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Imagining the Taste: Transnational Food Exchanges between Japan and the United States

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INTRODUCTION

The omnipresence of American brands and consumer products in Japan has triggered an avalanche of writing on different aspects of the cross-cultural relationship between Japan and the United States. Whenever cultural interactions between East and West take place, they are frequently accompanied by the term "globalization," a word often equated with cultural homogenization and "cultural imperialism." According to the critical theorist John Tomlinson, cultural imperialism is a term that "constrains the negatively marked notions of power, domination, or control."[1] On closer scrutiny, both of these concepts are often hasty oversimplifications, given the contemporary cultural interaction that exists between Japan and the United States. Although economic power relations still play a role, processes of cultural exchange are complex and inconsistent, and they frequently meet resistance.

Cultural imperialism, defined by Edward Said as practices and attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory, is a problematic concept when applied to East–West relationships, since it

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ignores that commodities cannot simply be imposed on consumers.[2] Instead, consumers actively respond to new influences, and thus, in order to fit local consumer tastes, negotiations have to take place; imported commodities are creatively recontextualized at national, regional, and local sites. By merging and converging foreign and familiar elements new hybrid transnational commodities are produced that can no longer be understood with an interpretative grid based on processes of cultural imperialism and homogenization. Instead of focusing on ideas of cultural homogenization, scholars such as social theorist Arjun Appadurai welcome communication, media, mass migration, and cultural interactions as enabling sites where local negotiations take place and create new cultural forms,[3] making hybridization rather than homogenization a process of globalization. In this context, theories of transnationalism and transculturalization offer new ways of thinking, of imagining cultural relationships in the twenty-first century. These approaches encourage a reexamination of concepts such as national identity by challenging traditional perceptions of the self and the Other.

One example of such a transnational cultural exchange is the introduction of Japanese food in general and sushi in particular into the United States. Food and the practice of eating and cooking characterize all cultures and help make them unique, distinguishing them from one another. As food scholar Warren Belasco states in his essay "Food Matters: Perspectives on an Emerging Field," food is often an indicator of "who we are, where we come from, and what we want to be."[4] In a globally interconnected world, characterized by increasing transnational mass migration and tourism, the frequent flow of people brings a frequent flow of food to different places. Today, people are exposed to a kaleidoscopic flux of dishes from all over the world, and food from many different countries is available in restaurants and supermarkets.

However, cultural interconnectedness and the spread of different dishes does not lead to the decline of local cuisines and thus to a homogenization of food cultures. Instead, "new hybrid cuisines are created and new identities embraced through the acceptance and rejection of new commodities and new forms of consumption."[5] In most cases, the unknown food is not consumed and accepted in its original state but is modified in order to please the local palate; modern eating today is more often than not "compromised, globalized, creolized."[6] Dishes are modified according to the availability of ingredients or their tastes, and, therefore, the majority of dishes in cookbooks and restaurants with a supposedly foreign origin are "rather products of the imagination of their creators."[7]

Appadurai has discussed such influences of the imagination in our global present and argues that "the imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order."[8] Appadurai's statement implies that the imagination can be used as a positive force to imagine alternative modes of viewing the world, without falling back on binary categories of the self and the Other as utilized in Orientalist approaches.

In this essay I elucidate how Japanese food is reimagined in the United States and how it is embedded in and adapted to local tastes. To contradict notions of culinary colonialism or Orientalizing processes resulting from the creation of new sushi rolls today, I argue that Japanese food in general and sushi in particular participate in a transnational exchange, thereby communicating across culinary and national boundaries. Consumers decide what kind of sushi they want, and therefore they determine the popularity of the dish. Sushi is not produced by a single company but by multiple sushi chefs from all around the world, who put their individual touch to the dish. Sushi—once a traditional Japanese dish—nowadays travels from Japan to the United States, is modified according to the American palate, and reenters the Japanese market as American sushi. Nowadays, both the cultures of Japan and the United States take part in a cross-cultural culinary exchange and redefine the idea of sushi without exoticizing the dish.

