Eating the West and Beating the Rest: Culinary Occidentalism and Urban Soft Power in Asia's Global Food Cities

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Abstract

A new global culinary geography of high cuisine has developed centered on global cities. This essay traces this development by focusing on the interaction between transnational flows of people and resources and local cultural politics in two of Asia's global cities, Shanghai and Tokyo. Although investments and increased wealth create the conditions for development of international restaurant scenes in cities, the advent of a cosmopolitan and lively urban food culture is not an inevitable outcome of economic globalization. Global city culinary culture is shown to be influenced both by local urban histories and by transnational cultural politics, as Asian global cities compete in terms of their attractiveness for investors, or their "urban soft power." "Culinary soft power," or the culinary reputation of a city, has become an important element of this "urban soft power." To understand the similarities and considerable differences in the restaurant scenes of Shanghai and Tokyo, we must also consider historical contexts. In both Shanghai and Tokyo recently booming international restaurant scenes are shaped by decades of colonial and postcolonial encounters. Cosmopolitan foodscapes build upon colonial spatial legacies and postcolonial imaginaries. Despite the increasing diversities of urban foodways, "culinary Occidentalism" as well as "culinary nationalism" still strongly influence the meanings of consuming foreign foods in Asia's global cities.

Global culinary cities and the transnational geography of haute cuisine

The prestigious *Michelin Red Guide* for 2009 awarded Tokyo's restaurants with a total 227 stars, compared with 59 awarded in the guide to New York and 40 in the guide to Hong Kong. Journalists rushed to proclaim Tokyo the "focus of the culinary world" (Joe 2008) or "the undisputed world leader in fine dining" (Lewis 2007). As such comments show, cities compete to be top food cities, but what actually goes into to making a city a good "food city," or at the very top end, a "culinary global city"? In an interview, Zheng Tao the CEO of Shanghai's leading online restaurant guide, Dianping.com, argues that Shanghai is destined for culinary leadership:

> I believe that Shanghai restaurants are some of the top in the world and that in 5 to 10 years Shanghai will have the best managed restaurant industry in the whole world. Shanghainese people love to dine out and they are very demanding. It's survival of the fittest. (Mo 2008)

Although Zheng focuses on business competition in making for a culinary global city, sources I interviewed emphasized the quality of suppliers, attitudes of financiers, training of chefs, and the cultural knowledge of consumers. Below I emphasize the role of city governments and their policies of cultural self-promotion. From a wider perspective, I want to suggest a different type of question, which is why are we now discussing global culinary culture in terms of competition among cities, and what are cultural politics at stake in this discussion?

This research is based on interviews with key actors, magazine articles, secondary sources, and observations from years of living in both Shanghai and Tokyo. I aim not at a detailed historical account of the international food scenes in each city, but a general comparative overview that explores aspects of globalizing culinary geography that are often less obvious or salient in studies focusing on European and American cities, including questions of the cultural politics of foreign foodways in a postcolonial setting. This paper is an exploration of the global culinary geography from a multi-scalar point of view (Sassen 2007), looking at the geography of western restaurant cuisines

The Australian owned Commune Café in the Tianzifang District of Shanghai
Photo by Liu Fang

in one dominant culinary city—Tokyo—and in one rising "global food city"—Shanghai. As Sassen points out, globalization produces a collapse of spatial scales, with global geographies simultaneously imbedded in local urban geographies. I emphasize that these global-local geographies also have to be contextualized in global-local histories that produce uneven landscapes of cultural globalization in urban space.

First I want to provide some basic comparative information about the culinary field in both cities, focusing on the question of internationalization. Both Tokyo and Shanghai lay claim to a status as national culinary capitals, though only Tokyo is regularly acclaimed as a "culinary global city." By quantitative measures, Shanghai and Tokyo are both impressive in terms of the number of restaurants. Japanese government statistics for 2004 count 97,236 eating and drinking establishments in Tokyo, of which 33,772 are considered restaurants, including 5,752 "western restaurants," or 17% of all restaurants[1] (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2004). Shanghai government statistics for 2004 show 30,800 catering businesses (SASS 2005). According to a US Department of Agriculture report, roughly half of Shanghai's catering establishments could be classified as "main meal restaurants," including "over one thousand" western restaurants (USDA 2004).[2] Although different ways of gathering statistics and differing average sizes of restaurants make these numbers hard to compare, both official statistics and informal sources indicate Tokyo has a substantial quantitative edge in the total number of restaurants and in the proportion of western and other foreign restaurants.

Qualitative differences are more difficult to measure. While part of the perceived gap between the two cities is an outcome of Tokyo's longer history of economic globalization and greater per capita incomes, many observers of the culinary cultures of Shanghai and Tokyo point to differences in the cultures of production and consumption. Based on my interviews with chefs and restaurant owners in Tokyo and Shanghai, these differences include: (1) an image in Tokyo of the cooking profession as a craft, in comparison with China where it is still seen as simple labor; (2) the prevalence in Tokyo of the chef-owner-operated boutique restaurant serving high-quality foods to small numbers of customers in comparison to large-scale chain restaurants prevalent in Shanghai; (3) the prevalence in Tokyo of customers with cosmopolitan gourmet tastes, particularly middle-class women, in comparison with

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1. The category of "restaurants" does not include eateries, such as small food stands, Japanese noodle shops, sushi shops, fast food hamburger shops, or cafes. In addition, there are roughly 40,000 bars, nightclubs and drinking spots that usually have food menus.

