

**MAKAN SUSHI: AUTHENTICATING JAPANESE
RESTAURANTS IN SINGAPORE**

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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

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RESTAURANTS IN SINGAPORE**

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SUMMARY

This thesis is to provide an understanding of the complexity of globalization of Japanese restaurant culture in Singapore. Japanese restaurants have become an international fad since the 1990s. However, in Singapore, the popularization of Japanese restaurants was rather complicated. Japanese restaurants were brought in to Singapore by the Japanese migrants in the 19th century. Until the 1980s, Japanese restaurants in Singapore mainly catered to Japanese clientele. With the shifting images of Japan invaders during the Second World War to the exporter of popular culture, Japanese restaurants gained popularity among local customers. This popularity of Japanese restaurants in fact complicated the picture of these restaurants over the years.

The global nature of Japanese gastronomy means that Japanese restaurants everywhere seem to serve similar dishes. However, localization does occur thereby complicating the picture of Japanese gastronomic standardization. In Singapore, since the 1980s, many types of restaurants have been opened and new dishes created to attract non-Japanese customers. Yet, at the same time, many of these restaurants have attempted to be “authentic” so as to attract clientele of both local and Japanese diners. They have creatively reconfigured their food and their eating spaces, thereby forcing us to question theoretical notions of authenticity and cultural reproduction.

Looking primarily at the management of food, people and space in Japanese restaurants in Singapore, I will discuss how localization and “authentication” are in fact compatible binaries. It is through the flow of people, commodities and information that the “authentication” of overseas Japanese restaurants coexists with the localization of these restaurants.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

'Japanese' cuisine in Singapore

“*Irrashaimase!*” This is the first word you will hear when entering a Japanese restaurant. In October 2004 I went to a *Kaiten Sushi* restaurant (revolving conveyer belt Sushi restaurant) in Singapore for the first time. I went to the restaurant with my friend for dinner, and I was surprised when we were greeted with an ‘*Irasshaimase*’. I felt it strange that it was uttered by Singaporean waiters who did not speak Japanese and knew only one or two phrases of the Japanese language.

The restaurant was one of the many *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants in Singapore. We looked at the menu and I ordered a bowl of rice with deep fried pork (*Katsudon*). After we placed our order, we looked at the plates of sushi revolving on the conveyor belt in front of us. The sushi I saw were very different from those I ate in Japan. One of the strangest items for me was rice wrapped in seaweed topped with what looked like tiny green beads on the top. The other thing I saw was a piece of sushi rice with mayonnaise wrapped with salmon. The Japanese cuisine which I was supposedly familiar with became an exotic form of food

which I have never seen in Japan.

Today, you can find Japanese restaurants in almost every country. When I was in Frankfurt Germany, I ordered a bowl of Japanese noodles. The restaurant served the noodles in a colorless broth but in Japan, the broth is dark. I went to a Japanese restaurant in the Netherlands. There the restaurant looked like a traditional Japanese restaurant. The waiters working there was Japanese. The foods seemed “authentic” in my eyes.

Through these experiences, some questions came to my mind. Although some Japanese have told me about Japanese restaurants globalizing, I wondered if they are truly globalizing. This initial question made me want to analyze the role of globalization and Japanese restaurants in Singapore.

The city-state of Singapore is located in Southeast Asia. It has a population of 4 million, a quarter of whom are foreigners. After its independence from British colonialism in 1965, Singapore welcomed multi-national companies and foreign workers to meet the fledgling state’s need for economic development. As a result, Singapore’s economy grew significantly and it became the most developed nation in Southeast Asia. The island is the commercial hub of Southeast Asia, and expatriates from all over the world have settled down in Singapore to explore business opportunities. With them came foreign cuisines that expanded Singapore’s gourmet scene. Japanese cuisine soon became one of the most

popular foreign foods in Singapore.

In this thesis, I will examine the globalization of Japanese restaurants in Singapore. Japanese restaurants are found all around the world. However, the picture of these restaurants has become complicated over the years. Many types of restaurants are opened and many new dishes are created to attract local customers. Yet, some restaurants try to target Japanese customers by serving “authentic” Japanese food in “authentic” settings. This begs the question of what constitutes authenticity. Who defines the parameters of “authenticity”? Through these questions, I explore what is authenticity and localization.

Looking ethnographically and historically through Japanese restaurants in Singapore, I argue that Japanese restaurants are localized, but at the same time it is “authenticated”. The perceptions of Japanese restaurants’ customers and workers are constructed by their experiences of dining and the history of each individual and also by information through the media. Thus, people create their own definitions of “authentic” Japanese restaurants through their experiences¹. In addition, both customer’s and owners’ perceptions on what is an “authentic” Japanese restaurant in fact affect the ambiance and food in restaurants. Therefore, no matter how localized restaurants are, the localization does not erode the “imagined authenticity”.

¹ Here the “authenticity” means “what it ought to be” (Appadurai, 1986: 25).

Japanese cuisine: Sushi from Southeast Asia

In Singapore as in many other countries, Japanese food include *Washoku* (Japanese food) and to some extent *Yoshoku* (Western food). Food such as Sushi, Tempura, *Shabushabu* (thin strips of beef dipped in boiling water and stirred until cooked) and beef bowl (beef on the top of rice) are considered *Washoku*, whereas Japanese curry rice, *Omuraisu* (rice wrapped with egg) and *hamburg* steak are considered as *Yoshoku*. In Singapore, Japanese cuisine includes both *Yoshoku* and *Washoku* and I include both when I use the term Japanese cuisine.

Not only *Yoshoku*, but also *Washoku* are the result of localizations and cultural transformations. Sushi originated in the mountains between Myanmar, Thailand and China (Ishige, 1990). It is vinegared rice topped with fish. This method of cooking was used in Southeast Asia from the 4th century (ibid). These people placed salted fish inside the rice to preserve the fish. The rice fermented and the fish was thus preserved longer. This method of preservation was passed down to Japan through China in 8th century (ibid), but they did not waste rice but ate it together with the fish. This eventually evolved into the form of sushi we know today.

The Beef bowl is a more recent example of cultural localization. Until

1868, the beginning of Meiji era, most meat was considered taboo² (Harada, 2005). However, with the rapid importation of western culture, the Emperor removed the ban on meat consumption (Harada, 2005) and Japanese started to eat beef which was a part of Western culture. Yoshinoya, a chain restaurant specializing in beef dishes was opened in 1899. Its signature dish was the Beef bowl - rice with slices of beef on top. The dish is now very popular among Japanese and an example of adopting western cuisine to the local taste (the combination of Western beef and the local Japanese rice).

It is hard to define what Japanese cuisine is. Food such as curry rice and beef bowls has a long history. Sushi stemmed from Southeast Asians' way to preserve fish. However, the ideas and materials were assimilated with the local context and these foods are now called Japanese cuisine in general. Japanese cuisine itself is an example of localization and it is always changing. In this paper, I use the term "Japanese foods" to describe the foods served in Japanese restaurants.

Reflexivity

My position as a Japanese researching on Japanese food had both its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, because the Japanese are a

² This was because of the Japanese Buddhism. Buddhism did not allow eating meat. However, deer and boar meat were allowed to be consumed.

minority in Singapore (although it is one of the largest foreign communities), Japanese tend to have an intimate relationship with each other. Because of this intimacy, it was easy for me to become friends with the Japanese here, and they provided me with information on foods in Singapore and in overseas Japanese restaurants.

On the other hand, being Japanese complicated matters when I tried to ask about “the War issue”. Japan’s invasion of East and Southeast Asia during the Second World War was remembered by many Singaporeans. I was interested in how popular perceptions of the war shaped the way Singaporeans looked at “Japanese” food. One of my Singaporean friends told me that Singaporeans usually learn about the war in school. Therefore, they more or less know about the war. However, many of my Singaporean friends tended to turn down my question. This could be because they wanted to avoid making me feel uncomfortable.

Fieldwork in Singapore

Between 2004 and 2006, I visited many Japanese restaurants in Singapore. I have been to more than 40 of the approximately 140 Japanese restaurants in Singapore (COMM, 2006). At restaurants I visited, I observed their ambiance, menus, and people who worked in the restaurants. I sometimes talked

to managers, waiters and chefs. I asked questions; how they prepare foods, where their ingredients are from, why and how they create the ambiance of their “Japanese” restaurants.

Most Singaporeans whom I went to restaurants with had an initial interest in Japanese cuisines and had some knowledge about Japanese food. Therefore, I asked questions such as how they became interested in Japanese cuisine, how they got to know Japanese food, what food they liked, how they found the restaurant’s ambiance and Japanese food in Singapore generally, and so on.

I went to restaurants with many Japanese friends too. Most of them are working in Singapore; some are expatriates (*Chuuzaiin*) sent from Japan by Japanese companies; and the others are working as locally employed (*Genchi Saiyou*)³ by either Japanese companies or local or transnational companies. I asked my Japanese friends which types of restaurants they like to go, what they think about Japanese food in Singapore and whether they think Japanese food in Singapore are “authentic.” As such, the people who worked in restaurants and the customers of restaurants are the objectives of my research.

I worked at two Japanese restaurants from January 2006 to March 2006. I

³ I use the word Japanese expatriates (*Chuuzaiin*) to refer to the people who are sent by Japanese companies in Japan. By locally employed (*Genchi Saiyou*), I refer to the people who are hired by local companies. Many of these locally employed Japanese tend to work at Japanese companies but are distinguished mainly by their salary. Expatriates get a higher salary and subsidies for the rent whereas the locally employed staff get less and usually no subsidies.

knew the general manager of these two restaurants through the alumni association of my Japanese university. One restaurant is in a 5 star hotel and the other in a shopping mall. I worked as the *Nakaban* (a middle person who brings dishes from the kitchen to the hall) at the restaurant in the hotel. This position gave me a chance to learn a lot about the work in the kitchen, but I hardly met diners there. In addition, since all workers in the restaurant are trained for a long period, a few months of my fieldwork was not enough for me to be trained and to help them cut fish or serve food. Therefore, I got information by talking to these chefs, managers and waiters during their breaks.

In the other restaurant at a department store, I worked as a waiter. Here the atmosphere was more relaxed and the restaurant hired part time waiters such as students. I observed the customers and saw the manner in which they ate and drank. I also conducted interviews with chefs, waiters and waitresses to find out why they decided to work here and the work that they do. Although my term of fieldwork was short, I obtained a lot of information about the management of these restaurants

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 presents the history of Singapore as it is related to Japan. Here I will describe how overseas Japanese restaurants historically had mainly catered to Japanese migrants until the 1980s and thereafter they started to target Singaporean customers. I also discussed the shift of the image of the Japanese from invaders to the exporter of popular culture. With this shift, Japanese restaurants became accepted by Singaporeans and the restaurants started to mushroom in Singapore.

Chapter 3 begins with a description of the variety of contemporary Japanese restaurants in Singapore. In the first half, I will describe the type of Japanese restaurants in Singapore. There are a variety of Japanese restaurants in Singapore, from fast-food chain restaurants to formal Japanese restaurants. These restaurants are “localized” to some extent. In the latter half of chapter 3, I will describe the two Japanese restaurants where I did fieldwork. Here I will describe how the restaurant’s chef and manager take effort to recreate the “authentic” Japanese atmosphere and food with certain adjustments for their customers.

Chapter 4 discusses globalization theories and how the case of the Japanese restaurant both fits and does not fit into these theoretical frameworks. Looking through the previous theories on globalization and food culture, I will discuss how localization and “authentication” are in fact compatible. Localization is observed in the restaurants through the food they serve and the way customers

dine. At the same time, chefs, managers and waitresses are “authenticating” restaurants with their own perceptions of what is an “authentic” Japanese restaurant. Regarding these facts, I argue that the globalization of Japanese restaurants is composed of localization and “authentication” without eroding each other.

Chapter 2

The history of Japanese community and cultural influence in Singapore

Introduction

Overseas Japanese restaurants and Japanese migrants have historically had a close relationship. As Pilcher argued about the migrants in general, “migrants overcame difficult working conditions and frequent discrimination to recreate traditional lifestyles and recipes.” (2006: 79) Japanese migrants in Singapore also have maintained their culinary tradition till today and Japanese restaurants mainly cater to Japanese diners. However, recently, many Singaporeans have started their own Japanese restaurants. In this chapter, I will describe the history of Japanese cultural influence in Singapore in relation to processes of Japanese immigration and the establishment of Japanese restaurants.

Through discussing the historical relationship between Japan and Singapore, I will argue two points. Firstly, at the beginning, Japanese restaurants were set up by the Japanese migrants until the 1980s. Most of the diners at these restaurants were Japanese. Therefore the spread of Japanese restaurants in Singapore was initially led by Japanese. However, from the 1980s, these

restaurants began targeting local customers with the popularization of Japanese cultures. For example, genres of Japanese popular culture such as TV dramas, comic books, cartoons, and videogames and so on, transformed local images of Japan from that of a tyrannical invader to cultural exporter. Regarding this, secondly, I argue the relationship between Singapore and Japan (e.g. Second World War and the propagation of Japanese popular culture) changed some aspects of the Singaporeans' image of Japan.

Japanese in Southeast Asia before the 17th century

The history of the Japanese in Southeast Asia can be traced from at least the 12th century. There was trade between Southeast Asian countries and Ryukyu Island⁴ (Nomura, 1992). Ryukyu islanders, a hub port for East Asia and Southeast Asia countries in the 12th century, brought Japanese and Korean products to Southeast Asia and in return, Southeast Asian products were traded with China, Japan and Korea via Ryuku with ivory and spice (ibid). Ryukyu islanders traded mainly with Malacca, Siam, Luzon and Java. They imported spices, ivory and dye and brought them to the Ming rulers in China as tribute (ibid). Ethnic

⁴ Ryukyu is the old name of Okinawa islands, the extreme southern tip of Japan. Before Ryukyu was colonized by Shimazu, who was the ruler of Kagoshima from 1581 to 1871. Ryukyu was an independent kingdom which had its own ruler, language and cuisine (Itou, 2003) Ryukyu became a part of Japan in 1879.

Japanese merchants soon followed suit and began arriving in the Southeast Asian region by the 17th century (ibid).

