Behind the creation of this situation was the education of pioneering cooks in the 1960s and the 1970s, as well as the entrepreneurs who planned to bring Italian culture into Japan.

This research stresses that the organizational field of Italian cuisine in Japan followed a path-dependent development (Aoki 1988; David 1985). It is impossible to explain the development of the Japanese Italian restaurant business in terms of macro factors alone, such as the maturity of the domestic market and the globalization of trade and labor markets. The creation of an Italian training system for Japanese cooks, the formation of an ethos that always places importance on authentic Italian cuisine, the establishment of networks that connect Italy and Japan, and the accumulation of human resources who acquired the techniques of Italian cuisine have been identified as the fundamental factors that supported the development of Italian cuisine in Japan.

As described above, the development of these human resources was supported by a specialized and institutionalized process not seen in other cuisines in Japan. Importance should be placed on the timing of factors that led to the institutionalization of training programs in Italy. For Italy, Japanese cooks were a resource that satisfied a high level of demand in labor during the growth period of the restaurant business. Although regulations regarding foreign workers had tightened, Italian restaurant managers were able to guarantee a stable labor force by establishing a training organization that could acquire student visas.

More recently, the institution of training or work in Italy has changed drastically. As Hareven (1993) points out, the careers of workers differ depending on their timing in entering a developing industry. Some Japanese cooks already recognized the necessity for training abroad even before the Italian cuisine boom in Japan during the first half of the 1990s. For Japanese cooks who returned home during this period, investment in training was rewarded by the boom’s demand. The ongoing institutionalization of training abroad within Italy, however, cannot be understood from the demands of the Italian restaurant business in Japan alone. This institutionalization of training abroad was established through the mutually beneficial relationship between the restaurant business and Italian regional communities.

An increasing number of cooks acquired work permits in Italy as we entered the 2000s. Many people also were entrusted to be chefs and second chefs in restaurants in Italy over a period of more than
ten years. However, it is not as easy as before for Japanese cooks to return to Japan and get a job. Today, even if Japanese chefs receive high evaluations in Italy, they can no longer count on receiving good offers from Japanese businesses. The flavors of traditional local Italian cuisine do not necessarily always coincide with the tastes of Japanese customers, either. However, no one hates creating cuisine arranged to fit Japanese tastes more than a chef who has sharpened his or her abilities through a long stay in Italy. For this reason, there are not many establishments that will employ these individuals who are fixated on their own personal style.

Forming a chef’s abilities in Japan has seen a sudden jump in costs involved in the pursuit of authentic cuisine. As Mériot (2006) pointed out regarding the difficulty of remaking an occupational identity among French cooks who work in everyday restaurants, Japanese cooks who returned to Japan after working a long time in Italy have difficulty readapting to the working environment and to Japanese customers. The more the chefs become invested in their pursuit of local Italian cuisine, the more difficult it becomes for them to form a global career. In the organizational field of the restaurant industry in Japan, there is great respect for those chefs who trained abroad for a long period of time. But a long-term stay in Italy is an investment that runs the high risk of sacrificing commercial success.

Notes

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1. A search of a Japanese phone directory website, iTownpage (http://itp.ne.jp), with the words “italian restaurant (イタリア料理店),” returns 9,870 establishments as of January 14, 2015, more than the number of French restaurants (7,842).

2. A particularly large number of Japanese cooks work in Italy’s Piedmont region, and according to my own research, among the 164 restaurants listed in Gambero Rosso’s Ristoranti d’Italia 2013 for that region, at least 25 restaurants regularly employ Japanese cooks. Among these, there are more than a few restaurants where all cooks aside from the chef are Japanese.

3. Vissani stated, “I don’t want Japanese people to cook Italian food in Japan when they go back there after only seeing the surface of the traditional food culture within a short period of time, nor can they cook Italian food with just that. [. . .] The essence of Italian food is the variation of the flavors. It is different from French cuisine in which one can make by learning the skills and using them” (Cooking Kingdom, p. 66, vol. 7, 2006).
4. The magazine for professional chefs, Senmon Ryouri (専門料理), published by Shibata Shoten, seldom published articles about Italian cuisine prior to 1990.

5. Interview with Hiroo Nozawa, the representative director of ICIF Japan, on November 24, 2009.


7. It was difficult to acquire vegetables common in Italy, such as arugula and cavolo nero, and only a few varieties of wines and olive oils could be acquired. It was only from the 1990s onward that prosciutto and white truffles came to be imported into Japan.

8. For example, Tokuzo Akiyama, who became the head chef for the imperial family, traveled to France in 1909 and learned his skills from top-rated restaurants at the time. Since the 1970s, when travel overseas became liberalized, French cuisine chefs started to receive local training in Switzerland and France.

9. Chefs such as Enoteca Pinchiorri, Gualtiero Marchesi, and Dal Pescatore established the reputation, giving Italy attention as the homeland of state-of-the-art cooking in the world.

10. The magazine Senmon Ryouri in March 1989 reported that twenty-nine cooks and three waiters who worked in Italy participated in the meeting. The last organizer of the meeting talked about the end of the meeting in the interview with the author.

11. Interview with Yoshimi Hidaka on August 8, 2012.

12. According to an interview with the Japanese managers who organize the training programs, over two thousand trainees (including short-term ones) have used the three schools as of 2009.


REFERENCES


PART III

GLOBAL-LOCAL CULINARY POLITICS
Chapter 8

The Invention of Local Food

Eric C. Rath

Local food is a concept that seems to define itself: the ingredients available for consumption in a given zone in contrast to foodstuffs that are either ubiquitous or are found in different places. Discovering local foods would appear to be as easy as following the contours of a map or simply drawing new boundaries. But in Japan the category of “local food” has a history as a way of recounting the points of contact between diet, place, and identity that not only is quite recent but also reveals how what designates a local food is more than simply the ingredients in a particular place but also a project of national and even transnational culinary politics.

Local foods could be assumed to encapsulate the traditional modes of eating in specific zones, but in Japan the words for local food are even younger designations than those for national cuisine. The earliest references to words signifying Japanese cuisine appear in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. However, words for “local food”—kyō do shoku and kyō do ryō ri—date to the 1920s. The novelty of local food should not be too surprising, since the conditions the words describe would have been meaningless in an age when nearly all of the foodstuffs eaten were produced and consumed locally, which was largely the case for most of Japan before 1930, when diet and food production remained more similar to the nineteenth century than to the postwar era. Food scholar Ishige Naomichi presents the example of his grandmother’s rural household near Yamagata City as typical of the way people in rural areas ate in the 1930s much as they
had during the early modern period (1600–1868): there was hardly a distinction between breakfast, lunch, and dinner; most of the side dishes were vegetables, and only one of these would be served to accompany miso soup, pickles, and the main staple, a grain mixture of six parts barley to four parts rice (Ishige 2009, 214–15). Before 1930 farmers used organic rather than chemical fertilizers and they threshed and milled grain by hand rather than with electric machines; tenant farmers continued to pay their rents in kind, like their forbearers had once offered feudal tribute (Arizono 2007, 1).

The Japanese words for “local food”—kyōdo shoku and kyōdo ryōri—are similar but have different nuances. Kyōdo ryōri may be the earlier expression, but kyōdo shoku was the term that was used most often in publications before and during World War II. But, depending on the context today, both kyōdo shoku and kyōdo ryōri should be translated not simply as prosaic “local food” but as “local cuisine,” to indicate that what these terms now designate is quite different from what they meant in the era when the words originated. Before and during World War II, kyōdo shoku and kyōdo ryōri stood for a diet of coarse grains, rustic ingredients, and rural recipes that many urbanites found unpalatable. Conversely, today the same terms reference tasty regional delicacies that evoke nostalgia, nature, sustainable agriculture, and other positive nuances. This chapter examines how local food went from being backward, bland, and peripheral to becoming a plethora of gourmet cuisines viewed as central to Japan’s national food cultures. As we will see, this changing politics of local food in Japan was not really local at all; instead it was led by state and national actors responding to the international and national environment, including wartime food shortages, postwar globalization, and the recent crises surrounding the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

**Premodern Japan: Local Delicacies without Local Food**

If cuisine can be defined as “a particular kind of talk about cooking,” then the categories of local food, local cuisine, and regional cuisine were just as absent from premodern culinary discourse as the concept of a national cuisine (Ray 2008, 289). Early modern Japan saw the development of a complex cuisine based upon a recognition of the power of food to signify religious, literary, and artistic meanings with rules for cooking and etiquette grounded in and disseminated by a highly prolific publishing industry that printed hundreds of volumes about cooking, menus, and other writings on gastronomy. The most
elaborate articulations of premodern cuisine were found in the banquets for the aristocratic and warrior elite and the texts that described these feasts, but the culinary rituals associated with seasonal observations practiced by all levels of society in both urban and rural zones reveal how foodstuffs in traditional Japanese culinary culture could take on multiple symbolic associations while still providing nourishment.6

Notwithstanding these sophisticated fantasies with food in premodern Japan, the first time that cooking and eating are imagined in reference to a nation occurred with the emergence of a modern Japanese state in the Meiji period (1868–1912). In India, by contrast, local and regional cuisines contributed to the formation of a modern national cuisine, as Arjun Appadurai has described (Appadurai 1988).7 But in the case of Japan, select dishes—not regional cuisines—were incorporated into modern Japan’s culinary repertoire, and by and large these recipes were from urban areas, especially Tokyo. Sushi, soba, and tempura—the main edifices of Japanese cuisine—were representative of the diet of Edo (Tokyo), not of outlying provinces. Even the preferred method of first boiling and steaming rice that is programed into Japanese rice cookers today was an urban way of preparing the grain that in rural homes was usually boiled in a caldron to make porridges. The first designations of regional styles of cooking, even such prominent examples as Kyoto cuisine (Kyō ri), date to the Meiji period, while the term for Kyoto cuisine was not widely used until the Taishō era (1912–1926) (Kumakura 2007, 124). Regionality was not generally associated with Japanese cooking until after the mid-1930s (Yano 2007, 27).

The Rise of Rural Food in Prewar Japan

Lacking a premodern equivalent, the Japanese phrases for “local food”—Kyōdo ri and Kyōdo shoku—were coined to describe the foodstuffs in not just any locale, but in rural zones, reflecting the original meaning of Kyōdo, a word that dates to as early as the eighth century and refers to the countryside. In the early twentieth century, Kyōdo came to suggest a personal connection to lands outside the urban core: Kyōdo signified the locale where one was born and raised.8 The exact boundaries of the zone expressed by the word Kyōdo are undefined but refer to a larger setting than one’s “native village” (Kyōri, Furusato). One is tempted to hypothesize that the change in the meaning of the term Kyōdo is connected to the doubling of the urban population in Japan in the first three decades of the twentieth century as people who left the farm for the city reflected on the rural life that they left behind.
Beginning in the 1910s with the work of the founding father of the study of Japanese folklore, Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962), and reaching a culmination in 1934 with the organization of the Center for Research of Rural Lifestyles (kyōdo seikatsu kenkyūjo), native ethnologists following Yanagita identified the rural kyōdo—particularly the most remote mountain and fishing villages—for ethnographic surveys. Yanagita and his colleagues averred that vestiges of Japan’s national past lingered in places far from the influence of advanced urban centers (Christy 2012, 96–99). Zones designated as “local” were backward, and the same was true of the diet of these places. “Local foods” (kyōdo shoku) were defined in negative terms by the absence of soy sauce, sugar, and rice as a staple grain (Yano 2007, 25, 27). Local foods, in other words, lacked the ingredients that people in cities considered necessary for a “civilized” life (Francks 2009, 88). Rural staple grains such as millet (kibi), barnyard millet (bie), and foxtail millet (awa) were “discriminated foods,” marking those who consumed them as stupid and contemptible (Masuda 2011, 2). For city dwellers, the rural diet might appear to have little to commend it other than the inventive but unappetizing ways that farmers coped with deprivation.

But the monthly magazine *Light of the Household* (*Ie no hikari*), founded by the National Agricultural Cooperative in 1925, presented the diet of the countryside in a more positive light, one respectful of the publication’s rural readership. In 1932 *Light of the Household* undertook a study of rural diets, convening a panel of six experts who surveyed the spending and consumption habits of 30 farm households in Tokyo prefecture. The specialists determined that rural cooking was nutritious and could provide inspiration to improve the diet in other parts of Japan. Based upon such observations and with input from the burgeoning field of nutritional science in Japan, *Light of the Household* sought to foster a “new rural cooking” (shin nōson ryōri) that would combine rustic culinary knowhow and local ingredients with modern cooking habits and the science of dietetics. New rural cooking was intended to transplant to the countryside the culinary dexterity and concern for nutrition found in middle-class urban households while at the same time to provide a way to disseminate local wisdom about foodstuffs and their uses from one rural zone to another (Yano 2007, 38–39, 42).

Knowledge of the ways to use native ingredients and techniques to economize on rice were exactly what the national government was looking for as it sought to address problems of wartime shortages in the late 1930s stemming from Japan’s military campaigns on the continent. Limitations on polishing rice and price controls on brown rice began in 1939 with the enactment of the National General
Mobilization Law (Bay 2012, 128). Rationing of sugar, charcoal, firewood, and milk started in 1940, while civilians were exhorted to view “luxury as the enemy” and stop making frivolous purchases (Ehara, Ishikawa, and Higashiyotsuyanagi 2009, 266; Cohen 1949, 362). In the same year, political parties were dissolved into the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRRA, Taisei Yokusankai), creating a support network for government policy modeled after Hitler’s Nazi Party. One of the first acts of the IRRA was to define a “national people’s cuisine” (kokuminshoku), a diet for the home front supporting the war effort. A 1942 IRAA publication defined national people’s cuisine as “food appropriate to the needs of the lives of civilians during war” and enumerated the following principles of what such a cuisine should look like:

1. The portions for national people’s cuisine are determined according to age, gender, and the amount of physical labor.
2. The ingredients for foods and their amounts are determined following the food policies of our nation and with the goal of self-sufficiency.
3. It is essential that the national people’s cuisine as the food of all the people is in accord with the climate and natural conditions of various places and that it has the ability to adapt so that it can use ingredients that are appropriate to the seasons.
4. The price should be affordable so that it is widely available to the general populace.
5. The goal is to use all resources. Thus, one tries to reduce the amount discarded, and attempts to prevent the loss of nutrients in processing and cooking (Taisei Yokusankai Bunkabu 1942, 28–29).

Self-sufficiency, care about nutrition, and the attempt to maximize the nutritive values of foods used were key points for national people’s cuisine. Such ideals notwithstanding, the diet on the home front gradually came to be defined solely in negative terms by the reduction of rationed foodstuffs including white rice, soy sauce, miso, and sugar. The previously cited IRAA publication went on to advocate that rice should be replaced in the diet with other grains and potatoes as staple foods, but that was already occurring by 1940 (ibid., 36). Wartime deprivation meant that the reified national people’s cuisine was becoming closer to the ways that rural diets had once been identified.

To provide concrete examples and inspiration for the new national people’s cuisine and to try to find solutions to the problem of food shortages, the central government sponsored two countrywide surveys
of local foods. The first of these studies was undertaken in 1941 at
the bequest of the IRAA’s Department for the Direction of National
Lifestyle, which contracted with the Popular Traditions Association
(minkan denshō no kai) to help contrive a national people’s cuisine
inspired from rural foods. The Popular Traditions Association was
the academic organization for ethnologists in Japan, a group estab-
lished to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of Yanagita Kunio and led
by his disciples. Native ethnologists had pioneered the study of rural
locales, and their 1941 survey aimed to use eating habits as a means of
understanding national psychology, as opposed to focusing solely on
how rural foods could contribute to a national people’s cuisine. Con-
sequently, most of the data in their reports provided relatively little
concrete advice on how local foods could invigorate national people’s
cuisine or help in the war effort.10

Japan’s domestic food supply only worsened after the completion
of the scholars’ study. Rationing of eggs, fish, rice, and wheat, which
began on a large scale in 1941, became systematized in the 1942 Food
Control Law that gave the central government power over the pur-
chase, distribution, and sale of foods including sugar and rice and other
grains. In the same year, the IRAA promoted brown rice; and wheat,
barley, and other grains began to be used to dilute rice rations. In 1943
the IRAA undertook to increase potato production, and as white and
sweet potatoes became increasingly important sources of food energy,
the tubers were re-categorized from vegetables to staple foods (Ehara,
Ishikawa, and Higashiyotsuyanagi 2009, 277; Johnston 1953, 82).

In 1943 the Ministry of Agriculture established the Association for
the Centralization of Food Resources, which in the year of its creation
charged the agricultural economics departments of the five impe-
rial universities with another study of local food to last for six months
beginning in the autumn of 1943 (Ichikawa 1996, 4). The study
was published in December 1944 as Research on Local Food in Japan
(Honpō kyōdo shoku no kenkyū) (Chūō Shokuryō Kyōryokukai, 1944).
The aim of the project was not simply to report on food culture in the
countryside, as the native ethnologists had, but also to mobilize rural
food for the war effort. The introduction announced, “We undertook
a survey of local food (kyōdo shoku), to clarify an ideal form of regional
cuisine, which when augmented through improvements from the field
of nutrition, will be appropriate to the conditions of warfare” (ibid., ii).
Faculty from the five imperial universities were left to devise their own
research methods, format, and scope of research. But in contrast to the
earlier study by folklorists, which examined a diverse range of foodways
and customs, the universities’ study had a much more narrowly defined

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mandate. According to the prologue, for each local food, the universities were supposed to record (1) the name of the foodstuff; (2) social, economic, and political factors that gave rise to the food’s origin; (3) methods of preparation; (4) how the food was gathered; (5) how foodstuffs were distributed locally; (6) methods of cultivation; and (7) the nutritional value of the food in local diets (ibid., 1–2).

The emphasis on practical outcomes rather than theory is evident in Tokyo Imperial University’s report, which explained in its preface, “In our survey, we avoided establishing a fixed definition of local food; instead we looked to various customs existing as time honored traditions in every locale, and we limited ourselves to staple foods that were substitutes or supplements to rice, which is the national staple food.” While purporting to deny a definition of rural food, the Tokyo Imperial University study nonetheless affirmed that local food was characterized by a non-rice diet harkening back to depictions of local food from the 1930s (ibid., 3). The study also reveals an urban bias in the assumption that a non-rice diet was non-normative.

After introducing the locations where the survey occurred, Tokyo Imperial University organized its study by foodstuffs and how they were prepared: flour-based foods like noodles, cooked grains, and tubers. Later sections made observations about these foods according to the seven aforementioned directives; then the report introduced the twelve locations surveyed. Kyushu Imperial University took a similar approach in its study, introducing foodstuffs and then following up with descriptions of the locales. Besides staple grains, Kyushu Imperial University described how to cook snakes, locusts, and silkworms, which its report presented as “local foods” in Hiroshima prefecture (ibid., 411–12).

