



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree programme
in Relazioni
Internazionali
Comparate

Final Thesis

**The political
nuances of
washoku**

From culinary diplomacy
to gastrodiplomacy

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Rosa Caroli

Graduand

Andrea Vito Giuseppe Mazzaraco

Matriculation Number 861823

Academic Year

2024 / 2025



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

SUMMARY

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER I – THE RISE OF GASTRODIPLOMACY</u>	5
<u>1.1 – GASTRODIPLOMACY AND NATION-BRANDING</u>	5
<u>1.2 – THE MAKING OF A NATIONAL CUISINE AND GASTRONATIONALISM</u>	13
<u>1.3 – GASTRODIPLOMACY AND UNESCO: THE PROCESS OF HERITAGIZATION</u>	21
<u>CHAPTER II – JAPANESE NATIONAL CUISINE</u>	30
<u>2.1 – THE HOMOGENIZATION AND WESTERNIZATION OF JAPANESE CUISINE: FROM THE MEIJI ERA TO THE TAISHO ERA</u>	30
<u>2.2 – THE BEGINNING OF THE SHOWA ERA AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR (1931-1945)</u>	42
<u>2.3 – THE POST-WAR YEARS: FROM THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION TO THE ECONOMIC BOOM OF THE 1960’S</u>	48
<u>2.4 – THE “RETRO BOOM” AND THE EXPANSION ABROAD: THE 1970’S AND THE 1980’S</u>	58
<u>CHAPTER III – JAPAN’S GASTRODIPLOMACY</u>	68
<u>3.1 – “COOL JAPAN”, THE FAILURE OF THE “SUSHI POLICE” AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JRO</u>	68
<u>3.2 – APPLICATION TO UNESCO AND WASHOKU AS “WORLD CULTURAL INTANGIBLE HERITAGE”</u>	80
<u>3.3 – ON THE WINGS OF UNESCO: JAPAN’S GASTRODIPLOMACY AFTER THE INSCRIPTION OF WASHOKU</u>	91
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	100
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WEBSITES</u>	102

ABSTRACT

Questa tesi esamina il ruolo che la cucina giapponese occupa nelle politiche di diplomazia culturale estera del Giappone, come un mezzo per incrementare il proprio “nation-branding” ed un veicolo per la proiezione di soft power all'estero. Sin dall'inizio del XXI secolo, come parte di un'ampia campagna di diplomazia culturale nominata “Cool Japan”, il governo giapponese ha incorporato il proprio patrimonio culinario all'interno di un'estesa serie di politiche domestiche ed internazionali, con il duplice obiettivo di incrementare le proprie esportazioni di cibo all'estero e di migliorare l'immagine del Giappone presso il pubblico internazionale. Attingendo da saggi accademici, saggi e ricerche, questa tesi analizza come il cibo giapponese sia stato iscritto all'interno delle agende politiche del governo giapponese lungo tutto l'arco del XX secolo come una forma di consolidamento di politiche nazionalistiche domestiche e, a partire dal XXI secolo, come un veicolo di diplomazia culturale estera. Vengono analizzati i molteplici canali attraverso cui il patrimonio culinario giapponese si interseca con l'influenza delle organizzazioni internazionali, con preoccupazioni domestiche riguardo la sicurezza e l'autosufficienza alimentare e con nozioni di identità, patrimonio e nazionalismo.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, where cultures, economies and politics intersect at unprecedented levels, nations are constantly looking for innovative ways to improve their international appeal and influence. One method that has considerable diffusion in the last decades is what has been termed gastrodiplomacy, a form of cultural diplomacy that exploits national cuisines as a mean for soft power. While culinary traditions have always been a fundamental aspect of cultural exchanges since ancient times, the formalization of gastrodiplomacy elicited a shift in how food is used not only to promote cultural heritage but also to further economic and political enterprises.

The concept of gastrodiplomacy appeared at the onset of the 21st century, spearheaded by initiatives such as Thailand's “Global Thai” campaign, which aimed at improving Thailand's global image through the intensive promotion of its cuisine. Since then, a great number of countries, from Peru to Japan, have inscribed gastrodiplomacy into their public

diplomacy agendas, publicizing their national dishes as symbols of identity and heritage in the international realm. By promoting traditional dishes and forming cultural ties through the medium of food, nations are in a position to cultivate a favorable image of themselves, to enhance tourism and boost food exports, contributing in the process both to national branding and the projection of soft power.

This thesis delves into the rise of gastrodplomacy, focusing on the intersection between food, culture and diplomacy. It focuses on how national cuisines are constructed, commodified and exported as part of broader nation-branding strategies. In particular, this work takes as its case study Japan's gastrodplomacy efforts, examining in the process the role that international organizations such as UNESCO have in legitimizing on the international stage national cuisines as intangible cultural heritage, and analyzing the impact of gastrodplomacy on Japan's global reputation and soft power. Through the study of both historical and contemporary examples, and attaining from a comprehensive body of works that ranges from the fields of international relations, heritage studies, food history, food studies and sociology, this dissertation aims to explore how gastrodplomacy functions as a tool for cultural diplomacy and how the relationship between food and politics has evolved in the 21st century, in particular by delineating the intricacies and motivations that undergirded Japan's gastrodplomatic efforts over the last two decades.

The body of work of this dissertation is subdivided into three main chapters. The first one offers a wide and comprehensive analysis of the key concepts that undergird the practice of gastrodplomacy and it is further subdivided into three sub-chapters, each focusing on a particular area of interest: the first sub-chapter offers a short but detailed introduction to the concept of gastrodplomacy, delineating its main characteristics and objectives as argued by influential scholars of the subject and offers valid examples of gastrodplomacy initiatives undertaken since the start of the 21st century; the second sub-chapter analyzes the concept of gastro-nationalism, a concept expounded by food scholar Michaela DeSoucey, and attempts to integrate it with the main theories of nationalism studies, from the seminal works of Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm to other influential theories such as Billig's banal nationalism; the last sub-chapter describes the recent phenomenon of heritagization and, attaining from the field of heritage studies, attempts to define how heritage is constructed and commodified and how influential organizations such as UNESCO are exploited by nation-states in order to gain economic and political dividends.

The second chapter takes into account our focus of study, Japan's cuisine, under a more historical lens, describing the various modifications that Japanese cuisine underwent since

Japan's inception as a nation-state and how such modifications were at the forefront of domestic political and economic agendas. Particular relevance will be given to the attempts made by the Japanese central authorities to mandate a centralized and unified vision of Japanese cuisine, from the integration of Western ingredients and nutritional knowledge as a way of achieving rapid modernization during the Meiji period to the attempts to resurrect an idealized view of a national Japanese cuisine in the 1980s following the increased Westernization of eating habits. Finally, the third and last chapter will delve into the contemporary efforts of the Japanese government to exploit its culinary patrimony as a way to increase its nation-brand and its soft power in the international arena, in a bid to raise its economy by boosting food exports and increase its international visibility through the medium of food. This chapter will analyze a diverse set of policies undertaken by the Japanese government, ranging from the failed certification scheme devised in 2006 and publicly lambasted as "*sushi* police" to the successful inscription of *washoku* as Intangible Cultural Heritage to UNESCO, with all the projects that followed in its wake.

CHAPTER I – THE RISE OF GASTRODIPLOMACY

1.1 – GASTRODIPLOMACY AND NATION-BRANDING

The first mention of the term “gastrodiplomacy” dates back to February 2002 in an article published by the famous English magazine “The Economist”, that examined the “Global Thai” campaign undertaken by the Thai government. This campaign had as its primary goal the sponsorship of Thai cuisine on the global stage by favoring the opening of new Thai restaurants abroad through a series of subsidized rate loans and incentives program. Beyond the financial support accorded to the new enterprises, commercial assistance and a series of market analyses operated by Thai embassies were offered¹. Moreover, the project was accompanied by a widespread media campaign that encompassed the projection of documentaries and the publication of newspaper articles. The ultimate aim of the project was to alter the perception of Thailand in the public’s mind, from haven of sexual tourism to a paradise for culinary tourism.² The “Global Thai” campaign, followed later by the “Thai Kitchen for the World” campaign, proved to be an astounding success for the Thai government, since in the span of ten years it has seen the number of Thai restaurants abroad rise from 5.500 to an estimated 15.000 and an historical surge in tourism and has made Thai cuisine of the most renowned at the global level³. Soon the term “gastrodiplomacy” started to spread and gain recognition in the academic circles, leading to numerous studies and researches in the field of international relations. After all, since ancient times gastronomy has always had a prominent role in the realm of diplomacy. The partaking of food during the visit of politically relevant figures has always been a fundamental part of the diplomatic process, from the luscious feasts honoring the arrival of kings and queens to the refined meals organized to welcome heads of State and ambassadors. Aristotle, in the IV century a.C., in his “*Politica*” underlined how sharing food was a way to ease tensions among politicians before discussing more pressing issues⁴. The political importance of gastronomy is lauded by de Calières in his treatise “*De la manière de négocier avec les souverains*” and by de Talleyrand, French Minister of Foreign Affairs under the reign of Napoleon, who

¹ “Thailand’s Gastro-Diplomacy”, *The Economist*, 21 February 2002, available at <https://www.economist.com/asia/2002/02/21/thailands-gastro-diplomacy>.

² Hong, D. “The Game of Gastrodiplomacy”, *Vittles*, 15 January 2024, available at https://www.vittlesmagazine.com/p/the-game-of-gastrodiplomacy?utm_source=publication-search.

³ Chapple-Sokol, S. (2013). “Culinary diplomacy: Breaking bread to win hearts and minds”, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 8(2), pp. 161-183.

⁴ Constantinou, C.M. (1996). *On the way to diplomacy*. (Vol. 7). U of Minnesota Press, p. 128.

exclaimed: “Give me a good cook and I’ll give you a good treaty!”. In the more recent past, the picture showing Nixon struggling with a pair of chopsticks during his visit in China for the re-opening of diplomatic relationships in the Cold War era or Russian president Vladimir Putin enjoying American barbecue at US president George W. Bush’s ranch in Texas come to mind. Such events are part of what has been termed “culinary diplomacy”, that is “the use of cuisine and food as a medium to enhance formal diplomacy during official diplomatic functions”⁵. The last twenty years have seen a remarkable revitalization and extension of the practice at the international level. Since 2002, following the example of Thailand, numerous nations have embarked on gastrodiplomacy campaigns aimed at exporting their culinary heritage abroad. In fact, food and cuisine are fundamental traits of the cultural heritage of a nation, which makes them “one of the many tools that a government can utilize in its wide strategy of public diplomacy”.⁶ Cultural diplomacy is defined by Nicholas Cull as “an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad”⁷. Thus, culinary diplomacy encapsulates a diplomatic campaign that attempts to influence foreign public through the appeal of cultural heritage. In this process, particular traits of the nation’s cultural heritage are selected, distilled and subsequently communicated abroad in order to create favorable and positive associations among a foreign public.⁸ Both culinary diplomacy, which serves as a “means to further diplomatic protocol through cuisine”⁹, and gastrodiplomacy, which refers to a tool of public diplomacy, can be incorporated into the widefield of cultural diplomacy. In fact, both operate a selection of foods and recipes from the nation’s culinary heritage, which are later grouped under the banner of a “national cuisine” and communicated abroad with the aim of raising the nation’s appeal. Even though both culinary diplomacy and gastrodiplomacy entail the use of food as a cultural medium, the target public they strive for is noticeably different. Culinary diplomacy, taking place during official diplomatic functions, addresses a specialized public that comprises bureaucratic and governmental élites. On the other hand, gastrodiplomacy operates on a wider scale, attempting to influence a bigger and more heterogeneous public, focusing mainly on the

⁵ Rockower, P.S. (2012). “Recipes for gastrodiplomacy”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 8, p. 237.

⁶ Wilson, R. (2011). “Cocina Peruana Para El Mundo: Gastrodiplomacy, the culinary nation brand, and the context of national cuisine in Peru”, *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 2(1); pp. 13-20.

⁷ Cull, N. (2008). “Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and history”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 61(6), pp. 31-64.

⁸ Rockower, P.S. (2012), p. 236.

⁹ Rockower, P.S. (2012). P. 236.

entrepreneurial and middle classes.¹⁰ As a combination of culinary and cultural diplomacy, gastrodiploamacy is a project undertaken by a national government, through the use of economical or other tangible resources, that aims at raising the nation's cultural visibility on the international stage through the projection of a national cuisine.¹¹ Paul Rockower, one of the leading scholars in the field of gastrodiploamacy, defines the ultimate goal of this process as an attempt to "raise the nation's brand status".¹² In fact, as businesses utilize slogans to gain the public's attention, so nations create specific representations of themselves in order to make themselves more attractive for a foreign public. In the field of public diplomacy the creation of a "national brand" in order to promote the nation abroad is a common practice. According to the definition given by Aaker, a brand is an "assortment of strategical, emotional and relational elements that collectively generates a unique set of associations in the public"¹³. By the same token, nations have their own distinctive "brand", as they possess a distinctive name, culture and tradition.¹⁴ However, the presence and recognition of a set of peculiar elements that distinguish a nation from its peers is not a sufficient condition for the constitution of a national brand. In order to effectively increase the international profile, this cultural imagery has to be supported by a set of practices that reconstitutes a precise image of the nation ready to be exported abroad. This set of practices encompasses a wide variety of activities that range from relatively "cosmetic" operations, such as emphasizing historical monuments or peculiar cultural traditions, to the establishment of statal organizations assigned to the promotion of the nation abroad.¹⁵ The main objective of this process is an attempt to influence and alter the perception that the foreign public has of the nation in question, leading to an increase in "reputational capital" that can be spent in subsequent enterprises.¹⁶ Thus, nation branding is "a process through which a nation's image is created, monitored and proactively managed in order to raise or better the nation's reputation among a foreign public".¹⁷ This raise in international visibility is directly connected to the dimension of soft power, a concept introduced in the field of international relations by Joseph Nye in the '90s. With this term Nye defines the attempt by a State to "get other countries to do what it

¹⁰ Matta, R. (2019). "Gastro-diplomatie: un soft power (pas si soft)", *ESSACHESS – Journal for Communication Studies*, 12(1(23)), p. 105.

¹¹ Rockower, P. S. (2020). "A guide to gastrodiploamacy", *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. Routledge. 205-212.

¹² Rockower, P.S. (2020). P. 205.

¹³ Aaker, D.A. (1996). *Building strong brands*. Free Press, New York.

¹⁴ Fan, Y. (2010). "Branding the nation: Towards a better understanding", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 6(2), 97-103.

¹⁵ Matta, R. (2019).

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Fan, Y. (2010). P. 6.

wants”¹⁸ through the use of “intangible power resources such as ideology, culture and institutions”¹⁹. It stands in direct opposition to the concept of hard power, which identifies the use of threats of economic, military or political nature to obtain an actor’s compliance. On the contrary, soft power describes the use of a culture’s attractiveness to influence an actor’s behavior and co-opt them to adopt one’s values.²⁰

Thus, the relationship between gastrodiplomacy and soft power lies in the shared objective of promoting a positive image of a nation and enhancing its influence on the global stage. By showcasing its culinary traditions, a nation can create a favorable perception of its culture, heritage and people. Food represents a particularly suitable medium to convey cultural values due to its essentiality for human life, its unique ability to evoke sensorial and emotive reactions in the eater and its relative easiness of reproduction abroad. In fact, as Wilson points out:

“Because we experience food through our senses (touch and sight, but especially taste and smell), it possesses certain visceral, intimate and emotional qualities, and as a result we remember the food we eat and the sensations we felt while eating it. The senses create a strong link between place and memory and food serves as the material representation of the experience.”²¹

For this reason, “food can function as a non-threatening way to gain favor and make a connection with a foreign audience”.²² Promoting their gastronomic prowess, nations can shape their national identity and enhance their soft power by projecting an appealing and distinctive image of themselves to the world. As a result, this can stimulate tourism, encourage foreign investments and boost food exports. In turn, these economic activities can further strengthen a nation’s soft power by demonstrating its prosperity and attractiveness as a business partner. The relationship between food and soft power has given rise to what has been termed “culinary soft power”, in which the food and foodways of a nation are seen as “one form of the cultural commodity that is linked to national, regional or local prestige”²³.

¹⁸ Nye, J.S. (1990). “Soft power”, *Foreign policy*, (80), p. 155.

¹⁹ Nye, J.S. (1990). p. 167.

²⁰ Nye, J.S. (1990).

²¹ Wilson, R. (2011). “Cocina Peruana Para El Mundo: Gastrodiplomacy, the culinary nation brand, and the context of national cuisine in Peru”, *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 2(1), p. 18.

²² Wilson, R. (2011). P. 14.

²³ Farrer, J. (2010). *Globalization, food and social identities in the Asia Pacific region*, Tokyo: Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture, p. 10 as cited in Assmann, S. (2024). “Culinary heritage in Asia: National and regional identities – Reflections from the field”, *Routledge Open Research*, 3(6), p. 6.

In the last twenty years an ever-increasing number of governments have turned to their culinary heritage in order to raise their nation's appeal, leading to the launch of different gastrodiplomacy campaigns. In its infancy the practice of gastrodiplomacy has been undertaken mainly by nations commonly considered as "middle powers", that is, nations that find it difficult to raise their visibility on the global stage due to being relatively unknown among the global public or due to the negative perception that this public holds towards them.²⁴ The former case is exemplified by Malaysia and Indonesia which, despite being politically relevant regional actors in Southeast Asia, did not enjoy wide recognition on the global stage and, by emphasizing the tastiness of their national cuisines through the respective "Malaysian Kitchen for the World" and "Spice Up the World" campaigns, managed to gain international visibility.²⁵ On the same page, the nation of Peru managed to requalify its international appeal by casting off the shadows of its civil war years through the campaign "Cocina Peruana para el Mundo", which made Peruvian cuisine one of the most renowned globally.²⁶ Besides increasing international visibility and opening up economic opportunities, some nations adopt gastrodiplomacy to be able to take political stances without compromising their international standing or incurring in sanctions, playing up the seemingly innocuous cultural aspects of culinary heritage. A case in point is the so-called "Dim sum diplomacy" undertaken by the island-nation of Taiwan, which by emphasizing the distinct flavors of its cuisine managed at the same time to distinguish itself from its menacing neighbor, China, without challenging it directly.²⁷

However, attracted by the economic returns and spurred by the success of the other nations, in recent years great powers have started their own gastrodiplomacy campaigns in order to diversify their economic enterprises and make themselves more relevant on a cultural level. In fact, the rise in international visibility, beyond increasing the cultural weight of a nation, opens up new possibilities for generating economic windfalls, for example by increasing tourism or developing new commercial activities. Food and cuisine give a tangible demonstration of the distinctive culture and history of a particular nation and, being an "edible national brand"²⁸, they allow the consumer to interact with a foreign culture without the necessity to physically travel there. Consequently, the spread of ethnic restaurants abroad,

²⁴ Rockower, P.S. (2020).