The Japanese expanded their trade further to Southeast Asia after shipwrecked Portuguese landed on Japanese soil in 1534. With this contact with the Portuguese, Japanese merchants began to trade with the Portuguese colonies of Malacca and Macao and later expanded their trading networks to include Ayutthaya, Phnom Penh and Tonkin.

With the increasing number of Japanese traders in Southeast Asia, Japanese towns were soon established in many port cities. Japanese towns in Manila and Ayutthaya were the largest and included over 1000 inhabitants. The most well known Japanese in Southeast Asia was Yamada Nagamasa⁵ who fought for Ayutthaya with the Samurai army⁶ (Nomura, 1992). Nagasama became a ruler of a province (Nakhon Si Thammarat) in 1630. However, after his murder, the Siamese attacked and destroyed the Japanese town. With its destruction, the Japanese lost their community, and they disappeared from Ayuthayan history

⁵ The name Yamada Nagamasa was in fact suspicious. This name did not appear in Thai texts and Yano (1987) argued that the detail of his background was probably created around 1888 by the Japanese scholar Sekiguti Takamasa (1987). That was a time when Nanshin Ron (the argument of invading the South) was being popularised and Yamada Nayamasa could have been a creation of Sekiguti to show the close associations between Japan and Southeast Asia throughout history.

⁶ In 1600 a battle ensued between Tokugawa Ieyasu, and the followers of the previous political regime. With Ieyasu's success some samurai loyal to the old regime traveled overseas for fear of being killed should they remain in Japan.

(ibid).

In 1641, Japan closed off its borders fearing the tide of Christian missionaries. This led to the slow decay of Japanese towns in Southeast Asia. Due to seclusion laws, Japanese who lived abroad for more than five years were prohibited by the government to return to Japan⁷. Japan under the regime of Tokugawa had trade connections only with Holland as they promised that they would not bring any missionaries to Japan. Simultaneously, the Japanese were prohibited from going abroad until 1853⁸. Until the eighteenth century, Japanese towns were still found in Southeast Asia, but because these overseas Japanese could not return to Japan, they were increasingly isolated from it and they gradually assimilated into the host society (Nomura, 1992).

Japanese migration to Singapore in the 19th century: Karayuki-San and businessmen

Japan's imperial rulers opened the country up to foreign trade in 1854 due to increasing American pressure. As a result some Japanese realized that their

⁷ This was legislated by Tokugawa regime to prohibit foreigners from residing in Japan except for the Dutch. With this law, the Tokugawa elite could only trade with the Dutch and monopolize the trade. In addition, Japan could develop their culture with little influences of abroad.

⁸ There were some exceptions. John Manjirou was shipwrecked and saved by an American ship went to America, and Otokichi settled in Singapore as the first Japanese.(Japanese association ed., 1998)

level of technology lagged behind most of Europe. In 1853, American Matthew Perry arrived in Japan with a fleet of four black steamships carrying a letter from President Millard Fillmore⁹. A year later, Perry returned with 7 ships and Japan was forced to open itself to the outside world. This episode led many Japanese to the realization that they had to open their country to foreign trade, in order to be “civilized (*Bunmeika*).” *Bunmeikaika* (Bloom of civilization) which meant the importation of Western culture became a buzzword among the Japanese. The Meiji era (1868 – 1912) in Japan’s trade history was characterized by the Japanese interpretation of westernization known as “*Datsua Nyuou* or “Getting out from Asia and into Europe”. The Meiji government sent many Japanese government officials and students to Europe to learn the European system of education, military technology, and culture¹⁰. At the same time, many Japanese sought jobs abroad because of poverty in Japan. During this period, many Japanese migrated to Brazil, North America, Canada, and Southeast Asia.

The first documented Japanese to arrive in Singapore was a fisherman by the name of Otokichi (Japanese Association ed., 1998). Shipwrecked, he was rescued by the British in 1832. He was consequently sent back to Japan via

⁹ Matthew C. Perry (1794- 1858) was a commodore of the American navy at the time.

¹⁰ Learning European culture created a new kind Japanese cuisine called Western-Japanese cuisine (*Youshoku*). Eating beef became very popular in the Meiji era and *Sukiyaki* (thin slices of beef cooked in a heavy iron pan with various vegetables and tofu), and *Gyudon* (bowl of beef on rice) were created at the time.

Vancouver, Hawaii and London but the ship he was on was cannoned by the Japanese from the shore of Japan making it impossible for him to return Japan. In 1862 Otokichi married a Malay woman and migrated to Singapore only to die five years later.

The first known Japanese business in Singapore was a brothel (Shimizu and Hirakawa, 1999). Otoyō came to Singapore with her husband¹¹. Her husband died soon after they reached Singapore and she worked for a European hotel. With the money she earned from the hotel she set up a brothel. She smuggled Japanese girls from Kyushu and made them work in her brothel (Nishioka, 1997). In 1906, there were 1,835 Japanese in Singapore of which 852 were prostitutes (Shimizu and Hirakawa, 1999). Since almost a half of Singapore's Japanese population were prostitutes, Japanese stores were set up to cater to them. These included drapers, eating houses, sundry goods stores and tailors. These prostitutes were called *Karayuki-San* which means "Japanese who went abroad to work as prostitutes" and became the first Japanese settlers in Singapore (Yano, 1978) During the Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905, the number of *Karayuki-San* in Southeast Asia numbered 6,000 and 600 of them were in Singapore (Shimizu and Hirakawa, 1999). However, brothels were banned in Singapore in 1920. They then either continued their job illegally or returned to Japan. The population of

¹¹ The date when she came to Singapore is unknown.

Japanese, however, kept increasing with Japanese business expansions into the rubber industry and financial sectors (ibid).

The British introduced rubber cultivation in the Malay Peninsula in 1877. Managing a rubber plantation soon became a fad and attracted many Japanese to Singapore to set up plantations. There were eleven companies and one hundred and six private businesses in 1911 owned by Japanese businessmen. Seventy percent of their plantations were in Johor and these Japanese workers lived in Singapore and commuted between Johor and Singapore¹² (ibid).

Most Japanese in Singapore lived in a Japanese enclave at Middle Road which is located in today's Bugis area. Singapore's Japanese town was composed of Japanese brothels, hotels, publishers, restaurants, barber stores, doctors, pharmacies, general stores, draper shops and so on. Most of the occupants of the town were poor Japanese whereas wealthier Japanese expatriates lived elsewhere (e.g. Orchard Road)¹³.

In the early 1910s, there were two social classes in Singapore's Japanese society. Japanese who were sent from Japan by Japanese companies and were to return in a few years were called *Gudang*¹⁴ in the Japanese community. They were

¹² Johor- Singapore Causeway was built in 1923 and Malayan Railway in 1924 (Nishioka, 1997).

¹³ In 1911, Japanese primary school was founded in Singapore (Nishioka, 1997). This shows workers had families since then.

¹⁴ The word "Gudang" was derived from the Malay word which means warehouse. There were warehouses around Raffles Place in the early twentieth century.

mostly employees of large Japanese trading companies and banks located at Raffles Place. The *Gudang* lived around Orchard Road and commuted in chauffeured cars. They lived luxuriously with maids, drivers and gardeners.

The second social group were the *Shitamachi*¹⁵. They were people who conducted business in Singapore and had chosen to settle down in Singapore permanently. Those appellations are called by each other with some envy and disdain (Japanese Association ed., 1998: Nishioka, 1998). The *Gudang* group was usually wealthier than the *Shitamachi* who had immigrated to Singapore because of poverty. Many of the *Shitamachi* worked as *Karayuki-San* or plantation laborers (Japanese association, 1998: Nishioka, 1998).

According to an interview by a member of the Japanese Association with Japanese who lived in Singapore in the 1920s, it was possible to get Japanese groceries in Singapore (Japanese association, 1998). A *Shitamachi* man told his interviewers that, “You could get any Japanese goods in Japanese town. But we went to any kind of market like Malay markets. We bought rice from Chinese stores and *Miso* (fermented soybean paste) from the Japanese stores. Our meal was a mixture of Japanese and Chinese food.” At the time, shipping was the only way to send cargo from Japan to Singapore (ibid). According to the interviewee, it

¹⁵ *Shitamachi* literally means downtown in Japanese. It was a place where small shopkeepers and craftsmen lived. Shops were very small and catered to local people.

seemed that there was already a circulation of Japanese products in Singapore but the life of the Japanese in Singapore did not only rely on Japanese products as they also consumed local goods.

Between 1912 and 1920, most Japanese restaurants were located in the red light district of Japanese town where the *Karayuki-san* worked (Japanese association, 1998). These restaurants catered to relatively poor people such as the *Karayuki-san* and other members of the *Shitamachi* whereas some other restaurants on the east coast of the island and in the city center catered to the richer *Gudang*. The restaurants in the east were located along the sea with a Japanese garden and they hired Geisha girls¹⁶ (Kaneko, 1978). In Kaneko's travel notes, he mentioned that the Japanese who stopped by Singapore along the journey to Europe or to India were entertained at the restaurant by Japanese who resided in Singapore (ibid). It shows that these restaurants were used to entertain the Japanese on special occasions, while the restaurants in the Japanese town were frequented by those who lived in the area. During this period, Japanese restaurants catered primarily to a Japanese clientele.

¹⁶ *Geisha* were professional hostesses. There is a common misperception of the *Geisha* as a prostitute, but in fact they not all of them are sex workers. Geisha who prostituted themselves, were called *Makura-Geisha* (pillow *Geisha*) or *Onsen-Geisha* (hot spring *Geisha*). In Singapore, poverty forced many geisha to work as prostitutes.

The intimate relationship between Singapore and Japan

In 1902, Singapore's Japanese community allied themselves with the British Empire. In that year, Japan and Britain shared a common enemy. Japan had to prevent Russia's southward advancement and the British also had to protect their colonies, India from Russia. Therefore, the British welcomed the Japanese to run plantations in Malaysia and Singapore to establish a better political relationship. Therefore, the relationship between Singapore residents under the control of Britain and the Japanese was good until the Second World War.

The Japanese and overseas Chinese also shared a close and intimate relationship at the time through Sun Wen¹⁷ (孫文) in Singapore. Sun Wen tried to initiate the Chinese revolution and had traveled to many countries. Most of his supporters were overseas Chinese and after he set up a Chinese revolutionary alliance in Tokyo, he moved to Singapore, where he stayed from 1906 to 1910. Japan also supported his movement in Singapore because of the good relationship which he shared with the Japanese.

The visit by Imperial prince and Heihachiro Togo and Maresuke Nogi

¹⁷ Sun Wen (known as Sun Yat-Sen in another name) was a Chinese politician. He dreamt of starting a revolution in China, therefore he tried to get the financial support from overseas Chinese. In addition, he tried to ally Japan with China to fight against European imperial power but he died without the succession of the revolution.

was another episode of intimate relationship between Japanese and the local (Nishioka, 1998). Togo and Nogi were the heroes of the Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905¹⁸. In 1905, the Japanese navy defeated Russia and boosted confidence for Japanese and other Asians, that Asian could defeat powerful “Western” countries¹⁹. This news spread throughout much of Southeast Asia so much so that Togo and Nogi were warmly welcomed by the locals in Singapore.

After the First World War, the relationship between the Japanese and Chinese turned sour. In 1918, there was a Chinese riot against the Japanese in Singapore because Japan had invaded the Shandong area of China. Three quarters of the Singapore population were Chinese and most felt uncomfortable with the news. Singapore’s Japanese town was attacked by angry Chinese nationals living in Singapore (ibid).

It was relatively quiet after the riot, but Japan’s relations with China and the Chinese deteriorated. When Japan allied itself with Germany in 1936, the Japanese (mostly *Gudang*) in Singapore started to return to Japan. In 1941, the year the Pacific War broke out, many rich Japanese returned to Japan. However, there were still 1,500 Japanese in Singapore, mostly from the *Shitamachi* group

¹⁸ The war was between Japan and Russia (1904- 1905). They both wanted Korea as a colony and fought in Korea. Japan finally won the war.

¹⁹ This war also led Japanese to a delusion of Advancing South that Japanese could become a leader of Asian countries and they should rule over East and Southeast Asian countries.

(ibid). Their businesses were in Singapore and they had no home or future in Japan.

The Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia during World War II

The Pacific War began with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 8th 1941. Simultaneously, Japanese military forces landed on the Malay Peninsula in Kota Bahru (Yano, 1989). The Japanese army invaded Southeast Asia under the banner of the Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere²⁰. During the war years, there were Eight thousand Japanese stationed in Singapore, most of them soldiers (Nishioka, 1998).

When the Japanese launched the war, all Japanese who were living in Singapore were caught by British police on the morning of December 8th and taken to a prison camp in Port Stayham, fifty kilometers from Kuala Lumpur. These internees comprised Japanese who lived in Malaysia and Singapore and numbered some 2,588 individuals. After ten days, some of them were brought back to Singapore while the others were sent to New Delhi, India. Eight hundred of them were allowed to come back to Singapore as part of a program of prisoner

²⁰ This ideal was to win the Asian independence from colonial masters. However, the reality was to invade Southeast Asian countries and get oil and rubber and tin.

exchange between the British and the Japanese. The rest had to remain in India until the war ended (ibid).

The Japanese who used to stay in Singapore before the war were not allowed to live in Singapore after the war started. However, the Japanese military changed their mind when they found that these Japanese had close relationship with the local people and they might help the military to administer Singapore. Therefore, they could return to Singapore but they were asked to be a link between the Japanese military administration and local residents.

The Japanese military abolished Singapore's Laissez-Faire policy and Singapore's economy was monopolized by Japanese companies. For example, Mitsubishi Corporation was allowed by the military administration to monopolize rice importation. Mitsui & Co. monopolized the trade in salt and sugar, and Japanese department stores were set up throughout Singapore. Matsuzakaya for instance, took over the Robinson Department Store building at Raffles Place and established their own Department Store (Shimizu and Hirakawa, 1999).