The researchers from the five imperial universities interpreted local food as deviations from the presumed national norm of eating rice as a staple, and they saw geography as the cause for these variances. Local foods, according to the five imperial universities’ reports, reflected adaptations of the Japanese race to different environments. The discussion of local food by the survey team from Tōhoku Imperial University in Sendai explained,

From the beginning food takes on particular characteristics depending on race, and these set characteristics are greatly related to such things as the climate where the foodstuffs are produced and the topography. For instance, rice, which is the staple food of our Yamato race, certainly has an intimate relationship to the weather and geography of our land, making it something that did not appear by accident. Consequently, the more closely that we examine this point we find in our country there are many
regional gradations of not only staple foods but also subsidiary foodstuffs according to various regional climates and topographical conditions.

In contrast to diets found in cities, which were sites of consumption but not of food production, “local foods (kyōdo shoku) are created from the foodways that arise from places where production and living are intertwined,” according to the report (ibid., 435). Researchers from Tōhoku Imperial University stated that the most significant local foods in northern Japan were barnyard millet, foxtail millet, and buckwheat. The university’s study explicated methods of cultivating, harvesting and cooking these grains, describing their nutritional value (ibid., 599). Kyoto Imperial University selected the mountainous Hida region in northern Gifu prefecture due to the variety of well-known indigenous food customs there. In the scholarly literature of the period, Hida was synonymous with a non-rice diet, a place where locals relied on grains such as barnyard millet, foxtail millet, and buckwheat, and on sources of starch that included chestnuts, horse chestnuts, and acorns. At a popular level in the 1930s and 1940s, the rugged mode of living in mountainous Hida, nicknamed “Japan’s Tibet,” was associated with a primitive, almost simian lifestyle (Ema 1998, 1, 9). If the Yamato race relied on rice as a staple, by implication Japanese living in remote mountainous areas like Hida, where rice cultivation was not possible, could be deemed primitive, if not subhuman.

Efforts of government-sponsored food researchers to publish their work even at the final phase of World War II did not solve the country’s food problems. More than half of Japan’s war casualties died from starvation. Conditions at home worsened even after surrender, as historian Barak Kushner describes. “When Japan surrendered in August 1945, its food supply, perilously dependent on rice, reached only sixty percent of its prewar levels. Conditions continued to decline in 1946.” Kushner elaborates, “In the first year after the war ended, people died at Tokyo and Ueno rail stations at an average of about twenty a day. In Osaka, about sixty people a month perished from starvation” (Kushner 2012, 154,161). Japan’s GDP did not return to prewar levels until 1953.

**The Rise of Local Cuisine in the Postwar Era**

The category of local food took on new meanings in the 1950s and 1960s when many Japanese left the countryside and agricultural work. From 1960 to 1975, each year approximately seventy to eighty thousand workers found jobs outside the agricultural sector, reducing the number of people engaged in farming over the course of those same
15 years by some 58 percent (Kimura 2010, 359). Japan’s urban population grew from 38 percent in 1950 to 75 percent by 1975 (Gordon 2003, 251). Not only did these urban arrivals modify their eating habits, over time they also developed new attitudes about the foods in the countryside that they left behind. Nutritionist Ura Riyo, who participated in wartime government-sponsored studies of local food, authored one of the first postwar books on local food not by traveling around Japan but by interviewing colleagues from different parts of the country while studying at the Institute of Public Health in Tokyo in 1951–1952 (Ura 1961). From the late 1950s, researchers like Ura Riyo became acutely interested in trying to document local food, given the rapid and profound transformation of the Japanese diet, as measured in the increased variety of foods consumed.

The sense that Japan’s entire dietary culture and especially local ways of eating were entering a new phase of development is evident from an Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō) survey conducted in 1962–1964. The forward to the study indicates, “There is greater consciousness of the protection of the properties of folk culture in the general public, but due to rapid social developments in recent years, daily life is transforming, and the traditional lifestyle and customs of our country are swiftly changing; tangible and intangible cultural properties are quickly disappearing” (Bunkachō 1988, unnumbered introduction). Food was only one dimension of folk culture surveyed by Department of Education personnel under the auspices of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. With the aim of cultural preservation, researchers conducted fieldwork in thirty locales in each of Japan’s prefectures. The remarkable accomplishment of the survey was the creation of twelve maps of Japan’s regional food culture, which gave a name to the study: The Atlas of Japanese Folk Culture (Nihon minzoku chizu). The twelve maps display local variations in the consumption of staple grains; foods made from flour such as noodles; the ratio of rice to other grains consumed; different names for lunch; contents of morning meals, of afternoon meals, and of box lunches (bentō); and local occupations. The variations were explored in further detail in an interpretive essay that was followed by descriptions of foodways in the localities surveyed.

Even as the study was undertaken, the data in the Atlas of Japanese Folk Culture was quickly becoming an anachronism. The very year that the study began saw the amount of rice consumed annually per capita in Japan reach its highest point ever at 171 kg. Distinguishing local food on the basis of how much rice as opposed to other staple grains consumed became meaningless after rice became Japan’s main staple grain nationally. From the late 1950s, regional and class differences in the diet were much less pronounced than before World
War II, and the daily diet was becoming standardized (Ishige 2009, 178,183). Knowledge of many local foods was also fading, according to a major study in 1972 by food scholar Matsushita Sachiko and Yoshikawa Seiji, a Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries employee. The authors asked 677 food researchers, educators, and students in courses about food and home economics to identify 712 local foods. The study concluded that only 201 local foods were well known and that just 162 more were barely known, prompting the authors to call for further research on the 349 local foods (almost half of the foods surveyed) that were becoming extinct (Matsushita and Yoshikawa 1973, 297). Many local foods were time-honored methods of preserving raw ingredients, such as through pickling, and these traditional recipes became less necessary by 1970, when some 90 percent of households owned electric refrigerators (Ishige 2009, 192).

One attempt to reassess local food in the midst of these dramatic changes in the diet was geographer Kōsaka Mutsuko’s influential survey published in 1974. Criticizing wartime studies of local food as simply the search for ways to relieve famine, Kōsaka shifted focus away from local foods (kyōdo shoku) to local cuisine (kyōdo ryōri), defined as dishes dating from before the Meiji period and distinct to a specific locale. Kōsaka acknowledged that Hokkaido only became part of Japan in the Meiji period, and she allowed that recipes invented there after the Meiji period could be considered authentic regional cuisine. Yet she refused to include Osaka and Tokyo, since these urban centers were sites of food consumption but not production, an assumption similar to the wartime studies that equated local food with rural food. Dispatching researchers who were students at Risshō Women’s University in Tokyo, Kōsaka instructed them to conduct interviews in different prefectures, inquiring about foodstuffs such as local ingredients and seasonal specialty dishes. Collating the data, Kōsaka produced maps showing regional variations in ingredient use and cooking methods, noting, for instance, that 64 percent of local dishes were made by simmering (Kōsaka 1996, 28–29, 34–36, 38–39). Unlike prewar folklorists who surveyed local foods and assumed that they offered an accurate picture of time-honored customs, Kōsaka’s study attempted to use interviews to reconstruct elements of a food culture that by definition predated the lives of any informants surveyed.12

Kōsaka’s methodology, for its naïve faith that oral testimony can somehow bridge a century of history, was part of what anthropologist Millie Creighton has dubbed the “retro boom” of the 1970s, “involving a renewed interest in Japanese traditions and nostalgia for the past . . . that has romanticized Japan’s agrarian heritage.” Creighton
describes how the domestic tourist industry capitalized on the nation’s fascination with nostalgia by promoting travel to rural hamlets “that were formerly considered unsophisticated and boring” (Creighton 1997, 241). The nostalgia associated with native place as expressed by the term kyōdo and by the related but more familiar word “hometown” (furusato) intensified in the 1970s, as many people’s actual personal links with rural life had faded when they moved to the city.13

Virtual culinary travel to the countryside was part of the romanticized journey into Japan’s agrarian past, and cookbooks in the late 1960s and early 1970s offered detailed descriptions of local cuisine. Local food writings coincided with a gourmet boom that began in the mid-1960s as the mass media focused on the pleasures of eating, as seen in television programs like That Was Delicious (Gochisō-sama), which debuted in 1971, and Culinary Heaven (Ryōri tenkoku), first broadcast in 1975 (Ishige 2009, 231). Significantly, Matsushita and Yoshikawa’s 1972 study of local food, mentioned earlier, was one of the first to ask respondents whether or not they ate local foods and if these dishes tasted good. Such information was valuable for cookbook authors seeking to compile collections of favorite local delicacies, which besides representing authentic local identity, also had to be delicious. The cookbook Japan’s Local Cuisines (Nihon no kyōdo ryōri), first published in 1966 and then in a revised edition in 1974, promised in its introduction “fresh Japanese cuisine that can reveal hometowns (furusato)—the prototypical destinations for tourists to the rural countryside seeking to reconnect with their cultural and emotional roots (Zenkoku Ryōri Kenkyūkai Hiiragikai 1974, 3). Japan’s Local Cuisines was composed by teachers in cooking schools throughout the country, and it describes the regional dishes of 47 prefectures. Departing from previous studies that denied a local cuisine to cities, the cookbook included Tokyo, where examples of local cuisine included sushi, loach, horsemeat sashimi, tempura, grilled eel, soba, and beef sukiyaki (ibid., 113–18). All these dishes, excepting horsemeat, are familiar staples of modern Japanese cuisine, an acknowledgment of the profound impact of urban foods on the shaping of national cuisine. That the cookbook was also meant for the armchair traveler is evident from the prefaces to the different regions. The section for foods from Gifu promised “the taste of authentic mountain country” and described famous tourist sites in the prefecture such as Takayama, Gifu’s “little Kyoto.” The delicacies of Kōchi, which represented “chic southern country cuisine,” were introduced with a short essay about the prefecture’s geography and history and its famous Sunday markets, described as “the most representative thing about Kōchi” (ibid., 139, 295).
Trends to identify and promote local cuisines continued and intensified in the 1980s, reaching a pinnacle with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) 50-volume series *Collected Writings on Japanese Foodways* (*Nihon no shoku seikatsu zenshū*), a countrywide survey of regional food lore advertised as a “catalog of 15,000 types of local foods.” MAFF’s series used oral interviews to reconstruct the diet in the Taishō and early Shōwa periods (1926–1989) preceding World War II, a much more recent past than in Kōsaka’s earlier survey but a past that is equally as problematic in recovering, as folklorist Fukuta Azio pointed out contemporaneously in 1987. Fukuta wrote, “There is what amounts to a delusion that folklore surveys can reconstruct the situation of the Taishō and early Shōwa periods, over fifty years ago” (Fukuta 1987, S92). Yet MAFF’s volumes replicate the past to the point that the descriptions of conditions in the 1920s are written in the present tense. A note in each of the volumes indicates that the photographs attempt to recreate scenes from half a century ago. Descriptions of the local diet are interlaced in the volumes with vignettes of country life and snippets of unattributed folksy dialogue to complete the portrait of hometown foodways.

Ambiguities between the present and past are similar to the blurring of the concept of the local in MAFF’s volumes. Each book examines a different prefecture, dividing it into about half a dozen subregions. Niigata prefecture, for instance, is reported as having six culinary subregions, Kōchi has four, Gifu has seven, and Saga has six (Honma 1985; Matsuzaki 1986; Mori 1990). An essay at the end of each volume describes what sets the prefecture apart from the rest of Japan. Like Kōsaka’s study, *Collected Writings on Japanese Foodways* makes use of oral interviews, but the fact that the foodways described were those of the childhoods of the informants gives the findings more credulity. But the informants, whose names and biographical information appear in the volume, are never quoted directly. Their testimonies are instead woven together into unattributed narratives presenting an idealized version of local food culture in the 1920s including typical daily meals, festive dishes, and the ways in which special foods celebrate moments in people’s lives. A work of 50 volumes, each divided into about six separate subregions, containing essays synthesizing interviews with dozens of informants shows the diversity of Japan’s food culture even as it undermines the idea that regional or local food or cuisine is a meaningful rubric for all this information. Consequently, the terms “local food” and “local cuisine” do not appear prominently in MAFF’s series, which prefers the use of place names, making food entirely local by linking it to specific locations on a map. The study
also renders local food entirely historical, because the diets in the locales surveyed have obviously changed drastically in half a century; otherwise the authors could have reported on conditions in the 1980s when the volumes were created.

**Traditional Dietary Cultures (Washoku) and Native Foods (Fūdo shoku)**

MAFF’s approach of pinning local food so closely to the specifics of the 1920s undermines the larger category of local food by suggesting that local food has largely disappeared, but the term “local food” has seen a resurgence since the 1980s with consumers’ interest in “eating locally” and public and private efforts to promote regional foodstuffs. Especially poignant local foods since the 1980s are heirloom vegetables, traditional varieties that existed before the advent of modern hybrids such as Kyoto vegetables.\(^{17}\) Scientist and food studies scholar Ichikawa Takeo has dubbed this manifestation of local food “native food”—fūdo shoku. Fūdo is an ancient term expressing local climate and topography. Fūdo shoku (風土食) is a homonym for another word also pronounced fūdo shoku but written differently (風土色), meaning terroir, the special characteristics derived from a locale. Ichikawa writes, “Native foods are largely the effect of their ingredients which include vegetables, gathered herbs (sansai), wild animals, wild fowl, domesticated animals, and marine products. Among these, heirloom vegetables are intimately intertwined with the conditions of the local environment including the weather, geography, and the soil” (Ichikawa 1996, 13). By Ichikawa’s estimation, it no longer matters that the diet has changed since the 1920s, because one can create authentic local cuisine simply by adding native foods to a recipe. Thus chefs in Kyoto include the leafy vegetable mizuna to their noodle soup to make “Kyoto ramen,” while other restaurateurs serve “Kyoto cuisine” prepared with heirloom Kyoto vegetables shipped to their restaurants in Tokyo (De St. Maurice 2012, 107–22).

Ichikawa’s portrait of native foods resembles prewar definitions of local food that emphasized the primacy of geography in distinguishing the local diet but with two important distinctions. First, postwar native foods are, by Ichikawa’s definition, the ingredients for side dishes containing meat, not grains, reflecting changes in the postwar Japanese diet since the mid-1960s away from rice consumption. In the 1960s, staple grains still supplied half of the food energy of a typical Japanese household, but by the time that Ichikawa’s essay was written at the end of the twentieth century, the average household derived more energy
from meats and fat than grains. The domesticated and game meats that Ichikawa highlights as native foods would not even have been on the table of most Japanese in the first half of the twentieth century. Beef, pork, and other meat composed less than 1.7 kg per capita of the food supply in 1925. However, by the year 2000, meat supply reached 45 kg per capita annually, indicating nearly a twenty-six-fold increase over seventy-five years (Smil and Kobayashi 2012, 17, 49). Foods may be native to a place, but they also reflect modern preferences for meat dishes.

A second point that distinguishes native foods like heirloom vegetables, popular since the 1980s, from prewar rural foods is taste. During World War II, city dwellers complained about having to eat foods that were typical of rural diets (Ehara, Ishikawa, and Higashiyotsuyanagi 2009, 299). In contrast, the more variegated diet of the postwar era allowed more opportunities not only to consume meats and other delicacies, but also to reflect on their taste; and gourmandism has now become central to defining the authenticity of local foods. Gone are the days of wartime austerity when side dishes literally meant eating crow—or at least “crow snake” (karasu hebi) in some locales (Chūō Shokuryō Kyōryokukai 1944, 411). The advertisement for the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries series Collected Writings on Japanese Foodways equates local foods with gourmet delicacies, explaining that “local foods developed within the native setting (fudō) of a locale, and they are tastes found nowhere else. That ‘taste of nowhere else’ has the highest value in the age of gourmet food.” Here, the “value” of the local dish is not measured in the daily nourishment it provides the local consumer, but instead as a potential delight for the gourmand who arrives to try new delicacies. Locals benefit from reading MAFF’s series by learning which indigenous food products to sell to outsiders.

In a move that further emphasized that local foods should taste good, in 2007 MAFF convened a panel of eight experts in “culinary research, food culture, the relationship between urban and rural areas, and women’s movements” to select the top hundred best local dishes for a project dubbed “I Want to Eat! I Want to Serve! The Taste of Hometowns.” According to the project’s website, local food “is premised on the distinct natural features, foodstuffs, eating habits, and historical-cultural background of each locale, and inevitably arises from an original idea of the people’s lifestyle of that area.” Yet local foods also have to taste good to qualify as “I want to eat! I want to serve!” MAFF’s panelists selected from a list of local foods gleaned from publications and by suggestions from prefectural and municipal governments as well as an Internet poll (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries). Japan’s wartime government contracted with
scholars to speak with people about what they ate, but the current government employs expert panels with only minimal input from ordinary people to determine that dishes like salmon roe over rice (ikuradon), curry soup (su–pu kare), pork shabu shabu, and Hiroshima okonomiyaki are representative local delicacies for national enjoyment and reflections of Japanese culture to be promoted internationally.

In appealing to foreign audiences, taste has taken priority over place in determining the authenticity of local foods, as evidenced by a pamphlet offered on MAFF’s website, which features the words kyōdo ryōri on its front cover. The brochure showcases, according to its subtitle, Local Food That Satisfies the World’s Most Demanding Eaters. The dishes listed include Chinese dumplings from Utsunomiya and the Sasebo hamburger from Nagasaki, two obvious foreign adaptations to the Japanese diet (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Rural Development Planning Commission 2009, 2, 48). Local foods may not survive unless people consume them, but MAFF’s pamphlet reveals a perception that local food must adapt to modern tastes to include cheap, high-calorie foods such as those served by fast-food restaurants.

Attention to local delicacies supports MAFF’s efforts to promote domestic tourism and the agricultural and fishery sectors, and it assists the efforts of the Japanese government to advance the country’s dietary cultures internationally, as exemplified by the 2012 application by MAFF and the Agency for Cultural Affairs to have Japan’s traditional dietary cultures (washoku) receive UNESCO heritage status. According to a press release from the Agency for Cultural Affairs, washoku “utilizes various fresh ingredients” depending on such factors as the four seasons and the locale; has distinguishing characteristics including a “presentation style that reveals the beauty of nature;” follows a spirit of “respect for nature,” which is fundamental to the Japanese people; is intimately connected with seasonal observances such as the New Year’s, rice planting, and harvest festivals; and has social customs that strengthen ties within families and members of a local community. (Bunkachō 2012, 3)

Rejecting wartime definitions of local food as linked both to specifics of place and to race and postwar studies that present local cuisine largely in historical terms, traditional dietary cultures are, by MAFF’s definition, rooted in timeless communities whose diet is natural, tasty, and beautifully presented. Japan’s traditional dietary cultures are, in other words, said to be found in the local cuisines of anonymous, socially
engaged communities that benignly impose on the environment for sustenance. Such a definition of national dietary culture directly confron
ts fears of more problematic interventions between man and nature, as witnessed in the March 2011 nuclear disaster at Fukushima, which prompted the evacuation of many local communities in the northeast, devastated agriculture and fisheries in the region, and sparked international and domestic fears about the safety of Japan’s foodstuffs. In fact, the Japanese government’s application to UNESCO called for the designation of washoku with heritage status as a “symbol of Japan’s recovery” from the March 2011 disasters, requesting the international community to reaffirm the purity and refinement of Japan’s traditional dietary cultures despite ongoing fears about radiation in the food supply (ibid., 3).

