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Globalization, Food and Social Identities in the Asia Pacific Region: Edited by James Farrar

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impacts of this transition and how these compare with other regions and their associated similar losses in the biodiversity of staple crops as a result of globalization.

GLOBALIZATION, FOOD AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

EDITED BY JAMES FARRAR (TOKYO: SOPHIA UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF COMPARATIVE CULTURE, 2010).

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This collection of sixteen online papers epitomizes the collision of Arjun Appadurai and Immanuel Wallerstein with *Iron Chef*. Both eclectic and familiar, the works capture the rich pastiche of food traces that have become the modern, global, foodways of fast capitalism. Centered in Japan, and the outcome of a symposium on “Globalization, Food and Social Identities in the Pacific Region” held at Sophia University on February 2009, the project invites the reader to its smorgasbord of tasty, bite-sized entrées. This is not your full-blown sit-down dinner cum feast, *à la* the traditional “book,” but rather it allows the reader to move among the papers, downloading, tasting, and digesting according to interest and pleasure.

The collection marks the importance of the Asia-Pacific region as a global, historically central, commercial hub, and seeks to establish the co-evolution of food studies and global studies, arguing successfully that food is an excellent subject by which to interrogate the complexities of globalization. Each food examined provides rich local history, is highly context-specific, and engages with its movement through national consumption and distribution networks and into the global trading and culinary systems, collectively creating a unified framework of understanding.

The theoretical reach of the collection is broad, crossing cultural sociology, urban studies, and food studies to examine social, national, and increasingly complex interconnected national food identities. Unlike those critics of globalization who warn of the homogenizing impact of American food products (fast food and processed industrialized foods), decrying the seduction of the global palate by Coca-Cola and McDonald’s, these papers describe the nuanced emergence of globally aware, local food practices that are creative, formative, and to some degree signal a change in the global culinary tipping point towards Asia.

The collection is sectioned into three parts. The first focuses on particular foods and examines a range of issues around the concept of “local” food. The second examines food in a global perspective through a number of eclectic examples. The third section is well described by one of the contributors, Rossella Ceccarini, as an examination of the glocalization of foreign culinary products. Food is one of Appadurai’s “things” that has moved with nomads and traders around the globe for centuries. The “origins” of a particular food are often lost, and over centuries their



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presence in a community becomes so normalized that they become part of the local culture, gathering a social history and sometimes even achieving a nationalistic, ideological standing.

The first section of the book covers themes of tourism and nostalgia, raising questions about the porosity of the “local” and its usefulness in theorizing the social meaning of food. The chapter by Kenneth Riddle and Naomichi Ishige, “On the origins, diffusion and cultural context of fermented fish products in Southeast Asia,” takes the concept of origins and diffusion and examines fermented fish foods. They argue that these foods were first developed in inland places because of the conditions they identify as necessary for the production of fermented fish products, namely, that there would be a marked seasonality in the availability of fish, and that there would be access to rice and salt. The paper highlights an important aspect of the “local” and “origins” debates, that humans have commonly shared good ideas about food and that a good discovery is rapidly copied in other local contexts where the necessary ingredients and conditions are present. Patricia Yarrow, in her chapter “‘Here’s looking at you’: re-imaging saké locally and globally,” charts the local slump in saké brewing and consumption in Japan in favor of beer. The paper discusses the movement of saké consumption away from its “local” context into the urban Japanese context where saké is considered to be an old man’s drink by younger Japanese urbanites. Tourism, combined with high-end Japanese restaurants selling superior saké in America and across Europe, has enabled “outsiders” to savor specific locally-produced Japanese saké. It is now something that the global food market recognizes as quintessentially Japanese even as Yarrow questions whether the global audience understands the true meaning of the saké label. She fails, however, to question the possibility that it may be because of the exotic unintelligibility of the saké label that it has such cachet in high culinary circles. Yarrow asks instead if it will be because of the popularity of saké in culinary hubs such as Paris that Japanese urban youth will re-identify with it as a source of national identity and pride.

Hiroyuki Tani’s paper, “From national symbol to economic goods: a brief history of maize consumption in post-revolutionary Mexico,” addresses the “local” dimension of political meaning and the ideology of food in its examination of maize. Tani charts the history of the social meaning of maize from its elevated post-revolutionary days as a crop of the people to its present role as a poor person’s food, ultimately showing that maize is no longer valorized as the food of “national identity.” As Sidney Cheung’s and Yarrow’s discussions also show, food identities are not neutral; they have symbolic value that changes over time in the local context. Yarrow’s question about whether saké will be taken on by Japanese youth because of its high status and popularity outside Japan extends the question of change to symbolic value by opening up the possibility of a recursive loop of revalorization. Could the same happen in Mexico with maize, given a new set of global conditions?