2. The report cites Shanghai government statistics, but I have so far been unable to locate official government statistics that break down restaurants by categories. According to one study of the 500 most popular restaurants on the most popular online restaurant review site, 5.7% were "western restaurants," roughly equal to the number of popular Sichuan restaurants. 大众点评网发布2007年上海、杭州餐饮行业分析报告 http://tech.sina.com.cn/roll/2008-04-07/1907625280.shtml

the prevalence in Shanghai of men on business expense accounts; (4) the common practice of eating western and other foreign foods at home in Japan in contrast with the rarity of foreign food consumption among Chinese; (5) the general resistance of some Chinese customers to foreign food ways. In particular, I was surprised that Chinese chefs in even prestigious western restaurants often ate very little non-Chinese food in their spare time, and none of them actually grew up eating western foods. In contrast, many more Japanese chefs have grown up eating western foods, and many have spent years studying in the West. Although too complex to deal with in this essay, almost all of these differences are related to the greater transnational flows in both the producer and consumer components of the culinary field in Tokyo, in comparison to Shanghai.

In general, the advent of new global food cities indicates an increase in transnational culinary flows and perhaps the advent of a single global culinary field, but this discussion also seems to indicate a new emergent organization of high-end restaurant cultures, one increasingly disconnected from nations and regions and more focused on a handful of global cities. This global field of haute cuisine is still "French" in many respects but increasingly eclectic in its flavors and geographically dispersed. The produce may be local – and indeed an attentiveness to local products is evident nearly everywhere (see Assmann in this publication)—but customers, chefs and recipes are not tied to localities. Restaurant entrepreneurs, star chefs and skilled restaurant workers now circulate among global cities (Ferguson and Zukin 1993; also see Ceccarini in this publication).
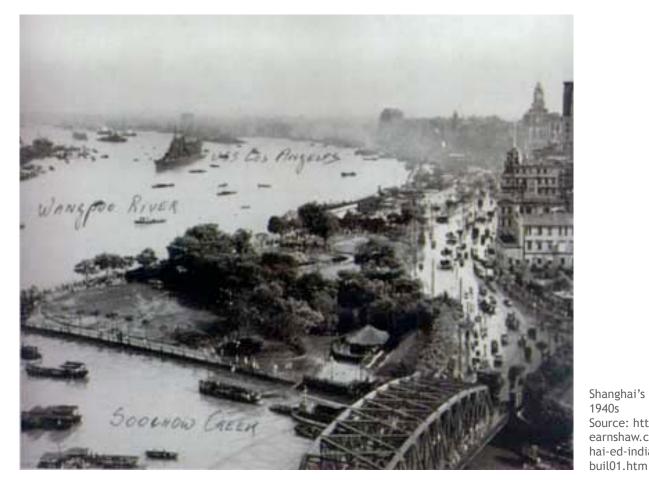

Mollica di Pane, an Italian bakery in the Tianzi-fang district of Shanghai
Photo by James Farrer

We also may be seeing a growing disjuncture between national and urban culinary cultures. The best example of this delinking may be London, with its celebrated global cuisine, and England, with its reputation, deserved or not, as a culinary backwater. Also, when we look at the contents of high-end international restaurant cuisine, we seem to be moving from a system defined through national cuisines (with French invariably at the top) to a global cuisine no longer centered in the West, no longer exclusively French, and increasingly dominated by star chefs whose reputations are based both on creativity, including a blending of national styles (Leschziner 2007), and an international resume, especially a history of working for established chefs in various countries (Ferguson and Zukin 1993). Although the insistence on an established pedigree means that the transition from a Paris-based dominance of French cuisine is not complete, the advent of non-French star chefs based in cities such as London and New York and Tokyo heralds the advent of a new order of global food, though still based on French kitchen organization and techniques. In

this system, travelling between global cities is the new pathway to career success, or even stardom. In sum, the flows of culinary talents, culinary knowledge, and even customers for high end restaurants, seems to be increasingly transnational rather than limited to national spaces, very unevenly distributed, and most densely channeled through a few global culinary cities.