In Japan, local food, which was once synonymous with a backward diet of coarse grains found in remote villages, has become in recent years a cornucopia of gourmet dishes justifying the designation of “local cuisine.” The transition in meaning from food to cuisine mirrors developments in the Japanese diet in the last fifty years, particularly the shift away from grains as the main staples and toward more diverse and luxurious sources of food energy as consumers sought to make dining on a daily basis a more pleasurable experience. Changes in the meaning from local food to local cuisine also reflect a shift in attitude about the places that produce food. The backwater villages of the prewar became, in the postwar era, sites of disappearing cultural assets, romanticized hometowns, and tourist destinations. Similarly, the inhabitants of rural locales were no longer viewed with scorn or pity for their poor diets, but instead they were valorized for their engagement in traditional communities, especially as purveyors of authentic ingredients. For scholars, the means of discovering local food shifted away from interviews with locals about contemporary conditions in the 1940s to the attempt to use oral history in the 1970s and 1980s to bypass current practices, in the hope of recovering conditions of fifty years ago or more. Even as more recent iterations of Japanese dietary culture promise benign sourcing of seasonal, native ingredients like heirloom vegetables, the hamburgers, Chinese dumplings, and other dishes that are among the newly designated “tasty” local foods, are fatty concoctions unhealthy for anyone to eat on a daily basis.

From the standpoint of the consumer, eating locally in Japan or elsewhere can be a strategy to support nearby producers and possibly obtain fresher foodstuffs; by other definitions eating locally might simply describe what people in a specific zone consume without much thought given to their food’s points of origin, historical resonances,
or cultural dimensions. Eating locally can also be a type of gourmand-
ism, especially when heirloom foods and delicacies are more expensive
than conventional varieties, which is usually the case.

But, as this chapter has shown, rather than being something created
from the ground up, the categories of local food and local cuisine in
Japan have taken their meanings in relationship to the policies of the
central government, which mobilized elements of the rural diet to fit
the exigencies of wartime and sought in the postwar era to find and
promote regional delicacies to bolster the domestic economy, tourism,
and Japan’s image abroad. Although Japan can now boast of delicious
local cuisines, sophisticated local foods, and even of the quality of its
hamburgers, the main continuity driving the changing iterations of
local food has been the role of the central government and scholars,
many of whom were working on the government’s behalf—as opposed
to the ordinary people who live, cook, and dine in diverse locations.

Notes

1. A longer version of this chapter will appear in Japan’s Cuisines (Rath, 
forthcoming).
2. Searching the Asahi shimbun newspaper reveals use of the word honpō
ryōri from 1879, Nihon ryōri from 1880, Nihon shoku from 1884, and
washoku from 1892 (Kikuzo II Bijuaru Database). I am grateful for the
help of Michiko Ito for alerting me to this.
3. The women’s literary magazine Josei kaizō provides a short article on
local dishes in its March 1924 issue composed of local recipes sent in by
contributors (Ojiman no kyōdo ryōri, 139–41).
4. The number of usages of the term kyōdo shoku in print outnumber those
for kyōdo ryōri before and during World War II in Asahi shimbun more
than three to one; in Yomiuri shimbun two to one; and six to one in Zasshi
kiji sakuin shūsei dē tabēsu, a database of magazines and journals. (See
Kikuzo II Bijuaru Database; Yomidasu Rekishikan; Zasshi Kiji Sakukuin
Shūsei Dētabēsu.)
5. For a discussion of nuances of the term “cuisine” (ryōri) in premodern
Japan, see Rath 2010, pp. 28–30.
6. Rice cakes (mochi) provide a prominent example of the ways that ordi-
nary foodstuffs could take on extraordinary meanings in traditional Japa-
nese dietary culture (Rath 2015, 3–18).
7. Appadurai concludes, “The idea of an ‘Indian cuisine’ has emerged
because of, rather than despite, the increasing articulation of regional and
ethnic cuisines” (21).
8. According to Nihon kokugo daijiten, accessed through Japan Nareji.
9. The year 1920 marked the creation of the Imperial Government Institute
for Nutrition, one of the first such government bodies anywhere in the
world (Cwiertka 2006, 121).

11. Smil and Kobayashi assert that there were more profound changes in the average Japanese diet from 1950 to 2006 than in the American diet from 1909 to 2006 (Smil and Kobayashi 2012, 95).

12. Kōsaka’s study does not mention informants by name or age, so whether the interviewers spoke with anyone born before 1868 is unstated. Any informant born before 1868 would have been over a century old when Kōsaka made her study, and the pre-Meiji conditions that the informant would have reported on would have been vague recollections of life as a toddler.


15. See, for example, Matsuzaki 1986, p. 3.

16. The fifty volumes comprise forty-seven devoted to different prefectures, a volume on Ainu food, and a two-volume dictionary.

17. On the promotion of local foods in Kyoto, see Rath 2014, pp. 203–23.

18. Karasu hebi is more commonly known as shimahebi, the Japanese striped snake. Non-poisonous and reaching lengths of five feet, it is used in traditional medicine.


20. In 2013, I ate in a noted restaurant in Kōchi City where the hostess touted the authenticity of the establishment’s local cuisine by showing me that the dishes I had ordered were mentioned in the volume for Kōchi in MAFF’s series.

**References**


Introduction: Japanese Cuisine Abroad and at Home

Washoku as UNESCO Heritage: Japanese Food Abroad

On December 5, 2013, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) acknowledged washoku, which can be translated as “Japanese cuisine,” as an intangible cultural world heritage. In particular Japan’s elaborate New Year’s cuisine (o-sechi ryōri) received the status of a cultural world heritage. In accordance with the Japanese government’s efforts to convey the image of a globally recognized national cuisine characterized by elegance and tradition, washoku has joined the list of intangible cultural world heritage assets next to the French gastronomic meal, Mexican cuisine, and a number of specific culinary dishes such as Korean pickles (kimchi) and gingerbread from Northern Croatia (Robinson 2014). One intent of applying for world heritage status for washoku was to shift global attention away from the potential dangers associated with radiation and food safety after the nuclear disaster of March 11, 2011, and elevate the image of Japanese cuisine by associating it with elaborate cuisine, refined ingredients, and cleanliness.
This chapter describes how a nationalist food education initiative termed shokuiku is developing in a transnational context in which the Japanese state, by applying the concept of washoku, tries to gain recognition for a kind of “pristine and traditional” Japanese cuisine globally, while it simultaneously tries to contain the realities of Japanese culinary globalization on the ground. In practice, the focus on “tradition” in Japanese food education actually contains within it a neoliberal culinary politics that places responsibility for good eating on the individual rather than on the state, society, or community.

Diversifications of Eating Habits in Postwar Japan

In contrast to the refined and sophisticated washoku-style cuisine propagated abroad by the Japanese government, Japan’s domestic culinary scene reveals quite a different picture. Since the postwar period, diversifications of eating habits among Japanese citizens have occurred. In particular, three changes are noteworthy.

Firstly, the consumption of rice, Japan’s major staple food, has decreased significantly. In 1960, 48.3 percent of the daily diet of a Japanese adult consisted of rice; this figure changed to 30.1 percent in 1980. In 2004, rice amounted to only 23.4 percent of the daily diet of a Japanese adult. In the same period, the intake of meat increased from a mere 3.7 percent in 1960 to 12 percent in 1980 and is currently at a level of 15.4 percent of the share of a person’s daily diet. In the same time period, the consumption of oil and fat rose from 4.6 percent in 1960 to 14.2 percent in 2004 (MAFF 2008; Suematsu 2008, 44–46).

Secondly, Japanese people now tend to eat more premade foods and frozen foods. Convenience stores are a rapidly expanding source of food for consumers in Japan. The four big convenience-store retailers that dominate the Japanese food retail market are 7-Eleven, Lawson, Family Mart, and Circle K Sunkus (Japan Food & Drink Report 2010, 58). In 2004, a total number of 42,738 convenience stores operated throughout the country, with yearly sales of 692 trillion yen (Shokuseikatsu Dē ta Sōgō Tōkei Nenpō 2009, 25).

Thirdly, eating has partially shifted from family meals to dining outside in family restaurants and fast-food restaurants. Today, single people tend to cook less, eat out more, and replace meals with frequent snacking. According to a five-thousand-person survey by the Japan Finance Corporation (Nihon seisaku kinyū kinkō kokumin seikatsu jigyō honbu seikatsu eisei yūshi-bu 2013, 5), 40.2 percent of respondents dined out for dinner one to three times per month. Another


21.8 percent dined in restaurants one to three times per week, and 8.4 percent dined outside the home four times or more per week. Of those who ate out less often, 7.6 percent dined outside the home only four to five times within six months, and 14.5 percent had dinner in restaurants one to three times within half a year. Only 7.4 percent stated that they almost never had dinner outside their homes. On average, the amount spent on dinner in a restaurant per person was 1,994 yen. In 2009, popular places to dine out were family restaurants followed by sushi restaurants and ramen eateries (*Shokuseikatsu Dē ta Sōgō Tōkei Nenpō* 2009, 146). Family restaurants and convenience stores are actually conduits for the massive dietary globalization with regard to both food imports and culinary innovations in Japan.

**The Fundamental Law on Food Education (Shokuiku)**

**Enactment and Purpose**

Governmental efforts seek to counter the consumption of fast foods and eating out in order to improve the eating habits of Japanese citizens. This is reflected in the Fundamental Law on Food Education (*shokuiku kihon-hō*), which was enacted in 2005 during the Koizumi Administration under the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) has defined the basic concepts of the Fundamental Law on Food Education. A few of these are as follows:

*Shokuiku* should have the purpose of promoting people’s health in body and in mind, as well as enriching human lives.

Especially parents, educators and day care providers should actively promote *shokuiku* among children.

Awareness and appreciation of traditional Japanese food culture as well as food supply/demand situations should be promoted, and opportunities of interaction between food producers and consumers should be created, in order to revitalize rural farming and fishing regions, and to boost food self-sufficiency in Japan. (MAFF, n.d.)

**What Is Food Education (Shokuiku)?**

The above objectives of food education in Japan remain vague in tone and require a closer examination of the meaning and implications of *shokuiku*. The term *shokuiku* consists of the Chinese characters for...
shoku (which, depending on its usage, can mean to eat, food, or diet) and iku (meaning to educate, to nurture, or to cultivate). The term shokuiku can roughly be translated into English as food education or as food education. Historically, the term shokuiku dates back to the year 1896, when the nutrition expert Ishizuka Sagen discussed shokuiku in his work Chemical Theory of Diet for Longevity as part of a fourfold education consisting of intellectual education (chiiku), moral education (saiiku), and physical education (taiiku).

Food education, or shokuiku, can be understood as part of a global movement toward nutritional governance, often described as “nutrition policy.” Nutrition policy is defined as a coherent framework for the control of food production, processing, distribution, and retailing in order to encourage the consumption of nutritious food by the population (Barlösius 2011, 245). Governmental nutrition policy programs address three dimensions. Firstly, they ensure food security: a guaranteed minimum of available food. Secondly, state intervention programs seek to improve food safety, meaning the quality of available food. Thirdly, they target individual nutritional habits.

Another term for nutritional governance is food literacy, which is defined as the ability to craft one’s daily eating habits in a self-reliant, responsible, and joyful manner (Barlösius 2011, 289; see also Müller, Groeneveld, and Büning-Fesel 2007). Yet another term is nutritional prevention, which underlines the relationship between unhealthy eating habits and lifestyle-related illnesses such as obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Nutritional prevention enables human beings to design their nutritional habits while considering lifestyle-related illnesses that may arise in the future, to practice self-discipline and to maintain a long-term perspective on their lives and nutritional habits.

The Food Education Campaign as a Case of Culinary Neoliberalism

Previous scholarly contributions have addressed the Fundamental Law on Food Education from a gender perspective and have investigated the nationalistic overtones of this law (Kimura 2011; Kojima 2011). This chapter’s approach comes from a slightly different angle. It examines how the food education campaign effectively establishes bodily norms and helps to internalize and reinforce a standardized national cuisine through various modes of implementation. Food education in school lunch programs, visual elements like the Food Guide Spinning Top, regular health surveys, and medical checkups help to internalize normalized ideals with regard to physical appearance, body
weight, and familial conviviality. These ideals are internalized through continuous and subtle reminders in various institutions such as kindergartens, schools, universities, and companies.

Michel Foucault’s ideas of creating mechanisms of self-surveillance through regular monitoring can be applied to the Japanese food education campaign. In his work “Discipline and Punish,” published in 1977, Foucault argued that brutal corporal punishment shifted toward more subtle mechanisms of punishment. The objective was to educate the delinquent and to help him internalize the appropriate rules of conduct. Individuals are supposed to survey themselves so that surveillance from outside forces is no longer necessary (Hope 2013, 36). The ultimate objective is to create a society in which punishment becomes obsolete since its individuals have been trained to monitor and educate themselves. Japan’s food education campaign consists of governmental monitoring and the creation of an educational environment that helps to establish internalized mechanisms of self-surveillance. Individuals who have established internal mechanisms are able to monitor their own nutrition and adhere to nutritional standards that the government has outlined for them.

In a similar vein, sociologist Eva Barlösius (2011) points out the moral dimension of nutritional habits. Following the argument of Anthony Giddens, in modern contemporary societies, a shift has occurred from collectively morally binding obligations toward a moral consciousness. This consciousness rests on self-reflexivity and conscious decisions of the individual, in particular with regard to physical appearance, nutritional habits, body weight, physical fitness, and sexuality (Barlösius 2011, 274). Food choices rest upon individual eating patterns that reflect responsible behavior and a degree of food literacy. Food choices prevent the occurrence of lifestyle-related illnesses such as obesity and diabetes. Sensible eating behavior reflects conscientiousness and a commitment to accept responsibility in other areas of life. In short, increasing individualization has created new moral responsibilities such as the obligation to be healthy and to maintain appropriate food behavior patterns. Japan’s food education policies can thus be seen as part of a global pattern of culinary neoliberalism, or policies that put the responsibilities for nutrition and dietary health on the individual, while leaving food distribution largely up to market forces.

In a slightly different approach, Kimura (2011) has examined the strategy of responsibilization, which has become an integral part of the current food education campaign in Japan. Kimura has defined the term responsibilization as a process where the government demands that individuals and communities take responsibility for social life
and their own risks, and makes them accountable for risk management and rational choices (Kimura 2011, 205). As stated earlier, state nutrition policy programs address the following three dimensions: (1) the available quantity of food, (2) the quality of food, and finally (3) the behavioral aspect of individual eating habits. In the context of the Japanese food education campaign, the causes for nutrition-related problems such as being obese are seen as exclusively behavioral, and thus responsibility has shifted to the individual. Busy work schedules, a limited availability of fresh food products in metropolitan areas, a decline of agriculture and food self-sufficiency, and growing uncertainties about the quality of available food products caused by previous food scandals and the nuclear disaster of March 11, 2011, are not portrayed as considerable causes of food-related problems. Instead, the roots of all nutrition-related problems—and the responsibility to solve these problems—lie in the private sphere of the individual. In accordance with this principle of individual responsibility, nutrition-related problems can only be solved on an individual basis and through a return to familial conviviality and the consumption of domestic food products. This type of neoliberal culinary politics, while advocating “tradition,” actually is a state-led effort to discipline future consumers.

**Washoku—The Basis of Shokuiku**

The globalization of an elaborate *washoku* cuisine stands in contrast to actual eating habits of Japanese citizens. This discrepancy demands a more refined definition of what *washoku*, Japanese cuisine, actually is and what it might be. In accordance with the aim of this volume, “cuisine” is defined as referring explicitly to the discursive elaboration of food in cookbooks and in writing and talking about food.

In a 2013 survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries entitled “The Reality of Our Country’s Food Life and the Advancement of Shokuiku” (*Waga kuni no shokuseikatsu no genjō to shokuiku no suishin ni tsuite*), the Japanese-style dietary life (*Nihon-gata shoku seikatsu*) is defined as follows:

Japanese style dietary life is based on rice in accordance with the Japanese climate and consists of a variety of side dishes such as seafood, meat, and vegetables. Not only is [Japanese style dietary life] superior with regards to [its] nutritional balance, but its characteristic is that it consists of agricultural products that have been harvested throughout Japan. (MAFF 2013, 16)
Based on the definition of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, *washoku* consists of the following three characteristics: (1) Rice is a component of every meal. The importance of rice is reflected in the usage of the term *gohan*, which has two meanings. The term *gohan* as opposed to the term *meshi* is honorific and means *cooked rice*. In addition, the term *gohan* can also mean *meal*. (2) The presentation of a meal is based on the composition of one soup and three side dishes (*ichiju sansai*) served with rice and pickles. (3) Japanese cuisine has been based on a tripod of components of Western, Chinese, and Japanese elements (Cwiertka 2006, 173).

In practice, the globalization of Japanese eating habits is nothing new. A “Western” meal is also accompanied by rice, soup, and three side dishes. For instance, meatballs—a popular food in Japan—are arranged in the same way as a Japanese meal. However, some definitions of *washoku* attempt to establish a more exclusive definition of “Japanese” cuisine. Sociologist Aya Hirata Kimura has pointed out that the “Japanese style dietary life” (*Nihon-gata shoku seikatsu*), which is the basis of the food education campaign, implies the absence of Western foods. She argues that a Japanese-style dietary life entails a “construction of ‘Japanese food’ as an antidote to foreign elements” (Kimura 2011, 214) and states that “JSDL is better defined by what it is not—it is not a ‘Western’ diet” (Kimura 2011, 213–14). Hence, the food education campaign can only be understood as a defensive reaction to the realities of dietary globalization in Japan.

**Objectives of Food Education (Shokuiku)**

Based on the three pillars of *washoku*, the principle objective of food education is to teach its recipients about the production and distribution of food products and methods of food preparation. In short, the objective of food education is to teach culinary competence and enable its recipients to make informed food choices on a daily basis.

The transfer of culinary competence within the framework of the food education campaign is conducted according to three principles. Firstly, culinary competence follows the basic composition and visual presentation of meals in *washoku* cuisine. Every meal is presented on the basis of *ichiju sansai*; that is, as consisting of rice, soup, three side dishes, and pickles.

The second principle addresses the ideal of familial conviviality. As mentioned earlier, eating has partially shifted from family meals to dining outside in family restaurants and fast-food restaurants. The food education campaign counters this tendency and encourages
families to eat their meals together, preferably at home. However, a 2013 survey conducted among 1,603 persons by the Cabinet Office, entitled “Current Situation and Tasks of Policies for Advancing Food Education” (Shokuiku suishin shisaku no genjo to kadai) and published in the Food Education White Book (Shokuiku hakusho), reveals that 59 percent of the respondents (945 persons) eat breakfast with their families almost every day, or at least four to five times per week (Cabinet Office 2013, 4). Seventy percent of all respondents (1,122 persons) indicated that they have dinner together with their families (Cabinet Office 2013, 5). Considering these results, at this point, a collapse of the familial community seems unlikely, yet the food education campaign seeks to strengthen the family, which is perceived as the primary location of teaching food preparation methods, appropriate meal times, and table manners.3

The family is also the location for communication, in particular during meal times. In linking food and familial conviviality, the food education campaign reinforces the postwar ideal of the nuclear family with the mother as the primary caregiver. In doing so, the ideal of the nuclear family reinforces the division of gender roles. As Kimura (2011) states, “The Japanese government’s shokuiku campaign captures the normalized model of the family with a highly gendered division of labor where [sic] women bearing the bulk of household chores including cooking and childrearing. By constructing food not only as a means of nutrition, but also as a way to affect discipline and proper manners for children and to channel ‘food culture’ for the future generation Japanese, shokuiku further expands the burdens placed on women” (Kimura 2011, 220).

