

Japanese Culinary Mobilities Research: The Globalization of the Japanese Restaurant

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Abstract

Japanese restaurant cuisine is now prevalent in markets around the world, from large cities to small towns. Our research project develops a mobilities perspective to represent the transnational spread of Japanese cuisine. We emphasize that the organization of the Japanese culinary field is centered in global cities which are the hubs of the local

networks through which ideas, producers and products flow. Non-Japanese ethnic networks are especially important in spreading Japanese cuisine in low-cost forms away from urban centers. Migrant Japanese entrepreneurs remain significant innovators, especially in global food cities such as New York.

1. The *Culinary Mobilities*Approach

In recent years, Japanese restaurants have proliferated around the globe, increasing from 24,000 in 2006 to 89,000 in 2015 according to Japanese government reports 1, 2). We have formed a transnational and multidisciplinary research project at Sophia University to study this global spread of Japanese restaurants, based on interview and archival data. We are a multicultural team, with extensive personal and fieldwork experience in Asia, North America, Europe and Latin America, the regions where the vast majority of the world's Japanese restaurants outside Japan are located (See Figure 1). During the past year, we have been interviewing restaurant owners, chefs, and customers in restaurants in all of these regions. This report is a brief introduction to our guiding concept of culinary mobilities, some preliminary findings, and a discussion of their implications for Japanese actors in this transnational culinary field.

Many scholars inside and outside Japan have written about the phenomenal globalization of Japanese foods and cuisine in the past half century 3~15. However, most of their writings have highlighted the activities of people from Japan, including Japanese chefs, entrepreneurs and migrants. During the earlier phases of Japanese culinary globalization this focus on ethnic Japanese actors was justified. Before the 1980s, most of the Japanese restaurants around the world were operated by Japanese restaurateurs and headed by Japanese chefs. Japanese migrants, including business people temporarily stationed abroad, also represented the most important group of customers.

Beginning in the 1980s, however, the story of the globalization of Japanese cuisine has taken new turns. One is towards localization, or adaption to local markets in terms of recipes, food workers, and consumers. A second is the emergence of non-Japanese producers of Japanese food, including many non-Japanese migrant entrepreneurs. The localization of Japanese cuisine involves adaptations to

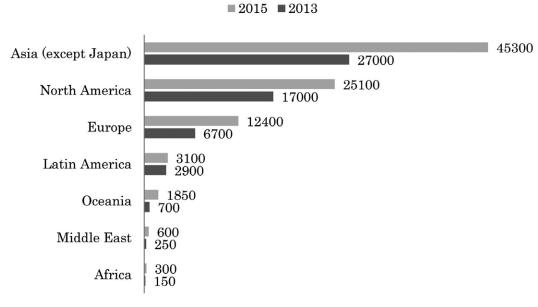


Fig.1. The Number of Japanese Restaurants By Region 2)



(Photo Taken by James Farrer April 2, 2017) The Tai Shu Kenka izakaya, created by Yuji Umeki, is one of the more colorful venues in the 'Little Tokyo' that has formed between St. Mark's Place and 10th Street in New York's East Village.

local ingredients and tastes. To take a well-known early example, in the 1960s Japanese chefs in Los Angeles came upon the novel idea of adding avocado, crab, and mayonnaise as a substitute for fatty tuna in making sushi rolls. Known as the 'California roll' this variety of rolled sushi now has spread around the world, engendering countless local variations ^{8,9}. This trend has travelled far beyond the United States. Sushi restaurants from Singapore to Berlin now serve elaborate rolls with innovative ingredients that would not be found in Japan ^{13,16}. Other types of Japanese foods, from teppanyaki to ramen,

also have first been localized in the United States, and then spread around the world with the globalization of North American restaurant culture ^{6, 14, 15)}.