I. EARLY ENCOUNTERS AND FOOD EXCHANGES

That people are exposed to a greater variety of cuisines today does not necessarily mean that consumers are automatically more open and less prejudiced vis-à-vis unknown dishes. According to food writer Leslie Brenner, "we're suspicious of food . . . because we learn to be suspicious of food,"[9] by which she means that we are taught that some foods are not palatable and that certain tastes do not fit our idea of what is food. Thus, cultural exchanges in the past and today were and often still are accompanied by clashes and misunderstandings over food. Clashes over food occurred in the initial contact between Japan and the United States, when early diplomatic exchanges started between the two nations in the nineteenth-century and diplomats from both sides of the Pacific reported on the different eating habits.

The travel account written by Samuel Wells Williams, the chief interpreter of the 1854 trip of U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry to Japan, reports his unsettling culinary encounter with Japan. During the voyage,

Williams recorded all events in his diary, among them an invitation to a Japanese dinner that failed to meet American expectations. They were served tea, sponge cake, raw oysters, mushroom soup, seaweed cooked with sugar and raw ginger, among "other unknown matters,"[10] none of which was considered very delicious by the Americans. Japanese diplomats had similar disconcerting food experiences in the Unites States.

During the first voyage of Japanese diplomats to the United States on an American ship, food was a permanent source of worry for the Japanese travelers, who were not able to cope with the Western diet based on wheat, meat, and dairy products. Wary of the strange food and eating habits of the Americans, which they had observed when the Americans visited Japan, the Japanese had taken fish and soy sauce with them on the ship. The American sailors, however, threw the unknown Japanese food overboard, since they believed that it was tainted and poisonous. With the familiar food gone, the Japanese had no alternative but to eat bread, meat, and cheese for the rest of the voyage.[11] One of the Japanese officials lamented that "it is well beyond the power of my pen to describe what we, the Japanese, suffer on our journey to a foreign country,"[12] referring to his experience with American food.

Williams's diary entry as well as the Japanese diplomat's comment on Western food reveal a mutual inability to accept the unfamiliar dishes and to appreciate the hospitality and culinary culture of the other.

Indeed, although some Western food was introduced to Japan in the nineteenth century, Japanese people clearly differentiated themselves from the West by strictly distinguishing Japanese cuisine from Western cuisine. Due to Buddhist traditions, meat was widely believed to be impure, and as a consequence eating meat was considered barbaric.[13] Moreover, before the arrival of Westerners, the term *nanban ryōori*, which can be translated as "southern barbarian cuisine," was used in Japan for non-Japanese Western dishes. The term reveals that although Western food was accepted, the Japanese still considered their food culture more civilized and consequently superior to that of Westerners.[14]

Similarly, Americans differentiated themselves in terms of food from Japan by setting up their own binaries of their civilized selves against uncivilized others. American standards were applied to differentiate between the civilized and uncivilized, between "us" and "them." Such attitudes toward the "other" food resonate with the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's conceptualization of inclusion and exclusion via the cooked and the raw.

In the 1970s Lévi-Strauss expounded the idea that food was not only important in terms of nourishment but also of great cultural importance. Different cultures have different, sometimes even diametrically opposed, rules about how food has to be prepared, served, and consumed. The notion of what is considered edible and therefore food and what is deemed inedible varies; by classifying food into categories of edible and inedible, a binary is created. Lévi-Strauss classified different forms of food preparation, relating them to the idea of civilization and "barbarism." Using the concept of the "raw" versus the "cooked" he set up a dichotomy of the uncivilized natural and the civilized cultural. According to his definition, ingredients only become a dish, and thus part of culture, when they are cooked.[15]

The creation of an uncivilized Orient, according to the Western imagination and on the basis of Western normative ideologies, helped to reinforce the allegedly superior position of Western nations, since to the majority of Westerners, Japanese food not only seems "raw" but also inedible. Yet, this Western definition of civilized or uncivilized food collides with Japanese conceptions, since for them "raw or uncooked food is food, while in other cultures food usually means cooked food."[16] Disregarding the difference in Japanese culinary culture, in the West, Western eating practices are set up as a norm, according to which everything that does not fit is seen as strange and suspicious.

In the West, Japanese food has been frequently associated with sushi, thus simplifying and reducing Japanese culinary culture to the consumption of raw fish. By imagining Japanese food to be exclusively raw fish, and thereby imagining Japan to have a monolithic, supposedly uncivilized food culture, a stereotypical Orientalist discourse of the Other is created by differentiating the West or the United States from Japan in terms of food.