The Japanese military also revived the prostitution industry, which had been abolished by the British in 1920. Many brothels and Japanese restaurants were set up to cater to the sexual and gastronomic demands of the army and other Japanese living in Singapore. Japanese soldiers who were assigned to China or Southeast Asia were first sent to Singapore. Wartime brothels hired mainly Korean

and Malay “comfort women”. Japanese women were reserved for high-ranking officers. Most of the Korean women were forced to come to Singapore by the Japanese military.²¹

Japanese restaurants also catered to the sexual demands of high ranking Japanese officers. Therefore, these Japanese restaurants such as *Ryotei* type restaurants were set up by the Japanese with help from the navy and army (ibid). Japanese women worked in these restaurants as *Geisha* and prostitutes. One restaurant called Tsuruya was a three story high building with *tatami* mats on the floor. It employed 80 Japanese kimono clad women and served mainly military customers. Since military personnel visited this restaurant every night, there were complaints from the neighboring residents and many officers going out with these Japanese women were frequently seen by local people (ibid).

It should be noted that during the Japanese occupation there was a massacre in Singapore. This was remembered by Singaporeans as the symbol of Japanese cruelty during the occupation period (Shimazaki, 1991). When Japanese invaded Singapore from the Johor Channel, there was a protest by the Chinese community (Oribe and Ishii, 1995). Because of this big protest, the Japanese

²¹ These comfort women worked in Japanese restaurants or brothels which mainly served for military. Some of them were forcefully brought in from Korean villages. Their exact numbers are unknown, but it is said that more than twenty thousands of Korean women were forced to work as comfort women during the war years. (Hata, 1999)

military was scared of the Chinese in Singapore. The *Kenpei* (military police) “investigated” many Chinese and found that thousands of local Chinese did not obey the Japanese. Some Chinese were arrested because they wore glasses: they were suspected as being intellectuals who sympathized with the British. Others were caught because they had tattoos and were suspected members of an anti-Japanese secret society. Since these *Kenpei* did not have enough Chinese translators, its investigations were very sloppy. The number of Chinese who were massacred in Singapore was estimated to be five thousand to fifty thousand (Nishioka, 1998). When I was talking to my friend, a Chinese Singaporean who was 35 years old, about the war, he mentioned this massacre. This historical event of anti-Chinese hatred and cruelty has been discussed in the media, text books, and popular oral literatures and has inadvertently shaped how Singaporeans view the Japanese.

Japan occupied Singapore after defeating the British. Although Japanese restaurants profited from the military presence, local people suffered from hyperinflation and food shortages (Shimizu and Hirakawa, 1999). The Japanese fought the war under the name of the independence of Asia from ‘Western countries’, but the fact was that only the Japanese lived in luxury and the Chinese in Singapore were in distress over their occupation. The Japanese occupation finally ended in 1945, with the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and

Nagasaki.

Japanese as a business partner but with the legacy of the War

In 1945, after Japan lost the war, Tokyo was devastated and needed to recover its losses. Rapid economic growth from 1950 onwards soon led to Japan having the second highest GDP (after the USA) by 1968. With the rapid development of the Japanese economy, the Japanese began to gradually return to Singapore in the 1950s.

In 1945, the Japanese, both soldiers and citizens, had built a camp in Jurong (the west part of Singapore Island) by themselves and lived there for eight months. Since the place was far from the city center and British allowed them to live there as long as there were no anti-Japanese riots. These citizens returned to Japan after eight months of living in a camp and the military followed them one year later. After the retreat of the Japanese military, there were no Japanese in Singapore until Japanese investors started coming to Singapore in the 1950s²².

²² In 1945, Singapore was under the control of British. The British established the Malayan Union in 1946, consisting of Malacca, Penang, and Singapore which were under the direct control of the British government. However, because of great resistance to this idea by the local, the British set up the Federation of Malaya in 1948 which allowed the Malays to be politically privileged. In 1957, the Federation of Malaya obtained complete independence from Britain. Singapore became a part of this Federation in 1961. However, because Singapore had a majority Chinese population and the Federation held preferable Malay policies, conflicts of interest occurred between Singapore's leaders and the Federation's Malay political figureheads. Singapore decided to break away from the Federation and

(Nishioka, 1997)

In the immediate post war years, Japanese was not allowed to live in Singapore. By the early 1950s, only Japanese diplomats and professionals such as doctors and lawyers were allowed to enter the country. Japan was under the control of United States in 1951, and signed the Treaty of Peace with forty eight countries in the same year. In addition, under the pressure of the US Far Eastern strategy, Britain was pressured to trade with Japan. In 1953, the Bank of Tokyo established a branch in Singapore. From that year, the number of Japanese in Singapore gradually increased, but most of them stayed in Singapore temporarily rather than settling down permanently in Singapore (ibid).

The new Singapore government only allowed businessmen who worked for Japanese companies to stay in Singapore, therefore the Japanese community in Singapore consisted of Japanese who stayed temporarily in Singapore. Yano stated that Japanese's unconcern for the locals caused Anti-Japanese movements in Singapore and other Southeast Asian countries (Yano, 1975). They only tended to enjoy the benefits of the Japanese companies and ignored the local benefits. Therefore, they did not have much interest in local residents. As I noted before, there were Japanese who worked for local companies and also Japanese who were low class workers such as *Karayuki-san* in the pre-war Singapore. The post war

attained independence in 1965 under the initiative of the Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew. Lee's policy toward Japan was to invite the Japanese companies to invest into Singapore.

Japanese were richer than those. The ignorance of the local culture and people by the “economic animal” was one of the factors contributing to Anti-Japanese movements (ibid). With these factors, there was the Blood debt issue in 1962.

The Blood debt issue (*Chi no kessai*) was the compensation which Singaporeans required of Japan for World War II. In January 1962, when a residential unit was being constructed in the West Coast of Singapore, human skeletal remains were unearthed at the work site. This reminded Singaporeans of the memory of Chinese massacres in the hands of Japanese forces and this resulted in protests against Japan. At first, the Japanese government refused the requests of Chinese Singaporeans regarding the monetary reparation. The government claimed that it was stated in the Treaty of Peace of San Francisco²³ that the reparations was abandoned by the allied countries. In addition, Prime Minister Lee’s intention was to make use of Japan for the economic development as investors without requiring the monetary compensation (Shimizu and Hirakawa, 1999). However, to make those Chinese Singaporeans calm down, the Japan and Singapore governments made an agreement that Japan pay twenty five million Singapore dollars to Singapore and Singapore to never raise the reparation issue again.

²³ This treaty declared the official end of the World War II and the end of Japan’s position as imperial power and the distribution of the compensation to the people who had been suffered from Japan’s war crimes. Regarding the compensation, it was noted in the clause of the treaty that the compensation would be negotiated between each country.

After the debt issue, Singapore and Japan had a tight economical relationship. The number of Japanese and the amount of investment to Singapore continued increasing until the Asian currency crisis in 1997. After the crisis, the number of Japanese started to decrease in Singapore following the long recession of the Japanese economy. Their wealthy lifestyle as expatriates in Singapore was relatively scaled down. Although the business presence of Japanese in Singapore was still visible in the 1980's and 1990's, this business presence was gradually being replaced by Japanese cultural exports.

The changing image of Japan in Singapore with Pokemon and Hello Kitty

The boom of Japanese popular culture in Singapore started in the 1980s. Japanese TV dramas, cartoons, comics, music, video games, fashion and food became very popular among youth not only in Singapore but also in other East and Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Thang 1999). In Singapore, the popularization of Japanese popular culture was largely introduced by local companies that had selectively adopted certain aspects of it that appealed to a local consumer base (Ng, 2001a).

The first TV drama that triggered the boom in interest in Japanese

popular culture was Oshin (ibid). This melodrama was broadcast in Channel 8²⁴ in 1984 every night at 7:30 pm. Because of the prime time slot, this TV program was watched by many Singaporeans. This drama was in fact successful in fifty nine countries, mostly in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and changed the image of Japan for those people who had at one time been invaded by Japan (ibid)²⁵.

There were Japanese cartoons and comic books such as Doraemon and Dragon Ball in Singapore in the 1980s. However, most of them were translated into Mandarin Chinese so that only Mandarin speakers could read these comics (ibid). There was one publishing house which translated Japanese comics into Mandarin in Singapore, but it declared bankruptcy in the early 1980s. Cartoons and comics were not a direct import from Japan, instead they had undergone translations in America or Taiwan and Hong Kong before arriving in Singapore.

As such, Japanese drama, cartoons, comics and video games are to an extent reinterpreted through the process of translation. However, these genres of popular cultures transformed the image of Japan from that of an enemy invader to the being a sought-after cultural exporter. As the blood debt issue showed, the image of Japan in the minds of many older Singaporeans was largely related to the

²⁴ Channel 8 mainly broadcast programs in Chinese.

²⁵ The first country where Oshin was broadcast was Singapore. This drama is about the life of a woman named Oshin who lived through World War 2 and the post war period in Japan. The War was described from a Japanese perspective; it showed many Japanese as being victims of the conflict.

War and its memories. Oshin changed the images of colonial cruelty. Similarly comics and video games transformed Japan's aggressive war history into that of a disseminator of modernity and youthfulness.

Japanese restaurants mainly catered to by Japanese until the 1980s. Singapore's first Japanese restaurant to be established after the War was located inside the premises of the Japanese Association building in 1959. It catered exclusively to a Japanese clientele²⁶. The number of Japanese restaurants in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s remained small. But they started to mushroom from the late 1980s in tandem with the rise in popularity of Japanese popular cultures. The number of Japanese restaurants increased from ten to twenty in the 1970s. By the mid 1980s, there were fifty Japanese restaurants on the island (Ng, 2001 b). Today there are more than 140 restaurants on the island (COMM, 2006).

The growth of Japanese restaurants also mirrored the increasing Japanese population in Singapore. (Thang, 1999) The population of Japanese in Singapore was approximately 1,000 in the 1970s. This increased to 8,000 in the 1980s and 24,000 by 1996 (ibid). This shows that the proliferation of Japanese restaurants in Singapore was also related to the expansion in Singapore's Japanese population. However, the increasing number of restaurants rested heavily on the local customers who were grown up and surrounded by Japanese popular cultures since

²⁶ Only the member of the association could dine at the restaurant.

the 1980s.

Although there are many types of Japanese restaurants in Singapore, Sushi restaurants are the most common. One of the *Kaiten Sushi* (revolving conveyer belt) restaurants²⁷, Sakae Sushi was founded in 1997 by a Singaporean (Sakae Sushi, 2006). They have twenty eight outlets in Singapore and the customers are mostly Singaporeans. With the effort of these *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants and the popularity of Japanese popular culture among Singaporeans, mainly among Mandarin speakers, Japanese cuisine became one of the most popular ethnic cuisines in Singapore²⁸.

Conclusion

The Japanese have had a complex history in Singapore. Relatively poor Japanese such as the Karayuki-San moved to Southeast Asian countries in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although they created Japanese enclaves they had many connections with local people and established good relationships with them. During the Second World War, the Japanese military controlled Singapore

²⁷ Kaiten Sushi was invented in 1958 in Osaka, Japan (Genroku Sushi, 2006). This became popular in Singapore, UK,

²⁸ The popularity of Japanese popular culture is not the only reason for the increasing number of Japanese restaurants. As I will discuss, the globally recognized images of Japanese cuisine as health food also pushed the popularity of Japanese restaurants (Thang, 1999).

and they monopolized many important businesses such as rice, salt, sugar etc. After the war, the Japanese gradually returned to Singapore beginning in the 1950s, and Japan soon became a symbol of economic might. By the 1980s Japan had become associated with popular culture rather than militarism and war for many Singaporeans.

Japanese restaurants have historically followed the trends in Japanese migration. In the nineteenth century, these restaurants catered to both the poor and rich Japanese in Singapore. The affordable restaurants for the poor were located close to Japanese brothels inside the red light districts whereas the high-end restaurants were located in east coast and the city center. During the war, Japanese restaurants functioned to serve the sexual demands of the Japanese soldiers. These restaurants were expensive and only catered to Japanese clients. After the war, Japanese restaurants still catered primarily to Japanese. The number of restaurants relied largely on the population of Japanese until the 1980s.

TV dramas, comics and animations changed the impression of Japan from one of cruel colonizer to that of a much desired cultural exporter. With these changing views and the increasing population of Japanese, Japanese cuisine became popular and Japanese restaurants mushroomed in Singapore. With local entrepreneurs as managers, Japanese restaurants began targeting Singaporean customers. Although there are still many Japanese restaurants that cater mainly to

a Japanese clientele, the boom in the number and type of Japanese restaurants has meant that Japanese food in Singapore has taken on a variety of localized permutations. In the chapter 3, I will describe the ethnography of some Japanese restaurants in Singapore focusing particularly on how these restaurants have adopted Japanese food to attract local customers.

Chapter 3

Japanese restaurants in Singapore

Introduction

In 19th Century Singapore, both rich and poor Japanese dined at Japanese restaurants albeit ones catering to their social economic position. During World War II, many of these restaurants also provided Japanese military officers and soldiers with sexual services (Shimizu & Hirakawa, 1999). After the war, Japanese businessmen began arriving in Singapore from the 1950s. Singapore's increasing Japanese population meant that the number of Japanese restaurants catering to them mushroomed as well. This went hand-in-hand with the popularity of Japanese popular culture among Singaporeans by the 1980s. Today, both the local population and expatriate Japanese patronize Japanese restaurants resulting in a wide variety of Japanese restaurants.

There are many types of Japanese restaurants in Singapore, ranging from fast food chains to expensive high-end restaurants. Most Japanese restaurants are located in Singapore's main shopping districts such as Orchard Road, City Hall and Bugis²⁹. Other restaurants are located in golf clubs, hotels, shopping malls,

²⁹ These places are where many Singaporeans and foreigners go shopping. There

and in and around Japanese residential areas. University canteens, coffee shops, hawker centers and food courts³⁰ also serve Japanese food. Therefore the price range of Japanese food varies by location and the type of restaurants.

In this chapter, I will describe the variety of Japanese restaurants in Singapore. I will then ethnographically look at two restaurants where I worked at for about 2 months. To attract their customers, managers and chefs in these restaurants customized the food to suit real and “imagined” tastes. Many restaurants targeting a Singaporean clientele adapted the tastes of their foods to suit a presumed Singaporean flavor. As with restaurants everywhere, Japanese restaurants in Singapore attempt to attract customers by the taste of their food and the restaurant’s general ambience. By so doing, they play with discourses of “authenticity”. These strategies are affected by the perceptions of customers, managers and chefs on what they think as “authentic” Japanese foods. Thus the “authenticity” shows up in different ways.

are Japanese funded department stores such as Takashimaya and Isetan in Orchard Road and Seiyu in Bugis.