Conflicting expectations further complicate the enforcement of the shokuiku campaign. Mothers are expected to remain the primary agent of transferring culinary competence and culinary skills to the younger generation. However, in reinforcing the significant role of the mother as the primary caregiver in families, the Japanese government is sending conflicting messages. Demographic transformations such as the decline of births and increasing number of older people have led to a greater policy emphasis on gender equality in the workplace.4 In light of a population decline, the Japanese government has recognized the need to integrate women more effectively in the workforce. At the same time, women still are expected to accept exclusive responsibility of ensuring culinary competence within families.

Thirdly, food education is closely tied to the consumption of local food products. Governmental organizations such as the organization Food Action Nippon, which was founded by the Ministry
of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in 2008 with the objective to promote the consumption of local agricultural products and to reinvigorate the significance of rice as Japan’s major staple food, equate Japanese food products with health and locality as opposed to imported products, which are associated with potentially unsafe food. In contrast to imported foods, the origins of local food products are well known, and the faces of the food producers are visible to food consumers. Even after the nuclear disaster of March 11, 2011, local food products are portrayed as safe foods in the context of the food education campaign. One example for this is the campaign Supporting through Eating (Tabete ōen shiyō), which encourages the purchase and consumption of foods from the disaster-affected areas (Food Action Nippon 2014).

Ministerial Collaboration in Reinforcing Shokuiku

As we have seen, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries ties food education to the consumption of local products that are depicted as safe foods as opposed to transnational food products. However, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is not the only ministry that promotes food education. One of the characteristics of the shokuiku campaign is the close collaboration between several governmental organizations. Including the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, four ministries work closely together. The allocation of funding to ministries for food education activities is not a new phenomenon. But the fact that shokuiku is being addressed by all ministries has added a new dimension: “What is new, however, is the emphasis on the notion of shokuiku itself and how the government uses the term as an overarching concept across ministries” (Kimura 2011, 211).

Firstly, the Cabinet Office and its committee on food safety survey the eating habits of Japanese citizens and the safety of food products on a regular basis. This includes the monitoring of radiation levels in food products since the nuclear disaster at Fukushima Daiichi on March 11, 2011.

Secondly, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology (MEXT) seeks to implement the shokuiku campaign in school lunch programs and through visual elements such as the Food Guide Spinning Top, an inverted pyramid-shaped food diagram.

Thirdly, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) conducts health surveys such as the Survey on Health and Nutrition of the Japanese Population (Kokumin kenkō eiyō chōsa) on a
yearly basis. This survey collects various data such as on alcohol and tobacco consumption, breakfast habits, and weight control. In monitoring the eating habits of Japanese citizens, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) links the food education campaign to the metabolic syndrome and the occurrence of lifestyle-related illnesses such as obesity, diabetes, coronary heart diseases, and high cholesterol.

**Methods of Implementation of Shokuiku**

Surveillance and Documentation of Nutritional Habits

Cultural anthropologist Brian McVeigh has written about “hard” and “soft” nationalisms in Japan and has argued that nationalism is “implicated in the mundane practices of everyday life, and like other hegemonic ideologies, it garners its strength from its invisibility” (McVeigh 2001). Food education targets the everyday practice of eating, but it derives its power from subtle reminders of the adequate national cuisine while prioritizing health issues. Health issues are conveyed as the primary purpose of the food education campaign. However, a powerful state policy framework emphasizes the significance of domestic foodstuffs versus transnational food products as a means to achieve the utmost nutritional balance.

Food education in nutrition governance documents individual eating habits. As stated earlier, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) monitors the eating habits of its citizens through a regular survey entitled *Survey on Health and Nutrition of the Japanese Population* (*Kokumin kenkō eiyou chōsa*). This survey collects data on alcohol and tobacco consumption, the habit of skipping breakfast, weight control, dining out, sleeping habits, and the consumption of local food products. This survey has revealed a number of alarming concerns. A lack of culinary competence has led to the development of unbalanced eating habits such as skipping meals and frequent snacking. For instance, the habit of skipping breakfast concerns 12.8 percent of all male respondents and 9 percent of all female respondents. As a consequence of such unbalanced and irregular eating patterns, individuals develop lifestyle-related illnesses, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and coronary heart diseases (MHLW 2012). In this context, the metabolic syndrome (*metabo*) has also gained significance. The metabolic syndrome is defined as being obese in connection with at least two other risk factors such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol (Kasch 2013, 12).
Weight control is another important aspect of the health survey. According to the results of the 2012 health survey, 29.1 percent of all male respondents struggle with obesity, which is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or larger. According to this definition of the BMI, 19.4 percent of all female respondents are obese. 11.4 percent of women struggle with the opposite problem of being underweight, and 4.2 percent of their male counterparts exhibit a tendency toward being underweight, which is defined as having a BMI of 18.5 or less (MHLW 2012).

Definitions of overweight and obesity vary in the global context. The body mass index (BMI, in kg/m²) is an internationally recognized measuring device for the assessment of weight categories, but various definitions apply to the transition between overweight and obesity. Kuczmarski and Flegal (2000) have defined the category of overweight as follows: “Overweight is generally defined as weight that exceeds the threshold of a criterion standard or reference value. Reference values are generally based on observed population distributions of measured weight, whereas criterion standards are based on the relation of weight to morbidity or mortality outcomes” (Kuczmarski and Flegal 2000). They argue that overweight can be assessed through using two approaches. The first approach is to use weight standards that vary by height, whereas the second approach is to construct a weight-for-height index such as the BMI, which is currently the most commonly used weight-for-height index worldwide (Kuczmarski and Flegal 2000).

According to the definition of obesity by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1997, a BMI of 30 or larger indicates obesity (Harvard School of Public Health). A BMI between 30 and 34.9 indicates first-class obesity, a BMI between 35 and 39.9 defines second-class obesity, and a BMI of 40 or larger defines third-class obesity (Harvard School of Public Health). In contrast to the definition of the WHO, the Japan Dietetic Association (JDA) (Nihon Eiyo-shikai) does not list the category of overweight (kataijū), which would correspond with a BMI between 25 and 30. Instead, three categories exist according to the definition of the JDA: The first weight category is underweight, which is defined as having a BMI of 18.5 or smaller. The second category is normal weight, which is defined as having a BMI between 18.5 and 24.9, and finally there is the third category of obesity (in Japanese: himan), which is defined as having a BMI of 25 or larger (Japan Dietetic Association 2013). This rigid definition of the BMI explains the high number of men and women in Japan who struggle with obesity. The opposite problem of being underweight is defined
as having a BMI of 18.5 or less; this applies internationally and also to the Japanese case.

**Visual Representation of the Shokuiku Campaign:**

**The Food Guide Spinning Top**

In reaction to the above findings, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has initiated a number of campaigns. One example is the Wake-Up Meal (*Mezamashi Gohan*) campaign, which aims to encourage young people to prepare and eat a nutritious breakfast. The Wake-Up Meal campaign features a young and attractive female singer in commercial videos and advertisements who takes the time to prepare a Japanese breakfast despite a busy work schedule (MAFF 2013, 18).

Another and perhaps the most well-known visual element of the food education campaign in Japan is the Food Guide Spinning Top, an inverted pyramid-shaped diagram, which was jointly introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2005 and features nutritional components ranging from rice and wheat products to side dishes such as vegetables, eggs, fruits, and milk products (MAFF 2013, 14). In order to maintain weight control, food diagrams, such as the Japanese Spinning Top or the Food Pyramid are useful but ideological tools of food education campaigns and address two dimensions of nutrition: (1) the hierarchical order of foods that are depicted in terms of their nutritional value and (2) the quantity of foods to be eaten (Barlösius 2011, 290–95).

The Food Guide Spinning Top addresses both dimensions. One striking characteristic of the Food Guide Spinning Top is the emphasis on foods that are rich in carbohydrates, such as rice and wheat products. These foods are depicted on the upper side of the spinning top and portrayed as being particularly nutritious and to be eaten daily and in large quantities. This reflects the emphasis on rice as Japan’s major staple food. Due the decline of rice consumption in the daily diet of a Japanese adult, rice is being reintroduced as a staple food. A second significant characteristic is the presentation of composed meals as opposed to ingredients. This food guide displays a combination of staple foods and standard dishes available in eateries and food stores in Japan. There are different food guides according to age group—for young Japanese, the middle-aged, and the elderly—that address the various nutritional needs of each age group. The Food Guide Spinning Top for young adults addresses women in particular, who...
tend to be extremely slender. In addition, there are local variations of this food pyramid such as the Kagoshima Food Guide Spinning Top, which features local dishes.⁶

In 2012, the Distribution System Research Center conducted the Survey on Food Life and Experiences of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (Shokuseikatsu oyobi nörin gyogyō taiken ni kansuru chōsa). The survey measured awareness of the Food Guide Spinning Top and the degree of adherence to its guidelines. Of the four thousand participants, 61 percent of the respondents were either familiar with the guide to some degree or were knowledgeable about it and its content (Distribution System Research Center 2012). It further revealed that 60 percent of the respondents followed the nutritional suggestions put forward in the guide.

**Knowledge About Shokuiku**

Initial familiarity with the term shokuiku was low. The results of the Awareness Survey Regarding Food and Nutrition Education (Shokuiku ni kansuru ishiki chōsa),⁷ conducted by the Prime Minister’s Cabinet Office since 2005 on a yearly basis, confirm this. Immediately after the enactment of the Fundamental Law of Food Education in 2005, out of 1,626 respondents, 47.4 percent (770 persons) replied that they had never heard of the term shokuiku, nor did they know the meaning of this term (kotoba mo imi mo shiranakatta).

However, the results of the survey have changed gradually over the years. Two years later in 2007, the results of the same survey showed that out of 1,831 respondents, 34.8 percent (637 persons) had not heard of the term shokuiku and its meaning. According to the results of the most recent survey conducted in 2012 (published in 2013), out of 1,771 respondents, only 23.4 percent (414 persons) replied that had not heard of the term shokuiku, nor did they know its meaning. Thirty-three percent (584 persons) replied that they had heard of the term shokuiku but did not know its meaning (kotoba ha shitte ita ga, imi ha shiranakatta), whereas 43.6 percent (772 persons) replied that they possessed knowledge of the term shokuiku and its meaning (kotoba mo imi shitte ita). In addition, seventy-six percent of those surveyed replied that they were particularly interested in the sensitive topic of food safety (shokuhin no anzensei ni kansuru koto), while sixty-nine percent confirmed that they were interested in maintaining dietary habits that helped to sustain their health and prevent lifestyle-related diseases (seikatsu shūkan-byō yobō ya kenkōzukuri no tame no shokuseikatsu) (Prime Minister’s Cabinet Office 2014).
The Implementation of Shokuiku in the School Lunch Program

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) is responsible for the implementation of shokuiku in the school lunch program. A Diet and Nutrition Teacher System was introduced in 2007 in order to implement food education in schools more effectively (Tokudome and Yamamoto 2012, 127). School lunch programs have a long history in Japan. The earliest traces of such programs date back to the year 1889, when monks in Yamagata prefecture began to distribute food to children from poor families (Tanaka and Miyoshi 2012, 155). Temporarily suspended during World War II due to food shortages, the school lunch program was reactivated in 1947 during the Occupation period with the help of the Licensed Agency for Relief in Asia (LARA). At that time, bread and milk products were part of the food aid program initiated by the United States. These staple foods were part of school lunches for the following two decades and made a significant impact on the eating habits of future generations, who would rely on a breakfast consisting of toast, coffee, and milk in contrast to the Japanese breakfast of rice, fish, and miso soup (Cwiertka 2006, 157).

The School Lunch Act of 1954 became an integral part of the curriculum for compulsory school education in 1956. In accordance with the four educational principles of moral education, physical education, intellectual education, and dietary education, dietary education in schools fosters an understanding of a balanced diet and of the nutritional value of food products. One of the purposes of the food and nutrition program at schools is to inspire a sense of conviviality when students eat lunch together and a sense of gratitude toward nature and the producers of food. It wasn’t until 1976 that rice was reinstated as the main staple food of Japanese school lunches; it is currently served three times per week in most schools (Tanaka and Miyoshi 2012, 155–56). The emphasis on rice as an integral part of school lunches counters the declining consumption of rice in the adult population since the 1960s.

The School Lunch Act was revised in 2008 with the aim to promote shokuiku in accordance with the guidelines of the Fundamental Law of Food Education, which was enacted three years prior to the revision of the School Lunch Act. According to data collected by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), nationwide 31,419 schools (94.1 percent of all schools in Japan) participated in the school lunch program in 2014 (MEXT 2014). MEXT increased the number of nutrition educators from merely 34 teachers
in 2005 to 3,853 teachers who are based in schools all over the country as of April 2011 (Tanaka and Miyoshi 2012, 156). According to data accumulated by MEXT, in 2014, 4,355 nutrition educators taught nutrition in Japanese schools (MEXT 2014). Tanaka and Miyoshi present the principles of the revised School Lunch Act as follows:

There are four main goals: 1) develop a proper understanding of diets and healthy eating habits in daily life; 2) enrich school life and nurture sociability; 3) aim at rationalization of diets, nutritional improvement and health promotion; and 4) enhance a sound understanding on food production, distribution and consumption. (Tanaka and Miyoshi 2012, 156)

The Implementation of Shokuiku in Food Fairs: Strengthening Local Food Products

Shokuiku is not only practiced in schools with the objective of teaching children proper nutritional habits. As stated earlier, one goal of the shokuiku campaign is to emphasize the relationship between food and locality. Using the motto “Anzen, anshin,” (Sternsdorff 2014) which can roughly be translated as “safety and peace of mind,” local foods are portrayed as safe, with well-known origins of production. Surprisingly, this emphasis on locality persists even after the nuclear disaster at Fukushima Daiichi. Government initiatives and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) collaborate with the ministries involved in the shokuiku campaign, prefectural governments, local farmers, and food producers to promote local food products. For example, the NGO Food Action Nippon was founded in October 2008 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and became part of the shokuiku campaign in its efforts to revive local agriculture, improve dietary habits of the population, and help ensure the quality of food (Food Action Nippon website). In April 2009, Food Action Nippon co-hosted a two-day food fair in Yokohama with the prefectural government. The event name, Taberu Taietsu—Tsukuru Taietsu, can roughly be translated as “Vital Eating, Vital Growing” (Assmann 2010). The food fair focused on the relationship between the production and the consumption of food. This was highlighted by the presence of local food producers and distributors, who presented their food products to the public. Rice received particular attention at this event. For example, visitors were able to experience firsthand the traditional pounding of rice into rice cakes (mochi) eaten during the New Year holiday. In
another corner, children received small portions of rice that could be taken home in a small measuring cup. Visitors of the food fair mainly consisted of families with small children. They attended short lectures about basic ingredients and the preparation of simple dishes such as omelets and rice served with curry. Through such efforts, consumers are supposed to learn to “see the face of producers” (seisansha no kao ga mieru). Furthermore, Food Action Nippon organizes “Earth Day Markets” in suburban neighborhoods to give local producers an opportunity to sell their products directly to consumers.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has linked its food education policy to an effort to increase Japan’s low food self-sufficiency, which currently hovers around 40 percent (MAFF n.d.). This means that Japan imports 60 percent of its foodstuffs, mainly from China, the United States, Canada, and Australia. One objective of the shokuiku campaign is to lessen this dependency on food imports by raising awareness of local foods. In attempting to achieve an upswing of the food self-sufficiency rate, Food Action Nippon acts as a mediator between the government and consumers, who are supposed to learn more about food production and reconnect with local producers in their immediate neighborhoods. Building on relationships with farmers, food distributors, tourism enterprises, NGOs, and prefectural governments, Food Action Nippon ambitiously seeks to raise the food self-sufficiency rate to 45 percent by the year 2015.

**Shokuiku—The Remaking of a National Cuisine**

The Japanese government has reacted to the increase of people who are either overweight or obese through a food education campaign, which advocates a return to a Japanese diet and counters the globalization of foodways. This culinary nationalism cannot be understood without reference to the everyday realities of dietary globalization. Rigid definitions of what constitutes being overweight or obese persist and enforce the “responsibilization” and constant self-monitoring of the individual. What is represented as a return to “tradition” is in fact a neoliberal culinary politics of individual responsibility and discipline, which we can also observe in other industrial countries around the world.

Food education impacts school lunch programs, education at food fairs, health surveys, and medical examinations. The objective of the campaign is to internalize nutritional guidelines in the Japanese population. This is reflected in the surveys conducted by the Cabinet Office that show an increasing awareness of shokuiku, its meanings, and its objectives.
The major difficulty of the shokuiku campaign is the neglect of problematic conditions of the Japanese food market. It remains doubtful whether shifting the responsibility onto the individual will solve current food-related problems in Japan. Persisting challenges such as the decline of agriculture in Japan, the dependency on food imports, and the lack of time and resources to implement the ideals of the food education campaign are all obstacles to the shokuiku campaign’s success. Similarly, the potential long-term consequences of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear crisis have not been fully investigated as of 2015 but are instead being downplayed in favor of a nationalistic campaign that ignores the repercussions of radiation on food. Concerns about food safety indicate that the nuclear disaster at Fukushima Daiichi might have led to a renewed interest in the food education campaign, particularly in relation to food safety. However, the food education campaign does not explicitly address these concerns.

In its current form, the shokuiku campaign is primarily a tool to reinstate a national cuisine and maintain control of Japanese citizens’ diet through a system of “self-responsibilization.” The aim of the shokuiku campaign is to improve the eating habits of individuals. In the future, the Japanese government would need to consider multifaceted reasons to explain the increase in the number of people who suffer from overweight and other lifestyle-related illnesses. The current food education campaign is mainly aimed at consumers, but future campaigns could include more policies focused on food producers, including promoting more nutritious dining options or alternative forms of agriculture such as greenhouse agriculture.

NOTES

1. This research was made possible by a grant from the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Sciences, Grant No. 22402040, “Sociological Research into Culinary Soft Power and Culinary Contact Zones.”

2. The use of the term saiiku, which is translated as moral education, is peculiar to Ishizuka Sagen. The use of the term tokuiku, which is also translated as moral education, is more common.

3. In this context, Barlösius (2011) investigates three functions of the familial community. The first function of sharing a meal is to exercise control over physical needs. Adequate table manners and appropriate amounts of food are part of the familial community. In adhering to these rules of communal eating, conviviality leads to controlled eating. Eating disorders such as overeating and binge eating occur when solitary eating takes place and social control mechanisms such as the familial community are not in place. The second function of the familial community is the sharing of
tasks for preparing food. The third function of the convivial meal is to overcome the naturalism of eating, which is a basic and primitive need, through the elaboration of table manners. Placing the natural need of eating in the context of a community meal civilizes the basic human need to eat (Barlösius 2011, 175–82).