Culinary Occidentalism and postcolonial foodscapes in Asian global cities

Shanghai's Bund in the 1940s
Source: http://www. earnshaw.com/shang-hai-ed-india/tales/t-buil01.htm

Globalized urban restaurant cultures should not be taken as evidence of a "flat culinary world" of homogenized foodways, nor of an "end of food history" in which culinary nationalisms and antagonisms no longer matter. On the contrary, the hierarchies of culinary global cities are evidence of an increasingly stratified global culture, with forms of cultural capital, not unlike economic capital, functioning as a global currency that is very unequally distributed. Moreover, global food culture also retains an Occidental bias in rankings and organization, with the Michelin guide as a most obvious example. For much of the non-western world food globalization is tied to a history of colonial domination and resistance, with more recent American-led food

globalization decried as "McDonaldization" (Ritzer 2004) and "Coca-Globalization" (Foster 2008). As high cuisine goes global, there is no escaping that global cuisine is still postcolonial cuisine for much of the world, i.e., the foods of former colonial masters or subjects. We must thus take into account both postcolonial foodscapes—local geographies of food shaped by a history of colonization and being colonized (sometimes both)—and culinary Occidentalism—the cultural politics of westernized foodways, either as a means of appropriating western cultural authority, or as a means of rejecting it. Both culinary postcoloniality and culinary Occidentalism are evident in the development of a globalized food scene in Asian global cities in ways that would not be observed in New York or London, for example.

The past century and a half of culinary developments in Tokyo and Shanghai represent parallel and contrasting cases in culinary Occidentalism and culinary postcoloniality. Modern Japanese cuisine was a product of deliberate culinary Occidentalism during the Meiji Period, in which the Meiji Emperor was dressed in western garb and fed western foods (Cwiertka 2007). As in China, the newly adopted western practice of eating beef was a potent symbol of nationalist "self strengthening," simultaneously modernist and barbaric in the eyes of Buddhists in both Japan and China. Beyond meat eating, many elements of modern Japanese cuisine are an outcome of militarization of Japanese society and the spread of military canteen foods such as Anglo-Indian curry rice and *yakisoba* (Chinese-style fried wheat noodles) (Cwiertka 2007). Postcolonial contributions to Japanese cuisine also include *yakiniku* (grilled meats) from Korea. Urban food cultures also were impacted by more local developments, such as foreign hotels in Yokohama and Tsukiji in Tokyo (Cwiertka 2007). The culinary geography of postwar Tokyo was radically influenced by the American occupation. Former Japanese military areas such as Roppongi and Harajuku were occupied by U.S. forces and emerged as centers of American style and fashion during this period, simultaneously mapping anti-American and pro-American sentiments onto the same urban spaces (Yoshimi 2007). This remapped geography of Occidentalized western Tokyo included one of Tokyo's first Italian restaurants, opened by an Italian American former GI at the central crossing in Roppongi (see Ceccarini in this publication), an area still known for fashionable foreign cuisine.

Monument to the first cow in Japan to be slaughtered for human consumption in Shimoda
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ File: Butchers_monument_shimoda_2007-02-24.jpg

For most of the period following World War II, Tokyo's food scenes were heavily influenced by American models, including the advent of American fast food giant, McDonalds in 1971 (Ohnuki-Tierney 1997). With the rise of Japan as the world's second largest economy in the 1980s, however, western food became much more European, reflecting both greater

affordability of luxury products but also a subtle strategy for transcending post-war Americanization by Europeanizing tastes. By the end of the twentieth century Tokyo was becoming widely known as a cosmopolitan food city, while Japanese foodways have themselves gained the status of high cuisine (Bestor 2005; also see Imai in this publication). Department stores featured luxury European food items along with Japanese traditional goods (Creighton 1992). Department stores featured joint ventures with European patissiers and chocolatiers that represented an increasingly salient culinary star system, even for take-home items such as chocolates. Superstar foreign chefs were also invited into joint venture restaurants by Japanese F&B conglomerates. Another distinctive aspect of Japanese culinary Occidentalism can be seen in the particular hierarchies of foreign cuisine in Japan, in which European cuisines still have greater prestige than cuisines labeled as "ethnic" (*esunikku*), a term than in Japan usually refers to South and Southeast Asian cuisines. Unlike the association of U.S. ethnic foods with immigrant communities (see Ray in this publication), the meanings of ethnic food in Japan is largely associated with tourism (see Yoshino in this publication) and "imagined nostalgia" for a past simpler lifestyle that still than can be found in neighboring Asian countries (Iwabuchi 2002). Japanese tend to seek in ethnic foods the exotic "night market" feeling of tourism rather than the complex tastes and refined environments of high cuisine (usually Japanese, Western, or Chinese). We thus find in contemporary Tokyo, complex and varied geographies of culinary Occidentalism and culinary Orientalism inscribed with the legacies of Japan's past as both colonizer (in Asia) and colonized (by the U.S.).