³⁰ As an eating place, coffee shops, hawker centers and food courts are very popular in Singapore. They serve many types of cuisine including local Chinese, Indian, Malay, Western, Thai, Indonesian, Korean and Japanese. Coffee shops, or *Kopi Tiam*, are usually located beneath HDB (public housing apartments) blocks where the majority of Singaporeans live. Hawker centers are the old type of food court and they do not have air conditioning whereas the food courts are air conditioned and often located in the big malls. However, I would not consider them as restaurants since they have no specific space reserved for Japanese stalls.

Japanese Fast Food chains

MOS Burger and Yoshinoya are Japanese fast-food eateries located in shopping malls. The majority of their customers are Singaporeans and some Japanese teenagers. MOS Burger is a hamburger restaurant. MOS foods Singapore Pte Ltd was established in 1992. The first outlet was opened in 1993 (MOS Burger, 2006). Now MOS burger has 17 outlets across Singapore. Their best-selling products are “MOS Rice Burger” and “Teriyaki Chicken Burger”. The foods served at the restaurants are the same as those served in Japan, although there are some dishes which are exclusive to Singapore. The local dish “Butterfly Prawn”, which is popular in Singapore, is one of them and was re-imported to Japan with a change in name, “Butterfly Shrimp” in 2005. This is an example of “Japanese food” brought back to Japan.

Another famous fast-food chain restaurant is Yoshinoya, which is famous for its *Gyudon* (Beef on rice served in a bowl)³¹. Since the establishment of Yoshinoya in 1899, this restaurant has been one of the most successful chain restaurants in Japan. There are more than 1016 outlets in Japan and 258 overseas (Yoshinoya, 2006). In Singapore, Yoshinoya was established in 1997, and currently operates 16 outlets mainly in shopping malls. Their marketing concept is

³¹ Yoshinoya in Japan currently does not serve beef because of the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) scare.

the localization (*Rookaruka* or *Genchika* in Japanese)³² of Yoshinoya's food in accordance to local taste preferences (Makino, 2002). In an interview, Makino, the president of Yoshinoya D& C Co. Ltd said "For example, there is no Yoshinoya in Hawaii. If you open the business in Hawaii, it tends to target Japanese customers. We do not think about opening Yoshinoya for Japanese abroad. The overseas operation for Yoshinoya is for local customers because we think it does not last long if we target only Japanese." (ibid, 178p) Apparently he thinks of local people as customers and he believes that it is important to target the large population of local customers rather than the smaller Japanese communities for operating their business successfully. This strategy to target the local was different from the one which many Japanese owners took in Singapore.

The dishes served in Singapore's Yoshinoya are also different from those in Japan. Yoshinoya in Singapore has a wider variety of dishes on the menu than in their Japanese outlets. The restaurants in Japan serve only a few dishes besides rice bowls (a bowl of rice with a topping on it), whereas in Singapore they serve many types of lunch boxes such as *Tori Katsu* (Fried Chicken) with Red Curry Value Meal. Red Curry is a Thai style curry which is famous in Singapore. This kind of fusion cuisine was invented to attract local customers. With the strategy of

³² I will discuss the term "Localization" in the next chapter. Here I used it because the president of Yoshinoya D & C Co. Ltd used the word to describe the strategy of opening the outlets abroad.

increasing menus which should be favored by local people like Tori Katsu with Red Curry Value Meal and lunch boxes, Yoshinoya tries to customize their dishes to meet the taste preferences of the local populations.

***Kaiten-Sushi* restaurants**

The most popular types of Japanese restaurants in Singapore are the *Kaiten-Sushi* (Sushi on a revolving conveyer belt) restaurants. Although these restaurants serve other Japanese dishes, Sushi³³ is the most popular food served. The dining space is usually big and seats are placed around a revolving conveyer belt. Sushi is placed on small plates on the conveyer belt and the price is indicated by the color of the plate. There are plenty of *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants in Singapore, with the most popular being Sakae Sushi, Genki Sushi and Sushitei.

Sakae Sushi was set up by a Singaporean and has the largest number of outlets in Singapore. Their 28 outlets are spread over Singapore and overseas in China, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines (Sakae Sushi, 2006). Unlike *Kaiten-Sushi* restaurants in Japan, Singapore's Sakae Sushi serves a variety

³³ In fact the word "Sushi (寿司)" in Japanese originally refers to the cooked rice with vinegar sauce. The most popular type of Sushi which has raw fish on the rice is called *Nigiri* or *Nigirizushi* (hand made Sushi).

of Japanese foods besides Sushi, such as *Agemono*³⁴ (Fried foods), Bento (Lunch box), *Donburi*³⁵ (food served in Bowls), *Yakimono*³⁶ (grilled food) and Ramen (noodles). These dishes are not placed on the conveyer belt but ordered from the menu. In Japan *kaiten-sushi* restaurants serve only Sushi and a few deserts on a conveyer belt. In addition, the variety of Sushi served is also different from the ones in Singapore.

The word Sushi is a generic term of which there are several categories, such as *Nigirizushi*, *Makizushi* and *Chirashizushi*. *Nigirizushi* or *Nigiri*, the most basic form of *Sushi*, is rice with a slice of raw seafood placed on top of it. Other forms of *sushi* include rice wrapped in seaweed and a thick slice of pan-fried egg and a cut of cucumber in the middle which is known as *Makizushi*. The popular *Makizushi* has one rectangular cut of raw fish or cucumber inside the rice. *Chirashizushi* is a bowl of rice topped with assorted raw fish and some vegetables. However, there are some Sushi created in non-Japanese countries. The famous California Roll is such an example.

³⁴ *Agemono* is a category of Japanese food. It includes fried pork, fried chicken, croquettes and so on.

³⁵ *Donburi* is a category which includes beef bowls. This food is served with rice inside in a round bowl. This bowl is as same as the one used for Japanese noodles. However, Sakae Sushi uses a *Hako* (square box) instead of a bowl.

³⁶ *Yakitori* (grilled chicken on a stick) and grilled salmon are in this category.



Figure 1. *Nigirizushi*
Copyright (C) 2000, 2001, 2002 Free
Software Foundation, Inc.



Figure 2. *Makizushi*
Copyright (C) 2000, 2001, 2002
Free Software Foundation, Inc.



Figure 3. *Chirashizushi*
Copyright (C) 2000, 2001, 2002 Free
Software Foundation, Inc.

California Rolls are a kind of *Makizushi*. It was first created in the U.S. by a Japanese chef in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo in the 1960s and it symbolizes the global popularity of Japanese Sushi. (Tamamura, 2000: Matsumoto, 1995). It is a roll which has crab stick, avocado and cucumber wrapped with seaweed and rice. Unlike the other usual *Makizushi*, the seaweed is interwoven inside the rice³⁷.

The California Roll is one of the most popular forms of Sushi around the

³⁷ This way of wrapping seaweed is called "*Uramaki*". *Uramaki* was invented in America and disliked by many Sushi chefs in Japan. Some chefs in Japan and Japanese chefs in Singapore told me that it is not the "traditional" and "authentic" way of making "Sushi".

world. A Japanese Sushi chef working in Singapore told me that it is a shame if a Japanese restaurant does not have this roll because many Singaporeans and westerners order the California Roll, although ironically not many Japanese order it. As he said, the California Roll is so popular that it must be on the menu of every Japanese restaurant.

There are many varieties of Sushi served in Singapore that are not found in Japan. These Sushi were inspired by American culinary ideas or were created in Singapore with locally favored food. The local Sushi chefs sometimes use local ingredients to create new types of Sushi. For example, *Otak* is a spicy fish cake eaten in Singapore or Malaysia, but it became a *Nigiri* in Genki Sushi in Singapore (Genki Sushi, not dated). *Otak* Sushi is sushi rice wrapped with seaweed with an *Otak* on the top. Another example is the *Hanamaki*, which is rice and mayonnaise wrapped with salmon and a mini hotdog.

The first Sushi restaurant in New York, Take-Sushi, had a menu called “Beginner’s Sushi” (Matsumoto, 1995). This menu included a *Nigiri* of boiled prawn and Smoked Salmon, and California Roll. The owner of Take-sushi, Matsumoto wrote in his book that the California Roll was good for people who had never tasted sushi because it did not have raw fish and the seaweed was interwoven into the rice so that its flavor was not overwhelming which suited the American palate. These Sushi which cannot be found in Japan were designed to

allow people from other cultures to get used to the idea of eating Sushi. This idea of the local version of Sushi, which is the California Roll, to appeal to local customers has now become one of the most famous Sushi among the world except in Japan.

***Ryotei* (Formal Japanese-style restaurant) and Family restaurants**

Family restaurants and *Ryotei* (Formal Japanese restaurants) are restaurants which serve a variety of Japanese cuisine. Both have Sushi, Tempura, *Teppanyaki*, Bento and many other Japanese dishes on the menu. These restaurants are usually large and have small adjoining *Tatami*³⁸ mats on the floor. In addition, *Ryotei* are usually located in larger hotels and the price range of their foods is higher than those of family restaurants and *Kaiten-Sushi* restaurants.

Japanese-styled family restaurants cater to both Japanese and Singaporean customers. The tables are usually set for four people. These restaurants serves a variety of Japanese dishes such as *Sushi*, *Ramen*, *Donburi* (akin to beef bowls), *Bento* (Japanese food served in a lacquered box) and Japanese curry rice at affordable prices.

³⁸ Tatami mat is a Japanese style flooring made of straw. The room is called a "Japanese room" (*Washitsu*) and usually separated with *Shoji*, a Japanese slide door made from wood and *Washi* (Japanese paper)

Ryotei serves similar dishes as family restaurants but the price range is different from the family restaurants. Foods in *Ryotei* are more expensive than other types of restaurants because of their location and their ingredients. Many of them cook with ingredients imported from Japan. In addition, the foods on the menu are also slightly different. For example, *Ryotei* do not serve Curry Rice because Curry Rice is considered everyday food in Japan. Takada (2004) mentioned traditional *Ryotei* has professional chefs, rooms which are decorated by expensive furnishings, luxurious gardens and the waitresses who serve customers and sometimes perform, such as singing and dancing (*Gigei*). In Singapore, there used to be such traditional *Ryotei* (Japanese Association ed., 1998). However, these days *Ryotei* are located in luxurious hotels without gardens and without waitresses who dance. In addition, *Ryotei* in Singapore are not frequented by ordinary people but usually by Japanese businessmen.

Other Japanese restaurants and cuisine

Finally, there are also speciality restaurants like *Izaka-ya* (Drinking places), and those that offer particular type of cuisine such as *Okonomiyaki* (Japanese style pancake containing vegetables and meat) restaurant or Japanese regional fare. These restaurants are not as expensive as the ones described above,

but the majority of their customers are still Japanese. *Izakaya* style restaurants usually have many appetizers and less main dishes than other Japanese restaurants which attract Japanese customers.

Besides restaurants, there are a take-out Sushi counters in some supermarkets. These supermarkets sell selected Sushi in a box and some allow customers to choose their own sushi which they then pack in a box. The Sushi sold is prepared by chefs who work at the supermarkets.

Ethnography of two Japanese restaurants

Nowadays, there are many types of Japanese restaurants in Singapore. Although all these restaurants serve Japanese food, one needs to consider the social aspect of the production of gastronomy in these places. In other words, how is cuisine actually consumed in these restaurants? Are they served in a different manner in each restaurant? How do people working in these restaurants prepare food and how do they talk about it? Are there differences in the eating style of Singaporeans and Japanese? In order to answer these questions, I will describe two Japanese restaurants where I conducted fieldwork. One is a *Ryotei* and the other is a small Japanese restaurant in a shopping mall. The *Ryotei* main's clientele comprised expatriate Japanese businessmen whereas the other restaurant

is frequented mainly by Singaporeans.

In the first restaurant, I will sketch how the restaurant and the people working in the restaurant create an “authentic” ambiance through food to cater to their mostly Japanese clients. In this *Ryotei*, the “authenticity” is represented through many things in the restaurant such as non-Japanese waitresses wearing Kimono and speaking Japanese, food which is imported from Japan, the garnishing and presentation of the foods, and so on. However, since there are some local and foreign customers, it has to be adapted to the local context to some extent.

Hanamitei

Singapore’s Hanamitei is a branch of a similarly named restaurant in Japan dating back more than 150 years. The restaurant is located in a large hotel along one of the main streets of Singapore. This luxurious 5 star hotel is surrounded by shopping malls, and one of them is a Japanese-financed shopping center. The restaurant is situated on the hotel’s 5th floor and next to a Chinese restaurant. One has to walk through a long corridor with a red carpet before reaching the restaurant. Three big casks containing *Sake* are piled in front of the restaurant. A ‘fortune cat’, a traditional Japanese symbol of fortune and good luck,

stands inside the main entrance to welcome customers. A colorful *Kimono* with a crane embroidered on it is displayed between the corridor and the hall. These traditional Japanese symbols are imported from Japan and a huge amount of money was spent to showcase the luxurious and “authentic” atmosphere as a Japanese restaurant. The Japanese general manager of the restaurant explained me in Japanese why they display such a lot of expensive things. “You know, this is *Ryotei*. You have to convince customers that this restaurant is an authentic *Ryotei*. So it is important.” As explained before, *Ryotei* are usually luxurious. For him, the “authentic” *Ryotei* has to be luxurious so he displayed expensive décor rather than cheap ones.



Figure 4. Sakadaru (casks of *Sake*)



Figure5. Display of *Kimono*



Figure 6. *Manekineko* (fortune cat)

The corridor next to the Kimono display leads to rooms with Tatami mats and tables (*Washitsu* or Japanese room). Rooms are divided by *Fusuma* (a sliding door) and each room has a low four- to eight-seat table in the middle. The restaurant also has about ten tables which seats four customers each, a *Sushi* counter and rooms with black rectangular tables and black chairs divided by a black modern door (a “Western” room). When the customers come into the restaurant, waitresses greet them with “*Irasshaimase*” which means ‘welcome’ in

Japanese. This greeting is used in every restaurant in Singapore just like any restaurant in Japan.