The chapter by Jun Akamine titled “Problems on sea cucumber conservation” raises another aspect of “local” food production and consumption—that of population pressure and the local consumption of wildlife by examining the

Japanese delicacy—sea cucumber. The species favored most in Japan is a scarce resource, commonly taken from the Galapagos Islands, processed there, and brought back to Japan. Akamine asks what happens when a “local” wild food, full of social meaning, is no longer available locally, but must be imported to satisfy the “local” demand. Modern, global sea harvesting practices have the potential and the capacity to strip the sea of edible “wild” foods, even more so for high-status (and high market value) food such as sea cucumber and abalone. The concept of the “wild” and of local rights to certain “wild” foods has drawn attention from national and international wildlife conservation agencies who are working with communities to establish sustainable farming and harvesting practices for these foods.

The problem of the availability of “wild” foods is not confined to local communities. Increasingly, big players in the global market are looking for clean, unprocessed foods for their niche, adding pressure on sources of “wild” food. Stephanie Assmann’s chapter “Food Action Nippon and Slow Food Japan: the role of two citizen movements in the rediscovery of local foodways” brings this debate to the forefront as Japan considers its reliance on imported processed foods. Examining the issue from the perspective of food self-sufficiency and food safety, she discusses the fact that Japan is only 40 percent food self-sufficient, meaning that it can no longer feed itself on domestically produced foods. Her discussion highlights the vulnerability of populations to global food market fluctuations. David Wank’s chapter “Culinary nostalgia and Chinese neo-liberalism: local dish restaurants in Shanxi province” approaches the question in the context of China, examining what he describes as “culinary nostalgia” in the local food movement in Shanxi province. He makes the point that while there might be a demand for foods that are considered “local,” the actual ingredients in these dishes are often imported from around the globe.

James Farrer approaches his discussion of food in the globalized context and the emergence of new global cities in “Eating the West and beating the rest: culinary Occidentalism and urban soft power in Asia’s global food cities.” Focusing his chapter on Shanghai and Tokyo as two examples of this phenomenon, he examines their high-status culinary identities and the impact they are having on global culinary practices. What is fascinating in both this work and that of Michiko Kubo in “The development of an Indonesian national cuisine: a study of new movement of instant foods and local cuisine” is how global food production is keeping pace with an exponentially growing population. Kubo examines the demand by Indonesian women for instant foods that are less labor-intensive than traditional food, highlighting how traditional food preparation methods do not necessarily fit with modern life. While some markets will always cater to customers who prefer older-style food production and consumption methods, these chapters demonstrate that population growth and mass urban migration is leading to significant changes in food production methods and global culinary preferences, arguably tipping toward an “Asian” style of eating fast food.

Krishnendu Ray’s chapter, “A taste for ethnic difference: American gustatory imagination in a globalizing world,” echoes this change in the analysis of how American chefs are differentiating themselves as “taste makers.” On a similar



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theme, Vanina Leschziner in “Cooking logics: cognition and reflexivity in the culinary field” examines food and high cuisine, where chefs can either be differentiated by taste or by originality, drawing on global inspiration to create “high cuisine” in global cities in America. Shoko Inai’s chapter “Nobu and after: Westernized Japanese food and globalization” traces the successful transplantation of Nobu’s Japanese restaurants into America, arguing that there is an emerging Americanized Japanese food that is an outcome of this process of transplantation. In “Four dances of the sea: cooking “Asian” as embedded cosmopolitanism,” Jean Duruz discusses the new “Australian–Asian culinary citizenship,” building on the common theme in this grouping of articles about the shift in the global palate to Asian-style food preferences. Ceccarini in “Food workers as individual agents of culinary globalization: pizza and pizzaioli in Japan” examines the reverse transplantation process, discussing the popularity of Italian pizza in Japan. Her work focuses on the role and practices of the food creators, both Italian and Japanese, opening up important avenues for research into the complex processes of exchange and acculturation of new food knowledge practices into a new environment through human agency.

In counterpoint to these chapters, “Malaysian cuisine: a case of neglected culinary globalization” by Kosaku Yoshino asks the question of why Malaysian food, a clearly Asian style of cuisine that already draws from its multiethnic communities for its richness, has not achieved the same global status as other Asian nations such as China or Japan. A chapter by Mauro Neves, “*Como Agua Para Chocolate* as a food film: food, family ties and emotion,” examines the global film industry and the impact it has on newly emerging, globally connected, discussions about the food that humans are eating, how they are eating it, and what is driving the rich emotion behind new food practices.

Overall, this web-book successfully highlights how food, its creation, production, consumption and social identity are intimately imbricated with globalization, with implications for both public and private space. This collection raises many new and exciting possibilities for research, which are particularly relevant today when our knowledge about food—from harvesting to production to preparation to consumption to distribution—is entering a new phase where concepts such as “local,” “wild,” “sustainable,” and “national” are being shaped and are shaping global food consumption and production patterns. This collection proposes that Asian culinary habits are achieving global prominence because they are able to meet the demands of a global society who now, more than ever, are aware of the array of food options available to satisfy their increasingly demanding palates.