Shanghai also opened up to western culinary culture under the impact of colonization, and in the case of Shanghai more intrusively and abruptly than in Tokyo. Westerners claimed concessions in East China after the Opium Wars in 1840-42 and brought with them western foodways. At first the Chinese were not particularly impressed with western tastes, but they were impressed with western power, and culinary Occidentalism developed in China, as in Japan, as a way of appropriating western power through the consumption of western foods. Culinary Occidentalism was especially important to Shanghai residents' claims of cultural stature for their rising city. 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 2008, 125). We thus already see in the nineteenth century that claims of urban culinary prestige may rest on ties to distant and exotic places. Shanghai's numerous western restaurants in the late nineteenth century, known as *fancaiguan*, were often run by Cantonese entrepreneurs who capitalized on early associations with the West. Fuzhou Road in the International Concession became a culinary contact zone in which properly consuming foreign food was a sign of modernity. In particular, western food was a form of gendered consumption associated with trend-setting courtesans and nightlife. The focus was on

the "glittering décor," "ornate," "elegance and cleanliness" of western restaurants rather than the exotic and perhaps unpleasant tastes (Swislocki 2008, 133). Like dance halls, amusement parks, and department stores, western food, also became an important feature of Shanghai's Jazz-Age consumer culture, including western restaurants that were run by émigrés as well as by Chinese (Chen 2006). By the 1930s, eating at least occasionally in western restaurants or cafes had become a regular feature of Shanghai life, even for the middle classes. Western restaurants influenced the styles of service and presentation at expensive Chinese restaurants, and some items of western cooking even penetrated into everyday household cuisine, including items such as "Russian soup" (Li 1994).

Shanghai's culinary Occidentalism was part of a much larger century-long confrontation with Western modernity characterized by radical reversals and unresolved tensions. Chen Xiaomei describes a two-sided rhetoric of Occidentalism in late twentieth century Chinese culture that also can be used to explain the cultural ambivalence surrounding Western food in contemporary China. Under Mao, an "official Occidentalism" was contrived that treated western culture as a negative expression of everything bad and oppressive about Western capitalism. In opposition to this trend, with the collapse of Maoist extreme, a new "anti-official Occidentalism" emerged which identified Western ways with modernization and openness (Chen 2002). The development of Chinese food culture since 1949 shows elements of both official (anti-western) and anti-official (pro-western) Occidentalism. After 1949 Shanghai's international food culture was suppressed under socialist goals of food austerity, massification, and indigenization (Swislocki 2008). In contrast, after 1978 consuming western food once again became a way of affirming a cosmopolitan modern identity. This new trend of positive culinary Occidentalism developed in a vastly altered urban geography in which foreign-owned restaurants were completely absent and foreign foods were rare. Therefore, like the reemergence of ballroom dancing in the 1980s (see Farrer 2002), western food first reemerged in the 1980s as hand-me-downs from the Jazz Age, with remodeled "famous name" restaurants such as De Da and Hong Fang Zi (Red House, formerly Chez Louie) serving dishes vaguely recognizable as the generic western cuisine of a bygone area— steaks, soups, salads, cakes, soufflés and coffees.
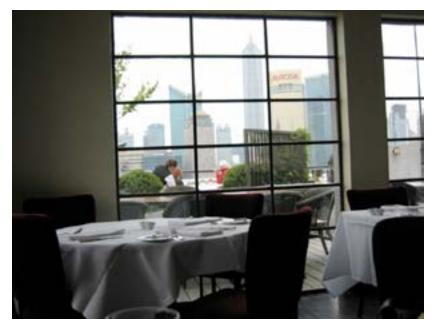
As in Japan, it was American fast food that was first embraced as a way of consuming contemporaneous western modernity. KFC opened up its first branch in Shanghai in 1988, though McDonalds did not arrive until 1994. Fast food chains became a space in which Chinese explored western modernity in the American vernacular of hamburger, pizza, fried chicken and clean bathrooms (Yan 2000, Lozada 2007, Watson 1997, Hsu 2005). Western-style fast foods especially appealed to children (Yan 2000, Lozada 2007), while employees learned work disciplines and styles of service that

Shanghai Starbucks mug as a symbol of fast food globaliza-tion and localization in Shanghai.
Photo by James Farrer

seemingly integrated them into a modern market economy and allowed an imagined space for "self development" (Hsu 2005). As they have evolved over two decades, western fast food operations in China are also localizing their menus, management concepts, and the social uses of space, perhaps becoming—as in Hong Kong—an unremarkable feature of quotidian urban life, so localized that many consumers no longer recognize them as imports (Watson 1997, Liu 2008).

Despite the development of the fast food scene, Shanghai's booming restaurant business in the 1990s was largely limited to regional Chinese cuisines. In the late 1980s modern western cuisine became available in a handful of newly opened foreign-managed hotel chains, and it was in these kitchens that a new generation of local Chinese chefs received their first training in western cooking techniques. Still, few Shanghainese ate at these hotel restaurants, and they did not constitute a cosmopolitan fine dining scene for the city. By most accounts Shanghai's new public culture of fine dining can be traced back 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

The view of Pudong's skyscrapers from Shanghai's M on the Bund, the first independent high cuisine restaurant in Shanghai.
Photo by Liu Fang

moribund waterfront boulevard, known as the Bund. With spectacular views of the skyscrapers of the financial center rising on the opposite shore of the Huangpu River, "M" was a stunning success.