²⁵ Rockower, P.S. (2012).

²⁶ Matta, R. (2017). "Unveiling the neoliberal taste. Peru's media representation as a food nation", *Taste / Power / Tradition. Geographical Indications as Cultural Property*, Gottingen University Press, pp. 103-117.

²⁷ Pascua, F. (2014). "Dim-sum over milk tea: Taiwan's 21st century gastrodiplomacy and some lessons for the Philippines", *Sciences*, 130, p. 88-96.

²⁸ Rockower, P. S. (2020).

encouraged by the economic support granted by the respective governments, makes foreign culture more readily accessible using food as a cultural gateway. Thus, restaurants function as contact zones that with time can favor the practice of “ersatz tourism”, raising initially in the consumer curiosity and interest towards a particular nation which can transform into a willingness to deepen that knowledge by actually visiting it.²⁹ According to a research by Braden Ruddy concerning the impact of national cuisines on a nation’s perception, 55.71% of the interviewees stated of having re-evaluated or changed their perception about a nation after tasting its cuisine and 84% of the interviewees considered visiting the nation after eating its cuisine.³⁰ The increased accessibility of foreign cuisines and the emphasis placed on the relationship between a nation and its cuisine, which are in part results of gastrodiplomacy campaigns, are contributing causes to the boom of “culinary tourism”, a phenomenon where food represents the main motivation for travelling. However, “culinary tourism” does not confine itself to the consumption of a foreign cuisine but involves different ways of participating in the “foodways” of that culture, such as through the preparation and presentation of a local cuisine.³¹ That is why, beyond supporting the diffusion of restaurants abroad, gastrodiplomacy projects aim at qualifying their nation as culinary destinations by organizing specific food-related events and activities. Even though food is just one of the many factors that contributed to it, it is nonetheless observable that nations that have undertaken gastrodiplomacy campaigns have assisted to a remarkable increase in tourism. After the start of the Global Thai campaign, across ten years Thailand has observed a 200% increase in tourism that has made it the 8th most visited nation in the world. According to a poll, one third of the tourists interviewed stated that food was the main motivation that led them to visit Thailand.³² Similarly, in the period going from 2009 to 2015, South Korea has observed a 70% increase in tourism.³³ Despite the unmistakable influence that the film and music industry had on the popularity of Korean culture abroad, the impact of the publicization of Korean cuisine through the so-called “Kimchi diplomacy” cannot be understated.

The international visibility obtained by exporting the national cuisine abroad and its increased exposure among a foreign public proves to be an opportunity to increase food exports as well. In fact, a direct consequence of the increased consumption of the national

²⁹ Suntikul, W. (2019). “Gastrodiplomacy in tourism”, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22(9), pp. 1076-1094.

³⁰ Ruddy, B. (2014). “Hearts, minds and stomachs: Gastrodiplomacy and the potential of national cuisine in changing public perceptions of national image”, *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, 11(1), 29-34.

³¹ Long, L.M. (2012). “Culinary tourism”, *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, pp. 389-406.

³² Scharf, S. (2016). *The campaign to make you eat kimchi*. Available at [The Campaign to Make You Eat Kimchi - Priceonomics](#).

³³ Ibidem.

cuisine is the establishment of a food infrastructure capable of supplying the restaurants involved. National cuisines involve the use of ingredients connected to a specific climate and to specific techniques of production tied to a specific territory. However, initially, ethnic restaurants relied on a more informal infrastructure, for example by using local food retailers or replacing difficult-to-find ingredients with similar and more readily available ones. So, in a bid to stimulate food exports, more and more governments involved in gastrodiploamacy encouraged restaurants to use “local” ingredients in order to reproduce an “authentic” cuisine. The question of what constitutes an “authentic” national cuisine will be treated more carefully in the next paragraph but a cursory glance to the concept will be helpful in explaining the increase of food exports. The concept of authenticity related to food denotes “an expected adherence of ingredients, dishes and customs to an idealized, supposedly original form... whose roots are to be found in time (in the past) and in space (specific places)”³⁴. So, in order for a cuisine to be perceived as “authentic”, it has to be first “authenticated”. This process of authentication, as described by Regina Bendix, involves the production of authenticities by reliance on a corpus of authoritative knowledge.³⁵ Governments involved in gastrodiploamacy projects, then, attempt to become the repository of this knowledge through a series of operations that include: the establishment of organizations whose objective is the promotion of an idealized image of the national cuisine; the organization and publicization of food-related activities and events catering to a large public, which reinforces the idealized image in the public consciousness; the use of media such as cookbooks, magazines, academic articles, social media and TV programs; the sponsorship of celebrities and locally renowned chefs as food ambassadors.³⁶

Once this idealized version of national cuisine is popularized, governments can wield it to distinguish what is authentic by what is not. This is done by establishing a network of certifications and marks of quality and by a series of quality-controlling programs that regulate the “authenticity” of restaurants abroad.³⁷ Receiving a state-sponsored certification represents a veritable badge of quality for a restaurant, that can help it stand apart from its competitors and distinguish itself on the market. However, applying for these certifications entails the compliance with a set of prerequisites, such as the use of ingredients with a specific provenance or the attendance of cooking courses. Thus, restaurants applying for these

³⁴ Parasecoli, F. (2022). *Gastronativism: Food, identity, politics*. Columbia University Press, p. 80.

³⁵ Bendix, R. (1997), *In search of authenticity: The formation of folklore studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

³⁶ Rockower, P.S.(2020).

³⁷ Suntikul, W. (2019).

certifications have to rely on an officially regulated food infrastructure and conform to a state-sponsored version of cuisine. Through this process governments attain two objectives. On the one hand, they create economic revenues due to the increase in food exports generated by the reliance on the national food infrastructure. On the other hand, by forming professionally trained chefs and controlling the quality and provenance of the ingredients used, they retain control of the image of the national cuisine communicated abroad.

Giving a summary of all of the practices involved in these projects would be quite difficult, but most of the gastrodiploacy campaigns mentioned above share some similar traits. First of all, there is the attempt at expanding restaurants abroad, through economic support and assistance, that will function as forward cultural outposts.³⁸ In order to be effective, gastrodiploacy has to rely on stable “anchor points” from which it can relay its influence to the foreign public. In this vein, restaurants abroad assume the role of cultural embassies and form a network from which it is possible to manage communication strategies.³⁹ Since any embassy needs its ambassadors, this role is carried out by the chefs and the personnel working in the restaurants who, beside creating a tangible representation of the nation through the act of cooking food, are involved in a series of projects aimed at furthering the knowledge of their nation of origin. These projects comprehend the promotion of cuisine in conjunction with cultural events like night markets or film screenings, the organization of public cooking classes and workshops or of mass cooking demonstrations and the participation in local festivities and events.⁴⁰ Secondly, governments facilitate the access to authentic local ingredients to culinary outposts abroad, increasing at the same time their food exports and creating opportunities for new economic investments, and encourage chef participation in cultural exchanges and cultural diplomacy.⁴¹ This is done by sponsoring world-renowned chefs as food ambassadors or by sending chefs abroad as cultural envoys, as for example with the Peruvian food truck that visited the city of Lima in the US or the US Food Corps.

Thirdly, governments establish organizations, whose main goal is the promotion of food abroad through a wide array of activities, who cooperate with ministerial agencies, such as those of commerce and agriculture, or with NGOs.⁴²

³⁸Rockower, P.S. (2012), p. 244.

³⁹ Matta, R. (2019).

⁴⁰ Rockower, P. S. (2020).

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

Finally, in a bid to secure the international legitimacy of their cuisine and to increase the recognition and the economic value of it, governments rely on international organizations. A common phenomenon observed in the last decade has been the forwarding of applications to UNESCO in order to recognize a national cuisine or selected dishes as “Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity”.⁴³

As explained above, gastrodiploacy is a branch of cultural diplomacy which uses a wide spectrum of activities and practices in order to obtain an increase in the cultural visibility of the nation, which could lead to a betterment of the international standing of the nation and to new and profitable economic activities. However, every gastrodiploacy campaign rests on two assumptions: that a “national cuisine” exists and that this “national cuisine” is recognized as such by a diverse cast of actors. Whereas this paragraph has focused on the main traits of gastrodiploacy and how and for what purposes it exports a national cuisine abroad, the next paragraph will be focused on how and by which means an idealized image of a “national cuisine” is constructed.

1.2 – THE MAKING OF A NATIONAL CUISINE AND GASTRONATIONALISM

Gastrodiploacy is, then, a public diplomacy campaign undertaken by a government that uses the attractiveness of food as a cultural tool to increase the national brand and appeals to a vast and heterogeneous foreign audience. Due to the emotive impact that food can elicit on our perceptions, a nation can exploit the power of its cuisine so whenever someone interacts with it that cuisine is recognized as belonging only to that specific nation. As a consequence, the association food-nation is constantly reinforced in the public consciousness. As seen in the paragraph above, this process can lead to an improved understanding of a foreign culture, to a novel interest or curiosity towards previously unknown countries and can even contribute to a change of the perceptions held toward a nation. As in the realm of cultural diplomacy some distinctive aspects of the nation are selected and transmitted abroad, so in the case of culinary diplomacy the same process occurs regarding the peculiar traits of the culinary patrimony. In order to increase the strength and spread of its impact, the cuisine communicated abroad has to be instantly recognizable and easily discernible for the foreign audience. This entails a selective process in which some foods, be it for their centrality in the

⁴³ Ibidem.

foodways of their nation of origin or for their visual and/or gustatory traits, become standard-bearers of that culture and are eventually inscribed in what is commonly labelled as a “national cuisine”. Thus, every nation involved in gastrodipomatic enterprises requires a national cuisine upon which to establish itself.⁴⁴ Once this national cuisine is established, initially through validation at a domestic level and subsequently through validation at an international level, “it can be exploited as a facet of the nation’s brand”⁴⁵. Nowadays, the national labelling of food is an omnipresent phenomenon, which plays a substantial role in conveying and consolidating images of the nations involved. “Most of the restaurants and cafes [...] either market themselves as part of a particular national food culture (Thai, French, American, etc.) or display, construct and reproduce nationalities in their menus, décor and products”.⁴⁶ For example, global chains such as McDonald’s and Starbucks, in order to broaden their share of consumers, offer localized versions of their products appealing to the particular tastes of the nation in which they are established, such as in the case of the *bulgogi* burger in South Korea. In every case, the foods on offering are always traced back to a specific place and time, which as a result becomes “fixed in time”, and they are emphasized as culturally intrinsic to a nation.

Despite their recent popularity, national cuisines have a long history, so much so that their appearance seems to have occurred concomitantly with the formation of national narratives and the consolidation of nation-states at the start of the 20th century.⁴⁷ However, from the end of the 20th century onwards, a resurgence of the concept has been observed, motivated partially out of the need for newly-established countries to assert their cultural distinctiveness in the international realm and partially as a reaction against the homogenizing forces that globalization had on society as a whole. The term “cuisine” is subject to a varied catalogue of definitions and interpretations but for the scope of this thesis we will take into account the one offered by Warren Belasco, according to which:

“Cuisine is a set of socially situated behaviors, comprising a limited number of edible foods (selectivity); a preference for particular ways of preparing food (techniques); a distinctive set of

⁴⁴ Chapple-Sokol, S. (2013).

⁴⁵ Chapple-Sokol, S. (2013). P.170.

⁴⁶ Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022). *Food, national identity and nationalism: From everyday to global politics*. Springer Nature, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022).

flavours, textual and visual characteristics (aesthetics) and an organized system of producing and distributing food (infrastructure)".⁴⁸

Then, following this definition, we can define a cuisine as a social construct, a symbolic code that conveys meanings and boundaries. In fact, food, beside satisfying our basic physiological needs, represents a foundational aspect of collective belonging, due to its ability to communicate symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders.⁴⁹ By choosing what to eat, how to cook it and when to consume it or, on the other hand, by refusing to eat some foods, individuals actively decide and manifest their affiliation to social groups, which may be national, political, religious and so on. For example, the partaking of roasted turkey during the Thanksgiving celebrations is seen as the epitome of Americanness, as the refusal to eat pork under the *kashrut* dietary prescriptions is shared by Judaist practitioners worldwide.

Following this reasoning, a national cuisine is a social construct that expresses links to a specific community and territory and erects symbolic norms of group membership which demarcates boundaries between who can understand these norms, and hence is part of the nation, and who cannot, and hence is excluded from it.⁵⁰ Moreover, by preparing foodstuffs following a commonly shared set of cooking and flavouring techniques and consuming them according to a ritual calendar of occasions and celebrations, members of the nation-group create and share a culinary background⁵¹. Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work "*Imagined communities*", affirms that a nation is "an imagined community because the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"⁵². This sense of mutual communion and understanding is built upon and sustained, among other things, by a shared cultural and linguistic background. National cuisines, constituting one of the pillars upon which a nation's cultural background is built upon, have then a paramount role in the construction of an "imagined community".

The importance of food is manifest in its centrality in the social life of the community and in its recurrence in festive and religious celebrations, which leads to its preservation in time from generation to generation. As such, food is particularly suited to function as a social

⁴⁸ Belasco, W. (1999), "Food and the counterculture: A story of bread and politics", *Food in Global History*, p.276.

⁴⁹ DeSoucey, M. (2016). *Contested tastes: Foie gras and the politics of food*. Princeton University Press.

⁵⁰ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). *Modern Japanese cuisine: Food, power and national identity*. Reaktion Books.

⁵¹ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

⁵² Anderson, B. (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso Books, p. 20.

binder under the guise of tradition. Tradition is defined as a social activity in which a community identifies and it involves the selection of practices and customs from previous generations that, due to their relevance, are passed down and still performed in the present. These elements are attributed special significance and their preservation is considered essential to cultural continuity and to the survival of the community⁵³. For these reasons, some foods are imbued with narratives, imagery and meanings that people find useful.⁵⁴ However, despite their appearance at popular level, traditions are prone to be integrated into political projects precisely because they play a significant role in determining what a community is and how it sees itself⁵⁵. Thus, traditions have great political value in themselves. Consequently, they are often adopted by governments to bolster the idea of the nation as an historical legitimated destiny and are actively promoted and supported in order to foster a sense of national identity and belonging.⁵⁶

As Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, this process takes the form of “invented traditions”, that is,

“a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”⁵⁷

This set of practices involves a “process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition”⁵⁸.

The first part of this process, that of formalization, involves a selection in which some traditions are selectively chosen as significant for national identity, due to their being historically rooted in the social life of the community. In order to legitimate their importance, the narratives associated to some foods hark back to a premodern mythical past, which usually involves some connection to the “greatness” of past civilizations, and highlight the ever-present centrality they had on the family table and in ritual celebrations⁵⁹. This historical narrative is subsequently reinforced and disseminated through the use of literature, the media

⁵³ Parasecoli, F. (2022).

⁵⁴ Holt, D.B. (2004), *“How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding”*. Harvard Business Press.

⁵⁵ Parasecoli, F. (2022).

⁵⁶ Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. (1983); *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁷ Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T (1983), p. 1.

⁵⁸ Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. (1983), p. 4.

⁵⁹ DeSoucey, M. (2016).

and the educational apparatus. Initially, this role was taken up by cookbooks⁶⁰, which played a prominent role in mandating an idealized image of what the national cuisine had allegedly always looked like. Important examples of the role that cookbooks had in the embedding of nationalistic discourses into food can be found in the case of Italy with Artusi's "*L'arte di mangiare bene: un ricettario Italiano*"⁶¹, of France with Escoffier's "*Le guide culinaire*" and of India, as shown by Appadurai, with the publishing of numerous cookbooks aimed at the Indian middle classes⁶². With the advancement in communication technologies achieved after World War II, the means by which this idealized image is spread have extended to cooking shows, food magazines, advertisements, depictions of food in movies and TV and so on. Moreover, governments have often undertaken educational reforms in the school system, with the aim of depicting a reified image of the national cuisine by appealing to selectively chosen notions of history, nutritional sciences and cultural specificity.

Out of these processes two outcomes can be observed.

First, most of the dishes and recipes are extrapolated from their regional and local context and incorporated into a national one⁶³. This leads to a simplification of their values which, in order to accommodate the needs of a larger audience, become vaguer. Consequently, regional and ethnic differences become "subservient to, and part of, a greater national identity"⁶⁴, which heralds a partial homogenization of alimentary practices that reinforces the idea of a similar cuisine shared by everyone.

Secondly, specific food items are "manipulated and utilized to create new meanings and values and to redefine group membership and boundaries"⁶⁵. Certain foods become symbols of national pride and are recurrently used and celebrated in different contexts pertaining to the nation, such as holidays, festivities and historical commemorations. Due to the national significance they acquire, the emotional responses they can evoke and their recurrent celebration in popular culture, these foods become a metonymical symbol of the nation. In some instances, the metonymical association food-nation is so deeply-rooted that any attack or critic directed at them is perceived as a direct attack to the national culture as a whole and

⁶⁰ Ferguson, P. (1998), "A cultural field in the making: Gastronomy in 19th-century France", *American Journal of Sociology*, 104(3), pp. 597-641.

⁶¹ Portincasa, A. (2019). "Cookbooks and the representation of Italian ways of food", *Italians and Food*, pp. 203-235.

⁶² Appadurai, A. (1988). "How to make a national cuisine: Cookbooks in contemporary India", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30(1), pp. 3-24.

⁶³ Ranta, R., & Ichijo, A. (2022).

⁶⁴ Edensor, T. (2002). *National identity, popular culture and everyday life*, Oxford: Berg, p. 66.

⁶⁵ Ranta, R. & Ichijo, A. (2022). p. 45.

can cause a virulent reaction⁶⁶, as shown by the popular backlash occurred in response to the attempts by ecological activists to halt *foie gras* production in France or by the surge of indignation felt by Italians whenever a slice of pineapple is laid on a pizza.