The various adaptions and localizations of Japanese cuisines have created occupational niches for non-Japanese entrepreneurs, often migrants who are able to access informal credit networks and ethnic and family labor to open up small eateries specializing in Japanese cuisine. Ethnic networks also provide training in basic culinary skills 17). By the late 1980s, hybridized Japanese cuisine in the United States was no longer being sold primarily by Japanese, but by migrant entrepreneurs from other East Asian countries, a pattern of 'ethnic succession,' also seen in other culinary sectors such as the activities of Bangladeshis serving Indian food, or Italians serving French cuisine 18). In many other contexts beyond the United States, we have also seen how the occupation of a culinary market niche marked as Japanese moves from one ethnic group (the Japanese) to others (mostly East Asians at first, but also other groups). In sum, our research emphasizes the importance of global cities outside Japan as spaces of culinary innovation and the role of non-Japanese ethnic networks in bringing these re-imagined Japanese cuisines to smaller cities and even rural towns 17).

We thus propose a concept of *culinary mobilities* to describe the organization of contemporary Japanese cuisine as a constantly shifting configuration of producers, consumers, suppliers, and products centered in global culinary cities and their accompanying networks. Inspired by Urry's 'mobilities' approach to social science research 19, culinary mobilities is a concept that challenges the traditional association of cuisine with place-signified in the French concept of terroir and institutionalized in the European system of 'protected designation of origin' for culinary products. The culinary mobilities approach suggests instead of the traditional association with place, contemporary culinary work and innovation are essentially characterized by mobility rather than fixity. Forms of culinary mobility include, but are not limited to: movements of people, both producers and consumers; movements of objects, not only food stuffs, but interior design elements; and imaginative mobilities, such as Japanese food media. Looking at all these forms of mobility, we can see that the transnational field of Japanese cuisine is characterized by increasing mobility of people, foods, ideas, and types of spaces. It remains strongly associated with the idea of Japan and its traditional foodways, but is not geographically centered in Japan.

Global Cities and Ethnic Succession in Japanese Cuisine

Our recent fieldwork for this project has taken us to China, the United States, Europe, and Brazil. In all these areas, the new developments in Japanese cuisine are mostly occurring in a few global cities where business travelers and highly paid professionals form the consumer base. As noted above, Japanese entrepreneurs played an important role in bringing Japanese foods to cities from Paris to Shanghai to Los Angeles, starting in the 1950s ^{3, 10, 15, 20)}. These global cities were not only the contact zones within which Japanese cuisine was localized, but also the nodes from which it was popularized to smaller cities in the region. Moreover, the popularizers of Japanese cuisine beyond major centers have generally been non-Japanese migrants or, in some cases, long-term local residents.

In the earliest boom in Japanese cuisine in the United

States, Los Angeles was the most important global center for popularizing Japanese food. Opinion leaders, notably Hollywood stars in Los Angeles in the 1960s, began to patronize these Japanese establishments, turning them into food fashion trends ⁸. West Coast elites, in particular, embraced the idea of fresh raw ingredients with an Asian flair, and sushi even began to appear in Hollywood films ⁸. Already by the late 1970s, the growth of Japanese restaurants in the United States was driven largely by demand among Euro-Americans ⁹. Now, New York plays an equally important role in innovating and popularizing Japanese cuisine, not only to urban elites, but to small-town America. Chinese migrants from Fujian come to New York, learn Japanese cooking styles, and move up and down the East Coast, opening small Japanese eateries ¹⁷.

In East Asia (excluding Japan), Singapore and Hong Kong, and more recently Shanghai, are the global cities that have served as nodes for the spread of Japanese foodways. In both cities, modern Japanese restaurant cuisine initially appeared in the 1960s and 1970s to serve Japanese corporate expatriates. By the 1980s consumption of Japanese cuisine expanded to a larger market of urbanites seeking this newly recognized taste of *global* modernity ^{12, 13)}. Hong Kong served as a model for the spread of Japanese restaurants to mainland China, and Singapore to the rest of Southeast Asia. The Michelin guide books to Hong Kong and Singapore both recommend multiple Japanese restaurants, reaffirming connoisseurship of Japanese cuisine as a form of transnational cultural capital.