4. 2011 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (danjo kōyōkkikai kintō-hō) (EEOL). After Japan ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1980 (Mae 2008, 219), the EEOL became Japan’s major legal framework for implementing gender equality in private companies. A second framework is the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society (danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai kibon-hō), enacted in 1999, which is a guideline for creating a society to which both men and women participate on an equal basis.

5. For Food Guide Spinning Tops for various age groups, see http://www.maff.go.jp/j/balance_guide/b_sizai/kaisetusyo.html#jireisyu, accessed on April 15, 2014.

6. For the Food Guide Spinning Top of Kyushu, see the following website: http://www.maff.go.jp/kyusyu/syohianzen/hiroba/balanceguide/balanceguide.html#02, accessed on April 15, 2014.

7. The Japanese name of this survey changed. In 2005, the survey was called “Shokuiku ni kansuru tokubetsu yoron chōsa” [Special Survey of Public Opinion regarding Food and Nutrition Education]. In 2007, the name was changed to “Shokuiku ni kansuru ishiki chōsa” [Awareness Survey regarding Food and Nutrition Education].

References


A “China Shanxi Food Festival in New York” took place on May 5–9, 2014. It opened with a food gala at the United Nations headquarters prepared by 16 chefs selected from the sixty thousand restaurants across North China’s Shanxi Province. The UN Under-Secretary-General and former Indian ambassador to China Vijay Nambiar tried his hand at making the province’s iconic knife-shaved noodles. “In many ways, cuisine and food culture are two aspects of a great civilization,” he said. “From that point of view, it’s a great and unique opportunity to be able to come here and taste the flavors of the hallmark of Chinese food culture. Today we are witnessing some of the fundamental items of Chinese cuisine, which have made it justly famous around the world.” The festival was hosted by the Shanxi Ministry of Commerce, in cooperation with provincial and national cuisine and industry associations. Other festival events were a noodle cooking performance at Manhattan’s Sun Restaurant, a Sino-US Industry seminar at the Sheraton Hotel in Flushing, Queens, and a Shanxi cooking and tasting event at New York University. The purpose of all this, according to Sun Yuejin, head of the Shanxi Ministry of Commerce, was to “help Shanxi food find its way in the world and
It is a good way to promote its cuisine and particular characteristics and give the province a more international image” (China Daily 2014).

All of this hoopla surrounding a relatively obscure cuisine from an inland Chinese province known for its poverty and insularity is surprising. Located in the Yellow River heartland of Chinese civilization, Shanxi fell on harder times when its traditional merchant-banking sector collapsed along with the Qing Dynasty in the early twentieth century. During the subsequent Republican era (1911–1949) it was known as the fief of the warlord Yan Xishan, a battleground in the anti-Japanese war and the civil war, and an early adopter of the Communist Party of China’s program of radical agrarian reform. In the People’s Republic of China (1949–) Shanxi became known for socialist values of hard work and political activism in the 1950s and 1960s through the model agricultural village of Dazhai; as the last province to decollectivize agricultural land in the 1980s; and, most recently, for corruption and disasters in its numerous wildcat coal mines. When I taught English at an agricultural university in Shanxi in 1980–1982, the teachers and students described the hardscrabble character of the province to me through its foodways. They told me that a millennia of farming had leached its earth of biological content so that the only things that could grow were such coarse grains as millet, sorghum, and maize and such non-leafy vegetables as legumes, turnips, mushrooms, and potatoes. They said that main staple dishes, such as sorghum noodles and corn buns were very fibrous and mealy, making it necessary to also drink large amounts of the province’s malty vinegar to aid digestion.

This chapter explores the rapid rise of food in Shanxi to a globally-feted cuisine. A key measure is the remarkable spread of restaurants purveying Shanxi cuisine in China and around the world since the late 1990s. In explaining this culinary globalization, I look beyond the consumers (i.e., Krishnendu 2012, Watson 2006) and restaurateur/chefs (i.e., Imai 2010, Ceccarini 2011) to view the state as a key actor (Yoshino 2010). The first section examines extant explanations of the consumption of Chinese regional cuisine to underscore the need for incorporating the state as a key actor in the rise of Shanxi cuisine. The second section describes the actions of the Shanxi provincial government in the 1990s to develop the idea of a provincial cuisine and then to promote it. This included the development of a restaurant industry in cooperation with networks of entrepreneurial restaurateurs, cuisine associations, and media. The next three sections examine the growth of this restaurant industry in, respectively Shanxi Province, nationally
in China, and globally through the case of Japan. The conclusion then considers the analytical and theoretical implications of this process for understanding culinary globalization. The data come from several weeklong periods of fieldwork in Shanxi Province and elsewhere in China since 2007, interviews and fieldwork in Tokyo, and documentary searches in libraries and on the Internet.

**Explaining the Consumption of Chinese Regional Cuisines**

There are two extant interpretative frameworks for understanding the patterns of consumption and popularity among the many Chinese regional cuisines. One is a common-sense view of cuisine status widespread among Chinese, and also conveyed in cookbooks, while the other reflects social science theories of migrants as bearers of culinary cultures. The former framework identifies about 20 regional cuisines in China divided into major and minor ones. The top four cuisines are from Shandong, Sichuan, Jiangsu, and Guangdong provinces; they are called the “four major cuisines.” The addition of cuisines from Fujian, Zhejiang, Hunan, and Anhui provinces constitutes the “eight major cuisines,” while the further inclusion of Beijing and Shanghai cuisines forms the “ten major cuisines.” Minor cuisines include those from Hubei, Henan, Heilongjiang, Jiangxi, Shanxi, Hebei, and Guizhou provinces and Tianjin city.

Major and minor cuisines have dichotomous characteristics. This can be seen by juxtaposing the cuisines of Jiangsu and Shanxi provinces. The former is a major cuisine referred to by the region’s imperial name as Huaiyang cuisine. “Huaiyang” is the traditional name of a historically wealthy region in the southern part of current-day Jiangsu Province that for centuries sent many native sons to serve as officials in the imperial state. Such is the cuisine’s prestige that it is still the banquet cuisine of choice at such official state occasions as anniversaries to commemorate the founding of the People’s Republic of China and to entertain visiting foreign leaders. It is based on the “fine grain” of rice and abundant use of green, leafy vegetables. This contrasts with the coarse grains and tubers and legumes of Shanxi cuisine, as described above, and its lack of recognition and prestige.

This distinction between major and minor cuisines has undergirded popular consumption of regional cuisine in China. Such major cuisines as Cantonese (Yue) and Sichuanese (Chuan) have long been favored by consumers for banquets at weddings, company openings and other important occasions where the face and honor of the guests and hosts
are reflected in the status of the food. Not surprisingly, dishes from the major cuisines are well known outside of their home region. Many Chinese are familiar with Huaiyang cuisine’s Yangzhou fried rice, Lion’s Head, and steamed dumplings, while even many non-Chinese can identify Gongbao chicken, Yuxiang pork slices, mapodofu, and Banban chicken as Sichuan cuisine. In contrast, dishes from Shanxi cuisine were unknown outside the province until very recently. An exception was the Jinyang Restaurant established in the 1950s by the Shanxi provincial government to give its officials familiar food while in the capital and a venue to entertain national officials. Before the 1990s, this was possibly the only restaurant outside of Shanxi specializing in the dishes from the province.

However, the status view of China’s regional cuisines cannot explain the growing consumption of Shanxi cuisine. Obviously, an idealized hierarchy provides little to explain the changes in the status rankings of cuisines. However, it is interesting to note that the rising consumption of Shanxi cuisine has little relation to the measures of provincial wealth and power that constitute the hierarchy of cuisine status. Despite having become better off since the economic reforms began in 1979, Shanxi is still relatively poor; its per capita GDP in 2013 ranked twenty-second out of China’s 31 national administrative divisions. Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider other sources of status and prestige linked to the rising consumption of Shanxi cuisine.

The other widespread view of the consumption of Chinese regional cuisine highlights the role of migrants to bring a cuisine to new locales and markets (Wu and Cheung 2002). For example, Swislocki (2009) attributes the late-nineteenth-century boom of restaurants in Shanghai that served Fujian, Zhejiang, and Guangdong cuisines to migrants from these regions flocking to this growing commercial entrepôt. He describes how entrepreneurs who came to Shanghai established restaurants serving their home cuisine for their migrant compatriots. A similar explanation is applied to the transnational diffusion of Chinese cuisines. Roberts (2006) describes how the first Chinese restaurants in the United States were opened by Cantonese migrants to serve the growing compatriot population in the Chinatowns that emerged in the late nineteenth century. From this beachhead, Chinese cuisine attracted the attention of American consumers thereby spreading to this new market.

Migration also has an effect on the cuisine itself. As migrant chefs include new ingredients from their new homes to dishes and adapt them to palates outside the migrant community they create fusion cuisines. One fusion is Nonya cuisine in Southeast Asia, which blends
dishes from southern Fujian Province, the origin of much of the coolie labor to plantations in the then-British colony of Malaya, with Malay/Indonesian spices and cooking techniques. Also, through migration, Chinese foodways became incorporated into the new “national” cuisines in other Asian countries, and part of the imagining of the nation in modern state formation. For example, Chinese deep-frying and stir-frying techniques, and use of oyster sauce have come to constitute such “typical” Thai dishes as rice porridge, fried rice noodles, and stewed pork with rice.

However, this migration account does not explain the growing consumption of Shanxi cuisine outside of the province for the simple reason that there are no significant Shanxi migrant communities. There has been no migration of Shanxi natives large enough to create demand for the thousands of new Shanxi restaurants within and outside of China. For example, in Japan, which has experienced a boom in knife-shaved noodle restaurants since the early 2000s, the Shanxi migrant community in Tokyo numbers only several hundred persons. This number is far too small to be a customer base for the dozens of knife-shaved noodle shops in the metropolis. Therefore, explaining the transborder spread of Shanxi cuisine requires identifying an actor other than migrants.

My state-centered explanation incorporates questions of status and transborder movement into my account of the rising prestige and diffusion of Shanxi cuisine. I will describe the role of the Shanxi provincial government in creating a concept of cuisine characteristic of Shanxi Province as a whole, giving it unique names, and promoting it in consumer markets both in China and globally.

**Provincial Government and the Creation of a Shanxi Cuisine**

Until the 1990s there was no term to indicate a cuisine coterminous with Shanxi Province as a whole. Instead food in the province was generally referred to by such terms as “foodstuffs,” “snacks,” and “specialties” linked to their county of origin, such as “Pingyao beef,” “Yuanping noodles,” and “Taigu pastry.” To understand how these disparate and localized dishes, ingredients and cooking styles came to perceived as “cuisine” characteristic of Shanxi Province it is instructive to begin with the purposive actions of the provincial government’s efforts to address the province’s problems of development.

Goodman (2002; 2006) describes how provincial leaders in the 1990s sought to overcome Shanxi’s lateness in decollectivizing
agricultural land, its poor infrastructure, and its heavy reliance on the coal industry. Their new approach to these problems included a reevaluation of the province’s culture to promote a Shanxi provincial identity that could create political unity and purpose, while also encouraging economic development through tourism. Toward this end the provincial leadership produced historical, literary, and popular journals promoting local cultures in Shanxi, and created a network of institutes, study groups, and associations to popularize the idea of “Shanxi” (Goodman 2002, 848–89). These efforts shifted the then-prevailing view of the province as a mosaic of insular local cultures to a unified cultural entity with a long and glorious history.

The provincial government focused on the architecture, literature, and folk traditions of opera, music, theater, and cuisine in the province to help create the idea of “Shanxi.” This involved the elevation of local traditions and products into “provincial” ones (Goodman 2006, 61) and then publicizing this in the media. For example, the merchant houses of central Shanxi, with their gray walls and red lanterns, became symbols of Shanxi’s material culture, appearing in such films as Raise the Red Lantern (1991) and the television drama Qiao’s Grand Courtyard (2006). Positive values were also ascribed to the provincial brand; for example, Qiao’s Grand Courtyard chronicled the life of a nineteenth-century Shanxi businessman whose ethics were honesty and humbleness and devotion to the nation. Similarly, in the arts, the Puju opera tradition from southwest Shanxi and the Shangdang theater of southeast China, were revived in the 1980s after suppression during the Cultural Revolution and labeled, respectively, Shanxi opera and Shanxi theater. A Shanxi folk music tradition was melded from scattered local traditions of drum and gong playing, and promoted as a popular and participatory form of community culture (Goodman 2002, 852).

A similar process occurred in Shanxi’s food as local ingredients, techniques, and dishes were systematized at the level of the province to fashion a distinct Shanxi cuisine (Goodman 2002). This process subsumed the province’s many noodle dishes under the term “Shanxi noodle culture” and wide range of local cooked dishes under the label “Jin cuisine.” The name “Jin” refers to a state in the southern part of current-day Shanxi Province that existed over two thousand years ago. This confers major cuisine prestige to the cuisine by a name that reflects the ancient glories of Chinese civilization. Such slogans as “kingdom of coarse grains” and “homeland of vinegar” were coined to valorize those foods identified with Shanxi’s new cuisine status and also appeal to people’s growing health awareness. Certain
adjectives were highlighted to describe the taste of Jin cuisine, most notably “sour,” which was attributed to the rich malt vinegar used as a cooking ingredient and dip.

Accompanying this was a new classification to position the medley of dishes from Shanxi’s more than one hundred counties into three intra-provincial culinary belts, each with a distinct tourist value. Northern Jin cuisine is centered on Datong and Wutai Mountain, famous for the Silk Road and major Buddhist sites, and is described as colorful and oily. Southern Shanxi style includes rice and seafood and is said to reflect the area’s proximity to the Grand Canal that connected Beijing to the rich rice-growing region of Jiangsu Province in imperial times. Central Shanxi cuisine, which includes the Provincial capital, Taiyuan, contains the greatest variety of dishes, most famously its noodle dishes, Muslim dishes using lamb, and hotpot dishes. This variety is said to reflect the region’s history in the Qing dynasty as a major merchant-banking center with networks throughout China and even abroad. Also, some local-level township and even village governments around the province have sought to promote their local fare as “poor peasant cuisine” to capitalize on the “red tourism” boom that emphasizes local connections with the history of the Communist Party of China.

Several dishes have been elevated as symbols of this provincial cuisine. The most prominent is knife-shaved noodles, which has become its iconic dish. It is said to have originated a long time ago in the northern part of the province. The elliptical noodles look like the leaves of a willow tree and are thick in the center while thin along the rim, with sharp edges. The leavened flour is smooth but pliable, which makes the noodles even tastier when chewing. They are served in a bowl with side gravies, such as slightly sweet tomato and egg, ground pork seasoned with soy sauce, or garlic and leeks soaked in the province’s signature sour sorghum vinegar. This vinegar, which is made in Qingxu County, was also elevated from among the dozens of local vinegars made from various grains to be the provincial standard-bearer. Fen liquor from Fenyang in southern Shanxi became the provincial liquor.

In promoting the idea of a Shanxi cuisine, its historical lineage, technical sophistication, and closeness to the people was emphasized. This can be seen in the words of the director of the Central Shanxi Cuisine Association Zhao Hongkui in a 2007 paper titled “The Unique Charms of the Culture of Traditional Food of Central Shanxi.” If you want to know about China, which has a history of five thousand years, you should have a better understanding of Shanxi. In the
profuse cultural treasure house of Shanxi, the dietary culture can be traced back to thirteen thousand years ago.” He next made the claim, oft-heard in Shanxi, that “China is the home of the world’s noodles. Shanxi is the home of China’s noodles. Shanxi deserves to be called the origin of noodles” (Zhao 2007). He then described the long history of the cuisine’s cultural traditions; for example, elderly men eat long noodles to symbolize the health and length of their lives. He concluded with a paean to its rich variety.

Therefore, we now have more than 300 kinds of Jinzhong wheaten food, including noodles, porridge, mush, thick soup, cakes, flour balls, noodles made from bean and potato, round flat cakes, dumplings and steamed stuffed buns, and so on. In addition “knife-shaved” noodles, “cat ears,” and “buoyuer” are well-known at home and abroad. There are more than 30 cooking methods, such as rolling, pushing, drawing, picking, baking, peeling, pressing, molding, twisting and smoothing, and so on.

The provincial government efforts to systematize Shanxi cuisine stimulated economic development. For example, vinegar is now a large cultural and food industry. The province’s many vinegar factories, classified into age-grades, account for one-fifth of national vinegar production. They have also produced innovative consumer products, such as vinegar-based cleansers, beauty products, and health drinks for domestic and export markets. Tourists can tour vinegar factories and visit museums devoted to vinegar culture. The provincial government has also encouraged festivals to stimulate the tourism industry. Most notable, since 2002 the Taiyuan city government, in cooperation with cuisine associations and media companies, has organized an annual China Shanxi World Noodle Festival with an eye to the global culinary tourism.

These efforts have also spurred the development of a Shanxi restaurant industry. This has proceeded in two streams, fast-food noodle shops (mianshiguan) and Jin cuisine restaurants (jincai-guan), oriented toward the middle and higher ends of the market. To appeal to fickle consumer tastes and health concerns, the provincial government has continuously pushed the restaurant industry to move away from oily and salty dishes towards a more sophisticated Jin cuisine. Toward this end it organizes cooking competitions to “improve” traditional dishes and create new ones, and it recognizes winning chefs and restaurants with awards. All of this has contributed to the spread of a restaurant industry purveying Shanxi cuisine within
the province, nationally and abroad, as described in the following sections.

**THE EMERGENCE OF SHANXI-CUISINE RESTAURANTS**

In the 1990s many establishments began to appear in the restaurant industry featuring the cuisine of Shanxi Province. Some were noodle shops with such names as Shanxi Noodle King, the Complete Shanxi Noodle, and Shanxi Noodle World (Goodman 2002, 851). They served noodles as the main dish, instead of more traditionally as the staple food at the end of a meal. However, the popularity of these shops does not appear to have been as great as elsewhere. For example, the question “Why are there so few noodle shops in Shanxi?” (Shanxi mianguan weishenma hen shao?), was recently posed on the popular question-and-answer website Zhihu (2015). It was answered by Shanxi natives, who said that noodles are already a delicious food commonly eaten in Shanxi homes, and that Shanxi natives resist the standardized noodles sold in noodle shops.

Other restaurants that began to emerge in the late 1990s emphasized Jin cuisine meat and vegetable dishes with staples at the end of the meal. Most appear to specialize in dishes from one of the province’s three regional belts (north, central, or south). Here are several examples (as of January 2015). The Old Yuncheng Local Dishes Restaurant serves standard dishes from the southernmost Shanxi city of Yuncheng. According to comments on the popular food site Dianping, a Chinese version of Yelp, its “genuine” dishes are popular with both locals and tourists. The Sanjin Restaurant in Taiyuan has seven branches in Taiyuan that serve food from the provincial capital and surrounding region. Comments on Dianping note that its food is quite orthodox but it is too old-fashioned. The Cai Family Restaurant serves the cuisine of Datong in the north and also has two branches in Taiyuan. It is famous for its orthodox dishes and is mostly frequented by locals.