Once the process of formalization has taken place, through which the meanings embedded in these foods are fixed in time and space, it is followed by the process of ritualization. Ritualization involves an imposed repetition by which traditions become so ingrained in the public consciousness to the point of appearing natural. This concept goes hand in hand with that of banal nationalism. Banal nationalism includes the mundane, routine practices and symbols that constantly remind people of their national identity. These practices help embed national identity in the consciousness of individuals, making the nation appear as a natural, taken-for-granted part of social life⁶⁷. The quotidian reinforcement of national identity, obtained through “dull, rote repetition, performed mindlessly and dispassionately”⁶⁸, ensures that people feel part of a larger community.⁶⁹ In his main work Michael Billig highlights the relevance that objects such as flags, anthems or sports competitions, which normally are only passive reminders of the nation in the public mind, assume in occasion of parades, national festivities and international tournaments and the role they play in reproducing the nation as an imagined community.⁷⁰ At the same time, the phenomenon of banal nationalism can be closely linked to national cuisines, since the everyday consumption and celebration of certain foods play a significant role in reinforcing a sense of national identity. As pointed out above, some national holidays and festivals often revolve around specific culinary practices, which bring people together in shared experiences and reinforce a sense of communal belonging. Fox and Miller-Idriss, in their work, have named this practice as people “performing the nation”, that is, a ritualized enactment of nationhood through symbols.⁷¹ Moreover, food companies often use national symbols, colors or cultural references in their marketing strategies to appeal to consumers’ nationalistic sentiments. This can be seen in the packaging, labelling and advertising of products. Using flags, landmarks or traditional imagery on food packaging can contribute in creating a subconscious association between the product and national identity and ultimately shape the preferences of consumers. This, among other practices, re-enters in the practice of “consuming the nation”, which

⁶⁶ DeSoucey, M. (2016).

⁶⁷ Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*, SAGE Publications.

⁶⁸ Fox, J. & Miller-Idriss, C. (2008). “Everyday Nationhood”, *Ethnicities*, 8(4), p. 549.

⁶⁹ Fox, J. & Miller-Idriss, C. (2008).

⁷⁰ Billig, M. (1995).

⁷¹ Fox, J. & Miller-Idriss, C. (2008).

involves an expression of nationhood and belonging to the nation through daily consumption habits.⁷² As we root for our national teams and feel connected to each other during sports competitions such as the Olympics or the football's World Cup, the same feeling of national pride can arise from the participation of chefs to international food competition or the winning of accolades, such as the coveted Michelin star, by restaurants. These successes are accompanied by a surge of nationalistic sentiments and can reinforce a belief in the uniqueness and superiority of one's own cuisine.⁷³

These are only some examples of how the nationalistic discourses embedded in food are spread and constantly reinforced in social life. The means by which traditions and symbols are reproduced through mundane activities are varied and are analyzed in extensive details in the studies of banal nationalism by Billig and of everyday nationalism by Fox and Miller-Idriss, among others. However, these processes “occurs more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which “old” traditions had been designed”⁷⁴. As such, the relevancy that national cuisines gained at the start of the 20th century, in which nationalistic discourses were still in their infancy and there was a need to foster a sense of national identity, and at the beginning of the 21st century, when the placelessness and the erosion of cultural boundaries elicited by globalization are counteracted by the “re-discovery” of old traditional values and practices, is readily understood.

Despite its centrality in reproducing nationalistic discourses, “food is not only used for domestic purposes and as an internal and banal symbol of the nation; it is also used internationally by the state in its diplomatic enterprises and as a form of soft power”⁷⁵. Unlike common banal symbols of the nation, such as flags and anthems, food has the ability to attract and be desired by others, consequently enhancing the appeal of the state⁷⁶. This ability to attract makes it a useful “cultural commodity”, which can be strategically spent in the field of diplomatic relations. Then, national food is viewed by the state as a resource that can be utilized to accomplish a variety of goals but that, at the same time, needs to be secured in the international arena.⁷⁷ Governments have often taken a proactive stance regarding the protection of their food infrastructure, in order to both allege their gastronomic uniqueness vis-à-vis other nations and to obtain a monopoly on the production of specific foodstuffs with

⁷² Fox, J. & Miller-Idriss, C. (2008).

⁷³ Ferguson, P.P. (2010). “Culinary Nationalism”, *Gastronomica*, 10(1), pp. 102-109.

⁷⁴ Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. (1983). p. 4.

⁷⁵ Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022). p. 10

⁷⁶ Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022).

⁷⁷ Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2008).

all the consequent economic windfalls generated.⁷⁸ The range of processes undertaken by governments encompasses the backing of local food industries through loans and economical support; the establishment of marks of quality which emphasize the uniqueness of specific ingredients by tying them to terroir and tradition; the use of advertising campaigns encouraging the population to support domestic products and producers and so on. However, in the recent past, more and more governments have turned to international organizations, among which UNESCO is the most relevant, to legitimize the singularity of their culinary patrimonies by appealing to notions of tradition and heritage. This phenomenon, which will be the focus of analysis of the next paragraph, takes the name of “heritagization”.

The diverse set of practices taken into account in this paragraph, by which governments strategically adopt and reify particular foods into a national cuisine through both domestic and international means, are part of what Michaela DeSoucey defines “gastro-nationalism”, that is, “the use of food production, distribution and consumption to demarcate and sustain the emotive power of national attachment, as well as the use of nationalist sentiments to produce and market food”.⁷⁹ The main focus of this paragraph was to underline the means by which national governments support and instrumentalize the idea of national cuisines in order to foster a sense of national belonging in the population and to increase their national brand abroad. However, despite the structuralist approach adopted, this does not imply that the meanings associated to food are artificially created and imposed on the population by top-down policies, nor that the individual is deprived of all agency in expressing his identity through food. In fact, through the adoption of particular consumption habits and practices individuals have the ability to endorse a different image of the nation than the one usually showcased as well as to oppose it completely.

Since the analysis of these phenomena was beyond the scope of this paragraph it has not been taken into account but the literature in this field is expansive and constantly evolving, in particular regarding the consumption habits of minority groups and the attempts at P2P gastrodiplomacy.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ DeSoucey, M. (2008).

⁷⁹ DeSoucey, M. (2010). “Gastronationalism: Food traditions and authenticity politics in the European Union”, *American Sociological Review*, 75(3), p.433.

⁸⁰ In this field of studies of particular interest are the researches of Rockower, P. (2012), Atsuko, I. & Ranta, R. (2022) and Parasecoli, F. (2022).

1.3 – GASTRODIPLOMACY AND UNESCO: THE PROCESS OF HERITAGIZATION

Culinary patrimony encompasses the traditions, recipes, techniques and cultural practices surrounding food and its preparation. It reflects the collective memory and shared practices of a community, often tied to local ingredients, historical events and regional customs. This patrimony is not only about food itself but also about the rituals, stories and social interactions that accompany it. As observed in the paragraph before, the construction of culinary patrimony relies on notions of historical tradition and continuously preserved authenticity, which are passed down from generation to generation and enacted daily in the social life of the community. Due to the social and identity-making meanings it is capable of conveying, culinary patrimony has often been instrumentalized by political actors at a domestic level to foster a sense of national belonging and of a collective shared identity in the population.

However, a similar process is taking hold recently at an international level under the guise of heritage. When certain elements of food tradition are recognized as fundamental for the social life of a community and for preserving its distinctiveness, they can be “further framed as heritage, which turns them into a useful tool to reinforce a distinction between insiders and outsiders”⁸¹. Beside the complex and varied values they embody, the concepts of heritage and tradition share a conspicuous number of similar traits, even though the existence of the former is based upon the social significance and the cultural relevance of the latter. Being the “outcome of social activities, cultural priorities and political values”⁸², both heritage and tradition undergo a process which imbues them with nuances relating to collective identity and memory. As traditions are passed down from the past to the present in order to signal a historical continuity in the community, so heritage is “a mode of cultural construction in the present that has recourse to the past, following motivations that have to do with current conditions”⁸³. Heritage, then, functions as a social milestone, which anchors and represents the existence of a common past that is kept alive and deeply treasured in the present. In particular, food heritage “has been actively used and promoted to face the anomie and placelessness produced by globalization”⁸⁴, much in the same way that people cling to an idealized traditional past when faced with a changing and uncertain present. As observed in

⁸¹ Parasecoli, F. (2022), p. 76.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ DeSoucey, M. (2008), p. 108.

the process of the invention of tradition beforehand, the process of heritagization too involves a selection and classification operated by social actors or groups that “emphasizes a value that no longer exists”⁸⁵, or is perceived to be in danger of disappearing. However, whereas traditions usually originate in popular practices that are reified and instrumentalized at a second time by political actors in order to achieve specific objectives, heritage always needs “to be upheld by an official institute”⁸⁶ to be considered legitimate and to gain cultural value. It could therefore be depicted as an “institutionalization of tradition” and, as such, its production and construction rest on an interaction between local and/or national actors with cultural organization at a local, regional or international level. Despite being considered a taken-for-granted aspect of the culinary patrimony of the nation, food heritage is nonetheless constructed⁸⁷. Thus, the process of heritagization rests on a “cultural construction of food that tends to invest it with an identity paradigm and a sense of belonging”⁸⁸, a process not very dissimilar from the building of a national cuisine analyzed before.

The process of heritagization consists of two distinct phases. First, food has to be claimed as an exclusive characteristic of a community, circumscribed to a delimited territory and inscribed into seemingly age-old culinary traditions. Subsequently, it has to be labelled as heritage by an official institute, which by its recognition confers it legitimacy in the international realm.⁸⁹

The first part of this process relies on two fundamental spheres, which intersects and sustains each other: the geographical sphere and the sociohistorical sphere.⁹⁰ The geographical sphere entails associating foods with a “geography of agricultural productions and with the physical specificities of that geography”⁹¹, emphasizing the gustatory properties of the selected foods as intrinsically linked to the biological characteristics of the soil and of the environment and delimiting them through a relation of exclusivity with said territory⁹². Thus, a “spatial homogeneity and a singularity in terms of agricultural yield”⁹³ is obtained. This geographical fencing is always accompanied by the inscription of these foods into a sociohistorical matrix. By highlighting the historical continuity “involving the accumulation of expertise and the

⁸⁵ Bessi re, J. (2013). “Heritagization, a challenge for tourism promotion and regional development: An example of food heritage”, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 8(4), p. 278.

⁸⁶ Di Fiore, L. (2020). “Heritage and food history: A critical assessment”, *Food Heritage and Nationalism in Europe*, Taylor & Francis, p.36.

⁸⁷ Parasecoli, F. (2022).

⁸⁸ Di Fiore, L. (2020), p. 35.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Bessi re, J. (2013).

⁹¹ Bessi re, J. (2013), p. 81.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

community ownership of production”⁹⁴ passed down in time, its significance for the social and economic well-being of the community and its symbolic relevance in traditional practices, these foods become cultural markers which convey the feeling of belonging to the same community.

Once this spatial and cultural delimitation is realized, the foods have to be recognized by an external actor in order to be considered legitimate and to be appropriated as exclusive. The more political weight and international relevance the external actor holds, the more valid will the legitimization be, hence generating a considerable increase in economic and cultural capital. These external actors usually take the shape of cultural organizations which operate at a local or regional level, focusing on the production of place-based labels which emphasize the geographical origin of a product⁹⁵. Some examples can be found, at a local level, in the DOC label (Denominazione di Origine Controllata) in Italy or, at a regional level, in the increasing involvement by the European Union in protecting and supporting traditional foods through these place-based labels, such as in the case of PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) or TSG (Tradition Specialty Guaranteed). However, the last thirty years have been increasingly characterized by an overt reliance on international actors for the legitimization of food heritage, as the start of the 21st century has seen a “food heritage fever”, defined by an “upsurge in food-based heritage claims and the emergence of international legal instruments to certify and protect food as an heritage”.⁹⁶

One of the main causes of this phenomenon is to be found in the historical change of perception towards heritage by international organizations, among which UNESCO plays undoubtedly the most prominent role, which has shifted from a Western-centric perspective focused on the preservation of material and immutable monuments to a more comprehensive view that includes also intangible practices susceptible to change in time.⁹⁷ This change was officially sanctioned with the drafting by UNESCO in 2003 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which describes intangible heritage as:

“The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Parasecoli, F. (2017). *Knowing where it comes from: Labelling traditional foods to compete in a global market*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

⁹⁶ Aykan, B. (2016). “The politics of intangible food heritage and food fights in Western Asia”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 22(10), p. 799.

⁹⁷ Nakano, R. & Zhu, Y. (2020). “Heritage as soft power: Japan and China in international politics”, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 26(7), pp. 869-881.

individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity”.⁹⁸

Since the ratification of the Convention, which took place in 2006, a growing number of nation-states have applied for the recognition of their gastronomic practices as World Intangible Heritage. It wasn't until 2010, with the inscription of the “Gastronomic meal of the French” and of the “Traditional Mexican cuisine – ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacan paradigm”, that food heritage was successfully represented in this prestigious list. As of now, more than thirty practices involving foods are represented and protected by the Convention. However, this “food heritage fever” is not just a cultural trend that spontaneously appeared at the start of the 21st century. On the contrary, it is laden with political and economic interests as a World Heritage nomination “serves as an instrument both for internal identity-making and for boosting national credibility and for appealing to the outside world”⁹⁹. Consequently, the recognition of food heritage by UNESCO is an important aspect of any gastrodipomatic campaign and it plays a significant role in increasing soft power resources in many ways, which trickle down into economical and touristic enterprises. One of the many ways in which food heritage and soft power intertwine is through the involvement with UNESCO itself. Due to the political and cultural relevance it enjoys worldwide and to the fact of being officially recognized by the near-totality of nations around the world, UNESCO is exploited as an “international platform to seek global recognition and reputation for national heritage”.¹⁰⁰ For many nation-states, especially for those that possess relatively less political and military weight in the international arena, involvement with UNESCO represents a strategic choice for “demonstrating the kind of values [they] want to uphold”¹⁰¹. In fact, by cooperating with UNESCO and by adhering with the guidelines and the moral code sanctioned by the organization, nation-states capitalize on “its moral and expert authority in the promotion of cultural diversity, human rights and peace-building”¹⁰², thus conveniently

⁹⁸ Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Article 2.

⁹⁹ Nakano, R. & Zhu, Y. (2020). P. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

shaping a positive image of themselves abroad. In this way, heritage is used as a “strategic narrative”¹⁰³ whose aim is to “win sympathy and support from the international audience”¹⁰⁴. The strategic construction of this narrative is further aided by the labelling process taking place inside UNESCO itself. In fact, despite its focus on preserving endangered local “foodways” from the homogenizing effects of globalization, local communities are forbidden from participating in the candidature process at UNESCO. The only actors who are allowed to take part in the process and who can apply for recognition of their heritage are nation-states. In this way, the processes of selection and classification are monopolized by nation-states, which have complete freedom in choosing “what is to be identified as heritage... as well as how to explain, contextualize and present such local foodways”¹⁰⁵. Since nation-states have a monopoly in choosing what heritage is and how it is to be contextualized, they can strategically select only those aspects of their culture which are instrumental in shaping a positive image abroad. Moreover, once recognized as such, food heritage is treated as an exclusive property of nation-states, thus making the successful inscription of a cuisine or of a particular foodstuff into the World Heritage List a way for states to justify its appropriation and a tactic to “delegitimize all claim to it by others”.¹⁰⁶ Since these foods are a symbol of collective identity¹⁰⁷, UNESCO turns into an international arena where “states flaunt their own cultural nationalism in response to globalization”¹⁰⁸. In fact, once a state successfully manages to have its cuisine recognized by UNESCO, it is increasingly perceived in the general public as being an intrinsic and natural element of the cultural background of that nation, a phenomenon greatly exacerbated by the pervasiveness and the polarization of the global media.¹⁰⁹ However, the labelling process of UNESCO is somewhat paradoxical in nature, as it completely erases any contact in the spatial or historical sense, spreading instead the perception of an alleged continuity in time which is historically false.¹¹⁰ This paves the way to vehement disputes between nation-states regarding the ownership of food heritage, which are a stage where political and historical struggles come to the fore, as the quarrel

¹⁰³ Winter, T. (2015). “Heritage diplomacy”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 21(10), pp. 997-1015.

¹⁰⁴ Nakano, R. & Zhu, Y. (2020). P. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Aykan, B. (2016). P. 807.

¹⁰⁶ Di Fiore, L. (2020). P. 43.

¹⁰⁷ DeSoucey, M. (2010).

¹⁰⁸ Di Fiore, L. (2020). P. 43.

¹⁰⁹ Park, R.E.S. (2010). “Duanwu Festival: national heritage and cultural ownership in East Asia”, *Stanford Progressive (Summer)*, pp. 117-224.

¹¹⁰ Di Fiore, L. (2010).

between Armenia and Turkey over the paternity of *keskek* aptly shows.¹¹¹ Thus, despite its mission of favoring cooperation and mutual understanding between nation-states through culture, institutions like UNESCO “end up enhancing the nationalistic case”¹¹². However, the recognition of food heritage does not stem only from mere nationalistic sentiments, but belies a significant array of economic interests and opportunities. The recognition of food as heritage imbues it with a considerable range of economic benefits, which “transform cultural products into distinctive and expensive commodities”¹¹³. By intimately associating food with inalienable elements, such as culture or territory, food heritage becomes increasingly commodified¹¹⁴. Besides being a cultural asset to showcase the cultural relevance and, in some instances, the perceived superiority of a nation in the international realm, food heritage becomes also an economic asset to be monetized by incorporating it “into global tourism industry as part of attempts to stimulate economic development”¹¹⁵. As a result of the blending of its cultural centrality, the attractive power it possesses and the added value of exclusivity granted to it by UNESCO, food heritage becomes increasingly promoted by states as “a must-see symbolic attraction in cultural tours, itineraries and tourist board marketing”. In fact, heritage cuisines “form an essential feature in the branding of tourist venues whose appeal is boosted and sometimes entirely generated by the presence of local gastronomy.”¹¹⁶ By intermixing appeals for national cultural relevancy, strategies for nation-branding through cooperation with international organizations and a vast array of economic and touristic enterprises, food heritage and the process of heritagization to which it is subjected represent a vehicle for accruing soft power in the international arena. However, beyond the surge of nationalistic sentiments that the heritagization of food can generate, the inscription of food into the UNESCO List ends up causing also a commodification of that cuisine.¹¹⁷ In fact, once recognized as heritage by UNESCO and inscribed into touristic circuits, that cuisine undergoes a process of commodification, which involves “tailoring its singular features to the expectations of a global consumer elite”¹¹⁸. In order to capitalize on the increased flux of tourists attracted by the heritage label while, at the same time, emphasizing their traditional traits, local cuisines find themselves walking a fine line between preserving what makes them

¹¹¹ Aykan, B. (2016).

¹¹² Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2015). P. 157.

¹¹³ Aykan, B. (2016). P. 800.