II. CULINARY COLONIALISM AND ORIENTALIZING VIA FOOD

The field of postcolonial studies explains that weaker nations in the past were dominated economically, politically, and culturally by colonizing nations. Based on the belief that the morals of the Western colonizing nations were superior to those of the colonized, colonialist nations believed it was their duty to help civilize and enlighten other nations. In order to justify their interference, colonialists created an imaginary Orient, which was defined as less developed and less civilized than the

West. Edward Said argued that in Orientalist discourses Europeans constructed an Orient according to their imagination, thereby defining and having power over it, while at the same time denying "Orientals" agency to represent themselves. By labeling a certain geographical space "the Orient," different Asian cultures were mixed together, essentialized, and stripped of their individuality, thereby becoming one homogenous mass under one umbrella term. Moreover, by creating a binary opposition with an Oriental Other that was considered inferior and almost childlike in contrast to an enlightened and mature Occidental self, "Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them").[17] According to this imaginary power relation, in which a dominant West represents a passive East, the Orient was used as a counterpart against which the dominant West could define itself. This allegedly superior position in regard to civilization of Western nations was used to justify their colonizing mission in the East.[18]

The Orient, an unknown and exotic place, has always fascinated Westerners, as it promised to be a place of exotic adventure. Yearning for the mysterious, exotic, and unknown, many middle- and upper-class people in the West collected Oriental art in the late nineteenth century. Today many people are said to participate in a gastronomic form of Orientalism, in which they act as culinary colonialists by deciding what is to be considered "Oriental food."

Consumers are often curious about new, unknown dishes because they promise to be different from the mainstream food and thus interesting. Like other "exotic" commodities, food that seems to be different from the known attracts people exactly because of its difference from the norm. African American feminist Bell Hooks criticizes that "within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning, that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture."[19] The image of Oriental food being special and exotic is used by chefs in restaurants who, for example, create a *Salade Orientale* to gain the interest of their guests. A *Salade Orientale* is a salad made with shrimp, crabmeat, white wine, celery, onion, and cucumber and rice.[20] The only "Oriental" aspect of it is the addition of rice, since usually this ingredient is not added to salads. Rice is further closely associated with the East and therefore seems to be a marker of "the Orient." Furthermore, the name of the dish can evoke the idea that this is a salad as consumed by "Orientals," who, according to

Western definitions of what a salad is, might have the uncommon idea to add rice to salad. Similarly, in 2003, McDonald's added Asian Chicken Salad to its menu in the United States in order to satisfy the consumer demand for healthy food. The salad is marketed first and foremost as an exotic and healthy alternative to hamburgers and french fries. On the restaurant chain's official homepage, McDonald's gave a detailed description of the dish: "A harmonious blend of crisp greens, warm orangeglazed chicken (grilled or crispy), snow peas, *edamame*, mandarin oranges and toasted almonds. Add the Newman's Own Low Fat Sesame Ginger Dressing and we're talking pure inspiration."[21] Most of the listed ingredients are selected for their association with the East. Yet they represent different nations in Asia, as, for example, mandarin oranges, associated with China, or *edamame* from Japan. These different ingredients are tossed together, thereby creating an Oriental salad that is different from Western salads. Additionally, the notion of a "harmonious blend" and words such as "crisp greens" emphasize the idea that this salad is fresh and healthy. In order to add a mysterious touch to the salad, more uncommon ingredients such as snow peas and *edamame* are used. The slogan associated with the Asian Chicken Salad, "Seek Flavor, Find Harmony,"[22] further evokes the idea of finding harmony via food, alluding to the Asian concept of Zen. The Asian Chicken Salad elicits curiosity in the potential consumer and promises to be an ideal way to relieve a person from the stress of a hectic workday. Some ingredients such as chicken and greens are used to reassure the consumer and provide him or her with some familiar aspects of a salad.

This menu item not only promises to be a healthy food choice, but it also suggests up-to-dateness and a touch of modernity with its Asian ingredients, since nowadays, Asian philosophy, anime, martial arts, Asian perfumes, and clothing styles are in vogue in the West. McDonald's employs old images and stereotypes of the Orient in order to sell a new product, thereby presenting consumers with an uncommon salad in a familiar American fast food restaurant. The Asian Chicken Salad is therefore an Oriental dish, constructed and imagined by Americans for American consumers.