A closer look at one such restaurant called Central Jin People illustrates this capitalization of the province’s history. Located in a small city near Taiyuan, its menu consists of dishes from the eleven counties that comprise the Jinzhong administrative region of central Shanxi Province. According to its manager-owner, “the business concept is to serve the kind of food that people liked from when they were very young. This makes people feel as if they are eating at home.” He scouted each of the Jinzhong region’s eleven counties for cooks specializing in traditional local dishes. Some dishes are prepared on-site,
while others are procured from specialty makers in the counties. Patrons are mainly local residents, as well as traveling businesspeople and tourists. The décor is a pastiche. Its first floor is a large open space with a concrete floor and yellow linoleum tables that evoke the atmosphere of a government canteen of the socialist period. An open kitchen running along one side of the room lets patrons watch their food being prepared. The second floor is for private dining rooms. They are entered by a hallway modeled on the courtyards of Qiaojia Mansion, with gray walls, red lanterns, brick arches, and windows covered with dark woodcarvings. Some rooms have the arched ceilings and whitewashed walls found in the peasant cave dwellings in the Shanxi mountain. The rooms have pictures of Shanxi merchant mansions on their walls and posters touting the health benefits of specific Shanxi dishes and ingredients. However, the owner confided to me that his restaurant was not very profitable. This is because many of his customers are locals who know the costs of the ingredients, and so he has to keep prices low, resulting in a thin profit margin.

More ambitious restaurateurs aim for higher ends of the market by appealing to culinary tourists coming to Taiyuan on tour groups or for conventions, and also have facilities for large banquets. They serve upgraded local dishes and fusion dishes in theme-park settings of Shanxi history and famous sites. One such establishment is Jinyun Mansion, founded in the early 2000s. It occupies a four-thousand-square-meter site in the downtown area, employs seven hundred cooks, servers, and office personnel, and can seat eighteen hundred guests at a time. Tourists are a large percentage of its annual turnover of one million customers. Each floor is decorated with a different Shanxi historical theme. The second floor features central Shanxi merchant culture, with dining rooms arrayed along a hallway lined with the red lanterns like a merchant mansion courtyard. The third-floor theme is the fourteenth-century classic novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which describes the turbulent politics at the end of the Han dynasty around AD 200. The private dining rooms on this floor are named after characters in the story, and the hallway features a life-size display of a scene from the novel that includes Guan Yu, a general from the ancient state of Jin and one of the novel’s most famous characters. The fourth-floor theme highlights famous Shanxi personages with dining halls that memorialize poets, prime ministers, and emperors. The fifth floor is China’s emperor culture, with luxurious dining halls, some of which were restricted for use by central government officials at the time of my visits to the restaurant.
Jinyin Mansion develops and serves fusion dishes that command higher prices because of their unusual and high-quality ingredients. During a visit to the restaurant, the manager explained the types of fusions. One mixes ingredients from different regions in Shanxi, an example being the addition of Luliang ham and Pingyao beef to the common stir-fried dish of potato strips and beef. Another type of fusion is the addition of an ingredient from elsewhere in China to a Shanxi dish. For example, Spanish mackerel from South China is added to Shanxi’s venerable golden squash and millet porridge to create an unusual and tasty dish. Yet another type of fusion incorporates ingredients from another Asian cuisine into a Shanxi dish, an example being the Shanxi-Thai fusion dish “The Jewel in the Frog’s Mouth,” a traditional stewed pork dish in which Chinese spicy pepper is replaced with Thai red pepper. Finally, there are fanciful East-West fusion dishes, such as “fried goose liver and soy sauce,” inspired by French foie gras, that adds Shanxi oats to a mixture of goose liver sauce, red chili, coriander, sesame seeds and spring onion. The creation of such fusion dishes is institutionalized in Jinyin Mansion’s Research and Development Group that sends cooks to visit other restaurants and local markets for inspiration. The chefs then present their creations at a monthly Recommendation Day to taste and select new dishes for the menu, receiving a bonus if their dishes are chosen.

Jin cuisine restaurants also enhance the symbolic capital of their dishes in various ways. Jinyin Mansion invents narratives for specific dishes. An interesting example is “wild vegetable ball,” which takes the weeds that in Shanxi were traditionally considered as “starvation foods” eaten during famines, mixes them with dough, and then deep-fries the balls. Servers then tell guests that it was eaten by the Dowager Empress as she passed through Shanxi while fleeing from Beijing during the Boxer Uprising (1900–1901). Another example of cultural naming concerns Reconstructed Xigou, a restaurant in Taiyuan featuring “poor peasant culture” that serves fare from Xigou village in southeastern Shanxi. This village became famous in the 1950s when it was visited by Mao Zedong and its villagers were designated as socialist model workers. Each “poor peasant dish” is listed on the menu with two names, one being its vernacular name as called by the villagers themselves, and the other is a “culture name” invented by the restaurant. Culture names add prestige to a dish by linking it to the broader Chinese culture. For example, “Xigou stir-fried millet” is the vernacular name for a dish that that has the culture name of the Chinese proverb “The foolish old man who moved the mountain.” The manager explained the culture name to me. “The stir-fried millet
on a serving plate resembles a small mountain. Each person takes a spoonful and it is gone.” In this fashion the culture name adds prestige to the peasant fare by invoking a famous proverb while alluding to the values of hard work of the village’s model workers.

All of the noodle shops and Jin-cuisine restaurants highlight the performative aspects of food preparation in open kitchens for customers to watch the food preparation. The making of knife-shaved noodles is a sight to behold. A chef cradles a large lump of soft dough in one hand, while wielding a curved steel blade in the other. With rapid flicks of the blade, an experienced chef can shave off two hundred strips of dough a minute, and send them streaming into a pot of boiling water. Upper-end Jin-cuisine restaurants even organize noodle-making shows. At Jinyun Mansion customers can request a virtuoso display of noodle making whereby a chef makes various kinds of noodles. For the climax, the chef flicks a stream of knife-shaved noodles across the room to hit a target. Customers can also ask performers to sing Shanxi opera and folk songs at tables.

**Shanxi Cuisine Goes National**

Beginning around 2000, restaurants serving Shanxi cuisine have proliferated nationally. An Internet search conducted in 2014 on the restaurant websites Dianping, Daodao, and Ganjiwang for such major cities as Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong found about 1,400 Shanxi-food restaurants. The actual number is much higher, because some are corporations with multiple branches with the same name. The Ninety-Nine-Cent Shanxi Noodle Shop chain is illustrative. It began in 1995 when a Shanxi native founded Shanxi Noodle King in Haikou, the capital of Hainan Province. Realizing the appeal of the product, he moved to the larger market of Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong Province, and opened the Ninety-Nine-Cent Shanxi Noodle Shop. Its name originates from a derogatory slang term for Shanxi natives as cheapskates, but the company uses it to refer to the good value it offers thrifty customers. By 2014, the chain had grown to about a hundred shops, with a third in Guangzhou and the rest in other cities throughout China. The chain has standardized noodle production and runs a program called Noodle University to train chefs in making and cooking noodles.

As noted above, these shops are fast-food establishments that serve noodles as the main dish. The typical meal is a big bowl of noodles with sauce on it. The most common noodles are knife-shaved noodles, but others are served as well. In their décor some are modern
and functional, with the Formica tables, metal and plastic chairs, and bright colors typical of fast-food restaurants. Slightly more upscale establishments have wooden tables, with wood-beam ceilings and Chinese paintings on the walls to create a modern yet rustic feel. Regardless of the décor, these restaurants typically have large pictures of bowls of noodles with different gravies on the walls to serve as menus. Some also serve such Shanxi side dishes as meat pies and lamb spareribs. Many customers are young people and office workers attracted by the taste, low prices, and quick service.

Restaurants offering a full Jin-cuisine menu are also very popular. Their menus contain typical Shanxi dishes, with the saltiness, spice, and sourness adjusted to fit local palates. The restaurants create a Shanxi-style atmosphere in their architecture and décor, and some even tout their authenticity by advertising the Shanxi origins of their owners and staff. An example is the Shanxi Country Residence founded in 2002, which expanded to seven branches in Tianjin. All of its restaurants are gray stone buildings with curving roofs that resemble Shanxi merchant houses. Their interior décor are pastiches of the province’s cultural zones, most notably the merchant mansions of central Shanxi, the Yungang Buddhist grottoes of the north, and the Shanxi cave-style dwellings in mountainous areas. Its menu features a variety of Shanxi dishes similar to that of the Central Jin People restaurant mentioned in the previous section.

The boom in Shanxi cuisine has also buoyed the aforementioned Jinyang Restaurant, which has purveyed Shanxi dishes in Beijing for over half a century. Since 2000 it has opened four branches in the city, with a menu modified to meet consumers’ new health concerns by reducing the salt and oil in its dishes. It now touts its signature Fragrant and Crispy Duck as a less fatty alternative to Beijing Duck, because it is boiled to remove fat. I was told that the Jinyang Restaurant has become quite popular with officials in the state’s military and security organs because cuisine from Shanxi is considered a power food. My informant attributed this to the fact that Guan Yu, the famous Shanxi general in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, is venerated for his military prowess.

Jin cuisine has also entered the higher end of China’s culinary world. An example is Hutong, one of Hong Kong’s first Chinese restaurants to be awarded a Michelin star. It is part of the Aqua Restaurant Group run by restaurateur David Yeo, which operates a range of restaurants including Spanish and Japanese. Hutong advertises itself as serving Northwest Chinese cuisine—a fusion that mixes Shandong cuisine, also known for its use of vinegar, with Sichuan cuisine—in a
setting evocative of a Shanxi merchant mansion. It also holds regional food festivals emphasizing other North China cuisines, one being a Shanxi Cuisine Festival held in 2011. This festival drew heavily on the province’s cultural capital. For example, alongside the entry for Pingyao beef, the menu noted that that Pingyao is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a roof from Pingyao hung from the restaurant’s ceiling. Claims were also made about the healthy character of Shanxi cuisine as a medicinal antidote to the stresses of modern life. For example, to its Shanxi braised lamb dish, the restaurant added *dangshen* root, known as a “poor man’s ginseng” and used in traditional Chinese medicine to lower blood pressure.

**Shanxi Cuisine Goes Abroad**

Restaurants serving Shanxi dishes are also appearing in cities around the world. In New Zealand one can dine at Shanxi Noodles in Christchurch, Shanxi Noodle House in Addington, and Shanxi Restaurant in Auckland. In New York’s Chinatown, one can find three restaurants selling knife-shaved noodles next to each other: Sheng Wang, Tasty Hand-Pulled Noodles, and Super Taste Handmade Noodles. In Paris one can dine on Shanxi dishes at the Restaurant Shanxi. Perhaps, the most successful export of Shanxi cuisine is to Japan, where knife-shaved noodles have become very popular.

Jinfeng Mansion is reputed to be the very first restaurant in Japan specializing in cuisine from Shanxi Province. It was opened precociously in 1987 during the early boom in trade between Japan and China as a partnership between the Japanese restaurant corporation Tricolore and a former chef from the aforementioned Jinyang Restaurant. It offered an upscale dining venue where Japanese businessmen could entertain Chinese officials. Competition in the early 2000s from many newly established restaurants serving less expensive Shanxi fare led to its closure in 2005. A down market offshoot called Jinfeng Younger Sister opened as a Shanxi-themed Japanese-style drinking place (*izakaya*) before going out of business a few years later.

The boom of Shanxi restaurants in Japan began in 2002 with the opening of several knife-shaved noodle shops. In a little more than a decade this number had grown to 250 establishments, with about one third in Tokyo, according to the Japanese restaurant website *Taberogu* (2014). However, many are chain restaurants and so, just as in China, the number of shops is probably greater than indicated by these statistics. Many of their noodles are served in soups, just like Japanese-style ramen noodles, rather than with sauces on top as in China. Some of
the more popular soups and toppings are spicy Sichuan *mala* or *dan-dan* sauces, mixed vegetables, and scallion and oil, none of which are traditionally found in Shanxi Province. These restaurants all feature open kitchens so that customers can view the noodle-making chefs. Some have large street-level windows to entice pedestrians with displays of noodle making. Also, many Chinese restaurants serving pan-Chinese cuisine now include knife-shaved noodles on their menus.

I asked restaurant managers and chefs why knife-shaved noodles were so popular in Japan. Some said simply that Japanese consumers craved novelty, and that the noodles were heavily promoted in the mid-2000s through television shows, food festivals in department stores, and magazine articles. Others cited cultural familiarity. One manager said that, as all noodles in Japan originally came from China, it is natural for Japanese to appreciate yet another one from China. Another manager said that many Japanese know of Shanxi. Everyone knows the famous Buddhist sites on Wutai Mountain are in Shanxi Province. He also credited the 2006 documentary *Ant Army* (*Ari no Heitai*), about defeated Japanese soldiers after World War II who fought in the warlord army of Yan Xishan against the communists, with further increasing awareness of Shanxi. Yet others mentioned cultural affinity. One chef said that Japanese could appreciate the skill of making knife-shaved noodles due to their own artisanal tradition. Another said that both Japan and Shanxi are insular cultures, with the former surrounded by water and the latter by mountains.

Interestingly, some of the establishments market knife-shaved noodles as from Xi’an the capital of Shaanxi Province, which lies just to the west of Shanxi Province. An example is the Xi’an Knife Shaved Noodle Restaurant chain with branches in Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Niigata, which is owned by China Travel Agency, Inc., a private company based in Tokyo’s Kanda district, home to many Chinese and Taiwanese trading companies, I heard two explanations for this. One is that it is a marketing ploy; Xi’an is a popular tourist destination for Japanese, so Japanese are more familiar with this place name than with Shanxi Province. The other is that knife-shaved noodles were brought long ago from Shanxi Province to Xi’an and became assimilated into the local Xi’an cuisine. Therefore, restaurateurs from Xi’an view knife-shaved noodles as a Xi’an dish and market it as such. I find this latter explanation more plausible because these restaurants also include many other Xi’an dishes on their menus, suggesting that the noodles are considered part of the local cuisine.

The case of Xi’an noodles also underscores how the actors behind the spread of Shanxi cuisine in Japan are not Shanxi natives. The
Chinese restaurateurs in the industry appear to be from Xi’an and Fujian, and some work with Japanese partners. I heard of only one noodle shop operated by a Shanxi native, the aforementioned one that opened briefly but went out of business. Also, many servers and managers are from northeast China, the former Japanese colony of Manchuria and origin of many migrants to Japan from the 1980s. In fact, during visits to multiple shops and restaurants, I never met a single staff member from Shanxi Province. The significance of this for the globalization of Shanxi cuisine will be considered below.

**Reflections on the Globalization of Shanxi Cuisine**

Over the course of two decades obscure foods from China’s backwater Shanxi Province have become an increasingly globalized cuisine. It first spread nationally, then around the world, most recently being feted at the UN. In reflecting on this culinary globalization an insightful starting point is provided by Yoshino’s study (2010) of the “neglected” globalization of Malaysian cuisine. He addresses the question of why the culinarily rich Malaysian cuisine has been far less successful at globalizing than such other Asian cuisines as Japanese and Thai. The situation of Shanxi cuisine begs the opposite question, namely how an obscure regional cuisine in China has successfully globalized? My insights into this process are organized along the three contexts proposed by Yoshino for understanding culinary globalization: the global consumer culture; the key actors who “reproduce” the cuisine; and the role of the state (Yoshino 2010, 14).

Yoshino argues that a key reason that Malaysian cuisine has not globalized is its lack of a distinct identity for non-Malaysian consumers, who are hard-pressed to name any Malaysian dishes (2010, 5–7). Within multi-ethnic Malaysia, its food is seen an amalgamation of different ethnic dishes, such as Chinese and Indian, and there is no widespread concept of a national Malaysian cuisine. Before the 1990s the situation in Shanxi Province was similar; within the province its food was simply seen as numerous local dishes and there was no image of a distinct provincial cuisine to present to non-natives. However, during the 1990s the provincial government successfully created an image of a provincial cuisine replete with iconic dishes, signature ingredients, and characteristic flavors.

Globalization of this Shanxi cuisine has proceeded in two distinct consumer cultures. One is culinary tourism for travelers visiting new places or simply those dining out near home. The proliferation of
Knife-Shaved Noodles Go Global

Jin-cuisine restaurants let consumers enjoy a wide range of new Chinese food tastes beyond more familiar Sichuan, Beijing, and Cantonese cooking. This phenomenon is not only confined to cuisine from Shanxi. Restaurants serving other provincial cuisines have also proliferated, an example being Yuxiang People, a restaurant chain in Beijing that features cuisine from Chongqing, Sichuan Province (Wank 2010, 12–13). The other consumer culture is fast food that emphasizes a tasty, quick, and cheap meal. This has proliferated mainly through Shanxi noodle shops. In the case of Japan, the noodles are a standardized product purveyed in the chain branches of restaurant corporations. This process has similarities to the globalization of the taco, the pizza, and the hamburger that are sold in fast-food chains (i.e., Taco Bell, Shakey’s Pizza, McDonald’s) and have been assimilated into the food cultures of many countries where they are no longer seen as foreign foods (i.e., Pilcher 2012, Watson 2006).

Second, the creation of a Shanxi cuisine has stimulated commercial opportunities for entrepreneurial restaurateurs. They operate on a larger scale than the single-proprietor small Malaysian restaurants that

Figure 10.1  The fifth-floor theme of Jinyin Mansion is China’s emperor culture. This picture shows the dining hall of the Emperor’s Room, part of a suite that includes a study and bedroom, and use of which is restricted to central government officials. Photo credit: David L. Wank, March 16, 2012, Taiyuan, Shanxi, China
Yoshino describes in Tokyo. The commercial actors purveying Shanxi cuisine in Japan are corporations with ties to the media and Japanese capital, and in some cases the government. These ties provide greater resources for restaurant development than the reliance on personal family and savings by Malay restaurant operators (Yoshino 2010, 10–12). Also, it is significant that restaurateurs purveying Shanxi cuisine in Japan are not from Shanxi, but from elsewhere in China and include Japanese partners. This is akin to the situation of Fujianese restaurateurs selling Japanese cuisine as described by Wank and Farrer (this volume); owners and staff of the Shanxi restaurants are purveying a regional Chinese cuisine that is not their own, even though this is not apparent to diners. The point is that Shanxi cuisine is a generalized “ethnic niche” that can be exploited by restaurateurs regardless of ethnic and national background and actual familiarity with Shanxi Province. This opens the gates to a much larger pool of entrepreneurial talent than the situation described by Yoshino where Malaysian

Figure 10.2 The theme of the third floor of Jinyun Mansion is Romance of the Three Kingdoms (see text). These statues recreate the novel’s Peach Orchard scene, where Shanxi native Guan Yu (right) and his oath brothers swear allegiance to the Han dynasty. Revered in Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism, small statues of Guan Yu are ubiquitous in Chinese restaurants around the world. Photo credit: David L. Wank, March 16, 2012, Taiyuan, Shanxi, China
restaurateurs in Tokyo are from Malaysia or are Japanese with direct personal experiences there.