A boom in fine dining began only after 2003, when a shopping, entertainment, and gallery complex named "Bund 3" opened next door to "M" in another 1920s office building that was completely rebuilt within the shell of the historic structure. Bund 3 involved an investment of over 80 million U.S. dollars and featured globally established restaurateurs, most notably the first Asian venture by star chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, whose Michelin three star restaurant and several other highly regarded ventures in New York City, London and Paris have made him a star in the business of haute cuisine. One floor above "Jean Georges," Australian chef David Laris opened his namesake restaurant in a space

of glistening white marble floors and counters. Both "Laris" and "Jean Georges" served cuisine that can be described as contemporary French haute cuisine, with a few largely symbolic nods to local Chinese traditions. One floor below, we find the "Whampoa Club," where Hong Kong chef Jereme Leung produces elaborately researched "New Shanghai Cuisine" in an attempt to both resurrect the cuisine and tastes of Shanghai's 1930s glory days as well as establish a style of modern presentation and service that matches the standard of the western stars who occupy the other floors of the building. Not the least of his innovations is his self-promotion as a "star chef," including the sale of English and Chinese versions of his cookbooks, a nearly heretical idea in the secretive world of Chinese cooking. The commercial success of these high-priced ventures was widely taken as a sign that Shanghai was ready for international haute cuisine. New western restaurants have opened at many price levels, including mid-priced independent restaurants serving various national cuisines from around the world. Moreover, there has been a rush to construct Chinese restaurants whose service and innovativeness would justify similarly high prices. In this process, Western haute cuisine seemed to be transforming Chinese high cuisine rather than the other way around, a pattern reminiscent of the early twentieth century (Li 1994).

Dessert at "Laris" in Shanghai's exclusive Bund 3 Complex. Photo by Liu Fang

The global restaurant scene that emerged in developments such as Bund 3 points to a highly salient geography of culinary Occidentalism and culinary postcoloniality in Shanghai. First, these restaurants are located in iconic sites in Shanghai's old foreign concessions, including Shanghai's waterfront boulevard known as the Bund, and the prestigious development known as Xintiandi. City planners and well-connected

Shanghai's "Jean Georges" in Shanghai's exclusive Bund 3 Complex.
Photo by James Farrer

overseas Chinese entrepreneurs have developed these sites to showcase the city as a global center, consciously reusing spaces with important symbolic value as centers of Shanghai's previous life as a "global city" (Wasserstrom 2003), an example of what Suttles describes as the "cummulative texture of urban culture" (Suttles 1984). Shanghai's re-imaging of itself as a global city has played enormously on postcolonial nostalgia, including architectural nostalgia (Ren 2008). Shanghainese identify quite positively with this Occidentalist urban culture, known as "hapai" (Yang 1992), represented in physical traces of the colonial era, including such spaces as the Bund. Many of Shanghai's luxurious restaurants use remodeled private mansions from the 1920s and 1930s that consciously evoke a postcolonial nostalgia in both internal décor and exteriors. Shanghai's culinary Occidentalism thus reveals a more conscious association with postcoloniality than in Tokyo, which perhaps explains, as well, the much stronger countervailing strains of culinary nationalism in Shanghai.

In times of political tensions, foreign foodways often come under attack. During anti-American riots in 1999, McDonalds and KFC were the targets of protests. Similarly, Japanese restaurants were attacked in the 2005 anti-Japanese protests in Shanghai (Farrer 2005). At a more systemic level, foreign food chains are arguably subject to much stricter monitoring by the Chinese media than smaller Chinese competitors (Liu 2008). Culinary politics manifests itself in quotidian discourses as well. Although, a fashionable postcolonial nostalgia imbues the consumption of western foods with meanings of cosmopolitan style and exoticism, many Chinese consumers of western restaurants still revere the tastes of Chinese food as superior to all others. As in the nineteenth century, western restaurants are primarily discussed in terms of their environmental qualities, such as décor, atmosphere and service, rather than tastes. In other words, as a counter-weight to postcolonial nostalgia and positive culinary Occidentalism, a negative Occidentalism, or culinary nationalism, persists in Chinese responses to western culinary culture. Regardless of the basis of these claims, it

Nighttime view of Pudong skyscrapers from Shanghai's "Jean Georges" in Shanghai's exclusive Bund 3 Complex.
Photo by James Farrer

seems likely that food nationalism retards the spread of a cosmopolitan gourmet culture based on taste.

In contrast, Japanese foodways seem more deeply penetrated by foreign tastes. The imagination of "Asian cuisine" as exotic and ethnic incorporates elements of postcoloniality, or nostalgia for Japan's own past (Iwabuchi 2002), and for young Japanese customers in particular, consuming cheap spicy Asian foods represents the connections between food, fantasy and tourism that are increasingly common in all areas of the world (see Yoshino in this publication). There is an unreflective and casual mixing of Japanese, western and Asian foods in popular restaurant chains such as *izakaya* pubs and "family restaurants." One reason given for these trends is the postwar hybridization of the Japanese diet in Japanese school lunches (Cwiertke 2008). Certainly, trends of Japanese culinary nationalism are evident in some movements to eat more locally produced foods (see Assmann in this publication), and in recent public scandals over food imports, especially from China. However, these trends do not seem to extend to a rejection of a foreign tastes, per se, so much as a sense of vulnerability centered on basic food products.