¹¹⁴ Grasseni, C. (2013). “La patrimonializzazione del cibo. Prospettive critiche e convergenze sul campo”, *Voci*, 10, pp. 87-110.

¹¹⁵ Aykan, B. (2016). P. 800.

¹¹⁶ Di Fiore, L. (2020). Pp. 37-38.

¹¹⁷ Grasseni, C. (2013).

¹¹⁸ Di Fiore, L. (2013).

special and trying to satisfy the expectations and tastes of a completely new foreign audience. This brings about the formation of “haute traditional cuisines”, which attempt to link local elements typical of the culinary patrimony of the territory and “cosmopolitan” traits aimed at appealing to an heterogeneous foreign audience¹¹⁹. The juxtaposition of these two elements ends up, on the one hand, standardizing and reifying complex and symbolically rich cuisines into a few staple recipes and, on the other hand, it inscribes them into new circuits of re-signification, where they are deprived of their local significance and increasingly seen as a global commodity¹²⁰. Thus, haute traditional cuisines end up highlighting the national points in common although the communities and social groups involved in its preparation are mainly local. Then, the community who presumably enjoys the UNESCO nomination and is supposed to be protected by it is partially, if not completely, erased and is increasingly absorbed into the national orbit, with the active involvement of national Tourist and Culture Ministries.¹²¹

A case in point is represented by the impact that the inscription of the “Traditional Mexican cuisine” into the UNESCO convention elicited on the indigenous communities. Despite being mentioned only passingly in its title, the file forwarded to UNESCO presents foods practices typical of the region of Michoacan, home to the Purepecha indigenous community. In the file Michoacan culinary practices are linked to agricultural techniques dating back to pre-Colombian times, to the deliciousness of ingredients produced locally and to the expertise and the traditional recipes passed down in time by indigenous women. However, once recognized as World Heritage, the Michoacan local cuisine was represented as the standard cuisine of the whole of Mexico, sanctioning its absorption into the national matrix. Moreover, the emphasis on indigenous expertise and know-how and on the gendered division of labour in which indigenous women had the most prominent role was discarded in favor of male chefs trained in French cuisine and world-renowned restaurants.¹²² It is a striking example of how the inscription of localized foodways into heritage lists is used by nation-states as a means of increasing tourism and economic revenues and of how they appropriate local practices in order to improve their international standing. These elements are not circumscribed to the case of Mexican cuisine alone but they are an integral part of the process of heritagization

¹¹⁹ Sammells, C.A. (2016). “Haute traditional cuisines : How UNESCO’s list of intangible heritage links the cosmopolitan to the local”, *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*, Routledge, pp. 141-158.

¹²⁰ Wilks, R. (1995). “Learning to be a local in Belize. Global systems of common difference”, *Worlds Apart*, Routledge, New York, pp. 110-133.

¹²¹ Di Fiore, L. (2020).

¹²² Sammells, A.C. (2016).

taking place inside nation-states in cooperation with the guidelines expounded by UNESCO, which involuntarily play a substantial role in legitimizing the gastrodiplomatic campaigns undertaken by nation-states.

CHAPTER II – JAPANESE NATIONAL CUISINE

2.1 – THE HOMOGENIZATION AND WESTERNIZATION OF JAPANESE CUISINE: FROM THE MEIJI ERA (1868-1912) TO THE TAISHO ERA (1912-1926)

After its inscription into the list of World Intangible Heritages by UNESCO in 2013, *washoku* has entered the mainstream culinary vocabulary and has rose to fame thanks to the ubiquitous spread and the increasing popularity that Japanese cuisine has enjoyed worldwide in the last thirty years. The popular take on *washoku*, as sponsored by the Japanese government and as legitimized by the UNESCO approval, is that of a centuries-old culinary tradition passed down from generation to generation and intrinsically linked to the cultural life of Japan.

However, the culinary category of *washoku* exhibits a duality of meaning.

On the one hand, according to the definition given to it in the final nomination form for appliance at UNESCO:

“*Washoku* is a social practice based on a set of skills, knowledge, practice and traditions related to the production, processing, preparation and consumption of food. It is associated with an essential spirit of respect for nature that is closely related to the sustainable use of natural resources. The basic knowledge and the social and cultural characteristics associated with *Washoku* are typically seen during New Year celebrations.... The basic knowledge and skills related to *Washoku*, such as the proper seasoning of home cooking, are passed down in the home at shared mealtimes. Grassroots groups, schoolteachers and cooking instructors also play a role in transmitting the knowledge and skills by means of formal and non-formal education or through practice”.¹²³

Moreover, the definition of MAFF highlights the centrality of *washoku* in the daily eating practices of the Japanese population and its importance in the domestic sphere of life. It implies a diffuse homogeneity of eating practices among the population and equals *washoku* to the “national cuisine” of Japan.

¹²³ UNESCO (2014). “*Washoku*, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year”, available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/washoku-traditional-dietary-cultures-of-the-japanese-notably-for-the-celebration-of-new-year-00869>.

On the other hand, “some definitions of *washoku* attempt to establish a more exclusive definition of Japanese cuisine”¹²⁴, linking it historically to the development of the refined *kaiseki* cuisine, popularized by the tea master Sen no Rikyu in the 16th century, and highlighting the intrinsic Japaneseness of the cuisine, devoid of any foreign influence. The main characteristic associated to this categorization of *washoku* are a focus on fresh and locally-produced ingredients, an emphasis on seasonality and the harmonious balance between the flavors, colors and textures both of the dishes served and of the environment they are served in. Despite the opposing connotations that they assume, both categorizations of *washoku* share a similar trait: their construction is a recent phenomenon, which dates back to a period that stretches from the start of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to the period preceding the outbreak of the Second World War in the 1930s. The coinage of the term itself took place amid the increased Westernization and the revolutionary political and social reforms of the Meiji era and was born out of the necessity to differentiate typical Japanese cuisine from the increasingly popular Western one, *yoshoku*. The modern creation of the category of *washoku* originated, then, as a nationalistic response to the influence of a powerful Other, specifically against the influence that Western customs were eliciting on the Japanese society in the Meiji period¹²⁵. In fact, up until the start of the Meiji period, Japanese cuisine had developed out of a thousand-year-old process of merging the Chinese and Korean culinary influences, that landed on Japanese shores through the routes of trade and political expeditions, with the indigenous alimentary practices of the Japanese population.

As food historian Naomichi Ishige summarizes:

“Until the 10th century, Japan borrowed foods and eating habits from China and Korea and concentrated on imitating them. Then, during the next few centuries, the foreign influences were assimilated and reorganized according to the preferences and native customs of Japanese to form the national diet and cuisine of Japan that have been handed down to the present. They did not adopt it in a wholesale fashion but rather were able to pick and choose among the constituent elements of the civilization according to their own preferences”.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Assmann, S. (2015). “The remaking of a national cuisine: The food education campaign in Japan”, *The globalization of Asian cuisines: Transnational networks and culinary contact zones*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, p. 171.

¹²⁵ Good, B. (2011). “The Taisho pattern: How beef became an integral piece of Japanese cuisine”, *Indiana Food Review*, 1(1).

¹²⁶ Ishige, N. (2014). *History of Japanese Food*. Routledge, p. 47.

Throughout the centuries numerous culinary practices have been introduced in Japan by way of China, initially adopted and imitated by the royal classes and, with the passing of time, hybridized and incorporated into Japanese culture until they became a unique cuisine in itself. Among the main foreign imports it is worth mentioning the arrival of tea in the 9th century, the adoption of wheat-based foods such as noodles and *udon* and the introduction of *miso* and soy sauce as seasonings. As such, under the isolationist policy mandated by the Tokugawa shogunate, Japanese cuisine was relatively free from the influence of Western culinary practices, with some notable exceptions like the development of *tempura* following the encounter with Portuguese missionaries¹²⁷ along with the introduction of spices such as pepper, which laid the basis for the development of “*nanban ryori*”. This process of assimilation and hybridization would be repeated in Japanese culinary history in other two different historical periods: at the beginning of the 20th century in regards to the adoption of Western culinary influences and in the post-World War II period under the influence of the American occupation¹²⁸.

In the burgeoning culinary scene of 18th century-Japan, Edo “had a higher density of restaurants than any other city in the world¹²⁹” at the time, with dining establishments ranging from high-end *izakaya* to cheap eateries and food stalls in the corners of the streets, and the abundance and variety of Japanese cuisine was remarkable. However, there was a wide gap between the eating habits of the urban population residing in the main cities of Kyoto, Edo and Osaka and the rural population, a gap that has disappeared only at the start of the 1960s. Whereas the former were able to partake in the vibrant culinary scene of the time, the latter subsisted on a much more austere and monotonous diet, which consisted of a combination of barley or millet, locally-grown leaves and vegetables, pickled vegetables (*tsukemono*) and the occasional fish side-dish.¹³⁰ The now taken-for-granted centrality of rice was mainly present in the diet of the more affluent urban classes but was almost completely absent among the rural population, who relied on barley and millet as their main staple foods.¹³¹ However, from the 1860s onwards the consumption habits of the Japanese population gradually started to change.

By the end of the 19th century the Chinese cultural matrix around which Japan had gravitated for most of his history had been replaced by the Western one, which was seen as

¹²⁷ Ishige, N. (2014).

¹²⁸ Good, B. (2011).

¹²⁹ Ishige, N. (2014), p. 107.

¹³⁰ Ishige, N. (2014).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

the embodiment of modernity and progress as opposed to the weakness and obsolescence associated to the rest of the Asian continent.¹³² The encounter with the Western powers, marked in history by the arrival of the “black ships” captained by Commodore Perry in 1853 and by the signing of the Unequal Treaties in 1858, forced Japan to undergo a series of political, military and social reforms that had as their ultimate goal the thorough modernization of the nation under the Western model, in order not to succumb to the same fate of its Asian counterparts. The new reliance on the Western cultural matrix and the modernizing mission undertaken under the guidance of the Meiji leadership brought about numerous significant changes in the culinary practices and eating habits of the Japanese population. The arrival of foreign Western dignitaries and merchants in the wake of the opening of new trade routes brought in new ingredients, recipes and cooking techniques which, charged with the symbolic value and the social status deriving from their association with the perceived superiority of the Western image, were instrumentalized by the Meiji leadership in a bid to facilitate both their adoption by the population and as a symbolic marker that heralded the beginning of a new era of progress. At the same time, the intertwining processes of intense industrialization, urbanization and militarization coupled with the reliance on the European corpus of medical knowledge caused a major shift in the eating habits of the Japanese population, leading to a homogenization of taste and alimentary practices unprecedented until then.¹³³ While some aspects of this process were the unintentional consequences of the changes taking place in Japan at the time, most of them were the result of deliberate policies undertaken by the Meiji elites aimed at controlling and standardizing the consumption habits of the population with the ultimate goals of achieving a rapid Westernization and of speeding up the process of nation-state formation.

In its initial stages, Western-style food was adopted as a deliberate mean of culinary diplomacy, as the adoption of Western foods and etiquette was part of the mission of modernization undertaken in that period. Lavish French and Anglo-Saxon cuisine dishes were employed in formal diplomatic occasions as a mean to “impress foreign dignitaries with Japan’s ability to succeed in imitating Western’s conventions”¹³⁴ and as a way to accommodate the tastes of the new foreign intermediaries. Simultaneously, the adoption of Western-style banquets represented a strategic vehicle to “strengthen the authority of the new

¹³² Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006), p. 15.

political leadership in the domestic arena”¹³⁵, by exploiting the cultural conformity with the modernity and prestige of the Western image in order to legitimize the political standing of the Meiji elites.¹³⁶ Consequently, in the beginning Western cuisine was consumed mainly on the tables of important and influential political figures, a factor that helped coating it with an aura of social prestige and sophistication¹³⁷. The association with the political elites, the social values ascribed to them and the novelty of the foods itself sparked great interest and curiosity among the population and played a significant role in popularizing it among the common masses¹³⁸. However, its adoption by the common population was slowed down by the persistent taboo attached to meat consumption. In fact, up until then meat was scarcely present in the Japanese diet and its consumption was surrounded by a negative connotation, the result of a series of imperial edicts dating back to the 7th century and recurrently enforced throughout the centuries, which stemmed partially out of a need to preserve cattle for agricultural purposes and partially out of the influence of the Buddhist religious precepts¹³⁹. Consequently, for more than twelve centuries meat was a rare sight on the tables of Japanese people, if not completely absent in the case of peasants, and its consumption was limited to game meat. However, influenced by the scientific and medical knowledge introduced by the Europeans and impressed by the physical prowess of Westerners, the Meiji leadership regarded meat as a necessary element to step into the “modern” world. Thus, meat consumption was actively incentivized by the political elites both as a practical way to bolster the physique of the Japanese population and as a symbolic message to announce Japan’s entrance into modernity.¹⁴⁰ By this token, in 1872 it was announced that the diet of the Emperor himself incorporated meat on a regular basis¹⁴¹. This had a two-fold objective: on the one hand, it helped to erase the centuries-old stigma surrounding meat consumption, in order to ease its acceptance among the population; on the other hand, by publicly announcing that he was eating meat, the Emperor became the embodiment of the “modern ruler” who would have guided Japan into a new era of development¹⁴².

As Bradley Good states:

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ishige, N. (2014).

¹⁴⁰ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

¹⁴¹ Ishige, N. (2014).

¹⁴² Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

“the Emperor used his popularity among the people as well as his symbolic importance in order to promote acceptance of these new policies. By adopting a diet that included beef, the Emperor was encouraging overall Westernization.”¹⁴³

Then, from the 1870s on, cheap Western-style eateries, called *yoshokuya*, started to spread all around Japan, initially clustering around the treaty ports where the presence of the Western communities was more pronounced and subsequently establishing themselves in the main urban centers. While in the beginning the *yoshokuya*'s clientele consisted mainly of Westerners in search of a familiar taste of home, the public sponsorship of the Emperor contributed in increasing *yoshoku*'s appeal among the middle classes.¹⁴⁴ Despite the culinary hegemony that French cuisine enjoyed in the realm of culinary diplomacy in the 19th century, the cuisine served in *yoshokuya* tended to be of Anglo-Saxon origins. This was due to a series of economic and social factors: on the one hand, it mirrored the pervasive presence and influence of the English and American communities in the treaty ports and in the political life of Meiji Japan; on the other hand, unlike the refined and expensive French cuisine, it relied on a set of much cheaper ingredients and involved cooking techniques that were easier to learn and reproduce.¹⁴⁵ While in the beginning *yoshokuya* accurately imitated Anglo-Saxon cuisine in order to cater to the tastes of its foreign customers, the arrival of a more heterogeneous clientele engendered a hybridization between the original Anglo-Saxon recipes and the native Japanese cuisine, out of the need to make these new dishes “appear and taste less foreign”¹⁴⁶ to Japanese palates. Out of this process of hybridization have arisen characteristics that are still salient in the contemporary Japanese culinary scene: popular dishes of Anglo-Saxon origin were singled out and accompanied by a bowl of Japanese-style boiled rice, a bowl of soup and a portion of *tsukemono*, thus replicating the *ichijuu sansai* (“one soup, three dishes”) pattern typical of Japanese cuisine and inscribing these dishes into it; the pan-frying technique of the original recipes was replaced by deep-frying, already commonly practiced in Japan and more in tune with the tastes of the population; Worcestershire sauce functioned as the Western equivalent of soy sauce and was disproportionately used as seasoning in most recipes¹⁴⁷, becoming in the process so engraved in popular taste to still be nowadays the go-to seasoning for popular fried dishes such as *tonkotsu* and *okonomiyaki*.

Through these changes

¹⁴³ Good, B. (2011), p.2.

¹⁴⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006), p. 49.

¹⁴⁷ Ishige, N. (2014).

“a given dish was removed from the context of the dietary culture of its native country, and eventually took root as an everyday food in Japan by taking place in the Japanized foreign lexicon that is the context of Japanese dietary culture”¹⁴⁸.

Dishes such as roast chicken, beefsteak, croquettes, beef stew and curry underwent a process that rendered them more familiar to the Japanese population, making their incorporation into Japanese eating habits easier and speeding up the Westernization of Japanese society¹⁴⁹. As a result, popular dishes such as *korokke*, *sukiyaki*, *kare raisu* and *gyudon* entered into the culinary lexicon of Japan and became an exotic alternative to the typical Japanese diet. *Gyudon* in particular represents a perfect example of this hybridization process. Whereas beefsteak would involve the use of fork, knife and plate to be eaten, “putting rice with thin slices of soy-seasoned beef steak incorporated a foreign ingredient with the staple food of Japan while allowing for the use of chopsticks, making it very accessible for most¹⁵⁰”. By this way, *yoshokuya* bred “domesticated versions of selected dishes served with rice”¹⁵¹, which began to be “perceived as a category within Japanese cuisine”¹⁵². However, despite its popularity and the hybridized form it was gradually assuming, *yoshoku* was still mantled by an aura of foreignness and was regarded as a distinct cuisine in itself. It wasn’t until the start of the Taisho era, when the processes of industrialization and urbanization were already well under way, that *yoshoku* “lost its association with the West and came to represent the new, urban gastronomy of modern Japan with a strong, multicultural character”.¹⁵³

On the one hand, the intermixing of the processes of industrialization and urbanization allowed for an increased availability and affordability of previously rare and expensive ingredients, which gradually made their way inside the homes of the Japanese population. These processes greatly influenced both the agricultural and the industrial sector. In fact, while traditional Japanese cuisine encompassed the use of a wide variety of vegetables, such as different types of radishes, gourds and tubers, the vegetables necessary for the preparation of *yoshoku* were completely absent on Japan’s soil and had to be imported¹⁵⁴. However, attracted by the new economic possibilities afforded by the popularity of *yoshoku*, peasants

¹⁴⁸ Ishige, N. (2014). p. 159.

¹⁴⁹ Cwierka, K.J. (2006).

¹⁵⁰ Good, B. (2011). P. 5.

¹⁵¹ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p. 49.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). P. 54.

¹⁵⁴ Ishige, N. (2014).

started to diversify their crops in order to fulfill the growing demand for new vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, potatoes and carrots¹⁵⁵. Concurrently, the development of a national railway system which connected the main city hubs allowed for the quick transport of these vegetables, which started to become commonly used in daily life. At the industrial level, the reliance on more machinery-intensive systems of production, the development of new sectors in the food infrastructure, such as the canning industry, and the centralization of industries under big conglomerates (*zaibatsu*) further reduced the prices of food, increasing their appeal among the urban population.¹⁵⁶

On the other hand, the increasing industrialization and the monopolistic might of *zaibatsu* engendered a standardization of taste among the Japanese population, both at the industrial level and in the restaurant scene.