The release of the Asian Chicken Salad by McDonald's shows how "exotic" commodities are desired by consumers because they are new and unusual and also healthy. Familiar dishes such as salads are presented in what people might consider new ways, and these unusual dishes challenge people to experiment.

Henry Yu explains in *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* how an Orientalist discourse emerged in the United States when merchants and missionaries sailed to Asia. According to him, collecting and mastering knowledge of the Orient became "a fetish for elite white men and women," since the Orient represented "the adventure of the exotic" and "was the opposite of everything uninteresting in their own lives."[23]

In a similar vein, Lisa Heldke in *Exotic Appetites* calls the preparation and consumption of ethnic food dishes, mainly those of so-called Third World countries, "food colonialism."[24] She argues that the choice to eat unusual food is often "strongly motivated by an attitude with deep connections to Western colonialism."[25] Even when consumers endeavor to be respectful toward other cultures and their cuisine, according to Heldke, they are not likely to overcome their colonial culinary attitude. She further accuses consumers who experiment with foreign ingredients of seeing other cultures merely as "raw materials to serve their own interest" and claims that such people are less likely to be interested in the cuisine of another culture.[26]

However, despite people being exposed to and having access to a great variety of new flavors, this does not necessarily mean that people are obsessive about exotic food and thereby indifferent to the original cultural context of the dish, as Heldke suggests. Instead, the interest in new dishes can signify an openness to other culinary cultures. Lucy Long thus suggests using the term "culinary tourism" instead.[27] Her choice of terminology seems to be more appropriate, since culinary tourism is "about food as subject and medium, destination and vehicle, for tourism. It is about individuals exploring foods new to them as well as using food to explore new cultures and ways of being."[28] This approach takes into consideration that people are acting voluntarily and assumes that therefore they are open to an unknown cuisine.[29] Indeed, some culinary tourists may have colonialist attitudes, yet by choosing to take part in a new cultural or culinary experience, they show an openness toward different (eating) cultures. Unlike culinary colonialists who "regard culture *not* as a culture in the full sense . . . but as a source of materials to be extracted and used to enhance our own cultures,"[30] culinary tourists are interested in different cultures and their culinary heritage. Culinary colonialists, on the other hand, think of their food culture and eating habits as the universal standard against which other food cultures are measured. They seldom question their own habits but tend to think of deviant culinary

customs as the Other. Quite differently, culinary tourists use food as a contact zone with other cultures and do not categorize food that is unknown to them as "strange."

When talking about the influence of Japanese food in the United States, the idea of culinary colonialism or Orientalism seems inappropriate as well. Most American consumers of Japanese food are curious culinary tourists within their own country, interested in new dishes. Some of them are keen on the flavors or want to express their status in society, but they do not intend to take part in a form of gastronomical Orientalism. By choosing to consume a culturally different dish such as sushi, these consumers openly engage in a culinary dialogue and thereby cross personal culinary boundaries.

III. CONSUMING SUSHI IN THE UNITED STATES

That "the discovery of any food system starts with the shock of the unknown as it crosses one's sensory facilities" was certainly true for the introduction of sushi into the United States.[31] Among all dishes and Japanese flavors that have seeped into the American culinary landscape, sushi was probably the most challenging, as it implied the consumption of raw fish. Sushi, once seen as the epitome of the strangeness and otherness of Japanese food, entered the United States at the end of the 1950s. The first Japanese restaurants serving sushi were opened in the 1960s by Japanese expatriates for Japanese businessmen. However, despite the growing number of Japanese restaurants, many Americans were still inclined to believe that the consumption of raw fish was a sign of a lack of culinary skill and considered unhygienic and unsafe, and dishes such as teriyaki, tempura, and sukiyaki were sometimes consumed by Americans rather than sushi or sashimi. Although the idea of sushi being raw fish dominated the perceptions of Americans, raw fish is not the only ingredient used in making sushi, as vegetables are also included. Additionally, most of the fish used for sushi is prepared in some way, either by being smoked, salted, or pickled and thus cannot be considered to be "raw" in the sense used by Lévi-Strauss. It turns out that the main obstacle to consuming sushi for Westerners is only the *idea* of eating raw fish.