In this restaurant, I realized that (and I confirmed it with the manager of the restaurant) diners are usually businessmen entertaining their clients and they should be served with a great care. While I was talking to a waitress who was in charge of the cash register, there was a call from a customer for a reservation. She asked for the name of the customer, date of reservation, which room they prefer, and the name of the company the client was affiliated with. I asked the Japanese operating manager why she asked for the name of the company. She told me “We ask for the name of companies. Then if the competing companies come at the same time, we can avoid seating them next to each other.” The other day, she also told me that this type of service is necessary for the high-end Japanese restaurants because business entertainment is considered essential to successful negotiations for Japanese businessmen. Since eating and entertainment are considered an integral part of the businessmen’s culture, their companies pay the cost of the entertainment programs, and therefore, hosts tend to take their clients to expensive restaurants.

These businessmen prefer dining in Western or Japanese rooms because these rooms are conducive for discussing business. Therefore rooms are booked first by businessmen. Customers have to take off their shoes in the Japanese room.

The other Japanese manager of another restaurant explained to me about this. “There is also a rule in the positions of seating. Primarily, guests take seats in the middle of tables at the back of the room or closer to the *Tokonoma*³⁹ and the hosts take seats closer to the door. This is because they have to take good care of their guests.” For example, when a guest finishes his beer, it is the hosts’ responsibility to order more beer, thus it is easier for the hosts to sit near the door to attract the attention of waiters and waitresses. They make sure that their clients’ drinks and finger food do not run out and they talk about subjects of mutual interest.

One of my Japanese friends who has been working in Singapore for four years told me that during such meals when he entertains Japanese business clients, he often talks about Japan. Conversation topics included their provinces of origin, which schools they graduated from, or which sports teams they preferred. He told me, “I do not start with business talk. People need to break the ice first. Business entertainment is basically to let people know each other better and foster a closer relationship. Therefore, even though they have a relationship as client and host, they can create a better relation this way. This will definitely help the business because if there is a choice between two companies, we will choose the company which is reliable and has a better relationship.” The entertainment of business clients is still a very important factor for businesses and Japanese restaurants play

³⁹ *Tokonoma* is an alcove in a Japanese room where scroll picture or flower is displayed.

an important role in it because if restaurants chosen by the host provide bad service, it becomes a crucial problem since the business partner may have a bad impression. If clients are not served properly, it is the hosts' fault since the hosts chose the restaurant. Therefore, the host must choose restaurants which provide better service.

Shared dining is a common practice in Japanese business culture. In Japan since entertaining has traditionally been held at the *Ryotei*, *Ryotei* have had a close relationship with businessmen (Takada, 2004). Since this place is especially used in such a manner by Japanese businessmen, the restaurant has to be very sensitive to the customers' needs and the dishes served.

There are also non-business customers who frequent the restaurant. Whereas customers for business entertainment tend to like the closed rooms such as the Japanese and western rooms, non-business customers like to take a seat at the Sushi counter and enjoy a chat with the resident Sushi chef. The Sushi counter is a separate section from the main dining hall divided by a *Noren* (a curtain which is usually hung on the entrance door). Sushi chefs stand behind the counter where they prepare the Sushi. The Japanese manager told me about the importance of the Sushi chef. "The Sushi chefs are responsible for entertaining the customers dining in front of the counter. Customers can ask the Sushi chef questions about the food, about which fish is fresh and good on that day, and can

also complain to him about their companies and other personal matters. This is crucial, because if they like to talk to the chef, our restaurant can get more regular customers”



Figure 7. Sushis counter with *Noren*



Figure 8. Sushi counter

At Hanamatai, the waitresses and cooks start preparing food about 30 minutes before they open the restaurant at 6:30 p.m. Waitresses change into *Kimonos*. Two of the waitresses are Japanese and the others are Singaporeans and Chinese Malaysians. Most of them can understand at least some Japanese in order to take orders and to explain items on the menu to Japanese speaking clients. They learn Japanese by working at the restaurant, sometimes from the Japanese chef and managers and sometimes from customers. Since most of them are Chinese Singaporeans and Malaysians, they can also speak Mandarin and they use it to speak with fellow Singaporean customers and staff. However, staff meetings are held in English in a room between the hall and kitchen.

This room connects the kitchen and the hall. When the food is ready in

the kitchen, I as a middleman (*Nakaban*), brings it to this room and then waitresses bring it to the table. Besides this function, this room is also used as a staff lounge. I found some pieces of papers with basic Japanese printed on them pinned to the wall. The owner of the restaurant told me this is to remind the non-Japanese service staff of the names of certain dishes and fish. I also found a map of Japan with some notes on it. These notes were pasted on some regions on the map to indicate where the ingredients and the Sushi chef come from.

The kitchen is divided into four sections, namely places to make *Agemono* (fried foodstuff), *Nimono* (boiled foodstuff), *Yakimono* (grilled foodstuff), and *Zensai* (appetizers). *Yakimono* is especially important in this restaurant. This restaurant offers many types of dishes but it is famous as an eel restaurant. Therefore, a specialized cook handles the *Yakimono* department. He, a Singaporean, told me proudly the story of his training stint in Japan. “I was sent for training in Japan. Two weeks. There, I learned how to cook *Unagi* (eel). It was a good experience.” This part of the kitchen uses charcoal and it takes a longer time to prepare the dish compared to the other part of the kitchen that grills eels. He told me that they take great care in the cooking of wild eels. The restaurant serves wild and farmed eels. The Japanese operating manager told me wild eels are hard to catch in winter so they import only farmed eels. When I was working there, they started to import the wild eels again at the end of February. Wild eels

are imported by air, but some of them are weakened during the flight. These injured eels have to be served immediately since they go bad quickly.

Although *Yakimono* is the most important section in this restaurant, the appetizer section is a crucial part of Japanese cuisine too. The important things about the appetizer are visual and seasonal presentations. The owner of the restaurant said in the kitchen “Visual presentation is important because it has to make customers feel hungry. Therefore, the appetizer is the most important in terms of presentation since it is served at first. It looks very sophisticated and it looks even better under the orange light which most Japanese restaurants use.”

The unique part of Japanese cuisine is that Japanese chefs consider the four seasons in the cooking of certain dishes. Japan’s four seasons are usually represented in a meal from the appetizer to the dessert. For example, the Sushi chef in this restaurant put a branch of cherry blossom on Sushi in March and April since cherry blossoms bloom in early April. While I was looking at his work, he explained why he put the branch. “This is the authentic way (*Korega honmono no yarikata yade*⁴⁰)! And it looks beautiful doesn’t it? This should be the way. Otherwise this restaurant is not *Ryotei* and will not be different from other Japanese restaurants.” According to him, *Ryotei* is the most traditional and “authentic” Japanese type of restaurants so that they cannot compromise on their

⁴⁰ He speaks Osaka dialect.

“authentic” way of preparing foods. Representing the seasons in meals is one way for them to show the “authenticity” of their restaurant. However, in fact it is difficult to represent the seasons in every meal. The seasons are thus especially represented in appetizers and Sashimi in this restaurant.

The eel menu in February starts from an appetizer served in a white, egg-shaped plate. On the plate, there were five small portions which were *Nanohana karashibitashi*, *Noresore* with *Tosazu Jelly*, *Hotaruika Sumiso*, *Niihamaguri Sushi* and *Fukimiso*. *Nanohana Karashibitashi* is a green stick of rape blossoms (*Nanohana*) dipped in Japanese mustard. *Nanohana* (rape blossom) blooms in February and *Noresore* is young conger eel which also is a seasonal fish. *Hotaruika*, a type of squid caught in Toyama prefecture, *Niihamaguri*, a kind of seashell, and *Fukimiso*, butterbur sprout with *Miso*, all represent spring that has yet to arrive. In fact, serving the next season’s food is pricey since it is too early to get these food ingredients before it is distributed to the market, but this kind of pre-season service is considered one of great hospitality in Japanese restaurant culture.



Figure 9. **Appetizer (*Zensai*)**

These beautiful appetizers are followed by a clear soup. This supposedly refreshes the taste buds before the next course of raw fish (*Sashimi*). *Sashimi* is selected by the Sushi chef accordingly, therefore it just says “assorted *Sashimi*” on the menu. *Sashimi* also represents the season, decorated with plum flowers which bloom in February to March. However, the selection of fish depends on the customers’ preference. For example, the Sushi chef told me “Singaporeans prefer salmon, amberjack (*Kampachi*) and Yellow Tail (*Hamachi*) which are oily and fatty. There are also *Sashimi* which they do not eat, such as octopus. So we change the *Sashimi* menu according to our customers tastes.” The chef checks on who the customers are and they dish up *Sashimi* accordingly. In fact, this manner contradicts what the Sushi chef has said about the concern of seasons. Amberjack and Yellow Tail are fish found in September therefore, when one considers the seasonal fish, Amberjack and Yellow Tail should be served in August or

September. However, because of the customers' preference, they change the fish on the menu to cater to their taste. Here the chef makes a compromise on what he believes to be the "authentic" way of serving Sashimi.



Figure 10. Assorted Raw fish (*Sashimi Moriawase*)

Sashimi is followed by a dish of plain broiled eel (*Shirayaki*). The process of making *Shirayaki* takes a long time in this restaurant. They first steam the eel and then grill it. It takes about 40 minutes to complete this entire process.



Figure 11. Plain boiled eel (*Shirayaki*)
<http://www.yaizu.com/shohin/unagi/shirayaki.htm>

Before the main dish, customers are served vinegared dishes to prepare their taste buds for the broiled eel with sauce. They then serve the broiled eel with a separate bowl of rice, or together in an eel bowl (whichever the diners' preference may be), with another bowl of dark miso soup. This main dish takes more time than *Shirayaki* to cook. Chefs steam the eel first and then grill it in a same way with *Shirayaki*. But after the process, they put a special sauce and steam and grill it again. It takes about one hour to prepare the dish.



Figure 12. **Eel bowl (*Unagi Donburi*)**
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After the main dish, a dessert which is either strawberry, *Kisetsu no Dezaato* (the dessert of the season), or green tea ice cream is served to complete the whole course. The strawberry, *Sachinoka Ichigo*, is from Kochi prefecture in Shikoku Island and is gathered in winter. It is extremely sweet and smells of peach. Three pieces of these strawberries are served in a small dish.

This whole meal takes more than two hours to complete. This is so that customers can spend time in a relaxed manner to talk with their business partners. To serve these customers, the restaurant offers “authentic” Japanese cuisine to suit the Japanese palate. As the Japanese manager of the restaurant stated, “the concept of our restaurant is to serve authentic dishes. I believe that Japanese restaurants outside of Japan have a mission; to globalize authentic Japanese cuisine and make it more popular among foreigners.” On the other hand, when the customer is a Singaporean or Caucasian, chefs make some adaptation to their dishes. Although it is not a complete change, they make some changes in Sashimi for those who are not used to the less oily fish (e.g. seasonal fish to salmon, amberjack or yellow tail which is relatively common to them) or some raw seafood such as octopus and squid

Hanamitei Dining

At Hanamitei Dining, a branch of Hanamitei, dishes were more varied and cheaper than at the Hanamitei in a hotel. The eatery is located in a department store. The department store was set up by a Japanese company but it targets both local and Japanese customers. This restaurant is situated on the fourth floor, next to a Chinese, Thai and another Japanese restaurant. Hanamitei Dining consists of eight square tables designed for a company of four, five tables meant for couples,

and six chairs at the Sushi counter. Contrary to the relaxed *Ryotei*, at Hanamitei Dining, manager and waiters and waitresses have to consider the turnover rate of their customers daily. Hanamitei usually has about 50 customers per day with about 80 seats whereas this restaurant caters to about 200 customers per day with about 40 seats over a weekend.

The kitchen is located behind the Sushi counter and is much smaller than at the other restaurant. Cooks in this restaurant are all full-time workers but waitresses and waiters are part-timers except for one full time worker. Most of the waitresses and waiters are local university or polytechnic students. Here I worked as a waiter. The Japanese manager of this restaurant told me that waiters usually work for half a year therefore they are not as professional as Hanamitei's staff. When I asked one waitress why she wanted to work at this restaurant, she said the reason was that it was convenient because of its location in the city. Other waitresses said that they took the job because they saw the recruitment notice in front of the restaurant. They did not have much motivation to learn Japanese and about Japanese food so that the waitresses are less professional than those at the other Hanamitei restaurant.

As I read the menu in the restaurant, I observed that it emphasized the Bento (lunch box style) and set menus (*Teishoku*) by displaying them on the first few pages. The Japanese manager in this restaurant told me that the food they

serve here is adapted to Singaporean taste buds. “Singaporeans and Western people prefer a dish which of a certain size or amount whereas Japanese eat many small dishes. Since this restaurant has a lot of non-Japanese customers, we serve Bento (foods served in rectangular box), Tempura set, *Sashimi* with Tempura set, and of course Unagi (eel) sets. Unlike our restaurant in the hotel, most of our dishes are served in a set meal and they are very big meals.” In this restaurant, they serve bigger portions than in Hanamitei where they serve their dishes like appetizers in terms of size. The most popular dish is the Bento box which includes Sushi, Tempura, Grilled fish, eel cooked in an omelet, fried chicken, Japanese noodles, complete with a bowl of rice, soup, pickles and salad.

According to the manager of the restaurant, thirty percent of customers are Japanese and the rest are Chinese Singaporeans and Caucasians. Because of the location of this restaurant, customers come in to dine after shopping. Therefore there are also many customers with children, especially on weekends. Elderly Japanese tourists and businessmen also come to dine at this restaurant. Because of the large amount of local and foreign customers, they adapt their menu by offering more Bento and set meals and putting these dishes on the first few pages of the menu.