A case in point is represented by the production of soy sauce in the Taisho era.

Owing to the rapid urbanization and the rising standards of living of the middle classes, soy sauce went from being considered a luxury item to become the main seasoning of Japanese cuisine. In large part this was possible thanks to the modernization of the production process, which allowed to produce large quantities of soy sauce for cheaper prices, eschewing most of the manual labor previously needed. However, since industries started to rely more and more on chemical knowledge, bypassing the local know-how of artisanal producers, the taste of soy sauce became increasingly standardized. This was exacerbated by the monopoly that *zaibatsu* had on the market, in this case by the Kikkoman industry in particular, that effectively brought artisanal producers out of business and left consumers to rely on their brands alone.¹⁵⁷ *Zaibatsu* had a fundamental role in easing the incorporation of Western culinary practices into the daily life of the Japanese people. In fact, at the start of the Taisho era (1912-1926), independently owned and managed *yoshokuya* were increasingly replaced by cafeterias and dining establishments located inside big department stores, all managed and financially backed by the *zaibatsu* themselves.¹⁵⁸ The cafeterias' menus offered the now hybridized versions of *yoshoku* dishes side by side with typical Japanese fare, effectively blurring the distinction between the two, in the process casting aside the connotation of foreignness associated to *yoshoku*.¹⁵⁹ These cafeterias became part of the developing urban gastronomy of the time, catering both to the affluent middle classes and to workers looking for a cheap and

¹⁵⁵ Cwierka, K.J. (2006).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Good, B. (2011).

quick meal, and contributed to the rapid absorption of Western culinary practices. As such, they “gradually replaced independent *yoshokuya* as the main vehicles for shifting meanings and values ascribed to Western food”.¹⁶⁰ Then, the rapid Westernization of alimentary practices of the Japanese population was sparked by the instrumentalization of the symbolic capital ascribed to Western food and was part and parcel of the Westernization enterprise undertaken by the Meiji leadership.

The Meiji government, however, had a more direct role in the homogenization of the consumption practices of its population through the reliance on a corpus of medical and nutritional knowledge introduced by Europeans in the 1850s and through the enforcement of these notions by the establishment of specialized institutions. “The Hygiene Experiment Stations, set up in the 1870s by the Home Ministry, marked the first step in creating an institutional basis for the dissemination of nutritional knowledge in Japan”¹⁶¹ and progressively started to have an influence on the military and social spheres. However, “before the 1920s military rather than civilian institutions played a leading role in matters related to nutritional science in Japan”¹⁶², since “they were directly confronted with the consequences of malnutrition”¹⁶³. It was after the disastrous epidemics of *beri-beri*, a deathly disease caused by a deficiency of vitamin B1, that decimated the Japanese Navy during the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) that the Central Provisions Depot was established in 1897, whose main function was to “conduct research and coordinate production and distribution of military rations and catering equipment”¹⁶⁴. While the Central Provisions Depot was an independent military institution appointed with the management of the eating routines of the Army and Navy personnel, it nonetheless closely cooperated with the Hygiene Experiment Stations, on which it relied for updates on nutritional knowledge and for the assortment of military rations. Since it was suggested that the introduction of meat into the military diet regime would help to prevent the outbreak of *beri-beri*, due to the variety of vitamins that complemented the large consumption of white rice, and it was thought to be a viable solution to bolster the physical capacities of the soldiers, *yoshoku* was gradually introduced into the rations alongside the customary course of rice, soup and *tsukemono*.¹⁶⁵ Besides its usefulness in preventing *beri-beri*, the introduction of Western dishes represented a cheap and effective

¹⁶⁰ Cwiertka, K.J. (2016). p. 54.

¹⁶¹ Hagiwara, H. (1960). “Nihon eiyo gaku shi”, *Kokumin Eiyo Kyokai*, Tokyo, pp. 279-280, as quoted in Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 120.

¹⁶² Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 120.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 70.

¹⁶⁵ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

way of reaching the right amount of calorie intake for a soldier, as dictated by the nutritional tables drafted by the Hygiene Experiment Stations, thanks to their reliance on calorie-heavy ingredients such as meat and lard. Moreover, the reliance on deep-frying and the omnipresence of curry powder helped in diversifying the previously bland and monotonous rationing regime and made low-quality foods more palatable.¹⁶⁶

Then, under the stewardship of the Central Provisions Depot, rations became increasingly standardized for all conscripts, right up to the individual amounts of calories, proteins and fats and the “central authorities determined in detail the kinds and amounts of food that each sailor was to consume regardless of location”.¹⁶⁷ The development of this new rationing system, coupled with the universal conscription introduced in 1872, exposed cadets hailing from all over Japan to a predetermined and standardized diet. This had a two-fold effect on the consumption habits of the Japanese population.

First, since the rationing system took as its basis the *ichijuu sansai* pattern, in which a side-dish was always served with a bowl of white rice, a bowl of soup and a portion of *tsukemono*, “military menus reinforced the nationwide spread of the ideal of rice as the centerpiece around which a meal is constructed”¹⁶⁸, while at the same time normalizing the use of *yoshoku* as side-dishes. Conscripts got used to an alimentary regime centered around a large consumption of rice, soy sauce and meat which was completely different than the average diet of a common Japanese citizen. Upon their return home they reproduced the same dishes in the domestic arena, effectively bridging the consumption gap between the countryside and the urban population.¹⁶⁹ Secondly, the influence of the military apparatus did not stop at the Army and Navy personnel but had repercussions at the civilian level as well. The rationing system and the army kitchen organization were taken up as the ideal example for nutritional programs and were implemented in schools, factories and hospitals canteens, which relied on the same menus of the military and employed cooks that were previously part of the military kitchen’s staff¹⁷⁰.

The influence of the Hygiene Experiment Stations expanded to the social sphere of life under the social reforms undertaken by the Meiji leadership. The rapid Westernization of society brought about a series of changes at the level of the familial unit which transitioned from the extended family typical of the Tokugawa period to the conjugal unit, considered as the norm

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p. 72.

¹⁶⁸ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p. 84.

¹⁶⁹ Cwierka, K.J. (2006).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

in Western societies¹⁷¹. The Meiji government, using the slogan “*ryosai kenbo*” (“good wife, wise mother”), promoted a series of social reforms that led to a genderization of society, in which men took up the role of the family’s breadwinner while women were assigned the role of “*shufu*” (housewives), whose main responsibilities laid in looking after the well-being of the family and in managing the domestic matters of the house¹⁷². At the culinary level, the family meal was “elevated into a cult of family performance and the glorification of cooking as the epitome of housewifery”¹⁷³ and it started to represent both an occasion which brought all the family together and a moment of relaxation for the male head of the family. So, while in the Tokugawa period meals were spatially and temporally segregated according to hierarchical and gendered notions and were eaten on portable individual trays (*zen*)¹⁷⁴, now meals had to be eaten collectively by the whole family in the same place. Individual trays were then replaced by big, round tables (*chabudai*) around which the family could gather¹⁷⁵ and the meal schedule was synchronized around the working timetables of the male breadwinner. Following the recommendations of the “*ryosai kenbo*” slogan, housewives were charged with providing and preparing food for the rest of the family, guaranteeing a considerable amount of variety in the family’s diet and abiding by the nutritional values propagated by the Hygiene Experiment Stations¹⁷⁶. The implementation of these social reforms at the culinary level was helped by the introduction in 1881 of the mandatory subject of “*kaji keizai*” (Home Economics) at the higher level of girls’ schools, which comprised curricula tailored to educate professional housewives in a vast array of notions regarding the management of the domestic place, including culinary education. The topics ranged from the theoretical education in the preparation of a varied and balanced assortment of dishes to the learning of the basics of Western nutritional science.¹⁷⁷ These educational reforms were compounded by the widespread diffusion of cookbooks, cooking journals, magazines and nutritional pamphlets edited by the Hygiene Experiment Stations which displayed easy-to-prepare and nutritionally balanced recipes that soon became common in the daily diet¹⁷⁸. As the influential scholar Katarzyna Cwiertka, around whose work most of this paragraph revolves, aptly states: “cookbooks and periodical mass media provided a steady stream of

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Cwiertka, K.J. (2016). p. 88.

¹⁷⁴ Ishige, N. (2014).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Cwiertka, K.J. (2016).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

information and recipes that engraved the new ideal of home cooking in the minds of the readers”¹⁷⁹. From the 1920s onwards the influence of nutritional science became even more prominent in the daily life of the Japanese population, as food historian Ishige Naomichi states:

“Cooking classes were frequently offered by women’s club, girls’ schools, newspaper companies and other institutions. Cooking programs were aired on the radio and a daily “economical and nutritional menus” prepared by the government’s nutrition institute appeared in major newspapers”¹⁸⁰.

Through the culinary education institutionalized in schools and the constant exposure to images and recipes reproduced in cookbooks and magazines “foreign elements were carefully selected and accommodated to the taste preferences of an average middle-class family¹⁸¹”, contributing to the creolization of Japanese eating practices.

The induced Westernization of society and the reliance on European notions of nutritional sciences propagated in the military and civilian spheres by government-backed medical institutions throughout the Meiji period, compounded by the modernization of the industrial sector and increased standards of living among the urban population, laid the seeds for the homogenization of eating habits of the Japanese population. It was only at the start of the 1960s, following the experiences of wartime rationing, of the American occupation and the economic recovery, that the policies undertaken years before bore their fruits, leading to the levelling of the gap between the urban and rural population and to the complete hybridization of Japanese cuisine. It was against this backdrop of pervasive Westernization, increasing homogenization of eating habits and “the nation-state’s aim of attaining a modern Japanese image by incorporating Western cuisine¹⁸²” that the concept of *washoku* was born. Initially, it served to differentiate the native culinary practices of the Japanese culture from the culinary influences introduced by Western cuisine¹⁸³ and, as such, it was devoid of the characteristics that we associate to Japanese cuisine nowadays. With the creolization of Japanese foodways at the start of the 19th century *washoku* started to include more and more hybridized versions of Western dishes, mirroring the consumption practices of the Japanese population. Then, the period that stretches from the start of the Meiji Revolution until the years preceding the outbreak of the second World War represents a defining chapter in the

¹⁷⁹ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p. 99.

¹⁸⁰ Ishige, N. (2014). P. 159

¹⁸¹ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p. 101.

¹⁸² Omori, I. (2017). p. 729.

¹⁸³ Good, B. (2011).

culinary history of Japan. It was in this period that the common diet of the Japanese people, which took in numerous Western influences along the already present Chinese ones, spread to the urban social strata of the population and introduced new ingredients that are now considered common place.

2.2 – THE BEGINNING OF THE SHOWA ERA AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR (1931-1945)

The process of Westernization of society, the aggressive militarization and the social reforms undertaken under the guidance of the Meiji leadership coupled with the intertwining processes of industrialization and urbanization that took place in the Taisho era brought a series of significant changes in the eating practices of the population, as described in the previous paragraph. While these phenomena laid the ground for the construction of the modern category of Japanese cuisine, there was still a substantial gap in consumption habits between the urban dwellers and the rural population, whose diet was not very dissimilar from the pre-Meiji period.

At the start of the Showa era, particularly in the years when the imperialist expansion into Asia was at its apex, an interest in conceptualizing a distinctively Japanese cuisine started to arise. In the wake of a rise of neo-nationalist sentiments, a spread of theories of Japanese exceptionalism and a sense of superiority towards the rest of Asia elicited by the successful imperial enterprise, an “interest in a distinct Japanese-like cuisine”¹⁸⁴ started to permeate Japanese society. If at the beginning of the Meiji period Japan was desperately attempting to modernize its society out of a sense of inferiority towards the powerful Western nations, the 1930s saw a newfound sense of nationalism took hold of society, derived from the successful modernization and the increased standing Japan was enjoying in the international realm. As a result, the fascination with Western culture started to be downplayed in favor of a rediscovery of authentic Japanese culture.¹⁸⁵

At a culinary level, this renewed interest branched in two diverging paths.

On the one hand, there was the re-evaluation of *kaiseki* cuisine, a style of cooking invented by Sen no Rikyu in the 16th century, that accompanied the ceremonial serving of tea and

¹⁸⁴ Omori, I. (2017). “The redefinition of Washoku as national cuisine: Food politics and national identity in Japan”, *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 7(12), p. 729.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

emphasized the simplicity of food and their aesthetically pleasing presentation. In the 1930s *kaiseki* cuisine “underwent a revival through the effort of Kitaoji Rosanjin (1883-1959) and Yuki Teiichi (1901-1997)”¹⁸⁶ and inscribed itself as the epitome of Japanese culinary finesse. In particular Rosanjin is credited to be the first to serve *kaiseki* in its now commonplace multi-course format and he stressed the importance of tableware and of the surrounding environment as a fundamental part of the dining experience¹⁸⁷. So pronounced were his aesthetic sensibilities and so intense his commitment in highlighting the depth and finesse of Japanese cuisine that, in his first restaurant Hoshigaoka in Tokyo, he put in place a system of transportation that allowed him to have the freshest ingredients available at his disposal at all times and he personally crafted the ceramic tableware on which the dishes were served¹⁸⁸. At Hoshigaoka, Rosanjin offered “Japanese cuisine as a comprehensive artistic experience ... serving seasonal meals with the spirit of the tea ceremony”¹⁸⁹. The scholar Nancy K. Stalker states that:

“Rosanjin’s conception of *washoku*, emphasizing beauty and pristine freshness, diverged from the everyday habits of most of his countrymen, but resonated with emerging stereotypes of the Japanese, held both domestically and internationally, as a nation both highly aestheticized and close to nature”.¹⁹⁰

His influence and his pioneering contributions to the establishment of the modern high-class canon of *washoku* were recognized at the Japan Pavillion exhibited at the food-themed Milan Expo of 2015 which featured “the works and words of Rosanjin in numerous exhibitions throughout the hall.”¹⁹¹

On the other hand, the 1930s saw a resurgence in academic interest regarding the traditional foodways of rural Japan, as epitomized by the works of the influential ethnologist Yanagita Kunio. From the early 1930s Yanagita “undertook research on food folklore, spurring other scholars to consider ways in which food could illuminate religious and social dimensions of popular life.”¹⁹² With Yanagita at its helm and as its main influence, in 1935 the Popular Traditions Association was established and enrolled a consistent number of distinct

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Stalker, N.K. (2018). “Rosanjin: The roots of Japanese gourmet nationalism”, *Devouring Japan: Global Perspectives on Japanese Culinary Identity*, Oxford University Press, pp. 133-149.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Stalker, N.K. (2018). pp. 141-142.

¹⁹⁰ Stalker, N.K. (2018). p. 146.

¹⁹¹ Stalker, N.K. (2018). p.135.

¹⁹² Rath, E.C. (2016). *Japan’s cuisines: Food, place and identity*, Reaktion Books, p. 148.

ethnologists who led the way for the research on traditional foodways in the most remote and rural areas of Japan.¹⁹³ This wave of culinary interest toward a more authentic vision of Japanese cuisine was cut short by the dire food shortages and by the “militarization of nutrition¹⁹⁴” that followed the entrance of Japan into the second global conflict.

As Eric Rath lists:

“Limitations on polishing rice and price controls on brown rice began in 1938 with the enactment of the National General Mobilization Law. By the end of 1939 department stores substituted barley for rice in their meals; restaurants replaced actual displays of food with photographs to attract customers and price controls were instituted on the core ingredients to make Japanese recipes: *miso*, soy sauce, salt and fresh fish, and matches to light the cooking fire.”¹⁹⁵

The rationing of essential foodstuffs only worsened in the subsequent years, as the majority of food supplies were allocated to the soldiers deployed on the war fronts, and limitations on sugar, charcoal, firewood, and sweets were actively put in place. As the variety and availability of foods steadily declined and the daily diet of the population grew poorer and poorer, the slogan “Luxury is the enemy” became the de-facto motto of the culinary environment of the time, encouraging the common citizens to subsist on a strict and austere diet to support the military effort and eliciting an identification with the harsh conditions that soldiers were experiencing on the battlefields.¹⁹⁶ In this light the government institutionalized wartime initiatives that instilled in the population the ideal of a common sacrifice to triumph in the war. Among such initiatives there were the adoption of the Hinomaru Bento in schools, a *bento* box consisting of only white rice and a single plum at its center which resembled Japan’s national flag and soon “rose to the symbol of wartime mobilization and national unity”¹⁹⁷, or the enactment of the Meatless Day, which prohibited meat consumption on specific days of the month.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the enactment of the National General Mobilization Law coupled with the establishment of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA), a totalitarian political party shaped on the image of the Nazi one that had complete control over all facets of Japanese civilian society, “facilitated the successful implementation of far-

¹⁹³ Rath, E.C. (2016).

¹⁹⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). P. 148.

¹⁹⁵ Rath, E.C. (2016). P. 138.

¹⁹⁶ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

¹⁹⁷ Kosuge, K. (1997). *Kindai Nihon shokubunka nenpyo*, Yuzankaku, Tokyo, p. 169 as quoted in Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). P. 118.

reaching reforms that aimed at cost-effective production of food and efficient distribution”.¹⁹⁹ In fact, despite the extreme rationing of foodstuffs that took place in the war years, the IRAA kept relying on an authoritative body of knowledge, attaining both from the field of nutritional sciences and ethnology, that led to “wide-ranging efforts to disseminate scientifically grounded principles of efficient nourishment among the population”.²⁰⁰ The instrumentalization of this corpus of knowledge by the regime represented the basis over which the project of creating a national people’s cuisine (*kokuminshoku*) was established, a project that involved

“the enlisting of nutritionists, ethnologists, teachers of home economics and other experts to create a cuisine that would inculcate a common identity in wartime, make the best use of diminishing food resources and ensure the health of the population on the home front”²⁰¹.

The researches and studies carried out by the Popular Traditions Association in the 1930s proved to be particularly useful for the purpose of creating a national people’s cuisine, since they traced back an historical continuity with the traditional eating habits of Japan and at the same time relied on the local know-how of isolated and rural communities to make the most out of every food available. Then, in 1941 a branch of the IRAA tasked with the management of the well-being of the civilian population, the Department for the Direction of National Lifestyle, enlisted the Popular Traditions Association to conduct research on the traditional foodways of Japan, since they could have proven useful for the establishment of the national people’s cuisine.²⁰² While the ethnologists’ objective was to operate an historical reconstruction of the dietary habits of remote communities that could shed light on religious and cultural rituals on the verge of being forgotten, the IRAA was more interested in finding among the eating practices of these communities “substitute foods” that could replace the dwindling resources of rice and essential ingredients.²⁰³ In fact, to keep up the civilians’ morale, the IRAA

“rather than define a cuisine for the home front in negative terms by listing what was to be eliminated and reduced, portrayals of national people’s cuisine appealed to abstract sensibilities such

¹⁹⁹ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). P. 117.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Rath, E.C. (2016). P. 136.