With a raising health consciousness in the United States during the late 1970s and 1980s, American interest in sushi rose, as health experts started to promote "the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids, abundant in

fish."[32] Japanese cuisine, which mainly does use fish, fresh vegetables, and soy products rather than meat, sugar, or dairy products, was seen as the reason why Japanese people have the lowest level of obesity and longest life expectancy in the world.[33] Japanese food became increasingly popular among American consumers. Light food became preferred to dishes using heavy sauces or red meat, turning sushi into "a diet food with social cost,"[34] thus turning the dish into a prestigious diet. With the rise of the popularity of Japanese food as health food, sushi became a signifier of class and status, thereby turning from "an exotic, almost unpalatable ethnic speciality . . . to haut cuisine of the most refined sort."[35]

The supposed healthiness of sushi thus has helped to raise American interest in the dish, but the idea that consuming sushi was sophisticated and a marker of class further fueled its popularity. The fact that sushi was at first expensive and served only as a luxury made it easier to convince American consumers that the dish was indeed a culinary delight. Unknown dishes sometimes indicate aspects of class, since uncommon dishes with ingredients that are hard to get are considered a luxury, available only for those who can afford to pay the price. By consuming these exclusive foods, "desirable because of their foreign origin,"[36] status and wealth were expressed in the 1980s and 1990s.

Today, the consumption of sushi is part of American everyday life, and it is widely considered stylish to eat sushi. What started in the 1950s as a foreign dish has developed into a part of American mainstream food culture. The availability of sushi in American supermarkets further familiarized the formerly "exotic" dish by putting it into a familiar context and making it affordable. It became increasingly fashionable to combine different ingredients and cooking styles in new ways and to create thereby new Western versions of the dish without completely erasing the Japanese feeling. Globalizing processes made sushi widely available, especially in the United States and Europe, and the sushi economy contributed to an intercultural exchange that still continues.[37]

In order to familiarize sushi and make it appealing to a broader Western consumer audience, many new Western sushi versions were created and became part of the so-called California cuisine, which puts great emphasis on the use of fresh seasonal local ingredients such as avocado and at the same time embraces Asian and Mediterranean influences. The idea of this kind of fusion cooking is to bring different ingredients and cooking styles together. The result can be called trans-Pacific, transcon-

tinental, or transnational. These new culinary creations not only cross national borders but culinary borders as well, creating new, hybrid eating experiences without Orientalizing the dish.

The main focus and appeal of these dishes is the emphasis on differences: different ingredients from different cultural backgrounds are consciously combined in new, daring ways. Dishes containing unknown ingredients or unusual usage of well-known ingredients are especially interesting to those Western consumers who want to have new culinary experiences in a safe and familiar environment. These new creations are no longer part of a specific national cuisine but are a hybrid mix of Western and Eastern eating cultures. American sushi is one popular example of fusion cuisine.

With Japanese food and sushi becoming chic, a great number of sushi cookbooks and food guides, such as *Sushi for Dummies*, *The Connoisseur's Guide to Sushi*, and *The Encyclopedia of Sushi Rolls*, flooded the market, with the aim of explaining and reinterpreting the dish for Western consumers.[38]

IV. AMERICAN SUSHI COOKBOOKS

Since the late 1990s, a shift to promote the Japanese diet in general and sushi in particular as fancy food for stylish parties and as a supposedly healthy alternative to heavy meat dishes has taken place in the United States. Sushi in contemporary cookbooks no longer is positioned among other non-Western dishes but has become, in the form of American sushi, part of Western cuisine. One example of a contemporary sushi cookbook is *Sushi for Dummies*, one book in a series of simplified instruction books, that explains the basics of sushi, dispelling the "*huge* misconception that sushi means raw fish, when it really means vinegared rice."[39] The authors, Judi Strada and Mineko Takane Moreno, first introduce traditional Japanese sushi but then focus on recipes for fishless varieties. Using ingredients such as avocado, hot chili sauce, mayonnaise, sweet barbecue sauce, and mango they provide a familiar Western context and further assure their readers that making sushi is easy and that preparing sushi will soon become as second nature to every American as "building a cheeseburger."[40] Strada and Moreno explain that there exist many different types of sushi today and that the origin of most of these variations cannot be traced anymore.[41] They do not restrict sushi to the Japanese version but instead recommend using leftovers to

make sushi by "using what's on hand."[42] Expanding the opportunities to serve sushi in the United States, the authors include a selection of "glamorous sushi" for parties with sushi variations in matching colors and a recipe for a birthday cake sushi. With their innovative and sometimes daring recipes, the authors make sushi a less expensive and exclusive food than that which is primarily consumed in restaurants. Instead, they promote it as a fashionable party food as well as an everyday food, easy to prepare at home by anyone.