Third is the role of the state. Yoshino faults the Malaysian state for failing to help forge and promote an image of Malaysian cuisine. This is in marked contrast to the proactiveness of the Shanxi provincial government in “inventing” a Shanxi cuisine and then promoting and protecting the brand in national and global markets. Nor is this provincial government proactiveness an isolated fluke. Rather it reflects the widespread strategy of economic development in the 1990s of inland provinces that were economically disadvantaged by distance from the transnational capital flows and trade networks along the coast. Oakes writes that for these provinces, “promoting Chineseness as a unique feature of regional culture serves to connect localities to broader networks of power that include the national scale of the People’s Republic of China, the supranational scale of ‘Greater China’ . . . and others sites of Chinese capitalism, and the global scale of transnational capital” (Oakes 2000, 669). To make themselves attractive to investment, provincial governments revived regional identities that had been suppressed by the homogenizing social class discourse of socialism. Defining regional cultures as coterminous with their provincial boundaries enhanced governmentality by authorities within their jurisdictions. In this context I have argued that restaurants purveying these invented provincial cuisines are a site for the production and consumption of a new national imaginary based on provincial regionalism; culinary tourism lets people sensually experience the regional differences that constitute an essential civilizational “Chineseness” (Wank 2010, 12–14).

The efforts of the Shanxi provincial government also dovetail with the growing state elite perception that China lacks sufficient soft power in world affairs. From the early 2000s Chinese leaders have been concerned that the proliferation of such cultural products as Hollywood movies, fast food, and pop music, especially from the United States, is a threat to both China’s domestic “cultural security” and international influence (Li 2008). In 2011 the Chinese state announced a project to promote Chinese cultural industries and products abroad in order to build China’s cultural power globally (China Daily 2011). Such a project likely embraces efforts in regard to regional cuisine, such the Shanxi government’s creation of a Shanxi World Noodle Festival and promotion of Shanxi cuisine in New York. It is possible to imagine further actions. The provincial government could seek UNESCO world cultural heritage recognition for Shanxi noodles as has occurred for Chengdu, the capital of city of Sichuan Province, which became a UNESCO City of Gastronomy in 2011. One could also imagine the provincial
government creating a global certification for Shanxi noodles in order to promote and protect the Shanxi cuisine brand in a project similar to Thai Select, a project by the Thai Department of Export Promotion to recognize quality Thai restaurants around the world (Yoshino 2010, 12). Of course, such activities are also seen in initiatives by the Japanese state to promote culinary cultural heritage and culinary exports in this volume’s introduction (Farrer) and other chapters (Assmann, Rath).

An awareness by the Chinese state elite on the connection between cuisine and state power is expressed in comments by China’s minister to the UN. “Food is not just something that will keep us full, it is also an embodiment of culture and philosophy,” said Wang Hongbo while attending the Shanxi Food Festival in New York. “It is also a model to build understanding. In China there is this very famous saying, ‘to govern a big country is like cooking delicious food.’ We need to figure out what ingredients to put together, make sure we choose the right approach and we have to be very meticulous” (China Daily 2014).

Notes

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2. Interview in 2008 with the head of the Shanxi Clan Association in Tokyo.

3. The paper was presented at a conference that I organized called, “Rethinking Locales in Globalization: Shanxi Province in Comparative Perspective.” It was held at Jinzhong University, Shanxi Province, China from August 31 to September 1, 2006.

4. Many of these restaurants use the term “renjia” in their name. The term literally means “others” but also connotes “of the people” and “folksy.”

5. Servers take history courses offered by the restaurant to become proficient in these stories.

6. At least one firm has links to the Japanese government. The Shouryu Corporation, opened its first Chinese restaurants in 2003 in Tokyo and within a decade had grown to 25 restaurants, including knife-shaved “noodle huts” and Jin-cuisine restaurants. It also runs a Chinese teashop in the Japan-China Friendship Building, which belongs to the Japan-China Friendship Association that is supported by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote cultural understanding and trade between the two countries. Also, in Shanxi Province the Jin cuisine restaurants where I conducted interviews were run by former government officials. They appeared to have used ties to their former provincial and local government bureaus for access to real estate and other resources to run their restaurants.
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Chapter 11

From Cajun Crayfish to Spicy Little Lobster: A Tale of Local Culinary Politics in a Third-Tier City in China

Sidney C. H. Cheung

Introduction

Foodways have always been an entry point for anthropologists’ investigations of cultures (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Early anthropological research on food and cuisine centered largely upon questions of taboo, totems, sacrifice, and communion. With the cultural symbolism approach, the analyses emphasize how food reflects humans’ understandings of themselves and their relations with the physical world as well as the supernatural world. Structural anthropologists focus on edibility rules—why food is a symbol through which the “deep structure” of humanity can be investigated, and also how corresponding concepts of the body and spatial territories can be discerned. With the publication of Jack Goody’s Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology (1982), the anthropological study of food has turned our attention to many sociocultural issues in the larger political economy, which broadens our understanding of urbanization, modernization, class, social hierarchy, and the meanings of taste from a cultural and political
perspective. Recent anthropological studies on Asian foodways have focused on changes in the local dynamics of production, representation, identity construction, postmodern consumerism, etc.; in particular, they have highlighted the globalization of local foodways as well as the localization of foreign foodways in various countries, reminding us that foodways are simultaneously local and global in terms of production, manufacturing, and marketing. Nowadays, with the global turn in social science, scholarly attention has been given to the movement of ingredients that travel from region to region and even across oceans from continent to continent. The movement of ingredients not only reminds us of how objects and materials move, but also of the changing concepts of food, as well as eating and cooking styles among human groups. By focusing on a single food item, sugar, as well as the meanings associated with sugar in various social contexts, Sidney Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985) has shown that the consumption of sugar played a central role in the transnational development of modern capitalism and has inspired detailed studies on specific items such as tea, tobacco, coffee, etc., which all bring significant contributions to the understanding of modern economy and politics (also see Bestor 2004; Freidburg 2004; Gately 2003; Macfarlane and Marfarlane 2003; and Pendergrast 1999). These transnational histories of single food items enable us to investigate the changing social tastes and cultural values during the last few centuries. In this chapter, the process of making the American crayfish into a representative ingredient of local cuisine in China will be the focus of my investigation.

This chapter examines the transnational history and local significance of a spicy crayfish dish created in the Jiangsu area of China. It shows how the crayfish *Procambarus clarkia*, which originated in Louisiana in the United States, is now part of the fast-changing foodways of modern China. Biologically speaking, crayfish are freshwater crustaceans resembling marine lobster but smaller in size; crayfish has been marketed as “little lobster” in mainland China because of the upscale image of lobster. There are more than five hundred varieties of crayfish in the world; and in some countries, such as Australia and Sweden, they are an especially popular food item.1 The best-known culinary style would be the spicy Cajun cuisine, which originated in Louisiana and is widely considered a working-class food in the southern part of the United States.

Through the emergence and development of a popular spicy crayfish dish in the Jiangsu coastal area, I would like to draw attention not
only to the transnational mobility of food ingredients, but also to how the domestic mobility of people and resources contribute to the socio-economic changes of a third-tier city in China. Again, different from those previous studies on cuisines or processed products, the introduction of crayfish to areas where they originally did not exist helps us to investigate both social and cultural influences of the American crayfish on Asia (Cheung 2015).

In the early to mid-twentieth century, crayfish were perceived in both China and Japan as an exotic animal, but were promoted as local food in order to support regional economies as well as agricultural development. Therefore, the social economic impacts on Asian societies cannot be neglected. My earlier research focuses on the adaptations of two kinds of red swamp crayfish (P. clarkii, which is called “little lobster” in mainland China, and Pacifastacus leniusculus, which is called Uchida crayfish in Japan) from North America to Jiangsu, China, and Hokkaido, Japan. Interestingly, the development of crayfish farming in all these areas shares some parallels regarding the social economy, tourism development, local identity, class, contested meanings of taste, etc. in North America and Japan (Cheung 2015). Although I might not be able to bring all the details into this discussion, the similarities reflect how taste as a kind of cultural practice is constructed. For example, when I asked some local Chinese crayfish traders whether they knew that those crayfish originally came from the United States, I was told that since crayfish are farmed in their area, they are local products; in other words, local people were not concerned with the origin of crayfish. They were more interested in marketing it as local, even though many crayfish were actually collected in the other neighboring cities. When I made similar inquiries in New Orleans, people claimed that crayfish is an important part of the Cajun cuisine representing the local Southern culture, even though it is not always grown there. So, let us see what makes crayfish local.

This Louisiana red swamp crayfish was brought to Jiangsu Province by the Japanese in the 1930s. However, it was not welcomed by the local people, as it did not bring benefits to the community and it caused damage to crops. Still, due to the similar climate, the crayfish adapted to the local environment and was eventually popularized by a dish called “Xuyi Thirteen Fragrance Little Lobster” (Xuyi shisanxiang longxia). The dish has brought business opportunities to a “fourth-tier” city since the 1990s, helping elevate the city to a “third-tier” status, as local people discovered pride in this newfound local culinary heritage. During my field research, I found that many
elderly people still have reservations about eating crayfish, believing it is too dirty for human consumption. The younger generation, however, have heartily embraced the new spicy dish. Furthermore, its popularity was advanced in Xuyi, which made itself the “home” of this foreign species, together with the establishment of the Xuyi (International) Lobster Festival in 2000 and Lobster Museum in 2005. This process illustrates the role of culinary politics in promoting a distinct identity for a small and relatively unknown city in China, a type of place that is usually ignored in studies of culinary globalization, which often focus on famous “first-tier” cities such as Shanghai or Hong Kong.

Less than a two-hour drive from Nanjing, Xuyi is located in the lower basin of Hao River and the southern side of Hongze Lake. It has a population of more than 0.7 million people in an area of 2,500 square kilometers. Xuyi’s environment is famous for its hilly terrain and is very suitable for agriculture. It is now considered a third-tier city, having a combination of agriculture and industry as well as real estate development during the last decade.

Although Xuyi is in Jiangsu Province, local cuisine has been influenced by neighboring provinces such as Anhui and Zhejiang. Therefore, its flavoring is much hotter and spicier when compared to other Jiangsu areas. Additionally, we cannot neglect the fact that Xuyi adopted the hot and spicy flavorings such as Sichuan pepper included in the mixed herbal spices called “thirteen fragrance,” which was probably brought to areas within Jiangsu by inland working migrants for reasons that I would like to discuss further in a later section. In other words, I am going to draw your attention to this meeting point of inland migrant workers/traders and exotic/unfamiliar ingredients for the “local” invention—the hot and spicy “little lobster” dish.

The Construction of the Local

When wine lovers talk about wine, they talk about “structure and texture”; when cigar fans talk about cigars, they talk about “development”; and when anthropologists talk about culture, we talk about “construction.” Here, we have the crayfish originating in Louisiana renamed as “little lobster” in China and prepared as a local dish cooked with a hot and spicy taste. The rise and popularization of this dish serves as a tool in the development of a small Jiangsu city. It serves as a case study for our investigation of how taste is constructed locally and why it can be localized in different situations with various forms.
There are several kinds of meanings of the “local” in the context of production and consumption, and food can serve as an excellent showcase for the understanding of being local. Firstly, food is most often defined as local when seen as evolving from traditional practices, ethnically or historically defined or as a kind of family inheritance and emotional attachment. Secondly, being local also serves as a signifier of environment-friendly choices such as organic, low-carbon, seasonal, chemical-free, natural, non-GM, etc. Last but not least, local connotes a kind of slow production characterized as noncommercial, personalized, and involving regional characteristics. Such slow production stands in opposition to the mass production industry and market-oriented capitalism. Regarding the kinds of local food products, we might be surprised to see a very wide scope of varieties ranging from vegetables, fruits, honey, cheese, and wine to seafood, preserved meat, and instant noodles. Even chocolate, which is made from cacao, can be claimed as a local product from a different perspective. As most of us know, cacao trees are tropical plants that only “grow in a limited geographical zone of approximately 20 degrees to the north and south of the Equator” (Wikipedia). But by blending in local ingredients, or by emphasizing its European royal origins or its classic outlooks, chocolate has been promiscuously remade as a local product for consumers worldwide.

But then we also can ask why people want local food and what the consequences of having “local” food items are, especially the agricultural and aquaculture products grown for the consumption of the nearby community. From the consumers’ perspective, we assume that “local” food has some added value, as we imagine it is prepared with care, safe, healthy, etc. In addition, one larger motive of promoting the crayfish dish as a local cuisine is related to economic interests. From the perspective of producers as well as suppliers, it would be obvious that they aim to generate revenues; but from the local government’s perspective, it is also important to ensure that farmers can maintain a livelihood through local production and thereby prevent them from giving up on agriculture. Given the post-1980s rapid economic change in mainland China, a large number of peasants chose to work as small traders or factory workers for higher incomes after giving up farming and abandoning their farmland in order to try their luck in coastal cities.

Such migration pressures suggest why local governments do not aim merely at the development of primary industries such as farming, but at multiple modes of development such as processing and
marketing their own cultivated products, tourism, government-funded industry such as research and education, etc. Therefore, all these development directions can explain the rationale of why local government would like to put effort into promoting a tax-free industry instead of letting people work outside to earn remittances for the maintenance of the home economy. In fact, the whole idea of localization is far more complicated, as it generates many direct and indirect business connections with the outside world, and the so-called City of Lobster (crayfish) will serve as a showcase for similar kinds of rural development taking place in many third-tier cities in China nowadays.

Again, the study of the “lobster festival” in Xuyi provides an interesting case showing the transformation of crayfish from a wild and exotic animal into a popular ingredient for a local dish that played an important role in tourism development. Based on my several field research trips to Xuyi in the last decade I found that the rise of extensive crayfish farming only started in the late 1990s, and before that, all the crayfish was caught from nearby rivers and farming areas. Regarding its origin and the history of it coming to China, *P. clarkii* was brought to Nanjing by Japanese occupiers in the 1930s, though the reason is still unclear. In any case, local people did not welcome the introduction of crayfish, since it digs holes that drain water away from the rice paddies and eats crops and fish without bringing any benefits to the community. Therefore, for a long time, no one paid attention to it until the emergence of the dish called “Xuyi Thirteen Fragrance Little Lobster” in the early 1990s. The rapid growth in popularity of this dish was not limited to the Jiangsu area but extended to big cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. Regarding preparation of this dish, I would like to draw attention to how such a hot, spicy cooking style appeared in the area where the dominant style of flavoring cuisine had been mild, and to why local Xuyi people wanted to create such a large annual international festival for this exotic crayfish.

**American Crayfish Coming to Asia**

This transnational story of the crayfish also includes Japan. Since the early Meiji era, the Japanese government had plans for changing Japanese diets in order to improve nutrition and health. As part of this plan, milk and bread were introduced. The nutritional policy that was taking place within the armed forces in the 1920s was considered the turning point of Japanese dietary reforms (Cwiertka 1999).
The ecological changes brought through this state-led Food Increase Project should not be overlooked; rainbow trout, bullfrogs, and the *Uchida* crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*) were just a few foreign water species that were introduced to Japan from North America in the pre-war period. The red swamp crayfish was also introduced, to feed the bullfrogs. Local people told me that most Japanese people think crayfish carry a muddy taste and are unhygienic since they live in freshwater. Yet some Japanese people do eat crayfish as part of a simple dish.

I had a chance to eat boiled crayfish in a small restaurant in Lake Akan, which was owned by some local fishermen and served only a few kinds of fish harvested locally and prepared as simple dishes. Lake Akan and Lake Toro in the Kushiro area are the only two locations where, starting about two decades ago, fishery cooperatives gained rights to collect and catch *Uchida* crayfish for commercial usage. *Uchida* crayfish is caught for food consumption. It is sold for both canned soup processing and seafood for some local restaurants. In 2004, *Uchida* crayfish was labeled as an invasive species, and the demand dropped since then. Until 2004, five to six tons of *Uchida* crayfish were caught annually in Lake Akan by local fishermen. But during the following years, the total amount caught from Lake Akan was three to four tons yearly. A representative of the Lake Akan Fisheries Cooperatives stated in an interview that there were two major reasons for the decline of crayfish demand in Hokkaido. First, the label “invasive” gave a negative image. However, that might not be the major factor. Once *Uchida* crayfish was labeled as an invasive species, they could not be transported live and had to be cooked or frozen before transport. Therefore, some hotels and restaurants that used to order live crayfish for cooking stopped buying from the suppliers as well as fishery cooperatives. This story illustrates how “localization” is a punctuated cultural process that can also meet obstacles, as when an edible species is labeled invasive.

Besides being served as a boiled dish, crayfish has been processed into canned “lobster soup” for domestic consumption. As I was told, about one ton of *Uchida* crayfish is needed for ten thousand cans of “lobster soup,” which is sold at 500–600 yen per can in retail stores in the Lake Akan area. This soup is often sold as a gift set for visitors to Akan, who bring them back home as souvenirs. When I visited Lake Akan in the summer of 2012, I found that crayfish was also used to make chips, as a kind of new souvenir snack produced by the Akan fishery cooperative. Besides the fishery cooperatives, I visited a small café that was run by a professionally trained chef who made a
dish called *zaribonara*, inspired by *carbonara*—an Italian pasta dish. Crayfish is called *zarikani* in Japanese; *zaribonara* is a hybrid word of *zari* (*kani*) and (*car*) *bonara*. Local Akan crayfish and Hokkaido wheat flour are used for this dish in order to attract Japanese domestic tourists visiting Lake Akan. Besides the hybrid character of this dish, the café itself, while offering Western dishes, also has a Japanese hot spring. In the café, customers can enjoy *ashiyu* (foot hot spring) while eating *zaribonara* as well as various kinds of desserts and cakes. Therefore, the localization of crayfish easily can be seen as a consequence of the tourism development of Laka Akan, while the labeling of crayfish as “invasive” may be seen as a threat because of the negative image mentioned by people of the Lake Akan fisheries cooperatives.

The localization of crayfish as cuisine in Japan is limited, and the scale of production for consumption is small compared to the situation in Xuyi in the Jiangsu area, in which crayfish is promoted as a kind of nationwide icon. Thus, the details of the localization process cannot be overlooked. With the establishment of a museum and the organization of an international festival, the story of crayfish in mainland China is not only a story of crayfish’s global movement but also a story about the social and economic reform of a Chinese rural area.

As my research took place in three different geographical locations, one might ask if I was investigating a kind of economically driven globalization, given that this crayfish was deliberately transported from Louisiana to Japan, China, Spain, Turkey, etc. It does look similar to other items that were transplanted from one place to many others for the purpose of economic returns in relation to low labor cost; however, crayfish is quite different from other items such as sugar cane, coffee, and tea, as people did not bring along the relevant knowledge or technology for the intensive cultivation required for a substantial development with a “colonial” perspective. Interestingly, crayfish spread and moved without any consistent intention. It, nonetheless, became a local crop with unexpected consequences. For example, Louisiana crayfish was brought to Japan for bullfrog feed, but it was labeled as invasive due to the environmental situation. Nonetheless, it ended up becoming a local food in Lake Akan, attracting domestic tourists, who came mostly during the summertime.

Instead of understanding local adaptation of crayfish as a continuous linear development, one might want to discern it as a kind of punctuated process taking place in various countries with different forms and outcomes. *P. clarkii* was brought to the Jiangsu area by the Japanese in 1930. According to my informants, local Jiangsu people
tended to believe that there was a Japanese conspiracy to use the crayfish to destroy their rice paddies, since crayfish like to eat the roots of crops and dig holes that drain water away from the paddies. However, some biologists told me that crayfish have extremely low mobility, so it is hard to believe that it can be used for this purpose. So the spread of crayfish depends not on their mobility but on the efforts of people once they realize the potential for crayfish as a profitable crop. I was told that the spread was made possible because of the “sent-down youths,”4 who were the ones spreading the crayfish for agricultural purposes. However, this story was collected through indirect oral accounts.