One day when I was working at the restaurant as a waiter, there were a few customers. It was around seven in the evening on a Saturday. One of them

was a Japanese businessman in a tie and suit who had come alone and sat at the Sushi counter. He ordered assorted Sashimi, some appetizers and Sake. He was talking with the Japanese Sushi chef behind the counter about how the Japanese octopus is better than octopus in Southeast Asia. Two mothers and three children came in and ordered noodles for the children and Sukiyaki (slices of beefs cooked in a pot with vegetables) for themselves. There was also a Singaporean family comprising two parents and four children. They ordered a Tempura set and *Wafu* Bento for themselves and noodles for their children. When I brought out the Tempura set and *Wafu* Bento, I was asked by a customer to bring Japanese dried chili flakes for Tempura and *Wasabi* for the Sushi in the *Wafu* Bento (This restaurant does not serve *Wasabi* along with the dish). A man who looked like a father sprinkled Japanese chili flakes on his Tempura and the mother took a chunk of *Wasabi* and put it into soy sauce. When I saw that, I asked the Sushi chef about it. “Yeah, many Singaporeans do that. You know, the Tempura should be eaten just with Tsuyu (a special sauce for Tempura). Not with chili flakes.” In addition, the Sushi chef in this restaurant said that too much *Wasabi* kills the taste of Sushi and the Japanese hardly do it. When I was a waiter at this restaurant, I was asked to bring chili flakes and *Wasabi* many times. It seems to me that Singaporeans prefer spicy food and this preference shapes the way they eat Japanese food.

In Singapore, it seems that there are more people who like chili than in

Japan. Most stalls in hawker centers, coffee shops, and food courts serve dishes with chili. Although there is a chili (Nanami Tougarashi) in Japan, it is milder and usually only eaten with noodles. On the other hand, many dishes in Singapore are served with different types of chili. This locally preferred taste also affects the consumption of Japanese cuisine in Singapore. Hanamitei Dining thus adapted its menu through the hands of local customers and the chefs and managers in the restaurant.

Conclusion

Japanese restaurants in Singapore have a different style of serving food from those in Japan. Customers, workers, and the presentation and consumption of food vary from one restaurant to another. One thing in common is that there is localization in any restaurant to an extent. *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants here have created new varieties of Sushi that cannot be found in Japan. The president of Yoshinoya clearly argued that they followed the strategy of localization.

The ethnography of the two Japanese restaurants also showed the adaptations of Japanese cuisine based on the people in the restaurants. The adaptation to the local context was done by both restaurants' chef and their customers. The ethnography also showed that localization is affected by the

people's perception of "authentic" Japanese cuisine. The localization and "authentication" of Japanese restaurants and customers in Singapore leads us to a number of questions that revolve around the globalization of ethnic cuisine.

For instance, how do these restaurants help explain the global phenomenon of Japanese restaurants? In addition, if localization happens to Japanese restaurant abroad, how can Japanese restaurants claim that they serve "authentic" Japanese cuisine? In the next chapter, I will attempt to shed light on these questions through a re-reading of the globalization theory.

Chapter 4

“Imagined” Japanese restaurant

Introduction

As I showed in the previous chapters, the Japanese food in Southeast Asia paints a complex picture of globalization. Japanese restaurants initially came to Singapore with Japanese migrations. Cohen and Avieli argued that “world cuisines” such as Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and recently Thai cuisine became popular worldwide because these countries are major tourist destinations (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). However, it is more likely that these migrants spread their local cuisine around the world as I showed in the case of Japanese restaurants in chapter 2. Until the 1980s, Japanese restaurants targeted Japanese migrants. However, this situation has changed from the 1980s in many places around the world.

On my trips to Europe and the US, I noticed that the owners, chefs and waiters and waitresses of Japanese restaurants there were predominantly Chinese or Korean. Sometimes Japanese worked there but it was often temporary. One of my Japanese friends who was working in London as a waitress said that she could only find a job in Japanese restaurants and she was the only Japanese in the restaurant. She worked alongside Chinese waiters. These restaurants, including

Singapore's Japanese restaurants, go out of the hands of the Japanese and they are no longer the Japanese's monopoly.

At the same time, there still exist a lot of Japanese owned restaurants worldwide. These restaurants such as Hanamitei in Singapore which I described in the last chapter show that some Japanese restaurants still cater to mainly Japanese customers and they take pride in the "authenticity" of foods they serve and atmosphere of the restaurant. In this case, it seems that what James Watson called "localization" (Watson, 1997) does not refer these "authentic" overseas Japanese restaurants.

In this chapter, I will discuss how contemporary theories of globalization fit and do not fit in the case of Japanese restaurants' globalization. Applying theories of globalizations and theories of food culture to the case of Japanese restaurants, I will argue that local adaptation (localization) coexists with people's perception of "authentic" Japanese restaurants rather than erode each other. This view of "authentic" restaurants is constructed by flows of people, commodities and information. At the same time, local adaptation occurs in restaurants through the hands of workers and diners.

A shrinking world?

There has been a large amount of discussion on globalization and it is impossible to cover all of them here. These theories differ in their focus and the field of discipline. However, as Inda and Rosaldo noted, most scholars would agree with a simple definition of globalization as “the intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange.” (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002)

David Harvey advocated the “time-space compression” (Harvey, 1989). According to him, since the 1970s, the world has been shrinking in terms of time and space due to the speeding up of transportation, circulation of wealth and commodities, and flow of information (1989: 141- 172) . He argues that it emerged with the rapid innovation of new organizational forms and new technologies in production after the turnover of Fordism and its emphasis on mass production in Western economies. This resulted in improvements in market distribution systems and the emergence of social values and virtues of instantaneity. Even gastronomic cultures were influenced by the onslaught of the instantaneous with fast food and instant noodles, which became very much a part of the food landscape in many urban societies. He captured the phenomenon of globalization, well considering the current condition of the world with what he called “post-modernity”

Similarly, Anthony Giddens captured Globalization as a ‘time-space distanciation’ or a ‘stretching process’ (Giddens, 1990). He conceptualized globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”. (Giddens, 1990: 64) For him, the local which used to be a regional or particular area has been stretched to a global scale with the flow of information and economic circulation. For example, the Iraq War which occurred in 2003 threatened the oil supply in the Middle East and influenced the price of oil in New York. This boosted the price of oil all over the world and it affected people’s life from car fuel in China to the price of Coca Cola in Singapore. This theory of globalization is applicable to many situations in this era. Giddens’s theory captures the condition of the beginning of globalization but both Harvey and Giddens do not explain the impact of globalization on locals; how globalization affects the other locals and their response to the enormous flow of homogenization power (e.g. the reaction of the local people against American Hollywood or Japanese popular culture. See Berger and Huntington: 2002). To answer this question, many works about cultural globalization offer explanations.

Cultural Globalization⁴¹

⁴¹ Here I use the term cultural globalization to refer to the globalization which

Most anthropologists and sociologists tried to figure out the global system through culture. While Giddens and Harvey theorized globalization through Macro economic systems, many cultural globalization theorists explained it from micro perspectives although there are some who captured globalization as new ways of colonization by the West.

Following Wallerstein's World System theory⁴², Herbert I. Schiller (1979) argued that third world culture existed through multinational communication networks and the domination of the international system by Western nations. Adopting Wallerstein's center-periphery divide, he noted in his book (ibid) that 'the core', namely the developed Western countries dominate the distribution system of human and natural resources and the third world cannot manage their economic development by themselves but through Western transnational corporations.

John Tomlinson, however, argued that cultural imperialism did occur but the situation of globalization after the 1960s is different (Tomlinson, 2002).

Globalization may be distinguished from imperialism in that it is a far less

includes the flow of cultural products, people and ideas. It excludes purely economic actions such as the stock market and monetary flows.

⁴² He advocated the three system theory that the world is consisted of core, semi-periphery and periphery. (Wallerstein, 1993)

coherent or culturally directed process. For all that it is ambiguous between economic and political senses, the idea of imperialism contains, at least, the notion of a purposeful project: the *intended* spread of a social system from one center of power across the globe. The idea of ‘globalization’ suggests interconnection and interdependency of all global areas which happens in a far less purposeful way. It happens as the result of economic and cultural practices which do not, of themselves, aim at global integration, but which nonetheless produce it. More importantly, the effects of globalization are to weaken the cultural coherence of *all* individual nation-states, including the economically powerful ones – ‘the imperialist powers’ of a previous era. (p175)

Tomlinson’s understanding of globalization is in part similar to Giddens’ understanding, but he went deeper and grasped the effect and the temporal result of globalization. Like many other globalization theorists (Urry, 1987, Steward, 1990, Miyanaga, 2000, Shimazoe, 2002), he stressed that globalization has the feature of integration and also the weakening of the cultural coherence of nation-states. Yet these arguments are in question. In the late 20th century, many economic, political and cultural centers emerged therefore the world seems more disintegrated. In addition, some nations and people presume that local cultures

are exposed to the menace of ‘strong’ culture such as American Hollywood or McDonalds and people are persistent in protecting their local culture against this global homogenization which Ritzer called “McDonaldization” (1993). For example, Korea prohibited importing Japanese popular culture until 1999; or as Watson observed, China regarded McDonalds as the invasion of America when the restaurant opened in Beijing (Watson, 2000). Therefore, globalization resulted in both social integration and disintegration. It both weakens and strengthens local cultures.

Regarding these McDonalds, Disneyland, Coca-Cola and other so-called global symbols and denying the explanation of the global system from cultural imperialism or by center-periphery models, Appadurai referred to the ‘imagined worlds’ (Appadurai, 1996) inspired by Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983)⁴³. He put the imagination of person and groups as a central component of the global order. In so doing, he proposed five scapes which compose the ‘imagined worlds’ to account for the complexity of the current global cultural economy; ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas. By ethnoscape, he meant “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live; tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest

⁴³ Imagined community is a concept advocated by Anderson. A nation is a community of people who think themselves as part of the community which is ultimately “imagined” by them.

workers and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree(1996; 33)”. Technoscape refers to the “global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries. (ibid: 34)” Financescapes means the monetary flow such as in the stock market and currency markets. Mediascapes means “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (ibid: 35)” and ideoscapes refers to images associated with the political and state ideologies and counter-ideologies. His interpretation of globalization is remarkable since it shifted the globalization theories out from center-periphery models, and went farther from time-space compression ideas. However, these five landscapes can exist when the deterritorialized world is taken for granted and this deterritorialization should be contested in contrast with territorialization. As Ong mentioned (Ong, 1999), this territory based world is still bounded when we consider the main scapes; ethnoscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes. For example, Japan is notorious for closing its doors to immigration. Although Japan started to welcome foreign students in 1983, the Japanese government hardly accepted foreign workers. In contrast, the German government accepted a lot of foreign workers especially from Turkey, but after the economic recession, they tightened

the regulation for immigrants. Although Indian and Filipino workers immigrated to many countries, the jobs they can get are limited. There are also restraints for travelers. While a Taiwanese national needs a visa to enter the United States and have to go through a long process to obtain it, a Japanese can enter the US without a visa for three months. Israelis are not allowed to enter Malaysia. Indonesians need visas to enter the UK whereas Brazilians do not need it. European Union citizens can work anywhere within EU countries without any work permit. Although the boundaries are easier to cross with cheaper and more varieties of transportation than ever before, it is obvious that from the nation-states point of view, the world is still clearly territorialized.

How about the mediascapes and ideoscapes? Mediascapes, which are reminiscent of McLuhan's "global village"⁴⁴, and ideoscapes, according to Appadurai, are linked closely with landscapes of images (1996). Images are disseminated through the media such as newspapers, televisions, magazines and recently the World Wide Web. Here nation-states are again involved in creating boundaries between these supposedly unbounded flows of information. The local culture also set the limit to this deterritorialized information flows such as language barriers between each nation and each culture. The important point he overlooked is the 'autonomy' of people's choice. The Information does not drift

⁴⁴ Although Marshall McLuhan's intention is different (1962), his term 'Global village' tends to mean the current World Wide Web and internet.

away infinitely to reach all humankind all over the world but it is censored and sometimes hidden by states and governments. The Media cannot impose information on people who have no interest in it. For example, in Europe, I hardly saw information about Japan or Southeast Asian countries in the media. European Media reports tended to focus primarily on Europe and local news rather than reporting incidents from far away places. Most Europeans hardly know the names of the prime minister of Japan, China, Thailand or Singapore. On the other hand, Southeast Asian citizens hardly know the names of prime minister of Belgium or Holland many countries in Eastern Europe. As such, although Appadurai's five landscapes should be contested, I agree with his suggestion that the globally interconnected world is characterized by the rapid speed of the mobility of people, the flow of information and ideas supported by technology and financial activities. As James Clifford argued, through centuries of human history, people are 'dwelling in travel' (Clifford, 1997) The People are moving more or less; moving to a next village or to a distant country. Encounters through these movements are important to the understanding of any human society. I believe that this human mobility is essential to account for the flow of images and how the 'imagined' or 'fantasized' world is created. Whether the world is shrinking or stretching, people have been traveling for a long time. In addition, the speed by which this occurs is also increasing. Thus, the flow of people, commodities, and information has

resulted in the creation of an imagined Otherness (e.g. stereotyping Germany as a country of sausage and beer or Thai people always smiling as shown in tourist guide books.). These imagined ‘others’ take an important role to explain the globalization of Japanese restaurants which I will discuss later.

Cultural Localization

The largest debate among scholars of cultural globalization is whether the process of globalization is resulting in a world that is homogenizing or heterogenizing itself⁴⁵. Globalization is regarded by many scholars as the increasing homogenization of the world with the consequence of cultural shrinkage such as McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993). However, other theorists look at the local cultural adaptations that emerge from globalization. Localization advocates investigate so-called global cultures in different locales and insist that, contrary to the cultural imperialism advocates’ arguments (Schiller, 1979, Woods, 1999), globalization does not erase local culture. Rather so-called global cultures are localized by people in different ways (Allison, 2000; Barbar, 1992; Watson, 1997; Ng, 2001; Metcalf, 2002).

⁴⁵ Here, I mean by homogenization that the spread of single culture and the world is creating a homogenous culture. By heterogenization, I mean that cultures are diversifying and cultures are becoming different from each culture.

Glocalization is a term which combines 'global' and 'localization'. Robertson adopted the term which was used in Japanese companies in the 1990s (the original word *Dochakuka* literally means localization) and tried to conceptualize the current globalization process in terms of 'homo- and hetero-genization in time and space' (Robertson, 1995). According to him, his theory is effective in complementing the weakness of the globalization as a homogenization theory and as the process of the compression of the world as a whole. It also complements the theories of localization as the local adaptation of global culture. For him, "the global is not in and of itself counterposed to the local. Rather, what is often referred to as the local is essentially included within the global" (Robertson 1995:35). But in fact, this glocalization is not as much as different from localization theories. He gave an example of McDonalds saying "When one considers them (McDonalds) more closely, they each have a local, diversifying aspect (ibid: 34)". He took glocalization as the process that global culture will be adapted to local cultures.