²⁰² Rath, E.C. (2016).

²⁰³ Ibid.

as the importance of seasonality, celebratory and local foods and nutrition, which are more reminiscent of a cuisine than of a system of rationing.”²⁰⁴

As such, the IRAA incorporated the findings of this research into the urgent attempt to create a scientifically grounded and nutritionally balanced diet that could withstand the increasing scarcity of ingredients while, at the same time, relying on centuries-old indigenous practices that used every available foodstuff located on Japan’s soil. This proved pivotal in the latest stages of the war when the government, on the brink of defeat and out of food supplies, urged people to resort to unconventional ingredients, such as bee larvae, *mikan* peels and locusts, to counteract the lack of essential foodstuffs. As historian John W. Dower describes:

“The emperor’s loyal subjects were encouraged to supplement their starch intake by introducing such items as acorns, grain husks, peanut shells and sawdust to their house-hold larder ... Protein deficiencies could be remedied by eating silkworm cocoons, worms, grasshoppers, mice, rats, moles, snails, snakes or a powder made by drying the blood of cows, horses and pigs”.²⁰⁵

The creation of a national people’s cuisine was compounded by a widespread media campaign through which “nutritional advice came to be featured regularly in home economics textbooks, cookery books and women’s magazines²⁰⁶” and by a reform of the school curricula of Home Economics. Publications in cookbooks and magazines, edited by nutritionists and dieticians employed in universities and in the offices of the Department for the Direction of the National Lifestyle, displayed easy-to-prepare menus that abided by the nutritional values prescribed by the governments and replaced essential ingredients with adequate substitutes, such as the replacement of rice with other starches like barley, wheat or sweet potatoes.²⁰⁷

At the education level, the Secondary School Law of 1943 completely changed the system of home economics education. While in the pre-war years the subject of Home Economics encompassed a more theoretical approach to the topic of culinary education, the enactment of this law added the teaching of more practical skills in the courses.²⁰⁸ As the exigencies of wartime rationing got more severe and Japan’s position in the Pacific conflict grew even more

²⁰⁴ Rath, E.C. (2016). P. 140.

²⁰⁵ Dower, J.W. (2000). *Embracing defeat: Japan in the wake of World War II*, WW Norton & Company, p. 91.

²⁰⁶ Cwierka, K.J. (2016). P. 122.

²⁰⁷ Rath, E.C. (2016).

²⁰⁸ Cwierka, K.J. (2006).

uncertain, the project of the national people's cuisine ended in failure and people resorted to collecting any edible food in order to survive the widespread famines.

However, the experience of war still had far-reaching repercussions in the future eating habits of the Japanese population.

First, it introduced viable substitutes to the main staple of rice, which on the one hand contributed to the decline of centrality of rice that will reach its completion in the economic boom of the 1960s and, on the other hand, popularized dishes such as noodles and *gyoza*.²⁰⁹ In fact, since the allocation of rice grew thinner with the escalation of the conflict and by the end of the war it was almost considered a luxury, the population started to rely on different sources of carbohydrates, in particular on wheat-based alternatives.²¹⁰

Secondly, the experience of war greatly, if involuntarily, contributed in bridging the consumption gap between the urban and rural population that was still an ongoing phenomenon of Japanese society.²¹¹ The wartime rationing system allotted foods based on classifications of work, age and gender in order to guarantee the necessary amounts of calories needed for every person according to their specific physical needs. So, civilians employed in more physically demanding activities were granted larger quantities of rice in their rations²¹². At the same time, in order to support the necessities of the war front, the survival of pivotal industries such as mining, shipbuilding and the iron industry was considered essential and workers employed in these sectors were accorded supplementary rations to counterbalance the increased work shifts. Then, "between 1937 and 1944 about two million peasants switched to lucrative employment in the war industries²¹³" and grew accustomed, in the process, to eating a quantity of rice and meat that was previously unthinkable of in their previous occupations. This was coupled by the introduction of a dual-pricing system for rice, that accorded larger sums of money for the actual cultivators of rice to the detriment of landowners, greatly increased the standards of living and the buying power of peasants, that now could afford to eat rice several times a day²¹⁴. Moreover, since rural areas were less threatened by air raids and offered more in terms of availability of food, numerous urban dwellers relocated to the countryside and started to work as part-time peasants.²¹⁵ At the same time, due to the severe restrictions on food rationing and the extremely high prices for

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Dower, J.W. (2000); Rath, E.C. (2016).

²¹¹ Cwierka, K.J. (2006).

²¹² Rath, E.C. (2006).

²¹³ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p. 130.

²¹⁴ Cwierka, K.J. (2006).

²¹⁵ Ibid.

essential ingredients in the black markets, urban dwellers had to rely on a rice-less diet and started to substitute it with other starches as advised by the government's pamphlets, themselves based on the ethnologic researches of years prior, thus mirroring the diet of the rural communities.²¹⁶ The war years, then, were the stage where a reversal of consumption habits could be observed in which peasants, while still suffering from the hardships of war deprivation, enjoyed better living conditions and could afford more food than their urban dwellers, who in turn had to subsist on a poor diet that mirrored the old agrarian one. In the end, while the project of establishing a national people's cuisine was unsuccessful it nonetheless laid the basis, although involuntarily, for a further homogenization of consumption practices in the Japanese population. While the years of the American occupation represented a period of gradual economic recovery for Japan and paved the way for the introduction of different eating practices, it was only with the economic boom of the 1960s that the modern version of Japanese cuisine actually took form.

2.3 – THE POST-WAR YEARS: FROM THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION TO THE ECONOMIC BOOM OF THE 1960'S

The grueling experience of the Second World War saw its end on the 15th August of 1945 when Emperor Hirohito, following the shocking atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, officially announced Japan's surrender, paving the way for the start of the American occupation under the authority of General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). The American occupation, which lasted until 1952 when the Treaty of San Francisco officially came into effect, had as its primary objectives, in its initial stage, the demilitarization and democratization of Japanese society through a series of reforms encompassing the political, economic and social realms. Politically, a new constitution was drafted under the direct counselling of the occupation authorities and enacted in 1947, establishing Japan as a parliamentary democracy with a symbolic emperor, reinforcing civil liberties and introducing a pacifist clause that renounced to the right of war. Economically, the occupation authorities implemented land reforms that redistributed farmland from landlords to tenant farmers and enforced the dissolution of the zaibatsu, in an attempt to decentralize economic power and encourage competition. Moreover, the SCAP exercised strong control

²¹⁶ Rath, E.C. (2016).

over the Japanese government by imposing censorship and restrictions on every mean of public communication.²¹⁷

The context in which these reforms took place was a dire one, as the defeat in the global conflict left Japan literally and figuratively in ruins.

The food scarcity and the widespread famines that had ravaged the Japanese population in the war period only worsened in the aftermath of World War II, as a result of the loss of Japan's colonies in East Asia, the return of a massive number of soldiers and citizens previously residing in the colonies and the unfortunate bad harvests of those years, leading historian George Solt to define the period between 1944 and 1947 as "the worst period of hunger endured in Japan's modern history"²¹⁸. As accurately described by John W. Dower in his work "*Embracing defeat*", the Japanese state was heavily dependent on its empire for its food sustenance, since "before Pearl Harbor imports from these areas [Korea, Formosa and China] accounted for 31% of Japan's rice consumption, 92% of its sugar, 58% of its soy beans and 45% of its salt"²¹⁹ among many other foodstuffs. The loss of essential food resources was aggravated by the repatriation of millions of soldiers and civilians that were deployed in the colonies, which represented an additional strain on the already alarmingly unstable food infrastructure of Japan. Moreover, in an unfortunate turn of events, "due to adverse weather, manpower shortages, insufficient tools and a fall-off in fertilizer production, 1945 saw the most disastrous harvest since 1910"²²⁰, greatly reducing the dwindling food reserves. The civilian population found itself scavenging the urban landscape in search of any edible food available, resorting to eat wild herbs sprouting at the corners of boardwalks or hunting frogs and lizards in the fields as many historical reconstructions of the period attest, and had to deal with the abnormally inflated prices of the black markets for acquiring even the most basic foodstuff.²²¹ Among such catastrophic circumstances, the only saving grace was the shipment of foods sent by the US government or by charity organizations, such as LARA (Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia)²²². However, in the years following the end of the war, these shipments proved to be particularly unreliable and the "collection and distribution of even the

²¹⁷ Dower, J.W. (2000).

²¹⁸ Solt, G. (2014). *The untold history of ramen: How political crisis in Japan spawned a global food craze*. Univ. of California Press, p. 89.

²¹⁹ Dower, J.W. (2000). p.91.

²²⁰ Dower, J.W. (2000). p. 93.

²²¹ Dower, J.W. (2000); Cwiertka, K.J. (2006); Rath, E. (2016).

²²² Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

most basic foodstuff remained chaotic for years”²²³. In fact, the wartime rationing system adopted previously by the IRAA was taken up by the occupation authorities as the blueprint for establishing the allocation of rations but was plagued by “a shortfall in global food production and a poor oversight of the rationing system both by Japanese and American authorities”²²⁴, leading to widespread hunger and malnutrition.

If at the beginning of the occupation the main objectives were the demilitarization and an induced democratization of Japanese society, the onset of the Cold War in Asia led the US government to reconsider the strategic value of Japan, which was now considered the key to contain the advance of the Communist influence in Asia. The successful Communist revolution of 1947 in China coupled with the looming presence of the Soviet Union in East Asia and the strengthening of the domestic Communist party in Japan led the US government to adopt a different approach, shifting “from expecting to see the Japanese economy to recover on its own to actively devising a policy to aid it in its reindustrialization”.²²⁵

Food aid was a pivotal aspect of this new approach and the urgent need to stave off the rising Communist presence saw the “US reverse its punitive approach with respect to food policy in Japan and initiate a massive effort to alleviate starvation”²²⁶. This newly-devised food policy had a dual objective. On the one hand, food shipments, while necessary to mitigate the impending food crisis, were essential to improve the precarious physical conditions of the Japanese workforce, an indispensable asset for the goal of successful reindustrialization²²⁷. On the other hand, food shipments were part of a larger program of US propaganda that aimed at portraying the occupation authorities as generous benefactors and to increase their appeal among the population²²⁸. Thus,

“US food policy during its occupation of Japan shifted from providing only begrudging emergence assistance to offering both political and economic support with strategic geopolitical objectives and commercial exports interests as the Cold War intensified in Asia”.²²⁹

The food shipments “consisted primarily of staples such as wheat, flour, corn, legumes, sugar, small quantities of rice, powdered milk and tinned goods such as corned beef”²³⁰ and were

²²³ Dower, J.W. (2000). p.94.

²²⁴ Solt, G. (2004). p.90.

²²⁵ Solt, G. (2004). p. 105.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Solt, G. (2004).

²²⁸ Dower, J.W. (2000).

²²⁹ Solt, G. (2004). p.96.

enthusiastically accepted by the population, with some of them becoming so popular to be integrated into local eating habits. A case in point is the status acquired by luncheon meat in the local “*chanpuru*” cuisine of Okinawa, that at the time was the epicenter of the strategic operations of Communist containment and was under the direct control of the American forces. The arrival of numerous contingents of American military forces in the island was accompanied by an “influx of military ration food, including luncheon meat whose taste and abundance symbolized the victor’s power”²³¹. Among the scarcity of food plaguing the island, hungry Okinawans started to see luncheon meat as a “luxury food” and associated the physical prowess of American soldiers to its consumption. In the end, luncheon meat was seamlessly integrated into the local culture even after the re-annexation of Okinawa to mainland Japan, becoming a common feature of popular dishes such as *poku tamago* (bowl of rice with eggs and luncheon meat) and *onipo* (Pork and eggs *onigiri*).²³²

However, among the food imports shipped by the US government, one in particular played a determinant role in the re-construction of Japan and elicited a strong influence on its future eating habits: wheat.

The massive exports of US wheat were essential for alleviating the critical conditions of the population but, at the same time, were part of a program that had geopolitical and economic interests at its heart. In fact,

“encouraging Japan to consume more wheat was a pressing issue for the US, which needed to dispose of domestic surplus, help its ally to recover and develop economically and simultaneously open up Japan as a wealthy and import-dependent market for American farm products”.²³³

Thus, beginning under the SCAP occupation and continuing well into the 1950s, the US government, with the active cooperation of Japan’s Ministry of Health and Welfare, undertook a number of public campaigns and projects to promote wheat consumption among the urban and rural populations. In 1947, in order to improve the wellbeing of Japanese children, the occupation authorities started a program of school lunches, initially circumscribed to the main urban centers and covering the needs of three million children. The directives of the program stated that every school lunch had to guarantee a fixed amount of 600 calories and 25 grams

²³⁰ Dower, J.W. (2000). p.94.

²³¹ Koikari, M. (2018). “LOVE! SPAM! Food, military and empire in post-World War II Okinawa”, *Devouring Japan: Global Perspectives on Japanese Culinary Identity*, p.172.

²³² Koikari, M. (2018).

²³³ Hopson, N. (2020). “Ingrained habits: The “kitchen cars” and the transformation of postwar Japanese diet and identity”, *Food, Culture & Society*, 23(5), p. 591.

of proteins.²³⁴ The initiative used “canned meat and fish that had been stockpiled for use by the Japanese Imperial Army together with powdered milk, meat and other items donated by a coalition of charitable organizations under the banner of Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia (LARA)”²³⁵. The standard menu was centered around the mandatory presence of bread and milk, accompanied by a hot meal. By 1951 the school lunches program was “expanded to encompass children all over Japan”²³⁶ and kept its strong emphasis on the consumption of bread and milk, which “was determined less by its nutritional qualities and more by the fact that the US government was eager to dispose of the wheat flour surplus from the American market”²³⁷. The nationwide school lunches program was followed in 1954 by the signing of the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act through which, along with the concurrent drafting of the Mutual Assistance Act, “Washington was able to support economic recovery and political stability in its subordinate Cold War ally while simultaneously disposing of domestic agricultural supplies and opening new markets for future farm products”²³⁸. Japan then received 50 million dollars in food aid, among which were included 600,000 tons of wheat, which it had to sell on its domestic market in order to obtain the capital necessary to upgrade its military equipment for the upcoming Cold War. To dispose of the large quantities of wheat that flooded the Japanese market, the Japanese and American government embarked on a joint effort to promote its consumption among the common population.²³⁹

One of the more successful initiatives of the period was the establishment of a fleet of “kitchen cars”, whose primary goals were “improving nutrition and encouraging (wheat) flour-based food”²⁴⁰, that started touring all around Japan in 1956. The program was backed by the US Department of Agriculture’s Foreign Agricultural Service in close cooperation with the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare and with affiliated organizations such as the Japan Nutrition Association, who lent legitimacy to the project by highlighting the superior nutritional qualities of wheat.²⁴¹ The kitchen cars were “staffed by a team of three professional nutritionists each and operated with the cooperation of local health officials”²⁴² and everyday “gave multiple demonstrations of nutritionally balanced, economical food to

²³⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

²³⁵ Ehara, A. (1999). “School meals and Japan’s changing diet”, *Japan Echo*, 26(4), p. 57.

²³⁶ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 157.

²³⁷ Ehara, A. (1999). p. 57.

²³⁸ Hopson, N. (2020). p. 592.

²³⁹ Solt, G. (2004).

²⁴⁰ Hopson, N. (2020). p. 591.

²⁴¹ Hopson, N. (2020).

²⁴² Hopson, N. (2020). p.591.

improve the Japanese national diet”²⁴³. While in its infancy the project consisted only of a small fleet of a dozen cars, the resounding popularity it was gaining among the population led to an expansion of the fleet, which by the 1960s totaled more than one hundred vehicles. Thanks to their ability to reach far and isolated communities and to the simplicity and immediacy of the recipes exhibited, the kitchen cars proved to be the perfect conduit for advertising the benefits of wheat-consumption in rural areas.²⁴⁴ Thus,

“the kitchen cars [...] became – along with the school lunch program – became one of the most important tools for marketing American farm products, especially wheat, soy, corn, meat and dairy. [...] The kitchen car program similarly encouraged changes in the diet by teaching the mothers of those schoolchildren how to cook foods with “Western” ingredients”²⁴⁵.

While the above-mentioned projects represent the pinnacle of wheat propaganda in Japan, less known initiatives such as “baker training, advertising in newspaper and magazines and on television and radio, a training program for home-improvement extension workers to increase wheat consumption in rural areas, a personnel exchange program, an effort to make the Japanese school lunch program universal”²⁴⁶ played a substantial role in the popularization of wheat-based dishes.

The deprivation and hunger of the war years, the shifting geopolitical balance of the 1950s and the political undertones of the food aid policy undertaken by the American and Japanese governments ultimately had far-reaching consequences on the consumption habits of future generations of Japanese.

First, the school lunch program accustomed several generations of children and adolescents, who would be the backbone of the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s, to a completely new set of foods. Besides popularizing the consumption of bread and milk, the program also ended up revolutionizing the custom of breakfast, which until then was centered on rice and *miso* soup.²⁴⁷ Moreover, the school lunches program had an indirect influence on the adult population as well, as “children learn to like the taste of wheat rolls at school and want to eat it at home”²⁴⁸. Thus, parents had to learn how to integrate Western foods in the domestic realm in order to accommodate the tastes of their children. As historian Katarzyna Cwiertka

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Hopson, N. (2020). p. 593.

²⁴⁶ Hopson, N. (2020). p. 598.

²⁴⁷ Ayako, E. (1999); Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (1997). “McDonald’s in Japan: Changing manners and etiquette”, *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia*, pp. 161-182.

²⁴⁸ Hopson, N. (2020). p. 597.

aptly summarizes: “the popularization of bread and familiarizing the post-war generation with the custom of milk-drinking are clearly the chief legacies of the school lunch program”²⁴⁹.