Tracy Griffith takes a similar approach in her cookbook, *Sushi American Style*. She focuses on the preparation of sushi without the use of raw fish in order to offer alternatives for those who would like to try sushi but still feel wary of eating "raw" fish. She presents a vast variety of sushi rolls. Her rolls, such as the "Thanksgiving roll," which contains turkey and sweet cranberries, perfectly blend in with American dining habits. She further proposes sushi rolls for "Monday night football gatherings" to be served alongside potato chips and beer,[43] thereby suggesting a new use of sushi for typical American family gatherings as well as national American holidays. Following her credo that "whatever you roll up with this [seasoned rice], you are making sushi,"[44] she recommends, like Strada and Moreno, the usage of leftovers. To meet the craving of many Americans for a sweet dessert, she also offers recipes for American sweet sushi rolls, such as the "Elvis roll" made with peanut butter and bananas, which thus resembles Elvis Presley's favorite sandwich.

Most recipes in Griffith's book have little in common with the original preparation of Japanese sushi and clearly give the dish more than an American twist. She meets the demand of American consumers who prefer the American versions of sushi to the original and embeds this dish in American culture.

When comparing American sushi rolls to Japanese sushi rolls, it is evident that the ingredients used are culturally and locally specific. Not only are the ingredients changed for the American market, but the rolls are given names such as Boston roll, Crazy Horse, Happy sumo, or Tokyo sunrise. These names position the rolls within a familiar American context by referring to American cities (Boston roll, Seattle roll, Philadelphia roll) or by using names that are reminiscent of Native Americans (Crazy Horse). Other names allude to the Japanese roots (Happy sumo, Tokyo sunrise), hinting at the Japanese origin of the dish. These cookbooks show that the Japanese dish is neither imposed on American food culture nor is it turned into a fetishized Oriental dish by

the sushi chefs, as these chefs come from different cultural backgrounds, including Japan. Instead, American sushi needs to be understood as a transnational version of sushi, which imagines this dish differently without rendering it "exotic" or strange.

In addition to these books, the California Sushi Academy as an institution has helped to integrate sushi into the American culinary landscape and educated non-Japanese sushi chefs.

V. THE CALIFORNIA SUSHI ACADEMY

Founded in 1998 by Toshi Sugiura, the California Sushi Academy in Los Angeles offers various sushi classes for anyone who is interested in the preparation of the dish. Sugiura, the "pioneer of American Sushi,"[45] realized that the rising demand for sushi would lead to a need for more sushi chefs. Many fusion restaurants wanted to profit from offering sushi on their menus. Sugiura concluded that the traditional Japanese education of a sushi chef, which is based on a long apprenticeship, takes too much time and that it would make sense to train new sushi chefs in only a few months. For him, the education of sushi chefs in a short time is a logical consequence of the sushi boom in the United States and necessary in order to secure a good reputation for sushi. He observed how an increasing number of untrained chefs started to produce sushi on their own, often lacking the most basic knowledge about hygiene and proper techniques. Many of his fellow Japanese sushi chefs, who are very protective about their profession, disliked the idea of introducing non-Japanese chefs to the world of sushi, and some of them even consider Sugiura to be a traitor.[46] These traditional sushi chefs reinforce the boundary between original Japanese sushi preparation techniques and the new American sushi as taught by the California Sushi Academy.

Sugiura, however, is convinced that "America had already embraced sushi, and it would be foolish not to train American chefs."[47] At the California Sushi Academy students are taught how to prepare traditional Japanese sushi, the proper use of Japanese cooking utensils, and the meaning and history of Japanese food. Additionally, since most of the graduates are likely to work in the United States, the academy also encourages students to create their own American rolls.