In any case, due to its association with Japanese invasion, local people did not welcome the crayfish at all. Given that crayfish could survive in dirty water, most people did not consider them edible. Even now, it is still common to hear that elderly people in Jiangsu are surprised to know that eating crayfish has become a popular dish throughout China. Some people in Jiangsu who enjoy eating crayfish told me that they only consider buying the live, green-shelled ones at the market for home cooking instead of eating them in restaurants, because once they are cooked and have turned red, it is difficult to single out the “dirty” ones. Yet local villagers in Xuyi told me that in the past they caught crayfish in the river as a kind of leisure-time activity and ate them cooked simply—mainly boiled. As a commercial item, for a long time no one paid any attention to crayfish. Then people became aware of the emergence of a dish called “Nanjing little lobster,” which appeared in the early 1990s. Its rapid growth in popularity was not limited to Nanjing but extended to large cities such as Shanghai, Wuhan, and Beijing during the subsequent decade.

The Culinary Upward Mobility of Crayfish

I got to know the complexities of crayfish farming in mainland China in 2008 when I visited a designated wetland park in the Jiangsu area. But my first encounter in 2006 with the crayfish dish was at a local restaurant in Nanjing city, where the “little lobster” was cooked in Sichuanese hot and spicy style. At that time it was sold at the relatively low price of about one yuan (renminbi). And I can still remember that it was more like a street food consumed by the working class in a very casual way. People did not mind the messiness of handling the shells. They enjoyed eating with their hands rather than chopsticks while getting the meat out from the shells. Yet when I visited Nanjing again in 2008, I was brought to an upscale restaurant for
this dish and was surprised to find that the price was 128 yuan for a
dish in which there were about 20 to 30 cooked crayfish prepared in
a hot, spicy style. Many people in the countryside told me that eating
crayfish in restaurants was becoming too luxurious and they could no
longer afford it. Interestingly, I noticed at the above Nanjing restau-
rant a small leaflet on our table that read, “Today I am a little lobster,
but one day I will be an Australian lobster.” Obviously we know this
slogan is wrong, because a freshwater crayfish will not grow into a
marine lobster. With its rising prices in the last decade, however, spicy
crayfish has become a welcome dish offered by local hosts for their
guests visiting Nanjing.

What happened in Nanjing demonstrates not only the rising price of
crayfish marketed as “little lobster,” but also shows the upscale promo-
tion of this spicy crayfish dish from a peasant’s food of unknown origin
to a luxurious gourmet food that represents new Jiangsu foodways. With
this surprising upward mobility, I consider this as a timely example for
the investigation of land use and agricultural changes brought by China’s
emerging rural enterprises. Regarding the nationwide catching of “little
lobster” for food consumption, it is reported that only 6,700 tons were
harvested in the early 1990s; subsequently it was recorded that 6.55
million tons were harvested in 1995, and this increased to around 10
million tons in 1999 (Xia 2007, 3). If we only consider the production
in the Jiangsu area, the amount of “little lobster” harvested in 1995 was
3 million tons, while it increased to 6 million tons in 1999 (Xia 2007, 3).

In order to understand the local production of crayfish from the
farmers’ perspectives, I made several visits to Xuyi over the last six
years and interviewed several farmers regarding their experiences in
crayfish farming and about the future of their business. I use these
interviews, along with interviews with major investors and scholars of
aquaculture, to look at the rise of crayfish farming and consumption
as a showcase of the role of culinary politics in the economic devel-
opment of third-tier cities in China in the twenty-first century. My
earlier fieldwork mostly consisted of visiting crayfish farms in order to
understand the operation and relevant mechanisms involved in feed-
ing, harvesting, hygiene control, distribution, etc. I also interviewed
market vendors, migrant traders, investors, and restaurant people, and
I believe that all of this data can provide me with a holistic view of
what the crayfish dish means to the city and its people.

In the early 2000s, Xuyi crayfish farming in the city took place in an
area of more than 100,000 mow (1 mow is equivalent to 7,274 square
feet). Related businesses are also present, such as aquaculture, trading,
restaurants, and processing, with more than one hundred thousand
people involved. Due to the annual output of up to several billion yuan coupled with opportunities for cooperation abroad, the local people believe that this industry has a bright future. Chinese agriculture is facing the problem of a lot of abandoned fertile ground as farmers choose to leave their homes to become migrant factory workers in the Yangtze River Delta or Pearl River Delta regions. Therefore, I hoped to learn whether crayfish farming, and its closely related culinary activities, might provide a positive solution to some of the agricultural problems in some rural areas of China. In order to understand the farmers’ perspectives, I started my fieldwork in Xuyi by interviewing various local farmers. As one of my informants said, “Xuyi was very poor, holes everywhere on the street. In the last 15 years, it has been developing very rapidly. Before, there were only small vans and no taxis. Now there are taxis everywhere. The main road in Xuyi was all lined up with houses made of rocks, grass, and tiles before. Now rock houses cannot even be seen in the villages and rural areas. The old district is largely gone.” Xuyi is located at the northern part of Jiangsu (known as Subei) which was far less wealthy than the southern part of Jiangsu (known as Jiangnan) in which Shanghai and Nanjing are located (also see Honig 1992).

The first farmer I met in Xuyi used to be a crab farmer. He explained that “crab easily catches diseases, and the feed for crab is much more expensive compared to the feed for crayfish.” I realized how cheap the feed for crayfish could be upon visiting the second farmer, who used to be a lotus root farmer. He said that, apart from some corn powder, leftover parts from butchering chicken and duck are purchased to feed the crayfish. The reason he started cultivating crayfish was his discovery of the crayfish’s habit of hiding beneath the lotus leaves in order to seek shelter from the heat. However, when I interviewed another crayfish farmer (a former necktie trader from Zhejiang who moved to Xuyi to invest in crayfish cultivation), I was told that crayfish farming was not such an easy job as most local farmers thought, which was essentially that that crayfish can grow anywhere. In fact, the Zhejiang trader was not the only one to say that crayfish farming required specialized knowledge and techniques.

Another investor from a nearby city said that the reason they needed to have a large-scale operation for good-quality crayfish was that the harvest rate they could expect was far less than that estimated by many local farmers. Therefore, they made a total investment of 50 million yuan for the 2,000-mow farming area in Xuyi in 2007, and they planned to develop tourism together with food production as a kind of eco-friendly resort project. Another crayfish farm I visited had a similar idea for development. Occupying far more space, it was
a joint venture between a local company and an Australian company. Their business was obviously much larger than any fishpond I had ever seen in Xuyi. The total farming capacity is estimated to be 50,000 mow (10,000 mow run by the company and 40,000 mow designated as supporting areas cultivated by other farmers for the same brand). We should be concerned about how much of the rice paddy was turned into crayfish ponds, and about how the production of a stable food (rice, wheat, freshwater fish) will be affected by these large-scale methods in the long run. I do not have the answer at this time, but I am sure this is going to be an important issue for the Jiangsu area in the coming decade.

For all my informants, the rising price of crayfish was a major concern. Mr. Wang was not an exception in this regard. He provided me with a good reference to the rising wholesale prices in the wet market. He informed me that one catty (1 catty is equivalent to 370 grams) of crayfish was sold for 0.5 yuan in the early 1990s, 2.5 yuan in the early 2000s, and 10 yuan in 2010. The price went up twenty times in two decades, and his main customers (as well as local people) could no longer afford crayfish. Therefore, he had less business than before.
He also mentioned that during the peak years, he could sell one thousand catties, while he could only sell eighty catties in 2010. Mr. Wang added that the price in Xuyi rose higher than other places, so buyers tended to purchase from other regions instead of Xuyi, which made the situation worse. Furthermore, he claimed that because of the higher profits in restaurants, he would consider diversifying his business into catering and processing instead of relying merely on wholesale.

Regarding the rise of crayfish farming and the culinary popularity of spicy crayfish, I acquired some information through talking with some people who have been involved in this industry for a while. In my 2012 visit, I was told that the number of crayfish farms in Xuyi was much lower than people thought, mainly because most of the farmers could not earn profits from farming. On the other hand, one major crayfish cultivation company was planning to invest in the production of processed (convenient and ready to eat) frozen packs of spicy crayfish, as they expected to see an increasing demand of those products among the Chinese overseas community in North America. A similar dilemma can be found in Xuyi, as I was told that most of the crayfish consumed during the festival were from nearby provinces, because Xuyi could not support the demand; however, it is because of the name of Xuyi that the demand for crayfish has been continuously increasing over the last decade.

Some informants also mentioned that “Xuyi lobster is famous not because of the lobster but because of the thirteen fragrance.” In other words, people are more concerned with the “thirteen fragrance” rather than whether the crayfish is locally cultivated or not, given that it is an open secret that most of the crayfish consumed in Xuyi are from somewhere else. I was told that the “thirteen fragrance little lobster” had debuted in a local restaurant. I realized that farming was not the only sector they were concerned about; they were also involved in wholesaling, the spice trade, catering, and culinary training, which they called “one dragon service,” meaning a one-line system from farming to catering. In addition to the promotion of crayfish cuisine by private businesses, local government played a crucial role in this local culinary politics.

The Invention of a Lobster Museum and an International Festival

In coordination with the establishment of the Xuyi Lobster Museum in 2005 and the construction of an outdoor stadium with an audience capacity of eighty thousand, which is only used for the International
Lobster Festival, the Xuyi Lobster Festival started in 2001 as a local festival and was developed into an international one by inviting delegations from other countries to participate. We can see the active support from the government in building up Xuyi as the “City of Lobster.” Ironically, I was told frequently that there was a serious shortage of crayfish during the festival week, and most crayfish were transported from other areas in order to supply the festival participants. Therefore, it is important to know why and how such a high demand emerged for crayfish during the festival week.

**Xuyi Lobster Museum**

I visited Xuyi several times before 2012. But June 2012 was the first time I was able to visit the Xuyi Lobster Museum during the same week when the Xuyi International Lobster Festival was being held. Aside from the lobster museum, the only museum I am aware of that is dominated by one single food item is the Yokohama Ramen Museum in Japan. The Yokohama Ramen Museum includes the history of instant noodles, the décor of Japan’s postwar urban atmosphere, and the history of some major ramen chain stores offering

**Figure 11.2** Parade after the grand opening of the International Lobster Festival in Xuyi  
*Source: Photo by Sidney Cheung*
noodles cooked in various styles. However, the Xuyi Lobster Museum is very different from the Yokohama Ramen Museum, since it has no commercial activities and is closed throughout the year except during the lobster festival week. The displays are mostly plastic models of award-winning crayfish dishes of several varieties and staff costumes designed for the previous festival. There is a bit of information about the ecological issues of crayfish farming, but it is not comprehensive enough for common people to get the whole picture. From the city’s perspective, the museum mainly serves as a landmark of Xuyi because its gigantic edifice is situated in front of the stadium, which is the main venue of the variety shows and banquets held during the festival.5

Xuyi International Lobster Festival

The festival kicks off with a parade on the morning of the first day of the festival week. If one has a chance to visit the city during the festival, it is not difficult to witness the large-scale street parade right after the opening ceremony in the city stadium. Spectators included teenagers, senior citizens, and many groups of visitors from nearby counties. Many young people were dressed in crayfish costumes, and some seniors were dancing in groups wearing colorful clothes. The spectacle awakened the whole area to the importance of “spicy lobster” as a signature dish of Xuyi during the festival.

The Variety Show

The show was held on the first day in the outdoor stadium with an audience capacity of eighty thousand. When I was there in 2012, the place was fully packed with locals and visitors, and it was a show with top performers. In 2012, a Taiwanese popular singer—Elva Hsiao (Xiao Yaxuan) was on the stage, together with various nationally renowned Chinese singers.6 2013 was a difficult year because of the state policy of not allowing conspicuous spending on entertainment activities, so the budget for the variety show had to be cut down accordingly. Besides getting celebrities for the annual event, they also hired a celebrity to serve as spokesman for the promotion of Xuyi’s “little lobster” on the national level. The person they chose was Wang Baoqiang. Wang has starred in several well-known movies, and his down-to-earth style might be one of the major reasons he was chosen to be the spokesman. Through these associations, the Xuyi spicy crayfish dish was represented as a kind of food for the grassroots and local people.
The Banquet for Ten Thousand People

The Banquet for Ten Thousand People was an opportunity for many crayfish eateries to self-promote and make comparisons with other eateries. It was run by a prepaid ticket system. People brought their tickets to the venue and could exchange the tickets for hot and spicy crayfish dishes. I observed that the banquet was not only for local people and visitors to the festival; it also served as a promotion fair among local (crayfish dish) suppliers, through which each supplier could participate in the “taste competition.” Many restaurants and caterers were persistent in promoting their dishes by bringing visitors to their booths. After the security staff checked my ticket at the venue entrance, someone dragged me to his booth to receive a bag of cooked crayfish in exchange for my ticket. After two or three minutes, I was told to find a seat for my dinner, which was 2 kg of spicy crayfish in a plastic bag. I found myself one of the thousands of crayfish eaters at this outdoor banquet.

Conference and Workshop for Farmers

A conference and workshop on the technical enhancement of crayfish farming was held in a starred hotel, with the participation of government officials, farmers, experts, and investors. A few experts were invited to share their perspectives. One of the issues these experts tried to clarify was the difference between green-shelled crayfish and dark-shelled crayfish in terms of harvesting time. They emphasized the most appropriate harvest and hand-off time for crayfish at various stages for different types of crayfish. For example, green-shelled crayfish should be kept for a few more days, as they have potential to grow bigger and bring a better price. Dark-shelled crayfish, on the other hand, can no longer increase in size. Also, once crayfish are out of the pond, they should be kept dry instead of being immersed in water again. As crayfish is a relatively new crop for farmers, there is a demand for appropriate skills for crayfish cultivation, so the conference/workshop organized during the festival week served as a significant educational platform for many farmers and investors.

In June 2012, when I visited Xuyi for the festival, I found that some changes had taken place in the city. Compared to my previous visits, there were obviously more shops and restaurants. I also found a nationwide chain supermarket getting ready for its grand opening, and several private modern housing estates were under construction. In addition, a new, upscale resort hotel was there. During the last
two decades, because of crayfish farming and the international festi-
val, tremendous changes have taken place in regard to agriculture
and rural tourism development. Local people’s living standards have
improved significantly, and the income of local farmers has risen (Xuyi
was one of the poorest cities in Jiangsu Province in the 1970s). One
might ask whether crayfish farming really helps farmers earn enough
to cover their living expenses, and whether social problems that have
arisen from people abandoning farmland because of low income from
agriculture might be reduced or resolved to some extent. However, I
was told that the only innovation of the local government was to try
to make Xuyi famous instead of making crayfish farming the major
vehicle for generating revenues. The real developmental expectation
was to attract manufacturing and real estate development from out-
side in order to increase income tax and employment opportunities.
Regarding these issues in rural China, I don’t have much evidence
to show the effects of organizing the festival for more than a decade.
However, I realized there were quite a large number of abandoned
real estate projects in Xuyi during my 2012 visit, and I foresee that
these issues will need exploration in the near future. To conclude, we
have heard the story of the crayfish festival in Xuyi and have seen that
its impact upon the local community is not limited to agricultural
innovation in the context of the rural economy. It is important for us
to keep an eye on social and cultural development and investigate how
various interests (farmers, investors, consumers, and the government)
can work together for improving rural lifeways in today’s China.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the movement of crayfish (from Louisiana via Japan),
people (inland migrants coming to live in the coastal area), and capital
(revenue and resource) for the development of a third-tier city puts
together a picture of China’s rapid change since the market reform in
the 1980s.

Firstly, we discovered the global mobility of crayfish, but in fact it
had relatively low local mobility once it arrived in Jiangsu. This called
into question one of the most common narratives about how and
why the crayfish actually appeared in Jiangsu. A local researcher for
an aquaculture company said, “If you leave crayfish at the corner of a
pond, you seldom find them on the other side of the pond.” In other
words, the theory of Japanese militarists intentionally using crayfish
for destroying rice paddies seems implausible, because of the animal’s
low mobility. Also, I was told that most crayfish were found in the
lake near the old Nanking airport; this might support an alternative story: when the Japanese left in a rush in the late 1930s, they released the crayfish in the nearby lake. I collected another episode in the field regarding the spread of crayfish: informally I was told that the spread of crayfish from Nanjing depended on the mobility of “sent-down youths” during the Cultural Revolution, who helped to spread crayfish to various areas for agricultural purposes.

Secondly, while the low mobility of crayfish echoes its rejected existence, the rapid growth in its popularity since the 1990s indeed parallels China’s social and economic development, reflected by the massive mobility of inland migrants coming to the coastal area to look for a better life. Regarding the culinary characteristics of this hot and spicy dish, I speculate that it started out as food for the working class in Nanjing. In other words, the movement of inland workers and traders coming to work in the coastal areas explains why crayfish is cooked with the hot and spicy seasonings unfamiliar in the Jiangsu area. Last, but not least, mobility is not restricted to crayfish and people; it includes the movement of revenue and resources into this “City of Lobster,” brought on by industry and real estate development. Regarding the placemaking of Xuyi, it is important to realize the fact that once this spicy crayfish dish—Xuyi Thirteen Fragrance Little Lobster—became a local icon and famous nationwide, capital flowed in, remaking Xuyi into a third-tier city through tremendous infrastructure development in private housing estates, leisure facilities, hotels, public transport, international schools, etc. The culinary politics of the lowly crayfish thus had a tangible effect on local urban development.

**Notes**

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1. I was told that Swedish people hold crayfish-eating parties at the end of summer, while *yabby* and *marron* are commonly eaten in Australia. *Marron* especially is considered an expensive ingredient for upscale restaurants.

2. I do not adopt a standard definition for third- and fourth-tier cities in China, and I use this term merely based on how the local people defined their city, with the emotional expression in relation to how they were proud of their city being promoted from the fourth tier into the existing third tier; yet the primary industry-led development might be one of the major characters for defining these statuses.
3. The history of Xuyi can be traced back 2,200 years, together with the mystical underwater Sizhou City, Tieshan Temple in the National Forest Park, and the mausoleum of the grandfather and great-grandfather of the founding Ming emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang.

4. The “sent-down youth” or “educated youth” (知識青年) of the People’s Republic of China are educated young people who, beginning in the 1950s and until the end of the Cultural Revolution, willingly or under coercion left the urban areas and were sent down to live and work in rural areas during the “Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement.” The vast majority of those who went had received elementary to high school education, and only a small minority had matriculated to the post-secondary or university level (source: wikipedia.com).

5. Regarding the status of Xuyi spicy little lobster, I realized that it was included as part of the Huaiyang cuisine both as ingredient and local festival displayed in China Huaiyang Cuisine Culture Museum established in Huaian City.

6. A popular Korean singer, Jang Nara, was invited for the tenth Xuyi Lobster Festival (2010), and the variety show was broadcast on CCTV and later circulated through YouTube over the years.

References


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