There are also some similarities in the culinary Occidentalism in Tokyo and Shanghai. Perhaps the best example is the continued feminization of western food consumption. Since the nineteenth century, consuming western foods has been associated with the lifestyles of "modern girls" in Tokyo and Shanghai. Whether the courtesans of nineteenth century Shanghai (Swislocki 2008), the café waitresses of 1920s Tokyo (Tipton 2002), or the teenage girls who frequent McDonalds today (Yan 2000), foreign restaurants and cafes are a space of escape from foodways associated with patriarchal family structures. In both cities, high-end western restaurants still are associated with romance, fashion and feminine style, while traditional

Postcolonial pleasures at Shanghai's M on the Bund 10th Anniversary Party, an event attended by many of the long-term expatriates in the city.
Photos by James Farrer

A local television reporter interviewing a guest at the M on the Bund 10th Anniversary party.
Photo by James Farrer

local foods are associated with family events and masculine drinking cultures. Consuming Western food is thus one of the strategies Japanese women have found to express their imagined longing (*akogare*) for an independent Western lifestyle (Kelsky 2001), a gendered form or culinary Occidentalism also found among young Shanghai women.

While this discussion has shown the continued postcolonial mappings of urban foodscapes and foodways, culinary Occidentalism alone does not explain the new cultural forces pushing for the globalization of urban food cultures in twenty-first century Asian cities. As described in the introduction of this essay, it seems we are entering a new age of interconnected global food cultures, but this is also an age in which urban foodways are tied to new forms of cultural politics associated with competition among cities and regions, rather than simply among nation states.

Serving the global city: culinary soft power and urban soft power

The author admiring the Lychee dandelion on a stick by experimental chef Paul Pairet at Shanghai's Jade on 36.
Photo by Liu Fang

Behind the reporting on the Michelin guide is an undisguised discourse of competition among cities as cultural and culinary capitals. In particularly, cultural competition among Asian cities seems to have intensified. Beyond civic pride, there is a competition among cities to attract a "creative class" of designers, engineers and entrepreneurs that is perceived as both essential to economic development and also increasingly mobile across boundaries (Florida 2002). Most notably in Asia, Singapore has invested in riverside dining and nightlife zones, such as Boat Quay and Clarke Quay, in order to project a new image as a cool and creative metropolis, with a "buzz" that appeals to foreign talent (Goh 2007). Creating attractive urban nightlife and dining zones is increasingly perceived as an important element of what can be called urban soft power— which could be defined as the reputational pull of the city, including its image as an attractive place to live and do business. The term derives from the "soft power" concept developed by Joseph Nye (2004) to discuss the reputational and ideological

power of nation states, a discourse that seems to be increasing broadly in East Asia. Chinese and Korean academics and planners have employed the idea of "urban soft power"(城市软实力 chengshiruanshili /어반 소프트파워 o-ban soputu pa-wuo) to describe the complex set of cultural and human resources that make some cities more attractive places to live and invest than others. Shanghai's mayor has been quoted as saying, "Shanghai's future development depends on developing soft power, the central element of which is developing the service industries" (Zhang, Xie and Li 2007). There has even been a national survey comparing the "urban soft power" of various Chinese cities (Oriental Outlook 2008). Discussions of urban soft power suggest that the reputations of global cities are tied to the development of cultural and service industries, with reputations for good living and cultural "buzz." Urban representations are increasingly developed in online media with a transnational reach, while focusing on the elements of life that are the least mobile and most unique, such as built spaces and local communities.

Culinary Suburbia in Shanghai, Slice Café near Dulwich Academy, operated by David Laris
Photo by Liu Fang

As a companion term to *urban soft power* we can add the term *culinary soft power*, which can be defined as the acknowledged attractiveness and appeal of food culture that adheres to a nation, region or locality. The term "culinary soft power" has been used, for example to describe, the growing popularity of Japanese cuisine globally (Japan Society 2008). Clearly, France would have dominated the global "culinary soft power" rankings of nations for the past two centuries, with no close competitors. Asian governments seem to have become particularly conscious of national culinary soft power. With a eye on the global popularity of Japanese and Thai cuisine, the governments of Malaysia and Korea both have projects aimed at promoting the status of national cuisines abroad (Abu Bakar 2008; Yoshino in this publication). Korea, in particular has set an ambitious national goal of becoming one of the top five most popular global cuisines (Ro 2009). Partly in response to Korean government efforts to promote

national soft power, Japanese government working groups have included culinary culture in proposals to promote the "Japan brand" abroad (Intellectual Property Strategic Headquarters 2009). Trade groups and economic agencies also have attached the "soft power" discourse to the promotion of Japanese food exports (JETRO 2006; Shoku-bunka Suishin Kenkyu Kondan-kai 2005). The most infamous example of government involvement in promoting Japanese culinary culture abroad was the proposal by an agricultural minister to set up a system for certifying the authenticity of Japanese restaurants abroad (McNeil 2006). This proposal failed due to opposition both in Japan and overseas, but it points out the tensions inherent in exporting "national" cuisine while also attempting to monitor and control culinary authenticity and identity.