Sushi rolls are the most popular version of sushi in the United States, and "most sushi rolls in America have never been served in Japan."[48] The best example of such a popular American roll is the famous California

roll. Invented by Ichirô Mashita in the 1960s in Los Angeles, it has become synonymous with sushi in the West. Although the roll turned out to be a tremendous success, it was not consciously invented to offer Westerners a roll without fish. Chef Mashita once had problems with his tuna supply, and so he substituted the readily available avocado for the fish, as a fatty fruit that has a similar texture in the mouth as tuna.[49] Even though it was not first and foremost created to adapt to the American palate, today the California roll is considered to be "the key innovation that made sushi accessible to Americans."[50] Since then many different American sushi rolls have been invented and have entered the international foodscape.

Students of the California Sushi Academy are trained to create rolls particularly for American consumers and learn, for instance, that most Americans are reluctant to eat black food such as *nori* (seaweed)and that therefore inside-out rolls are preferred, with the rice coating the roll and hiding the black seaweed inside the roll.[51] American sushi rolls are larger than Japanese rolls and use fatty ingredients absent in the Japanese versions. By having pork, mayonnaise, or even ice cream as ingredients they no longer are a "healthy alternative," and "a sushi takeout box from an American supermarket could easily contain as many calories as two slices of pizza, and the rolls served in restaurants are often worse."[52] Again, sushi, formerly appreciated for having low fat, is transformed, and the dish no longer can be consumed as a health food. American sushi has become more a Western version of finger food and is served as a modern appetizer at parties. That it exists alongside Japanese sushi contradicts the notion that Japanese-American food exchanges lead to a homogenization of the eating culture. On the contrary, due to these cultural exchanges, new transnational versions of sushi have been created, which enrich the culinary landscape of both nations.

VI. AMERICAN SUSHI IN JAPAN

Today, some American sushi versions have crossed the Pacific and are available in Japan as well. In Japan the altered American sushi versions are also not seriously considered to be sushi but more as a new American dish, sushi as *imagined* by Americans. Japanese food writers such as Katô Hiroko, Matsumoto Hirotaka, and Ikezawa Yasushi acknowledge the popularity of sushi in the United States and do not criticize the modification of sushi in the West. Instead, they understand that sushi can have

different meanings in different cultures and reinforce the idea that the meaning of a cuisine is never fixed.

In *Sushi Purizu!* Katô Hiroko explains to her Japanese readers the difference between the Japanese idea of sushi and the American idea of sushi. She does not criticize the American way of making sushi with avocado and mayonnaise to be consumed with Coke, since she acknowledges that Japanese diners prefer their pizza with squid and oolong tea, thereby consuming pizza in a Japanese way.[53] Katô observes that much more sushi is consumed in the United States than in Japan,[54] and she speculates that Americans are not only fond of the taste of sushi but that the originality of the dish and the entertainment provided in American sushi restaurants contributes to a positive image of sushi in America.[55] Indeed, in the United States, restaurants combine "Japanese food with an American taste of entertainment,"[56] in an atmosphere that includes American popular music, karaoke, and sometimes even a karate show.

In Japan, however, sushi is traditionally consumed in silence to appreciate the taste, and traditionally "the sushi experience was a matter of getting to know the chef at your neighborhood sushi bar, visiting frequently, and letting him choose what he thought you would like."[57] Thus, not only the ingredients of sushi are changed in the United States, but the context in which sushi is consumed is altered as well. In Japan the preparation of sushi is traditionally considered to be a male realm, and most traditional sushi bars cater to men. However, the more recent trend of serving American sushi in Japanese sushi bars with jazz music playing in the background increasingly attracts young Japanese women.[58] American sushi restaurants such as Rainbow Roll Sushi in Tokyo are less traditional and offer a more modern ambience. The restaurant advertises itself on its official website as a place for "casual dining,"[59] and the menu is full of sushi and rolls that would "scandalize traditionalists."[60] Nevertheless, not all American sushi rolls are reproduced and served in the restaurant, but only those that meet Japanese consumer tastes.[61] Furthermore, the Japanese owners of the restaurant acknowledge that sushi, like other cultural commodities, changes when it travels across national and cultural borders, and they alter the American sushi versions in their restaurant to make them more appealing and palatable for Japanese consumers, thus relocalizing American sushi in Japan.