The story of the establishment of the Japanese restaurant sector in Europe follows a pattern similar to that described in the United States and Asia. Early Japanese restaurants in European cities opened to provide a taste of home for the Japanese expatriate community. Only in the 1990s did a wave of interest in Japanese cuisine reach a larger European population, and it largely reflected styles and tastes created in the United States 4.11. One of the earliest Japanese restaurants in postwar Europe, Takara, opened in Paris in 1958, in what grew into a small Japanese culinary district along the Rue Saint-Anne in the Opera district. Though under new ownership now, Takara still focuses on serving familiar Japanese dishes to Japanese expatriates in a nostalgic *izakaya*



(Photo taken by James Farrer Feb. 22, 2017) All-you-can eat Japanese cuisine buffets are a popular lunch option in Paris. Most are owned by Chinese migrants from Zhejiang Province.

setting. By the 1980s, however, Chinese migrants from Zhejiang Province began to fill a niche for Japanese food aimed at more cost-conscious and less discerning Parisian locals. These Chinese migrants in Paris produced not only hundreds of restaurants, but a culinary infrastructure which supplies them with pre-made sushi rolls, yakitori on skewers, and even ready-made menus.

Japanese restauranteurs we spoke with in Paris in February 2017 observed this emergence of a largely Chinese owned Japanese culinary infrastructure with a mix of admiration and resignation. As one Japanese restaurant manager said to us in an interview, 'It is really the Chinese who have popularized Japanese cuisine here, not Japanese people. And from that point of view it is a good thing. They first will learn about Japanese cuisine and then they will come to this shop. The only problem is if they come here and say that the way we Japanese are making Japanese food is wrong, and ask us to do it another way. That is difficult for us. For example, if someone comes in and says, 'why don' t you have a spoon with the miso soup', or if you serve sashimi, and they say, 'why is the soy sauce not sweet?' that sort of thing' 1.

Another Paris-based veteran Japanese restauranteur, however, saw this pattern more as a failing of Japanese entrepreneurship. 'Chinese and Japanese are definitely different. Chinese come here to make money. Japanese come here to look for themselves [laughing]. Just studying

French, and their energy is all used up. I really don't understand it [laughing]. They can just open the kind of restaurant a university student could manage or a *tako-yaki* restaurant for ten years, and then they could make millions. There is such a niche market here, but Japanese people don't see it. I am just seeing the Chinese rushing in.' ²

In Germany, we see a similar pattern, though not as dominated by a single metropolitan center. The first Japanese restaurant in postwar Germany, named Kogetsu, opened in Hamburg in 1962 followed by the Nippon-Kan in Düsseldorf in 1964. These were opened by Japanese restaurateurs for Japanese expatriates, with German customers becoming the mainstay much later 11, 21). Although Hamburg had been the earliest center for German-Japanese trade, it was superseded by Düsseldorf, which still hosts one of the largest Japanese expatriate communities in Europe with about 10,000 long-term residents. However, even in the cities around Düsseldorf, only a fraction of the Japanese restaurants now are owned by Japanese, while most are owned by Korean and Chinese entrepreneurs or German chains. Here we see the same trend towards ethnic succession that occurred in the United States. East Asian immigrants who could 'pass' as Japanese typically led the way in massifying Japanese cuisine and making it more affordable. More recently, we see the 'hand over' of these



(Photo taken by James Farrer June 24, 2017) Diners enjoy the summer warmth at Hashi Izakaya and Japanese Kitchen in the fashionable Mitte District in Berlin. One of the first izakaya in Germany, it was opened by Ethan Xu, a Chinese-German who after being exposed to Japanese cuisine during his studies in Canada took up Japanese cuisine. His parents run a Chinese restaurant in the city.

business niches to migrants from Southeast and South Asia, as East Asian migrants in Germany have moved to other niches.