Culinary soft power also is an important component of urban soft power, but cities seem to develop culinary reputations in ways that are quite distinct from the reputations of national cuisines. Indeed, urban culinary soft power seems to be based on nearly opposite principles to national culinary reputations. Whereas nations seek to develop reputations by exporting their

Photo by Liu Fang

cuisine, cities develop reputations for attracting the best chefs, vendors and clients from around the world. It is not necessary for a great chef to be from New York, to enhance the reputation of New York as culinary city. Indeed, it may be more significant that "Nobu" is a global chef first, and a New York chef secondly, and it is certainly not important that his food is "American" (see Imai in this publication). Tokyo tries to enhance its reputation as a global food capital by hosting events such as the "Tokyo Taste-World Summit of Gastronomy" in February 9-11, 2009—bringing in famous chefs from overseas. In any case, there are clearly both "push" and "pull" elements to culinary soft power, with national reputations benefiting more from culinary "push" (exporting national cuisine) and city reputations benefiting more from culinary "pull" (attracting foreign culinary talent).

There are numerous other factors that establish the international culinary reputation, or culinary soft power, of a city. These include the activities of the state in promoting nightlife districts, the role of the food media, the tastes and types of consumers, and the accumulation of human and cultural capital among restaurant personnel. It is thus not inevitable that a financial capital will immediately become a culinary capital, although it is almost certain that many of these actors—entrepreneurs, urban promoters, media outlets, and customers—will aspire to make

it one. Clearly Tokyo is already a global culinary city, and arguably Shanghai is becoming one. In concluding this essay, I would like to outline some of the features of this new organization of global food culture as seen in these two cities, focusing on the transnational networks of both producers and consumers. At this intersection of transnational and local urban shape the foodscapes of Asian global cities.

Global cuisine is increasingly defined by a highly mobile and entrepreneurial group of "star chefs." As the example of Shanghai's Bund 3 development illustrates, star chefs have become part of a package of retail development aimed at marketing a complete "lifestyle" to the transnational elites, including in the case of Bund 3, an art gallery as well as restaurants and an Armani clothing store. The presence of a star chef in a development such as Bund 3 simultaneously marks the space as prestigious locally and ties it to similar developments in a very small number of top-tier global cities. Like haute couture outlets, such as Armani, Louis Vuitton or Gucci, star chefs are lured to buildings in order to signal the value and status of the property to other potential tenants. If anything, in the networked hierarchy of global cities, the presence of a restaurant by a globally famous chef such as Joel Robuchon, Nobu Matsuhisa, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, or Gordon Ramsay is a greater mark of distinction than a Versace, or Gucci shop, which can be found now in many smaller cities. The artisanal quality of haute cuisine implies a uniqueness that cannot be easily transported or mimicked, while the name of a star chef paradoxically ensures a quality and reliability at the level of the original restaurants in Paris or New York.

Locally branded producers of western food do play a significant role in Tokyo, including old names such as French cuisine chef Kiyomi Mikuni, but in Shanghai's much younger international dining scene transnational ties remain essential, especially for head chefs. In contrast to Tokyo, there are no local Chinese celebrity chefs of western restaurants in Shanghai, and the kitchens of even mid-range western restaurants are almost all led by expatriate head chefs, despite the much greater costs associated with hiring a foreigner. The reasons for this reliance on expatriates include the low prestige of the cooking profession in China, the lack of exposure of Chinese chefs to western cuisine, and the association by customers (both Chinese and foreign) of western chefs with authenticity and skill (see Fung 2007). Even the chefs at the top Chinese restaurants are often expatriate Chinese from Hong Kong or Singapore. Jereme Leung, the acclaimed Chinese chef in the Bund 3 complex, hails from Hong Kong and made his reputation in Singapore. He pointed out the difficulties faced in raising the professional level of chefs in Shanghai, where work in kitchens is often associated with unskilled labor conducted by migrants from other regions of China. In contrast, informants generally agreed that the social status of chefs and restaurant workers in Tokyo is higher and international training and experience much more common, making it much easier to recruit quality western chefs in Japan. The

traditions of apprenticeship and craftsmanship in restaurant work are often cited as reasons for the high standards of Tokyo restaurants. For example, star Italian chef Enrico Delfinger, who heads the Armani-branded restaurant project in Tokyo said he can actually work in his native language of Italian in his Tokyo restaurant:

> Most of the Japanese people that work here speak Italian. They have been in Italy. They have been in Italy for a long time, one or two years, one of them even three years. So they learn, they speak Italian, they have been working in some of the top Italian restaurants. It is easy for us. It is easy because the language that we speak in the kitchen, even here in Armani is Italian. Even in the floor staff I want somebody that speaks Italian (2008 interview).