What is ultimately the "local" culture? To localize a foreign culture into the local culture, it means that there exists an indigenous culture; a foreign culture absorbed or assimilated into this 'indigenous' culture. Cultures have been in contact and have been connected for a long time, although in a smaller scale, than contemporary global interconnections. Cultures in the Greek Hellenistic period

were a fusion of Greek and Middle Eastern culture and became inseparable. In Southeast Asia, Wolters argued the Indianization of Southeast Asian societies and the localization of Indian culture but he also mentioned that the originally localized Indian materials have been re-localized (Wolters, 1999). Japanese cuisine is one example of this re-localization.

As I have shown in Chapter 1, the Japanese localized foreign cuisines, and adapted it to suit in taste of the local people (e.g. an invention of beef bowl in Meiji Era). Such food which was localized in Japan again are localized in Singapore (Chapter 3). However, the localization theory explains only one aspect of Japanese restaurants in Singapore. How can we explain the people who dine at Japanese restaurants? Do diners want to eat localized Japanese foods?

Globalization of Japanese restaurants

We looked through theories of globalization and localization. These theories are in part applicable to the situation of Japanese restaurants' culture, but as a whole, we need to elaborate in order to theorize the globalization of Japanese restaurants. Here I will theorize globalization of Japanese restaurants by combining it with the theories of food culture.

The globalization of Japanese restaurants depends largely on the high

speed of transportation. As Jack Goody said, the development of four basic factors is important for the development of world cuisine: preservation, mechanization, merchandization and transportation (Goody, 1982). As shown in Chapter 3, in the case of Japanese cuisine, preservation and transportation is extremely important since this accelerates the current global spread of Japanese restaurants.

I have been to Japanese restaurants in Singapore and almost all of these restaurants served Sushi. The Japanese manager of a Japanese restaurant told me “Sushi, Tempura and Teppanyaki are the most popular items in overseas Japanese restaurants. Off course Sushi is the most popular of them.” I have been to Japanese restaurants in America and European countries, every restaurant served Sushi. Sushi is the globally recognized Japanese cuisine and this is contingent on transportation. As Bestor observed, one departing point of blue fin tuna which is one of the most popular fish used in making Sushi was the East Coast of America (Bestor, 2000). Tuna is imported to Japan from all over the world including America⁴⁶. Because of the great demand for tuna with the popularity of Japanese cuisine, tuna which used to have no value in other parts of the world became a big business. However, because the biggest concern with Sushi is the freshness of the fish, it has to be transported to Japan as soon as possible, otherwise the delay will lower the price of fish.

⁴⁶ The largest supplying countries in 2002 are Indonesia, Australia, Spain, Taiwan, Korea and America. (Boekitokei, 2002)

As I have shown in Chapter 3, high-end Japanese restaurants in Singapore import fish and many ingredients from Japan. These are air freight from Japan to Singapore as freshness matters. One Sushi chef told me at Tsukiji, the central Japanese fish market in Tokyo, the taste of Sushi is different in Tsukiji than in Okinawa, the southernmost part of Japan because the three hours of transportation changes the taste. Therefore, these restaurants are hugely dependent on swift transportation which Harvey described as time-space compression. This speeding-up of transportation in fact allows Japanese restaurants to open around the world.

When I talked to workers in *Kaiten-Sushi* and some other Japanese restaurants, they told me that they had a local fish supplier in Singapore. These local suppliers do not go through the Japanese fish market but import fish from Hong Kong and Australia. They lower the price of dishes with this since it is pricey to import fish and ingredients from Japan. This example also showed the destabilization of the center-periphery theories since Japan is not the center of Japanese cuisine, but it has centers in many other places.

As I have discussed in the previous section, this speeding-up of transportation, namely time-space compression, is not enough to explain the impact on locales. In order to explain it, we have to look at how the localization and globalization theories fit in the case of Japanese restaurants in Singapore.

As shown in Chapter 3, localization can be observed through the food. The strategy of Yoshinoya was to localize their marketing strategy. They increased the items on their menu and served a wide variety of dishes. Many localized Sushi were observed being offered in *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants. In addition, food is localized through the hands of both customers and chefs as adaptations for the locals. The Sushi chef in Hanamitei told me that he changes the fish on the menu depending on when local or non-Japanese customers came into the restaurant. Instead of serving raw octopus or squid, he put salmon or Hamati to suit the customer's tastebuds. On the other hand, as I observed in the Hanamitei Dining, when customers did not like the taste, they added some Japanese chili (*Shichimi* or *Nanami*) or *Wasabi* to suit their own taste.

However, at the same time, both chefs and diners consider the "authenticity" of the restaurant's ambiance and food. As shown in Chapter 3, the restaurant management tries to create an "authentic" ambiance and food. How can localization and "authenticity" be compatible?

To explain this contradiction, the Appadurai's concept of "imagined world" is applicable. The flow of people and information construct the people's perception of "authentic" Japanese restaurants. The people who have been to Japan bring the idea of what is Japanese cuisine and restaurants. The information flows (e.g. Japanese cuisine shown on TV, magazines and newspapers) also allow

people in Singapore who have not visited Japan to shape their idea of Japanese restaurants and food; how Japanese restaurants “should” look like and how the food “should” taste like. In other word, this flow of people and information create an image of an “authentic” Japanese restaurant for them. Therefore, “authenticity” differs because of their experiences and the information they have.

“Imagined” Authenticity

In June 2005, my Singaporean friends and I dined at a Japanese restaurant to celebrate one of my friend’s birthday. All my Singaporean friends have been to Japan so that they were familiar with Japanese food. That was an *Izaka-ya* style restaurant so we mainly drank many kinds of *Sake* with many types of appetizers and dishes. After the dinner, I was on the way home with my friend and he asked me a question. “How did you find the food?” I just said it was fine. He continued “Do you remember the *Yakionigiri* (a toasted triangle shaped rice ball)? It was not authentic. The shape should be a triangle.” At the restaurant, we ordered a *Yakionigiri*; the rice was rolled onto a stick and toasted on a mesh over hot charcoals like a barbeque. He has been to Japan several times and has been to many Japanese restaurants in Singapore. He also likes to watch the TV show,

Japan Hour⁴⁷. With his previous experiences of Japanese food, he had a certain criterion of what is an “authentic” *Yakionigiri* in his mind.

The other day, I was invited by an old Japanese couple for a dinner at their home. They have lived in Singapore more than 30 years. I talked to them about my research briefly and the wife who is about 70 talked about one restaurant set up by a Singaporean. It was relatively more expensive than *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants. “You know the restaurant? Well, food there tastes not too bad but, well... you know the presentation.... Well, it’s a kind of fake, or, how do you say, not authentic? Well, it looks strange, doesn’t it? (*Nante iuka, nisemono ppoi to iuka honmono janai toiuka...hen desu yonee?*)⁴⁸” She also said that she has never been to *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants. For her, food in the restaurant was “inauthentic”.

These examples show that people have a certain criteria for “authenticity”. Then what is “authenticity”? Appadurai noted that authenticity is “the degree to which something is more or less what it ought to be” (1986: 25). In this sense, at overseas Japanese restaurants, the diners and restaurants’ managers and chefs expect ‘authenticity’ to a greater or lesser extent. However, the degree of ‘authenticity’ or what constitutes the “authentic” is defined by culture and

⁴⁷ Japan Hour is a long-run TV program broadcasted by a major channel in Singapore. It introduces various Japanese foods in Japan.

⁴⁸ In Japanese, the word ‘authentic’ is equivalent to *‘honmono’*. It also means ‘real’.

individual experiences which are characterized by the flow of information and people. (e.g. whether one has been to Japan, or how often one goes to Japanese restaurants, or even though they have never been to Japan, how much information they have gathered about them from the media or from rumors etc.) Hence there are no single criteria of “authenticity”.

I heard from some Japanese businessmen that they did not go to *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants in Singapore, despite the fact that similar type restaurants were common in Japan. This was not only because they believed that Singapore’s *Kaiten sushi* restaurants served “not authentic (*Honmono janai*)” dishes but also of the strange versions of *sushi* that could not be found in Japan such as Burger Maki (sliced hamburger wrapped with rice and seaweed) and California Maki. For such Japanese businessmen, the representation of food is one way to measure gastronomic authenticity.

The ambiance of the restaurants is also considered by some Japanese I spoke to as a show of authenticity. One evening, my friends and I were attending a meeting hosted by my Japanese university’s alumni. About 20 people gathered at the Japanese restaurant which was well known for its *ShabuShabu* (thin strips of beef dipped in boiling water and stirred until cooked). When I entered the restaurant with my Japanese friends, we were greeted with a spirited “*Irasshaimase*”, (welcome!), called out by the Singaporean waiters. This greeting

is heard in almost every Japanese restaurant in Japan. One of my co-alumni members who had just recently arrived in Singapore a month ago remarked with amazement, “Wow, they say *Irasshaimase?* It is like Japan.” And he reminded me of how the restaurant made them feel like they were back in Japan. For him, the atmosphere of the Japanese restaurant was maintained through the use of cultural signifiers such as the waiter’s word appealed to him. For most Japanese diners, their criteria for the “authentic” Japanese restaurants involve aesthetics in food presentation and the ambiance of restaurants.

”Authenticity” could be measured by the employment of Japanese chefs and waitresses. My Singaporean friend who has been to Japan for several times said, “I don’t go to a restaurant where the chef is not Japanese.” She continued, “I once went to a Japanese restaurant, a local chef there. He served me *Zaru-soba* (a Japanese noodle served on a square box with a bamboo sheet) with *Tsuyu* (a dipping source) but the *soba* (noodle) was hot!” What she had in mind was a cold *Soba*. According to her, because of this experience, she stopped going to locally-owned Japanese restaurants. For her, the degree of authenticity is decided by the employment of a Japanese chef.

Whereas diners measure the degree of “authenticity” along such scales, chefs and managers in the restaurants measure it in different ways. As I have shown in Chapter 3, the formal Japanese restaurant Hanamitei tried to be

“authentic” to meet the customers’ degree of authenticity with the display of a Kimono at the entrance of the restaurant, where the ingredients came from, food presentation and the employment of a Japanese chef. For example, waiters and waitresses are taught where the ingredients for the dishes come from in case the customers ask. A typical example of the consideration of “authenticity” is that instead of buying fish from local suppliers, the manager of Hanamitei import fish from the Osaka fish market in Japan. Since Hanamitei’s customers are mostly Japanese, the restaurant tried to serve the “authentic” taste of Japan through the purchase of ingredients from Japan. Although most Japanese may not really differentiate the taste of fish from the Japanese or local markets, the fact that fish are imported from Japan is important for the manager, in case customers ask.

My friend once pointed out the way one chef presented a plate of Sashimi. He used to be a chef of a Japanese restaurant in Singapore but at that time, he was running a Japanese restaurant in Singapore. “You know, because I am running a restaurant, I sometimes go to other restaurants for research. Once, I went to a Japanese restaurant owned by a Singaporean. I found a mistake there. When they served Sashimi, they laid out Sashimi in one line, but I could see a meat part (*akami*) between each Sashimi. We (Well trained Japanese chefs) never do this.” According to him, when he arranges Sashimi, the same type of fish should be lined without showing the cut side (see the silver fish in Assorted Sashimi in

Chapter 3). The way of presenting fish is important for him to measure “authenticity.”

For some Singaporeans, food served in a rectangular box with partition⁴⁹ is “authentic”. My friend who is the Japanese manager of a Japanese restaurant in Singapore told me about it. “Actually there were some customers who asked us to serve food in a *Bento* box. It is strange, isn’t it?” This would be the “authentic” way for him to consume Japanese foods.

Authentic food in general implies that “products are prepared using the same ingredients and same processes as found in the homeland of the ethnic, national or regional group” (Lu and Fine, 1995: 538). As such, one criterion which most people have in mind is that “authentic” cuisines are found in their homelands. However, even in their homeland, food differs by regions. The soup of Japanese noodle (*Udon*) is different in Tokyo and in Osaka. The soup in Tokyo has a darker color than the one in Osaka. Therefore, the “authentic” *Udon* also differs depending on which part of Japan they are from.

As shown above, “authenticity” differs for different people. It is also different both among Singaporeans and Japanese. My Singaporean friend who has been to Japan several times and who is a great fan of Japanese comics and animation complained that Singaporeans put too much *Wasabi* (green horseradish

⁴⁹ This box is used to serve varieties of foods in one plate. In general, it is called *Bento* box which is originally used to serve food and eat it.

paste) on their Sushi and this is not the authentic way to eat it.

The notion of authenticity, “what they ought to be”, is culturally, socially and individually constructed through each person’s experiences. Therefore, “authentic” Japanese cuisine and restaurants are a space that is ultimately “imagined” by both people who are native to the culture and foreign to it, since what people expect from the cuisine and restaurants is different. But why does the degree of “authenticity” differ and what made this “imagined” space so popular in Singapore over many other so-called ethnic restaurants?

Popularity of Japanese restaurants

In 2006, there are more than 140 Japanese restaurants in Singapore (COMM, 2006). The number of restaurants is beyond the number of McDonalds and other ethnic restaurants except Chinese restaurants⁵⁰. As I have shown in Chapter 2, the number of Japanese restaurants significantly increased in the 1980s. Thang (1999) conducted a survey in National University of Singapore and found out that about 80 percent of students can name at least one Japanese restaurant and

⁵⁰ Chinese restaurants are the most popular cuisine since it is supported by the majority of Singaporeans. About 80 percent of Singaporeans have the Chinese ethnicity.

more than 80 percent have been to a Japanese restaurant. What is so special about Japanese restaurants in Singapore?

Some scholars suggested the increase of Japanese population, the appetite for exotic cuisine and localization of food as factors to explain the popularization of Japanese cuisine in Singapore (Ng, 2001b, Thang, 1999, Chua, 2000). These factors are applicable in the case of Japanese restaurants, but these factors can also be applied to the popularization of other cuisines. How did Japanese restaurants become more popular than other ethnic cuisines among Singaporeans? Rather than arguing over these factors, it should be explained through the historical factor and the transnational flow of people and information. The popularity of Japanese restaurants should be considered with the shift of Japanese images.

