

日・韓・中における食文化の継承と創出

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Eating One's Way to Sophistication : Japanese Food in Hong Kong¹⁾

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Which country or region, do you think, is the biggest international market for Japanese food items in the world? It is neither China nor the United States, but Hong Kong, with a population of just 7.3 million. More people than Hyogo Prefecture but less than Osaka Prefecture. In 2005, Hong Kong surpassed the United States, which has a population forty times greater than that of the territory, and became the biggest international market for Japanese food products. In 2015, 22 percent of Japan's agricultural and marine products—worth an estimated ¥134.3 billion—was exported to Hong Kong.²⁾ While some of these products are re-exported to other parts of Asia, most remain in the territory. It is, therefore, probably safe to say that Hong Kong has the highest concentration of non-Japanese people who eat Japanese food on a regular basis than anywhere else in the world.

A meal at a Japanese eatery is a part of everyday life for Hong Kongers. According to OpenRice.com, the city's most popular dining guide that relies on user-generated reviews, in January 2016, "Japanese" was the fourth largest category with 2,306 restaurants and takeaways; it followed local "Hong Kong-style," eclectic "Western," and adjacent "Guangdong (Canton)." The ever-increasing number of "Japanese" eateries accounted for more than ten percent of all entries on the site. Hong Kong's older generation may find the percentage surprisingly high, but my students at Hong Kong University think it unexpectedly low. There is clearly a generational gap in the way Japanese food is perceived and consumed. The most popular Japanese dish among Hong Kongers is predictably *sushi*, with 1,001 restaurants and outlets serving it; this is followed by *ramen* noodles with 462 locations.³⁾

As you all know, *ramen* has its roots in China. For young Hong Kongers, *ramen* represents a refined Japanese take on basic Chinese noodles. In fact, Openrice.com separates *ramen* from Chinese noodles and gives it its own category. The difference is also evident in the prices. While a bowl of local wonton noodles usually goes for HK\$ 30 to HK\$ 40 (¥ 450 to ¥ 600), a bowl of *tonkotsu ramen* with creamy pork broth is twice as expensive at HK\$ 80 (¥ 1,200). Hong Kongers, who discovered the Japanese version through their consumption of *anime*, *manga*, and Japanese

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2) 農林水産省 [MAFF], "農林水産物輸出概況 2014 [An Overview of International Trade : Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Products, 2014]," [http : //www.maff.go.jp/j/tokei/kouhyou/kokusai/pdf/yusyutu_gaikyo_14.pdf](http://www.maff.go.jp/j/tokei/kouhyou/kokusai/pdf/yusyutu_gaikyo_14.pdf)

3) Open Rice, [http : //www.openrice.com/restaurant/index.htm](http://www.openrice.com/restaurant/index.htm), (accessed January 2016).

drama, eagerly queue for a bowl, since it adds a touch of luxury to what might be an otherwise mundane dining experience.

Has Japanese food always been so popular in Hong Kong? The answer is “no.” In the 1960s, Hong Kong visitors to Japan would return home saying, “There’s nothing to eat in Japan.” *Sushi* and *sashimi* were considered inedible and *dashi* soup stock tasted too fishy. The small number of high-end Japanese restaurants operating in the territory at that time offered *tempura*, *sukiyaki* and Kobe beefsteak, three cooked dishes that had proven popular among international visitors to Japan. The restaurant staff was, in most cases, entirely made up of Japanese nationals. The haute cuisine dishes were prepared by Japanese chefs and their Japanese assistants, and served by Japanese waitresses. For grocery shopping, the Hong Kong Daimaru supermarket, which opened in 1960, had canned, bottled and dried Japanese food items for sale. These establishments mostly served Japanese elite *salarymen*. As “Made in Japan” cameras, radios, textiles and other products began to find their way into regional markets, Japanese food was made available in the territory to satisfy the demands of homesick senior Japanese executives and their family members. To most Hong Kongers, Japanese food was too foreign, too expensive, and simply unattractive. There were also lingering anti-Japanese feelings in the territory as a consequence of Japan’s occupation of Hong Kong for three years and eight months during World War II.