Now this boom in Japanese food is even extending to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics ²²⁾. In Russia, Moscow and St. Petersburg are the globalizing hubs in the spread of Japanese cuisine. Although some fine dining restaurants in both cities are owned by Japanese or employ Japanese chefs, the most dynamic trend is the growth of locally owned Japanese chain restaurants headquartered in these two cities. Chain restaurants offer a wide variety of items, with the most popular being American-style California roll and Philadelphia roll sets (each cost about 1000 JPY). For example, the St. Petersburg-headquartered restaurant Evraziya (Eurasia), which opened in 2001, has more than 100 shops in Russia and 21 in Ukraine (Kiev). The Moscow-based Yakitoriya has more than 75 shops in Russia, 15 in Ukraine and 3 in Kazachstan. Japanese food has a high-end and glamorous image, despite its growing popularization throughout Europe 22).

3. Mobile Japanese in Urban Culinary Contact Zones

From the point of view of a narrow Japanese culinary

nationalism, the trends described above might imply a diminishing 'Japaneseness' of Japanese restaurant cuisine, and we can even see efforts by the Japanese state to 'renationalize' Japanese cuisine, ranging from a certification program by the Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad, to the submission of washoku to UNESCO for certification as an intangible cultural heritage. Critics describe these policies as clumsy attempts to reclaim Japanese cuisine as the cultural property of the Japanese nation 11, 23, 24). However, they can also be understood as policies to further culinary exchange, including programs that introduce foreign chefs to Japanese ingredients and techniques, or offer training in Japanese culinary techniques 25). Whether seen as reassertion of culinary authority or facilitating culinary

exchange, Japanese gastro-diplomacy is increasingly prominent. For example, the training for public servants sent to work in Japanese embassies overseas includes lectures about and tasting of Japanese sake and Japanese wine.³

The Japanese government, including JETRO, have also fostered opportunities for the Japanese food service industry to develop abroad. However, the expansion process is by no means smooth. Between 1985 and 2009, about fifty percent of Japanese restaurants established by Japanese outside Japan have failed 5. Local consumer tastes tend to be considered the primary difficulties by Japanese restaurateurs going abroad. However, these are not the most difficult obstacles to overcome. Most restaurants are able to adjust their products and services to be accepted by local consumers. Greater difficulties include accessing resources in the places they start their restaurant businesses. These include establishing effective systems of supplying, delivering, and storing food ingredients, having sufficient human resources, especially personnel at the managerial level, and reliable real estate agencies to find proper locations. In other words, whether a Japanese restaurant grows or dies is determined less by the quality of its products, than its ability to create a reliable culinary infrastructure in the local context. Therefore, a partnership between Japanese restaurants and local companies becomes the key to the fate of overseas Japanese restaurants 5).



(Photo taken by Mônica Carvalho in December 12, 2016) Entrance of restaurant Junji at Iguatemi Shopping in São Paulo, run by chef Jun Sakamoto. Iguatemi is a prime location, and most of its clientele is composed of high-income shoppers and office workers in the area.

Some of the more exciting innovations in Japanese culinary culture are led, not by large companies seeking to expand abroad, but by individual long-term migrant entrepreneurs, including Japanese living in major culinary cities outside Japan. Such migrant entrepreneurs, unlike corporate expatriates, are better able to make the complex cultural translations involved in culinary creativity. Innovative migrant chefs include Nobuyuki 'Nobu' Matsuhisa, a Japanese chef who moved to Peru, adopted the fusion Nikkei cuisine, which he took to other cities, creating a transnational culinary empire 26. While Peruvian influenced Nikkei cuisine has received global attention, Brazil also has its own fusion styles. In São Paulo, one of the most celebrated chefs is the Japanese Jun Sakamoto. Now fifty-one years old, Jun started as an assistant to sushi man Nakamura in the prestigious Shinbashi restaurant in New York. After this exposure, Sakamoto returned to São Paulo and opened the restaurant that takes his name. He was recently chosen by the Japanese government as the curator for the culinary section of 'The Japanese House' project in São Paulo. In an interview with us in December 2016, he expressed a desire for an innovative Japanese cuisine that would put together 'original Japanese and original Brazilian elements; not a blend of fakes, modified stuff'. He said; 'I dream of a fusion of originals, and that would be like watching a new culture