Considering the historical relationship between Japan and Singapore, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, the relation of these two countries are affected the Second World War. This issue has always been raised when it comes to the relationship between Japan and other Asian countries (Clammer and Ben-Ari, 2000, Han, 2001, Befu, 2001). I described in Chapter 3 the human skeleton which was unearthed in 1962. This fact again evoked images of the cruelty of the Japanese during the World War. Shimazaki (1991) observed that the issue came up during a meeting in the 1970s. The meeting was held by Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. During the meeting, the Japanese began talking about making profits exclusively

for Japanese in front of Singaporeans. One Singaporean in his 40s shouted a word “*Kenpei* (Japanese military police)!” *Kenpei* was the name of a military police. They arrested a lot of Singaporeans during the war and they represented the cruelty and selfishness of Japanese. Even though Lee Kwan Yew welcomed Japanese businessmen from the 1960s onwards, Singaporeans still remembered the cruelty of Japanese army at that time. The image of Japan as invader was evoked when anything related to the war was raised up (For more examples, see Shimazaki, 1991). And because of this image evoked from the word “Japanese”, the number of Japanese restaurants was small and they targeted mainly Japanese customers until the 1980s.

However, as shown in Chapter 2, the perception of Japanese-as-invader was changed by the Japanese TV shows, dramas, cartoons and comic books among people from teenagers to 30s⁵¹. As I have mentioned, *Oshin* was a prominent example of the shifting of the image of Japan. But not only did these cultures attenuate it but also allowed Singaporeans to know more about the

⁵¹ I would say the Singapore’s perception of Japanese-as-invader was ‘thinned down’. It is difficult to say it was totally changed since it was sometimes raised up by Singaporeans. Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni brought the discussion of the Second World War again. The Yasukuni War Shrine honors 2.5 million war dead since the Meiji era has begun. With the increasing criticism of this shrine by Japanese media and religious organizations, this shrine became an issue in Japan. This issue became an international issue by the visit of him in 2001. Chinese and South Korean government condemned his visit and it made a political and economic chasm between these countries. In Singapore, it was relatively quiet, but I heard from many Japanese that it actually changed the attitude towards those Japanese.

Japanese cuisine.

During my stay in Singapore, I once planned to go back to Japan for a while. I went to see one of my Singaporean friends and asked what he wanted from Japan. He said, “Buy me a *Dorayaki*!” *Dorayaki*⁵² is a Japanese sweet known to be the favorite food of Doraemon. Doraemon was broadcasted in Singapore and he knew *Dorayaki* through this cartoon. As such, there are TV shows, cartoons and comic books which introduced Japanese cuisine to Singaporeans.

Japanese comic books also disseminated the knowledge of Japanese food culture. According to Ng’s survey among Singaporeans in March 1999, 77 percent of young Singaporeans between the age of 13 to 29 read Japanese comics regularly (Ng, 1999). My Singaporean friend once told me about a Japanese comic book. “You know *Oishinbo*? That was a popular Manga (comic) when I was in Secondary school. The conflict between the son and the father happens in Chinese families. So it was very popular among us. And also (at the same time) we learned about Japanese food (from the comic).” *Oishinbo* is a comic book about Japanese food culture⁵³. But at the same time, it shows about the relationship between a father and a son. My friend was more interested in the

⁵² *Dorayaki* is two small pancakes with a red bean paste inside.

⁵³ *Oishinbo* is about a story which introduces many Japanese foods. It goes with competition between a father and son in search of an “ultimate” menu.

relationship between the father and son, but he also learned about Japanese food along the way.

Japan Hour also contributed to the dissemination of the information about Japanese food culture in Singapore. Japan Hour is broadcasted by Channel News Asia three times a week on weekends. This program is about searching for Japanese regional specialties such as in Hokkaido and Tokyo. It introduces specialties of each area.

As such, the information flows shifted the image of Japan and also distributed tips about Japanese food culture. Japanese foods thus became familiar to Singaporeans. Not only did Japanese restaurants become popular but it also created a notion of what is “authentic” food and a Japanese restaurant’s ambiance for Singaporeans.

Conclusion: Global intertwinement

As I have shown in chapter 3, the globally acknowledged Sushi is California Roll. This born-in-California Sushi is found in most Japanese restaurants from high-end *Ryotei* restaurants to *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants in Singapore. At Hanamitei Dining, I observed that the most popular Sushi was California Roll and Salmon Sushi. The Japanese manager of the restaurant told me

about this famous Roll. “California Roll is ordered by customers so many times it is probably because it does not contain raw fish and yet it is Sushi. Customers think that it is a Japanese sushi.”

The other day, my Singaporean friend took me to a Japanese restaurant which he claimed to be an “authentic” restaurant. He ordered a dish called California Roll with some other dishes. He said to me, “Try this, this is quite authentic, right?” In fact at the time, I did not know what this Roll was, so I explained to him this Sushi is not popular in Japan. But for him, the California Roll was an “authentic” Japanese dish.

On the other hand, when I talked to several Japanese chefs, they explained to me how stressful it is, in fact, to make this “inauthentic” Sushi. One Sushi chef talked to me about it. He has been working in Japan for many years as a chief chef and he was sent to this restaurant’s branch in Singapore. “If we do not serve California Roll, the local and Westerners will not recognize our restaurant as authentic. You know, we have to make such dishes which we can never show to Japan (the original restaurant in Japan). We can’t actually show it.”

When I was working at Hanamitei Dining, a Sushi chef was making a California Roll. The chef said with an unhappy voice, “I learned this (California Roll) when I came here. You know, Singaporeans and the white people like it.” I could sense that he did not like this Sushi. The Japanese manager in Hanamitei

Dining told me the same thing. “Sushi such as California Roll and Spider Roll are for local customers. Many Japanese chefs dislike making these Sushis. It is not authentic. But local people like it, so we have no choice. We have to serve what customers like.” These people think that California Roll is “inauthentic”. But because customers like it and it is a popular dish, they have to serve it. They make an adaptation to suit the locals.

As such, what people imagine about Japanese food is different because what they know, hence the “authentic” Japanese restaurant is “imagined”. Japanese chefs believe that the California Roll is “inauthentic”. However, the Singaporean who took me to a Japanese restaurant thought it is an “authentic” Japanese dish. Japanese chefs make it and serve it to the locals, hence they have to think about adaptation of their dishes to the local.

In Singapore, varieties of invented Sushi manifest the localization processes. However, even though it is localized, this does not erode the “authenticity” of Japanese restaurants since it is, by nature, subjective, hence the variety of Japanese restaurants emerged: restaurants that cater to Japanese, Singaporeans and foreigners. “Authenticity” is formed by “imagined” views to these supposedly “authentic” Japanese restaurants. These views are shaped by their individual experiences, culture and the society they belong to, and in addition the information spread through the world. The globalization of Japanese

restaurants shows how the interaction between ‘localization’ and ‘authenticity’ shapes the space of these restaurants. These restaurants create many localized dishes and the ambiance creates a more “authentic” feel, as much as they are imagined by people.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The globalization of Japanese restaurants began with Japanese migration to other countries in the 19th century. Until the 1980s, Japanese restaurants in Singapore mainly catered to the Japanese clientele. From the 1980s, the flow of information of Japan and Japanese cuisine went beyond borders and reached Singapore through the media and her people. These flows changed the images of Japanese as invader and allowed Singaporeans access to information about Japanese culture (chapter2). With this, Singaporeans could know more about Japanese food and the number of Japanese restaurants catering to Singaporeans increased. However, in order to suit customers' tastebuds, restaurants adapted Japanese food to the locals (localization). The restaurants' strategy of localization diversified the types of foods which restaurants served (chapter3). These factors, the localization and the information flow, diversified the concept of "authentic" Japanese restaurants. The people's perceptions of "authentic" Japanese restaurants, including foods, ambiance, diners and workers, differ for different people. "Authenticity" is thus affected by what they know about Japanese restaurants through their experiences and information (chapter4). In other words, "authenticity" is in flux and "imagined".

The globalization of Japanese restaurants is never about Standardization or homogenization. Restaurants are localized to attract local customers. However, since people's perceptions of "authenticity" differ in nature, no matter how localized restaurants are, localization does not erode people's perception of "authentic" restaurants. Rather, localization produces a new perception of "authentic" Japanese restaurants and foods.

In Chapter 2, I described the historical dimension of how Japanese restaurants emerged in Singapore. Globalization of Japanese restaurants should be contextualized within the historical migration of Japanese and the shift of people's perception of the Japanese. Japanese restaurants accompanied the migration of the Japanese since the late 19th century. The restaurants catered mainly to Japanese at the time. However, with the retreat of the Japanese army in 1946, the restaurants and the Japanese disappeared in Singapore.

After the 1950s, the Japanese gradually came back to Singapore. In the 1960s, many Japanese businessmen came to Singapore at the time of Japan's economic boom. As Europe allowed Germany to join in the region's economic integration program, Singapore too began to re-establish ties with Japan through economic activities. Japanese arrivals triggered the rise of Japanese restaurants catering to the Japanese population in Singapore. However, the number was still

small in the 1970s. The popularity of Japanese food in Singapore was boosted with the increasing popularity of Japanese popular culture such as TV dramas, comic books, cartoons, and video games.

Japanese popular culture was favored among young Singaporeans in the 1980s. One of these popular culture items which changed the image of the Japanese from a brutal invader to a culture creator was TV drama. The TV drama, *Oshin* created this remarkable shift. Japanese cartoons such as *Doraemon* and *Dragon Ball* also appealed to Singaporean children. Thus Japanese popular culture, although this popularity was pervasive mostly among Chinese Singaporeans, became one of the symbolic images of Japan for Singaporeans. With this boom in Japanese popular culture and the positive change in the image of Japan, Japanese restaurants also gained popularity among Singaporeans in the 1980s.

In Chapter 3, I described the current state of Japanese restaurants in Singapore. Many Japanese restaurants were set up in Singapore since the 1980s. Today, there are more than 140 Japanese restaurants on the island. The types of Japanese restaurants vary from Fast Food chain restaurants such as *Yoshinoya* and *MOS* burger to *Kaiten Sushi* (Revolving Sushi on the conveyer belt) restaurants, family restaurants and the formal Japanese restaurants. In addition, there are also many restaurants which specialize in particular types of meals, such as *unagi* (eel)

restaurants, *Okonomiyaki* (Japanese style pancake containing vegetables and meat) restaurants, *Shabushabu* (thin strips of beef dipped in boiling water and stirred until cooked) restaurants, and *Izakaya* (drinking place) restaurants.

Among these restaurants, *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants are the most successful of the various Japanese restaurants in Singapore. They cater mainly to Singaporean customers, and they have created many new varieties of Sushi that cannot be found in Japan. These new inventions, such as *Otak* Sushi and Caviar Maki were created to appeal to the local palate. I recently found braised octopus Sushi on the menu in one of the *Kaiten Sushi* restaurants. In Japan, octopus (Tako) is usually eaten raw, but since many Westerners and Singaporeans are not used to it, the restaurant serves it braised in order to make it “more palatable” for them.

Chapter 3 also shows how two restaurants negotiate between “authenticity” and localization. One is the formal restaurant (*Ryotei*), and the other is a Japanese restaurant in a shopping mall. Since it is more expensive to hire Japanese chefs and cooks, these restaurants hire Singaporeans. They use California rice and local vegetables instead of using rice and vegetables imported from Japan to lower cost. However, according to the chefs and managers of these two restaurants, they do not compromise on fish. Since fish is considered the core of Japanese cuisine all over the world, it has to be imported from Japan to meet the level of their “authenticity” for Japanese cooking. At the same time, they also

make some adjustments to cater to the locals and the Westerners. Instead of serving certain types of Japanese fish, chefs serve slightly more oily fish such as salmon, *Kanpachi* (a type of sea bass) and *Hamachi* (yellow tail). Also the California Roll is a must on the menu, according to one Japanese chef I spoke with.

At Hanamitei Dining, chefs were more concerned about customizing the items on their menu than the chefs at formal Japanese restaurants. They serve slightly more food in lunch box or heavier meals. According to the manager of the restaurant, the Japanese tend to order many appetizers than to order one meal, whereas Singaporeans and Westerners tend to order one big meal such as *Katsudon*, *Gyudon*, or a set meal served in a lunch box. Lunch box meals are not served in formal restaurants but the restaurants in shopping malls serve it to appeal to the local customers.

In chapter 4, I discussed how the theories of globalization, localization and food culture fit, or do not fit, in the case of Japanese restaurants in Singapore. Applying Appadurai's concept of "imagined" world (1996), I stressed that globalization of Japanese restaurants is composed of the flow of commodities, people and information. Advanced transportation networks allow Japanese restaurants to import fresh fish from abroad. The people who travel to Japan and people from Japan provided Singaporeans tips about Japanese foods and

restaurants. Information through TV, Japanese cartoons, and comic books feed Singaporeans with the ideas of Japanese cuisine. Through the influx of information and based on their experiences, people started to create their own criteria of what “authenticity” is.

I also have pointed out how “authenticity” differs from person to person. According to Appadurai, “authenticity” is “the degree to which something is more or less what it ought to be” (1986: 25). I showed that for a Singaporean who grows up in Singapore and has never been to Japan, California Roll would be considered “authentic” Sushi whereas Japanese and Japanese Sushi chefs would deny it as such. For a Singaporean who has been to Japan many times, he would consider the food in Singapore “inauthentic” since food are created locally. Hence “authenticity” is culturally and socially created through their own experiences and history. The “authentic” Japanese restaurant is “imagined”.

At the same time, localization occurs in the restaurants to suit the items on the menu to customers. This was observed in the food, the way food is served and the way customers dine (chapter 3). However, localization does not deny the restaurant’s “authenticity” but rather it diversifies the people’s notion of “authentic” Japanese restaurant.

In conclusion, this thesis has explored how Japanese restaurants are

globalizing through the case study of Singapore. The popularity of restaurants largely rest on the flow of information, commodities, and people. This global flow also provided different views of “authenticity” for different people. However, at the same time, restaurants took to the strategy of localization. This thesis also provided an understanding of the gap between localization and people’s perceptions of “authenticity.” Since people’s degree of “authenticity” is different based on people’s experiences and what they know, localization and “authenticity” are compatible binaries.

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