Joel Robuchon restaurant is one of three of Joel Robuchon's Tokyo restaurants that won stars in the Michelin Guide's first Tokyo edition. Source: http://www.robuchon.jp/ebisu/robuchon.html

In contrast, many of the head chefs I interviewed in Shanghai frequently described obstacles training their staff in the arts of western cooking. One American chef made the following comparison:

> Imagine taking a bunch of boys from Appalachia and teaching them Chinese cooking. That is more or less you would have to do with these guys. Most have never eaten western food in their lives (2006 interview).

In other words, the restaurant culture of global cities requires a flow of transnational talents, not only at the star-chef level, but also in terms of other professional kitchen staff (see Ceccarini in this publication).

Customers are also part of these transnational flows. Shanghai's haute cuisine restaurants are heavily dependent on international business clients. With an evening meal costing from US$50 to US$200 per person, these restaurants exclude most Shanghainese on local salaries. In most Bund 3 restaurants, for examples, at least half the customers are non-Chinese foreigners, including short-term business travelers or Shanghai based corporate expatriates. The rest are ethnic Chinese, including "overseas Chinese" from Hong Kong or Southeast Asia, Chinese "returnees" with
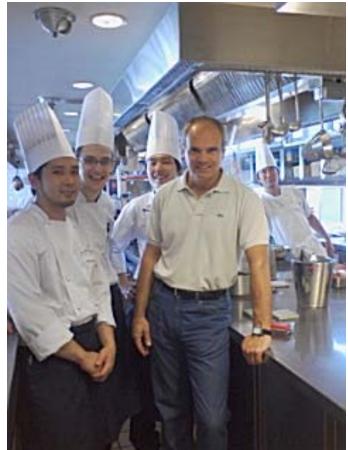
Chef Enrico Derflingher and his Japanese staff
in his namesake restaurant Oficina di Enrico in
Harajuku Tokyo.
Source: http://www.officinadienrico.jp/

Photo by James Farrer

foreign passports and wealthy local Shanghainese. As many managers pointed out, these categories are increasingly difficult to distinguish, since many Shanghainese customers have now spent considerable time abroad as students or business travelers. Moreover, some foreigners have now lived in the city for over a decade, making them a part of the local clientele. Despite these complexities, however, Shanghai's haute cuisine restaurants remain focused on the market of the well-heeled and mobile members of the transnational capitalist class rather than on localizing the customer base. Staff must speak English, and in some cases, foreign waiters are hired for this reason. Few concessions are made for "local" tastes. Both western menus and the overseas sourcing of expensive specialty ingredients reflect an emphasis on authenticity rather than localization, which is common in the fast food industry. Tokyo also has restaurants that appeal primarily to foreign visitors and expatriates, but in contrast with Shanghai, Japanese make up the majority of customers in most Tokyo haute cuisine restaurants. Thus the cosmopolitan Japanese gourmet customer is counted as another reason for the high quality of Tokyo restaurants.

With a background of complex demographic and cultural flows, Asian cities are increasingly adopting a cultural political approach to cuisine. Unlike national cultural politics that seems intent on exporting cultural products and practices, cities engage in a cultural politics of cosmopolitan elitism of which global haute cuisine forms a key

component. Such competitive cosmopolitanism is clearly not the only determinant of global food cultures but does explain why cities such as Shanghai are eager to have foreign food establishments at key symbolic locations such as the Bund (although not at locations sacred to the image of the nation state, such as the Forbidden City in Beijing).

Conclusion: competitive cosmopolitanism

In a region in which cultural flows are still conceived largely in terms of ethnic and national competition, urban cultural politics takes the ambiguous form of a competitive cosmopolitanism, in which cultural internationalism is simultaneously a product of, and in tension with, cultural nationalism. These pragmatic politics of urban cosmopolitanism are shaped by decades of colonial and postcolonial encounters. In developing global cities, contemporary urban foodscapes build upon colonial legacies and play upon postcolonial imaginaries. Despite the increasing diversities of urban foodways, culinary Occidentalism as well as culinary nationalism still strongly influence the meanings of consuming foreign foods in Asia's global cities.

This essay sketches changes in the culinary geography of global cities, by focusing on the interaction between transnational flows of people and resources and local cultural politics in two of Asia's global cities. Although investments and increased wealth create the conditions for development of international restaurant scenes in cities, the advent of a cosmopolitan and lively urban food culture is not an inevitable outcome of economic globalization. "Culinary soft power," or the culinary reputation of a city, has become an important element of "urban soft power," or the overall attractiveness of a city. Local governments court investors and mobile professionals by promoting nightlife and restaurant districts. We also see features of urban culinary cultures that are more resistant to commercial and political transformation, both in cultures of production and in cultures of consumption. Culinary cultural capital cannot be created overnight. A culinary "flat world" is still far from actualization.

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