As the case of Sakamoto illustrates, the global circulation of Japanese culinary talent seems for the moment to be centered in New York, a city of innumerable 'culinary contact zones' in which nearly all kitchens welcome migrants from around the world ²⁷⁾. In New York, a lone Japanese migrant entrepreneur Bon Yagi has created a little Japantown in the East Village. Through his T.I.C. Restaurant Group Yagi has promoted a variety of Japanese cuisines in twelve very distinct outlets ²⁸⁾. Yagi's Cha-an tea house, for example, features creative Japanese desserts with American influences, such as the dense earl grey chocolate *mochi* and a creamy, frothy *matcha* latte.

being crafted before our eyes.'

In China Shanghai has more recently emerged as a global center of Japanese culinary innovation, and with over 3,000 Japanese eateries, it may be the city outside of Japan with the most Japanese restaurants in the world ²⁰. In Shanghai,



(Photo taken by James Farrer April 2, 2016) The Japanese chef and Chinese assistant chef dress in kabuki style to perform a welcoming ceremony for diners at the theatrical Anthologia restaurant in Shanghai. Each dish is served with an elaborate video presentation and animated explanations by the chefs.

one Japanese restaurateur who represents the long-term migrant's role in culinary innovation is Hirano Naoya, the founder and president of Fulu Restaurant Management, which owns and manages some of the most prestigious Japanese restaurants in the city, including the high-end sushi restaurants Sushi Oyama and Kappo Yu. Like Bon Yagi, his projects no longer focus on the Japanese expatriate consumer, but on fusion products that appeal to fashion-conscious urban consumers. Opening in February 2016, Hirano's new restaurant Anthologia is a window into these fast-paced developments in the Japanese culinary field in Shanghai. This high-end eatery-whose Chinese name better translates as Global Gourmet Theatre (Digiu meishi juchang)—is quite literally a culinary theatre, in which Japanese food culture is staged by a mixed Sino-Japanese staff for a largely Chinese audience. A set menu is priced at 1,080 yuan per person (approx. \$166 USD) 20).

A meal at Anthologia features eight courses, each with a video presentation accompanied with music vibrating from the giant woofers. There are stylized performances, including even *ikebana* during the dessert course, led by the Japanese chef whose face is painted like a *kabuki* actor (and given a *kabuki*-style stage name 'Bulizo', or Master Yellowtail). One of the most memorable video presentations featured Hirano and the entire restaurant staff fishing off the coast of Nagasaki. The idea is to appeal to the global boom in gastro-tourism, and especially to well-off Shanghai



(Photo taken by Chuanfei Wang March, 16 2017) An Izakaya called He Feng (和风) in Tianjin, China. The owner chef from Tianjin strives to create genuine Japanese cuisine and ambience. The Japanese popular drama 'Midnight Diner' (深夜食堂) is playing on the television.

urbanites' desire for Japanese cuisine. The success of Hirano, thus far, lies in his ability to please and surprise this novelty-hungry Shanghainese public ²⁰).

Japanese migrants are still active in smaller and lower end markets as well. One of the most dramatic innovations in Japanese culinary culture is the popularization of the mid-range Japanese style pubs called *izakaya*. One example is in the city of Davis, California, a college town with 60,000 residents. There, one of the newest Japanese restaurants is Yakitori Yuchan, which serves classic *yakitori* and *izakaya* dishes along with standards like *ramen*. The owner trained in a small *izakaya* in Koganei, a suburb of Tokyo, and moved to California over 20 years ago. He seeks to recreate in Davis the *izakaya* where he worked in Koganei. Towards this end, the website for his restaurant explains in detail about what an *izakaya* is, and

how yakitori is prepared, and he even imports his charcoal from Japan. However, the needs for such detailed explanations also point out the difficulties of introducing restaurant concepts in smaller markets such as Davis.