Secondly, the widespread campaigns of the kitchen cars and the large quantities of wheat that flooded the Japanese market stably introduced wheat-based foods into the Japanese diet. While already popular, foods such as noodles and *soba* saw a renaissance in the 1950s and became a consistent presence in the daily diet. In fact,

“by the end of the 1950s, one-third of Tokyo’s food was wheat-based and four out of ten Tokyoites ate bread daily. These numbers fell dramatically in provincial cities and the countryside, where change was much slower, but it did come by the end of the 1970s as the eclectic postwar diet spread across Japan”.²⁵⁰

One of the unpredicted consequences of the surplus of wheat was the spectacular popularity of *ramen*, previously known by the name of *Shina soba*, which became the “staple lunch of construction workers and students during Japan’s era of rapid economic growth”²⁵¹ thanks to its relative affordability and its nutritionally fulfilling properties. A survey stated that “between 1955 and 1973, household expenditures in ramen increased by 250%”²⁵², a corollary of the rising incomes and of the “US government policy of encouraging allies to buy American wheat exports and the spread of modern nutritional science in Japan advocating the consumption of wheat, meat and dairy”²⁵³.

Finally, the traumatic experiences of hunger and starvation left an indelible scar in the popular conscience and represented a clean break with the pre-war diet, a partial *tabula rasa* over which new foods, brought in by the industrialization of the food infrastructure and the economic prosperity of the 1960s, slowly acquired more space. As historian Naomichi Ishige argues:

“The economy of Japan grew very rapidly from the late 1950s and dietary standards rose along with personal income. Larger amounts were eaten, and the food selection changed. Once food consumption had climbed back to the quantitative level of the pre-war years, it became clear that the

²⁴⁹ Schmidt-pott, K. (2000). “Heilmittel, Genussmittel, Erfrischungsgetränk: Milchkonsum in Japan 1920-1970”, *Japanstudien 12: Essen und Ernährung im Modernen Japan*, ed. N. Liscutin and R. Haak, Munich, as quoted in Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 163.

²⁵⁰ Hopson, N. (2020). p. 601.

²⁵¹ Solt, G. (2004). p. 128.

²⁵² Kawata, T. (2001). *Ramen no keizaigaku*, Kadokawa, Tokyo as quoted in Solt, G. (2004), p. 128.

²⁵³ Solt, G. (2004). p. 129.

Japanese were not returning to the dietary pattern of the past, but rather were in the process of creating new habits”.²⁵⁴

The 1960s, then, represented a period of unprecedented economic growth that transformed Japan into one of the world’s leading economies.

The forced ties elicited by the American Occupation proved incredibly fruitful in occasion of the Korean War (1950-1953) as Japan became a crucial supplier of goods and services for the US forces. The Korean War helped boosting Japan’s industries that subsequently appeared on the world stage as the leading companies in the technological sector, aided by the export-oriented strategy of the Japanese government which focused on producing high-quality goods for the global market. By the end of the 1960s Japan had confirmed itself as the world’s second-largest economy and saw its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) increase yearly by over 10% throughout the decade. As a result of this economic boom there was a significant improvement in living standards, a massive urbanization that saw people from the rural areas flocking towards the main urban centers and the establishment of a wealthy and robust middleclass. This elicited epochal changes in the consumption habits of the population.

First, after an all-time-high amount of 114kg per capita in 1962, rice consumption gradually and steadily started to decline throughout the rest of the century²⁵⁵. While this can be explained by the increased popularity of wheat-based dishes and as the result of the nationwide advertisements campaigns undertaken in the previous decade, the “decline in rice consumption was not the result of a shift from a rice-centered diet to a bread-centered diet”²⁵⁶ but, rather, it was a direct consequence of the rising standards of living. Since people could rely on much more generous and stable incomes, they “could afford to include former “luxury” foods such as meat, fish and fruit in their daily diet”²⁵⁷. Concurrently with the decline of rice consumption,

“between 1960 and 1975 the average daily protein intake in Japan increased from 69.5 grams to 78.8 grams per person, and the proportion of protein obtained from milk, eggs and meats grew from 7% to 22%. During the same period the average meat intake increased from 16 to 64 grams per day and wheat consumption increased from 60 to 90 grams per day.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Ishige, N. (2014). p. 162.

²⁵⁵ Ishige, N. (2014).

²⁵⁶ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 158.

²⁵⁷ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 159.

²⁵⁸ Japan External Trade Organization (1978). *Changing Dietary Lifestyles in Japan: JETRO Marketing Series 17*, Tokyo, pp. 6-8 as quoted in Solt, G. (2004). pp. 130-131.

There was, then, a stark reversal of the conceptualization of the meal: while previously rice was the centerpiece around which every meal was constructed, starting from the 1960s its centrality was overshadowed by the side-dishes, which became the real protagonists of the meal and rice was sidelined as an accompaniment²⁵⁹. Consequently, “as a result of economic expansion, more different kinds of dishes are placed on the table, and so more room in the stomach is taken up by what used to be considered side-dishes”²⁶⁰. This shift in consumption is corroborated by a research from economist Hiromitsu Kaneda, according to which: “the decline of the “starchy staple ratio” as income rises reflects the tendency of people to consume increasingly large quantities of meat, dairy products and other relatively costly foods as enlarged purchasing power allows them to modify their dietary patterns”²⁶¹. This shift involved the rural population as well, attesting to the “increasing variety of the diet and food preparation and of the rural emulation of the urban patterns of consumption”.²⁶²

Secondly, Japanese people tended to consume more industrially-processed and frozen foods.²⁶³ “Economic development entailed the growth of the food industry as a “public kitchen” that furnished households with new and different foods”²⁶⁴, among which the appearance of various supermarket chains and convenience stores (*konbini*)²⁶⁵ coupled with the invention of popular instant foods, such as the historic instant *ramen* developed by Nissin Foods in 1958,²⁶⁶ led to a shift from cooking fresh foodstuff at home to rely on ready-made dishes that could be prepared in a matter of minutes. The causes of this phenomenon can be traced in the widespread diffusion of electric appliances, favored by the Western-inspired ethos of “bright life” which “turned electrical appliances into symbols of affluence providing irresistible stimulus for their purchase”²⁶⁷, and in the pervasive presence that the food companies had in the media and in the public life. In fact, by the start of the 1950s, electrical appliances were seen as social markers as a consequence of the “Bright Japan” campaign, which advocated an emulation of American middle-class society as instrumental for the future prosperity of Japan, and of the New Life Movement Association that “propagated the idea of a

²⁵⁹ Cwierka, K.J. (2006); Ishige, N. (2014).

²⁶⁰ Ishige, N. (2014). p. 163.

²⁶¹ Kaneda, H. (1968). “Urban/rural contrast of consumption patterns and consumer preferences in postwar Japan”, *The Economic Studies Quarterly*, 19(2), pp. 26-27.

²⁶² Kaneda, H. (1968). p. 30.

²⁶³ Cwierka, K.J. (2006).

²⁶⁴ Ishige, N. (2014). p. 144.

²⁶⁵ Assman, S. (2011). “Beyond sushi and tempura: An overview of the Japanese food market”, *Japanese consumer dynamics*, pp. 165-184.

²⁶⁶ Solt, G. (2004).

²⁶⁷ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p.160.

rational, bright life (*akarui seikatsu*) as the symbol of Japan's future"²⁶⁸. This led to a capillary diffusion of electrical appliances in the households, regardless of social strata, such as refrigerators and freezers (97.9% of the population by 1976), gas water heaters (81.3%), electric rice cookers (68.7%) and ovens (47.7%).²⁶⁹ The diffusion of electric appliances was accompanied by a persistent media campaign, mainly backed by the food companies themselves, that presented the industrially processed foods as a symbol of the rampant modernity and well-being of Japan. Nissin Foods, the main giant of industrially processed food at the time, made an "effective use of newspaper, magazine, radio and television advertising through the use of popular young celebrities, original theme songs, quiz shows, cash giveaways, travel prizes to Europe and a host of other promotional campaigns"²⁷⁰ which firmly established its presence in the popular imagination. This new reliance on advertising was eased by the rapid diffusion of television sets all around Japan, which by 1960 roughly 50% of the Japanese population owned, that constantly broadcasted innovative advertisements of the most popular brands of the time, accompanied by catchy jingles and mascots, such as Chibikko. Moreover, some of the most popular TV shows of the time, such as the influential "World's Greatest Quiz", were directly sponsored and financially backed by the companies themselves.²⁷¹ Consumption data regarding this period show that the production of frozen foods increased "from 5,000 tons in 1960 to 141,000 tons in 1970"²⁷², while "between 1965 and 1976 instant ramen consumption increased from 2.5 billion servings to 4.55 billion servings per year, while instant curry consumption jumped from 32.800 to 70.000 tons and instant coffee consumption grew from 5,000 tons to 21,000 tons".²⁷³

As historian Katarzyna Cwiertka aptly summarizes:

"the 1960s was the period when the mass urban culture of the pre-war era, amalgamated with the experiences of military catering, wartime food shortages and school lunches turned into a national standard. [...] The circumstances of economic growth extended pre-war trends to encompass the entire society, whereas before they had been characteristic of a middle-class urban lifestyle".²⁷⁴

²⁶⁸ Partner, S. (2000). *Assembled in Japan: Electrical Goods and the Making of the Japanese Consumer*, University of California Press, pp. 142-150 as quoted in Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 159.

²⁶⁹ Japan External Trade Organizations (1978), p. 9 as quoted in Solt, G. (2004).

²⁷⁰ Solt, G. (2004). p. 176.

²⁷¹ Solt, G. (2004).

²⁷² Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 160.

²⁷³ Japan External Trade Organization (1978). p. 10 as quoted in Solt, G. (2004). p.155.

²⁷⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 173.

2.4 - THE “RETRO BOOM” AND THE EXPANSION ABROAD: THE 1970’s AND THE 1980’S

The 1970s and 1980s saw Japan confirming its position as an economic powerhouse in the international realm and, with the diffuse well-being that followed such an astounding economic growth, consolidated that trends that appeared in the previous decade, with the now widespread ownership of electrical appliances regardless of social strata and the increasing space taken up in the daily diet by industrially-processed and frozen foods. Moreover, from the start of the 1970s onwards, there was a stark increase in the trend of dining out that was “transformed into a routine component of daily life, especially in urban areas”²⁷⁵, leading various historians to define this period as Japan’s “gourmet boom”. In fact, spurred by the highest level of economic capital available and by the increasing variety of the eating establishments, since the mid-1950s there was a continued and developing interest around the act of eating not only as a mean of necessity but as a veritable form of entertainment, since “delicacies were no longer only for the elite, but were available even to ordinary people, who consumed food and, at the same time, were eager for information about food and the act of eating”²⁷⁶. As a proof of this ballooning interest, between the start of the 1960s and the tail- end of the 1990s “the number of drinking and eating establishments operating throughout the country more than doubled”²⁷⁷. This trend was favored by the concurrent ascent of the service sector industry in the 1970s, which replaced the declining manufacturing sector that characterized the previous decade, and by the presence of the so-called “Shinjinrui” (“New generation”), a generation of young people that did not experience the economic difficulties of pre-60s Japan and had at its disposal high levels of income to spend on leisure activities²⁷⁸. Thus, the activity of eating out embedded itself into the social fabric of the Japanese population, both as a marker of social status and economic prosperity and as a refuge from the daily grind of the workplace. Such renewed interest in food manifested itself in two opposing ways. On the one hand, there was a widespread curiosity and acceptance toward foreign culinary trends, ranging from the glamorous Italian and French restaurants to the arrival of the fast- food industry in Japan. While the former appealed to wealthy people and gourmards due to

²⁷⁵ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p. 165.

²⁷⁶ Scrolavezza, P. (2021). “Changing food landscapes in contemporary Japan”, *Italy-Japan: Dialogues on food*, 94, p. 96.

²⁷⁷ Cwierka, K.J. (2006). p. 165.

²⁷⁸ Solt, G. (2004).

their social and culinary capital that functioned as a mark of differentiation, the latter were embraced by younger generations attracted by the affordable prices, the simplicity of the foods and the American pop culture that permeated the previous decade.²⁷⁹ The first American fast-food to open one of its branches in Japan was McDonald's in 1971 in Tokyo, through the efforts of Den Fujita, followed closely in 1972 by Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in Kobe and by the Japanese chain Mos Burger, that offered a more local experience of fast-food with offers such as the *teriyaki* burger. Unlike their counterparts in the US, the Japanese branches presented themselves as trendy eating establishments by situating their stores in fashionable areas, such as the first McDonald's located in the historical Mitsukoshi department store in the wealthy neighbourhood of Ginza, and appealed to stereotyped images of the American lifestyle.²⁸⁰ Despite initial struggles, which saw stores incur in significant net losses in their first years, these establishments became very popular among students and children and in the span of a decade mushroomed all over Japan. As a result, Japanese people grew accustomed to typical American fare such as burgers, milkshakes, donuts and French fries and, in the process, familiarized with a different eating etiquette, normalizing for example the act of eating while standing out (*tachigui*) which is traditionally frowned upon in Japanese society.²⁸¹

On the other hand, the "economic affluence and a growing familiarity with foreign culinary trends since the 1970s have occasioned an emerging pride in domestic produce and local specialties"²⁸², in what historian Eric Rath defines as the "retro boom of the 1970s"²⁸³. The nostalgia and longing for supposedly healthier and fresher local foods were elicited by the sudden alteration of the social fabric of the Japanese population, which saw an unprecedented wave of urbanization leading to the growth of Japan's urban population from "38% in 1950 to 75% by 1975"²⁸⁴ and to the simultaneous depopulation of the countryside and of the agricultural sector. Consequently, people moving from the countryside to the big cities, severed and disconnected from their native places, "developed new attitudes about the foods in the countryside that they left behind"²⁸⁵ spurring a "renewed interest in Japanese traditions

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

²⁸¹ Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (1997).

²⁸² Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 167.

²⁸³ Creighton, M. (1997). "Consuming rural Japan: The marketing of tradition and nostalgia in the Japanese travel industry", *Ethnology*, 36(3), p. 241 as quoted in Rath, E.C. (2016), p.168.

²⁸⁴ Rath, E.C. (2015). "The invention of local food". *The Globalization of Asian Cuisines: Transnational Networks and Culinary Contact Zones*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, p. 153.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

and nostalgia for the past ... that has romanticized Japan's agrarian heritage"²⁸⁶. These sentiments were observable by the recurrence of terms such as "*kyodo*" and "*furusato*", different expressions for the word "hometown", in the media that expressed a "nostalgic longing for an allegedly more "authentic" rural life and local produce"²⁸⁷.

The focus on the rediscovery of traditional Japan, particularly in the field of gastronomy, and the nostalgia for the earthy and simple lifestyle left behind in the pursuit of economic well-being was a rather recurrent motif in the media at the time²⁸⁸. It was present in TV programs with the wildly inventive cooking show-offs between renowned chefs displayed in "Ryori no Tetsujin", that spawned countless imitators all over the world in the subsequent years; in the cookbooks and food-themed magazines that embarked on a research into the traditional recipes of ancient rural Japan; in *manga* with the success of series such as "Kokkingu Papa" and "Oishinbo", the latter narrating the adventures of a gourmand journalist on a quest to discover the "authentic" Japanese food²⁸⁹. However, the motif of nostalgia found its epitome in the seminal movie "Tampopo", aired in cinemas in 1985, whose plot follows a young widow running a small *ramen* shop in Tokyo and on a mission to create the "perfect bowl" of *ramen*. The themes of the movie embodied the resurfacing pride in local cuisine as it "visually reaffirmed the status of handcrafted *ramen* as the indigenous remedy to the decadence of the gourmet boom symbolized by high-end French and Italian dining".²⁹⁰

Besides this widespread feeling of nostalgia, the shifting in consumer's preferences from industrially-processed foods to local produce was further guided by a growing distrust towards the food industry, following a series of scandals that occupied the major front pages in the previous decades.²⁹¹ Among the main incidents to reach mainstream coverage there were the Morinaga milk accident of 1955, which saw 12.000 poisoning cases due to an arsenic contamination of milk additives resulting in 138 confirmed deaths; the Kanemi rice oil case of 1968, a mass poisoning by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) that affected more than 1900 people, and the infamous Minamata poisoning of 1953, where more than two thousand people died as a result of the illegal discharge of mercury by the Chisso Corporation into the waters of Minamata Bay. The rising distrust towards the industrial food infrastructure, compounded by a desire to eat healthily as opposed to the "fatty" dishes of fast-foods,

²⁸⁶ Creighton, M. (1997). "Consuming rural Japan: The marketing of tradition and nostalgia in the Japanese travel industry", *Ethnology*, 36(3), p. 241 as quoted in Rath, E.C. (2016). p.168.

²⁸⁷ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 173.

²⁸⁸ Solt, G. (2004); Rath, E.C. (2016).

²⁸⁹ Solt, G. (2004); Scrolavezza, P. (2021).

²⁹⁰ Solt, G. (2004). p. 231.

²⁹¹ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006); Rath, E.C. (2016).

engendered a conception according to which “domestically harvested foods or produced foods have generally become equated with high quality, safety and perfection of form”²⁹². The growing demand for local foods was the starting point that led to a series of initiatives, usually financially backed by the state or local prefectures, in revitalizing the cultivation of forgotten vegetables and fruits and to the consolidation of grass-roots movements and cooperatives involved in organic farming²⁹³. Among the main initiatives there is the revitalization of the so-called “Kyo yasai” (“Kyoto vegetables”), such as the *mizuna* leaf, undertaken by the Kyoto prefectural authorities in cooperation with local agricultural producers that “took the first steps towards preserving local vegetables threatened with extinction, successfully reintroducing them to the marketplace”²⁹⁴. The gourmet boom of the 1980s proved to be a boon for the success of the project, as many restaurateurs and greengrocers introduced the newly-marketed vegetables in their recipes and shops and attempted to re-shape the “image of Kyoto as the capital of Japanese culture and culinary heritage”²⁹⁵.

However, while the search for the culturally “authentic” among the rapidly urbanizing Japanese society and the rise of bottom-up initiatives in the agricultural and retailing sector proved to be instrumental in revitalizing Japanese cuisine, its importance was highlighted by a series of political maneuvers that in the 1970s and 1980s tried to stimulate the development of the domestic tourist sector, to revitalize the depopulated provincial localities and to reduce the dependence from food exports.²⁹⁶ In particular, the US soybean embargo of 1973 represents a watershed moment in Japanese political history, as the Japanese government realized the precarious stability of its food self-sufficiency. Following the détente between the US and the URSS at the beginning of the 1970s, in 1973 the US government agreed to ship a consistent amount of wheat to the Soviet Union in order to alleviate the famine that was plaguing its population. While it represented a resounding economic success for the US and it served as a political expedient to mitigate the political tensions of the Cold War, the shipment of such a large quantity of wheat proved to be an unmanageable strain on the US agricultural sector, as it completely depleted the US domestic wheat surplus. This led the US government to severely limit its food exports by imposing a worldwide embargo on the exports of soybean in

²⁹² Bestor, T. (2004). *Tsukiji: The fish market at the center of the world*, University of California Press, pp. 146-147, 159-160 as quoted in Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 167.