The history of sushi shows that the dish has always been in flux, changing over time and "remaking itself over centuries due to shifting pressures of economics and culture."[62] Sushi was "invented" in the

eighteenth century and at that time it was mainly sold in Edo as a street snack. Today, it is served in different variations in many different countries. In the past, sushi was traditionally served as part of an upscale formal dinner in Japan. However, today with the use of the conveyer belt in sushi restaurants to deliver sushi to guests, and the invention of a sushi robot that processes sushi, eating sushi for a light lunch snack is made affordable and popular again. This informal form of consuming sushi paved the way for American sushi to enter Japan. Nowadays, American sushi is an established genre in Tokyo restaurant culture.[63] As sushi is in constant flux, and different versions of the dish are invented in the United States and Japan by chefs from both sides of the Pacific in order to meet consumer demand, this contradicts the concepts of hegemonic globalization and cultural imperialism. The assumption that cultural (food) transfer is one-sided and forced upon a weaker nation cannot be applied to the food exchange between Japan and the United States.

CONCLUSION

After overcoming initial prejudices about the food of each other's culture, Japan and the United States started to engage in a culinary exchange. Although the diet of the United States is traditionally centered on meat and wheat, sushi has helped to popularize fish and rice. On their side of the Pacific, Japanese started to consume meat and dairy products after regular contact with the United States, and today even sushi rolls containing beef are eaten. Today sushi travels from Japan to the United States, is modified and made into American sushi, and from there travels back to Japan, where it is modified again, contributing to a transnational globalizing process. Therefore, each culinary culture influences the other nation's eating habits and challenges its own ideas about "other" food by openly engaging in a culinary exchange.

The mixing of different ingredients or cooking styles is not a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, food is "linked to overall social hierarchies and power relations,"[64] and the question of whether using and mixing different ingredients and different culinary styles in American sushi might not be a sign of culinary colonialism and disrespect for a different culinary culture remains. It can be argued that using Japanese techniques to create an American version of sushi for a U.S. market is a violation of Japanese culinary habits, because these new versions could be consumed as just another exotic dish. Yet, eating habits are culturally learned, and

dishes are constructed, that is to say imagined, by those who prepare them. Therefore, every dish is not only frequently changed when transferred to another culture but also when prepared by another chef. We can relate this to Appadurai's idea about utilizing the imagination as a positive force to imagine alternative versions of sushi without creating binaries of self and Other. American sushi can be interpreted as sushi imagined by Western and Japanese sushi chefs, and thus it cannot be called an Orientalist dish, created to meet only the Western palate. The dish is open to new interpretations from both cultures, and, therefore, it is both a Japanese dish with an American twist and vice versa.

The example of American sushi shows how intercultural, transnational, and cross-cultural exchanges of food lead to a larger variety of food and eating styles in both cultures and do not necessarily lead to a homogenization of tastes. By crossing and recrossing Japanese and American culinary borders, mixing cooking styles from both cultures, and giving them new names, a new hybrid eating culture has been established that no longer primarily belongs to one culture, thereby leading to a heterogenization of sushi.

Former ideas of cultural imperialism and Orientalism cannot be applied to this cross-cultural exchange between Japan and the United States, which is not unidirectional and which has created a new transnational cultural form. The analysis of the creation of new American sushi dishes shows that local negotiations take place when cultural commodities are transferred from one culture to another. Additionally, it becomes obvious that these commodities have a different meaning in the host country than in their country of origin. As some food has the power to separate people from different cultures, new codes in eating and preparing this food can bridge cultural differences in eating patterns. Food can "change perspectives and take us places we never thought possible."[65] Thus, "the acknowledgement of differences has led to the birth of new cultural forms that are neither American nor Japanese but a fusion of the two."[66] These differences however are no longer judged according to Orientalist perceptions. The ideas of the "raw" and the "cooked" no longer indicate an "otherness" of the other culture, and therefore fusion dishes such as American sushi bridge a culinary gap that existed for hundreds of years. Yet this fusion of two different food cultures in American sushi is not based on homogenizing processes but on national and culinary differences, which are needed to make the dish appealing for American and Japanese consumers. The American ingredients give

Western consumers the reassurance of something familiar, while Japanese techniques and ingredients such as *nori* or vinegared rice provide a point of identification for Japanese consumers. Therefore, American sushi does not generally extinguish Japanese sushi, which is still available in the United States as well, but is only an alternative, transnational possibility for enjoying different types of sushi both in Japan and the United States.

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