The emerging global popularity of izakaya represents a growing curiosity about Japanese drinking culture and expresses a new view of Japanese restaurants as relaxing and sociable, in contrast to the older image of sophistication and healthiness associated with sushi-ya. Izakaya have spread through urban China. They often feature screens showing popular Japanese restaurant dramas like 'Late Night Diner' and 'The Solitary Gourmet, programs with a much broader audience in China than in the United States or Europe. In Tianjin, an entire section of Shaanxi Road has emerged devoted to late-night izakaya, and these are especially popular with young local women. Such media exposure and tourism in Japan may explain why China is perhaps the foreign market with the greatest proportion of Japanese restaurants among international restaurant offerings.

This latter example also points to the continuing importance of Japan itself as a nexus for Japanese culinary mobilities. Tokyo and Kyoto remain centers for these networks of Japanese culinary mobility, including the production of food media, and not just foods. However, to return to our initial point in this chapter, many of the actors moving through Tokyo are not Japanese. Chinese who have studied in Japan are central in the development of Japanese culinary culture in urban China, and we anticipate more such culinary mobility as the numbers of

[「]日本食を広めたのは中国人です。広めたのはぼくは中国人だと思います。日本人じゃないです。そういう面では、すごくいいと思いますし、まず日本食に入るのが。ただ、その後うちに店に食べに来てもらいました、と。そのときに日本のやり方でやると、逆に逆のことを言われるんです。ぼくらはこうする。どうしてこうしてくれないんだ、と。それがぼくらにとってはすごく難しいですね…。例えば味噌汁、どうしてスプーンがついていないんだ?とか、お刺身ぽんと出しますと、どうして醤油甘いの無いんだ?とか。」

²「日本人と中国人の決定的な違いはみなさん、この、中国人は稼ぎに来るでしょ。日本人は自分探しに(笑)。フランス語を習得するだけでもエネルギーなくなっちゃう。ぜんぜんわかってない(笑)。日本の素人の大学生の模擬店レベルでもたこ焼きのお店でも十年やればミリオン店になるんですよ。その隙間の需要がこんなにあるのに、日本人はわかっていないから、中国人の人がワーッと入ってきたのかなとぼくは見ているんですよ。」

³ This component of the pre-departure orientation training is not compulsory and those interested must pay the consumption fee for themselves (interviews in May 2017).

foreigners working and studying in Japan increases.

As these observations suggest, the globalization of Japanese cuisine could be understood as a story of 'glocalization' in which Japanese restaurants are spreading around the world, while non-Japanese actors are increasingly central to these flows 17). Related features of this narrative are the indigenization of ingredients used in Japanese food, ethnic succession among migrant workers (from Japanese to non-Japanese Asian migrant groups, and eventually further), and the diversification and specialization of Japanese food service models beyond familiar items such as sushi and ramen. The culinary mobilities paradigm emphasizes the globalization of not only culinary workers, but of capital, supply chains, culinary media and forms of consumption and production. Finally, our research on Japanese culinary mobilities stresses the centrality of global cities outside of Japan, both in terms of culinary transmission and innovation, with networks centered there facilitating flows into smaller regional cities and towns.

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〔日本語訳(要旨)〕

日本食の拡散様式に関する研究―日本食レストランのグローバル化

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日本食レストランは、今や大都市から小都市まで世界中に行き渡っている。我々は、日本食が国境を超えて広がっていく動きを研究して、これを拡散性の観点から説明するに至った。日本食分野の団体は、国際都市に集まってはいるものの、彼らから発信される日本食の発想や、作り手、そして料理を通じて地域社会を繋ぐ中核となっていることがわかった。日本人ではない民族のネットワークが都市部から離れた地域において低価格の日本食普及に特に重要な役割を担っている。一方、日本人移住者の飲食店経営者は、とりわけニューヨークなどの世界の食の都において大きな影響を与える先駆者であり続けている。

PROFILE



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