It was not until the 1980s that Japanese food began to make a real impact in Hong Kong. A new middle class had emerged in the city that was more willing to embark on a culinary adventure. Hong Kong and Japanese entrepreneurs also played their part in making Japanese food more accessible to local diners. By the late 1970s, Hong Kong entrepreneurs had begun to invest in Japanese restaurants, and had managed to lower the cost of Japanese haute cuisine through rationalization and localization—by engaging local cooks under the supervision of a single Japanese head chef, and employing local Cantonese-speaking waitresses who, unlike Japanese waitresses, were able to explain the menu to local patrons. These entrepreneurs also introduced Hong Kong’s favorite dining style—the lunch buffet—to Japanese restaurants, offering a spread of Japanese food at a bargain price.⁴⁾

The availability of Japanese staples, such as *sushi* and *sashimi*, also increased through the opening of Japanese supermarkets in the suburbs. Yaohan, originally from Shizuoka Prefecture, was the first foreign supermarket to venture into Hong Kong’s suburban shopping malls—away from the city center where Daimaru and other high-end Japanese department stores had established themselves. The store opened in Shatin in December 1984—ten days before the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Yaohan operated stores in Hong Kong from 1984 to 1997, a time of political uncertainty, and one which provoked an unprecedented discussion of identity among Hong Kongers. During this period, Yaohan actively introduced relatively new and affordable ingredients, prepared using Japanese cooking methods, and in so doing popularized a localized, Hong Kong version of Japanese food.⁵⁾

Salmon *sushi* is one such an example. Today, when we visit the *sushi* section at any supermarket in the territory, display counters are overwhelmingly orangey-pink, unlike their counterparts in

4) Interview with Frankie Wu, Hong Kong, November 22, 2012.

5) 王向華 [Wong Heung Wah], 八佰伴的崛起與香港社會變遷 [The Success of Yaohan and the Social Changes of Hong Kong]. In 日本文化在香港 [Japanese Culture in Hong Kong], ed. 李培德 [P.-T. Lee] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2006), 164.

Japan which feature a colorful mosaic of tuna, flounder, prawn, egg, and *anago* eel. In Hong Kong, salmon is consistently the most popular variety of fish for *sushi* and *sashimi*.⁶⁾

The source of this stable, year-round supply of salmon to the territory is not Japan, but Norway. In 1985, the Norwegian seafood industry launched a campaign to develop the market for raw North Atlantic salmon in Japan. It organized a massive drive to promote farmed salmon as a substitute for expensive *toro* fatty tuna. This Norwegian campaign had a profound impact on the way Hong Kongers define *sushi*. When Yaohan stores started stocking their *sushi* counters with affordable, raw Atlantic salmon, it was not perceived as a substitute for *toro* by local shoppers; its popularity was such that it effectively became synonymous with *sushi*. Simultaneously, eating Japanese food became emblematic of the cultivated lifestyle that set Hong Kong's middle class apart from their cousins across the border in Mainland China.

Anthropologist Theodore Bestor, writing on the flow of tuna to Tokyo's Tsukiji market, notes that, "*Sushi's* global popularity as an emblem of a sophisticated cosmopolitan class more or less coincided with a profound transformation in the international role of the Japanese fishing industry."⁷⁾ However, the ready availability of *sushi* in Hong Kong was not only due to an evolution in the international role of the Japanese fishing industry, the Norwegian fishing industry also played a significant part in this process.

Five decades ago, consuming any kind of uncooked food was counter to Hong Kong foodways. Today, even the elite Hong Kong Jockey Club, a cultural legacy of the British Empire, serves *sushi*. At a properly set table, guests used to enjoy soup, followed by oysters, a shrimp cocktail or smoked salmon as appetizers, and roast beef or Chinese dishes for their main courses. There are still plenty of these items on offer at the buffet. But, today, a popular second course is a *sashimi* plate of Atlantic salmon and *toro*, *botan ebi* shrimps and *uni* sea urchin. A young waitress serves this assortment to guests without even asking whether they eat *uni*. Her assumption seems to be that everyone at the table will enjoy it.

A 2012 survey shows that younger and more affluent Hong Kongers consume Japanese food on a regular basis.⁸⁾ They also travel more and visit Japan for dining and shopping. The number of annual visitors from Hong Kong to Japan, which hovered around 150,000 in the early 1990s, has grown tenfold over the last twenty-five years, reaching 1.52 million in 2015. This number is equivalent to twenty percent of all Hong Kong residents. They sample dishes that are not offered in the territory, and head home with a broader definition of Japanese food and higher expectations. Hong Kong's idea of cosmopolitan sophistication continues to evolve through the incorporation of things foreign—including cooked and raw Japanese food.

6) Centre for Food Safety, *Hong Kong Population-Based Food Consumption Survey 2005-2007 Final Report*, (The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department of the Government of the Hong Kong, SAR, 2010). http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_firm/files/FCS_final_report.pdf (accessed January 2016).

7) Theodore C. Bestor, How Sushi Went Global. *Foreign Policy* 121 (Nov/Dec 2000), 57.

8) JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization), 香港消費者の日本食品に対する意識調査報告書 [Report on a Hong Kong Consumer Survey on Japanese Food], (2012), <http://www.jetro.go.jp/world/asia/hk/reports/07000835> (accessed January 2016)