²⁹³ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006); Rath, E.C. (2016).

²⁹⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 168.

²⁹⁵ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 169.

²⁹⁶ Solt, G. (2004).

1973, leading to a panic among the Japanese authorities, since Japan was the main importer of US agricultural products.²⁹⁷ While the embargo proved to be short-lived, as it lasted only a couple of weeks, it nonetheless elicited a startling realization for the Japanese government as it “understood the fragility of its food supply system and the risks linked to heavy dependence on a single supplier”²⁹⁸. Thus, Japan embarked on a series of initiatives to diversify its international food resources and to revitalize the struggling agricultural sector in order to achieve a more reliable food self-sufficiency.

At the international level, this was obtained by using “ODA (Official Development Assistance) funds to promote agricultural development in developing countries”²⁹⁹, such as Brazil and Thailand, under the slogan of “Kaihatsu-yunhyhu” (“developments and imports”) with the dual goal of diversifying the food sources and of enhancing the comprehensive security of the nation. Domestically, however, the need to incentivize the consumption of local produce among the population was coupled with the revitalization of the economy of provincial and countryside localities through the sponsorship of their unique agricultural products and by placing an emphasis on their local cuisines.³⁰⁰ Thus, between 1972 and 1974, Japan’s Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei launched the “town-revitalization movement” (*machiokoshi undo*) that was intended to “showcase the distinctiveness of Japan’s local cultures, to infuse rural areas with capital and to reduce Japan’s reliance on export-led growth”³⁰¹. To achieve this, “local business groups elaborated cultural exposition centers, festivals and commercial districts across urban and suburban rural Japan”³⁰², with the sponsorship of local food as a cornerstone of these policies in order to appeal to the gourmand ethos developing at the time. Such campaigns were accompanied by relentless media coverage and the sponsorship of numerous advertising and travel agencies, which contributed in turning long-forgotten municipalities into must-go attractions for the urban “foodies”.

A case in point is the popularization of regional variations of *ramen* and, in particular, the Kitakata-style *ramen*. The local authorities of Kitakata, a small town located in the prefecture of Fukushima and close to the popular castle-town of Aizu-Wakamatsu, decided to “market the distinctive style of *ramen* made in that area – flat, thick noodles with clear pork and

²⁹⁷ Farina, F. (2017). “The 1970s global food crisis and the securitization of food in Japan”, *Global Realities: Precarious Survival and Belonging*, International Academic Forum, pp. 17-29.

²⁹⁸ Farina, F. (2017). p. 17.

²⁹⁹ Farina, F. (2017). p. 25.

³⁰⁰ Rath, E.C. (2016).

³⁰¹ Solt, G. (2004). p. 209.

³⁰² Ibid.

niboshi (dried sardine) soup broth – as one of the attractions”³⁰³. The local authorities jointly collaborated with local advertising and tour agencies and “enlisted the national broadcasting network (NHK) to encourage tourists to visit one of the eighty *ramen* shops in town”³⁰⁴. The large media coverage accorded to the Kitakata *ramen* and, in particular, the national broadcasting of a NHK special, titled “Kitakata no men”, led to the boom of Kitakata *ramen*. Such a phenomenon was not circumscribed to this particular location, as “many cities followed Kitakata in promoting their distinct style of *ramen* with the hope of garnering national media attention and generating revenue through tourism”³⁰⁵. This policy to identify and promote local cuisines intensified greatly in the 1980s and reached its apex with the “Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries’ (MAFF) fifty-volume series “*Collected Writing on Japanese Foodways (Nihon no shoku seikatsu zenshu)*, a countrywide survey of regional food lore”³⁰⁶. The collection attempted to shed light through a series of oral interviews on the typical cuisine of the Taisho (1912-1926) and early Showa (1926-1989) periods but, by dividing every volume in increasingly smaller sub-regions and ascribing to each of them eye-catching dishes, operated an historical reconstruction of local cuisines with the intent of stimulating local tourism by equating local foods with gourmet delicacies.³⁰⁷

The government’s interest in reviving local cuisines and in incentivizing the consumption of local produce continued well into the 1980s on the wave of “consumers interested in eating “locally” and private efforts to promote regional ingredients”³⁰⁸, with initiatives such as the previously mentioned sponsorship of “Kyo yasai” and the re-introduction of rice as the main component of school lunches in 1976.

Paradoxically, just when Japan was starting to look inwardly towards a reappreciation of its distinctive national cuisine through a series of government-mandated and grassroots initiatives, Japanese cuisine saw an unprecedented boom of popularity abroad, in particular in the United States. Japanese cuisine was already relatively well-known in the US during the 1950s and 1960s, as a consequence of the preferential treatment that Japanese imports enjoyed on the American market which led to a robust presence of a Japanese expatriate community, in particular on the West Coast. In fact, “the number of Japanese employed overseas tripled during the period 1968-1975, largely due to Japanese enterprises setting up

³⁰³ Solt, G. (2004). p. 213.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Solt, G. (2004). p. 214.

³⁰⁶ Rath, E.C. (2016). p. 169.

³⁰⁷ Rath, E.C. (2016).

³⁰⁸ Rath, E.C. (2015). p. 157.

subsidiaries in the US in order to avoid trade frictions”³⁰⁹. In the wake of this influx of Japanese emigrants, an ecosystem that catered to their needs started to take form in the US, comprising beauty parlors, travel agencies and, mainly, food stores and restaurants. In the beginning Japanese restaurants in the US catered principally to Japanese customers, usually members of the economic diaspora elicited by the economic boom of the 1960s, but gradually the appeal of Japanese cuisine started to spread among American consumers as well.³¹⁰

Two dishes in particular were very popular: *teppanyaki* and *sushi*.

Teppanyaki, a technique which involves the cooking of meat and vegetables over steel griddles, originated in Japan during the American occupation as a way to accommodate the tastes of American soldiers who did not appreciate the typical cuisine available on the island. While originally the meat grilled in *teppanyaki* houses was usually thin slices of beef, inspired by the *shabu-shabu* technique, it was replaced by big steaks under the suggestion of American customers. It gained popularity in the US thanks to the efforts of Aoki Hiroaki, commonly known by the name Rocky Aoki, who opened the restaurant Benihana in New York in 1964.

While in the beginning it appealed mainly to American customers already relatively familiar with Japanese cuisine, like for example former soldiers or officials that resided in Japan during the occupation, it gradually started to gain popularity, thanks in large part to the similarity in taste with American grilled meat and the showmanship and Japan-inspired ambiance permeating the locales³¹¹. In fact, “the “exoticism” was provided by the Asian- looking staff in Japanese dress and the interior that replicated a Japanese country inn, constructed out of building materials gathered from old Japanese houses, shipped in pieces to the United States and reassembled”³¹². The popularity this type of restaurants enjoyed in the United States functioned as an incentive for its spread in Europe, where *teppanyaki* arrived in the 1970s and gradually started to spread in the main capitals.

However, Japanese cuisine reached widespread fame with the *sushi* boom of the 1970s. As Theodore Bestor in an article for Foreign Policy explains: “Japan’s emergence on the global economic scene in the 1970s as the business destination *du jour*, coupled with a rejection of hearty, red-meat American fare in favor of a healthy cuisine, and the appeal of high-concept

³⁰⁹ White, M.E. (1988). *The Japanese overseas: Can they go home again?*, Princeton University Press, p. 17 as quoted in Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 185.

³¹⁰ Farrer, J.; Hess, C.; de Carvalho, M.R. ; Wang, C. & Wank, D. (2019). “Japanese culinary mobilities: The multiple globalizations of Japanese cuisine”, *Routledge Handbook of Food in Asia*, Routledge, pp. 39-57.

³¹¹ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

³¹² Klug, J. (1995). *Benihana of Tokyo*, Harvard Business School Research paper no. 9-673-057, pp. 1-2 as quoted in Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 188.

aesthetics of Japanese design all prepared the world for a *sushi* fad”³¹³. In fact, *sushi* was initially embraced by the counter-culture movement in California, where incidentally the largest community of Japanese was present since World War II, that embraced organic foods and ethnic cuisines and, later, *sushi* “became popular among sophisticated consumers as a sign of class and cosmopolitanism”³¹⁴. This trend gradually but steadily spread all around the country and was followed by the opening of fashionable high-end Japanese restaurants in the most sought-after locations in metropolises, such as the opening of a *sushi* bar in New York’s Harvard Club in 1972 or the fusion cuisine restaurant “Matsuhisa” in Los Angeles managed by Michelin-starred chef Nobuyuki Matsuhisa. While in the 1970s and 1980s *sushi* took on a status of “yuppie” food, endowed with social capital and associated to an healthy and bourgeois lifestyle, in the next decade it started to become a veritable “fast-food”, making its appearance in supermarkets and take-away corners and with the opening of more affordable options for eating it in restaurants.³¹⁵ The popularization of Japanese cuisine in Europe was slower and can be partially imputed to the lack of a consistent base of Japanese expatriates. “Only in the 1990s did a wave of interest in Japanese cuisine reach a broader European population, and it was largely an extension of the popular styles of *sushi* that had already been created in the US”. The epicenter of the *sushi* boom in Europe was in London, the European culinary capital in terms of dynamism and innovation and home to the largest population of Japanese expatriates in Europe, where a number of popular and successful *sushi* restaurants opened in the mid-1990s, such as Harrods Sushi Bar, Moshi Moshi and Yo! Sushi. The popularization of *sushi* in Europe followed a slightly different path than the one observed in the United States. In fact, while the high-end spectrum of Japanese cuisine was undoubtedly present in Europe, as attested by the Hotel Okura in Amsterdam, *sushi* affirmed itself into the popular imagination with the advent of the *kaitenzushi* bar (rotary sushi bar), where it was served on mechanized conveyor belts in down-to-earth and accessible Japanese-styled locales.³¹⁶ The global boom of *sushi* was spurred by its allegedly healthy properties and by the increasing presence of Japan into the pop culture of the time, albeit viewed through a rather exotic lens. However, while “a characteristic feature of the pioneering establishments serving Japanese cuisine in Europe and the US was the endeavour of the management to recreate a

³¹³ Bestor, T. (2009). “How sushi went global”, *Foreign Policy*, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/19/how-sushi-went-global/>.

³¹⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). p. 182.

³¹⁵ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006).

³¹⁶ Farrer, J. et al (2019).

“Japanese” ambiance in their restaurants”³¹⁷ through the use of Japanese background music, red lanterns and *bonsai* plants, the food itself became increasingly localized, with invention of the California Roll and of the Avocado Roll that propelled its popularity worldwide.

The 1970s and the 1980s, then, were a watershed moment for the future of Japanese cuisine. The emerging pride and interest towards local and “authentic” Japanese foodways, the government-led initiatives that attempted to revitalize the struggling agricultural sector and the construction of local cuisine in a bid to appeal to domestic and international tourists, coupled with the popularity boom of Japanese cuisine abroad and the soon-to-follow economic recession of the 1990s, laid the basis for the instrumentalization of Japanese cuisine as a mean of soft power in the project of “Cool Japan”, which will be analyzed in the next chapter.

³¹⁷ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006), p. 191.

CHAPTER III – JAPAN’S GASTRODIPLOMACY

3.1 – “COOL JAPAN”, THE FAILURE OF THE “SUSHI POLICE” AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JRO

As observed in the preceding chapter, Japanese cuisine underwent a significant number of modifications throughout the 20th century, largely as the result of the direct influences of historical, geopolitical and economic circumstances. The first half of the 20th century was characterized by an intense Westernization of eating practices, consolidated following the Meiji leadership’s efforts to achieve a rapid modernization and the consolidation of the nation-state by recreating the successful model exported by the Western powers, obtained through the adoption of foreign ingredients and culinary techniques and the reliance on the field of nutritional sciences that brought a considerable shifting of alimentary practices in the population. Following the disastrous famines and the widespread starvation that ravaged Japan during the Second World War and in its immediate aftermath, in the 1950s and 1960s we can observe, along with a sudden rise of the standards of living following an unprecedented economic boom, a further Westernization of eating practices widely elicited by the close political ties established with the United States, as the flooding of the market with American food imports and the popularization of an idealized view of the American middle-class lifestyle engendered a significant impact on the consumption habits of the Japanese population. However, by the start of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, while foreign culinary trends such as the advent of fast-foods and the establishment of fancy Italian and French restaurants were by now prominent in the Japanese culinary scene, a newfoundreappreciation for an authentic and distinctly national cuisine took hold of Japan, largely spurred by ad-hoc political agendas, concerns over environmental and food security issues and a renewed interest in Japanese culture and folklore which was frequently depicted in a wide array of media.

Coincidentally, Japanese cuisine, although in a rather hybridized fashion, grew in demand abroad, particularly in the United States and in Europe, due to the popularity of standout dishes such as *sushi* and *teppanyaki* and the healthiness and tinge of exoticness associated to them. While the Japanese government during the 20th century often incorporated food into its political agendas as a way of shaping the consumption habits of its population by relying on the precepts of nutritional science, it wasn’t until the start of the new millennium that

Japanese food became an asset in a comprehensive foreign policy that had as its main aims the projection of the unique appeal of Japanese culture abroad, part of a plan that was aptly named “Cool Japan”, and the revitalization of its lagging economy. The re-evaluation of the economic and cultural value of food was kickstarted by the downward spiral in which Japan found itself throughout the 1990s, when prolonged economic stagnation left Japan’s economy in a worrying state leading many analysts and journalists to define this period as Japan’s “lost decade”. In fact, “by the end of the 1990s, the policies that had created growth in the first four post-war decades were no longer effective”³¹⁸ as the decline of the manufacturing sector, that was the leading industry on which Japan’s economic renaissance of the post-war era was erected, was followed by soaring levels of unemployment, the collapse of the real estate market and a significant downturn in wages, leaving what was until some years prior one of the wealthiest economies of the world in great difficulties. Moreover, in addition to having lost the status of economic superpower enjoyed until then, Japan’s international standing was repeatedly put into question. The refusal to contribute in military terms to the Gulf War effort, which was only later rectified through the dispatching of minesweepers and the provision of naval backup to US troops, and the deteriorating relationships with its Asian neighbours China and South Korea, soured by the territorial disputes over the Senkaku (Diaoyu in Chinese) and Takeshima (Dokdo in Korean) Islands and the longstanding animosity regarding Japan’s imperial atrocities, dealt an heavy blow to the “peace-loving” image by which Japan wanted to be recognized abroad.³¹⁹

However, despite the stagnating state of the economy and the controversies plaguing the international image of Japan, in this period

“playful teen-centric products and services – fashion, telecommunication, entertainment and in particular the multimedia culture of *anime*, *manga* and computer videogames, including all related merchandising, collectibles and toys – became the fastest growing component and among the most successful exports of Japan’s recession-stricken economy”³²⁰.

In fact, by the mid-1990s, Japan’s creative industries became the main sector carrying the brunt of the precarious Japanese economy, as the “total revenue from creative industries

³¹⁸ Green, H.S. (2015). “The soft power of cool: economy, culture and foreign policy in Japan”, *Toyo Hogaku*, 58(3), p.52.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Daliot-Bul, M. (2009). “Japan Brand strategy: The taming of “Cool Japan” and the challenges of cultural planning in a postmodern age”, *Social Science Japan Journal*, 12(2), p. 247.

increased over 86%”³²¹ during the decade between 1989 and 1999 and “by 2006 the value of cultural exports exceeded the combined total of total export and cultural imports”³²². As such, it did not come as a surprise that by the start of the 21st century Japan turned to its creative industries in order to revitalize its flailing economy and to assert its cultural attractiveness on the world stage.

How much of an impact Japanese creative industries could have on younger audiences abroad was analyzed in detail by journalist Douglas McGray in an article titled “Japan’s national gross cool” published in 2002 on the renowned magazine “Foreign Policy”. McGray highlights the pervasive influence that Japanese cultural exports, ranging from multimedia entertainment such as *anime* and *manga* to fashion and J-pop music, were eliciting on American pop culture at the start of the 2000s and he suggests how such an influence could be used as a platform for projecting soft power as elaborated by Joseph S. Nye³²³, according to which “a country that stands astride popular channels of communication has more opportunities to get its messages across and to affect the preferences of others”³²⁴. Then, in 2002, the same year in which the article was published, the Japanese government under the guidance of Prime Minister Jun’ichiro Koizumi embarked in a new program that had as its main objective the support of “intangible intellectual property in the form of innovative and creative products, spearheaded by Japanese media content such as *anime*, *manga* and game software”³²⁵ in order to create a recognizable “Japan Brand” to export abroad. Such a program entailed a two-fold strategy: on the one hand, Japanese creative industries were to take the place of the manufacturing sector, on which Japan built its fortunes in the second half of the 20th century, as the driving engine of Japanese economy; on the other hand, the creative industries, with the widespread popularity they enjoyed among young and fashionable audiences abroad and the relative harmless and innocuous images they displayed, represented a viable and inconspicuous mean to improve the image of Japan abroad, enhancing in the process Japan’s cultural capital that could be wielded as a form of soft power³²⁶. In fact, as exposed by Theodore Bestor, “a rich national cultural brand is a form of cultural capital that a nation can utilize as the basis for exerting soft power in global relationships, promoting exports, encouraging tourism, and positively influencing foreign opinion”³²⁷. Consequently,

³²¹ Green, H.S. (2015). p. 57.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ McGray, D. (2002). “Japan’s gross national cool”, *Foreign Policy*, (130), p. 44.

³²⁴ Nye, J.S. (1990).

³²⁵ Daliot-Bul, M. (2009). p. 248.

³²⁶ Daliot-Bul, M. (2009).

³²⁷ Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018). P. 114.

the first Intellectual Property Strategic Program, “reviewed annually by a group headed by the Prime Minister and consisting of all cabinet ministers including the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery”³²⁸, was drafted in 2004 and focused mainly on “media content as a lever for enhancing the value of Japanese products abroad”³²⁹. However, by its second iteration in 2005, the Intellectual Property Strategic Program started to tap into the diverse fields that composed the vast realm of Japanese pop culture, incorporating into its ranks different products such as fashion, music and food³³⁰. The 2005 minutes of the Intellectual Property Strategic Program relay that

“through the collaborative efforts of tourism institutions and cultural diplomacy, we [Japan] need to establish and strengthen a Japan Brand, by strategically conveying the “attractiveness” of Japan using the content business and lifestyle-related businesses such as food, regional brands and fashion”³³¹.

As many scholars have argued, the “Cool Japan” initiative is “often understood as the government’s efforts to project a favorable image of itself abroad and increase its influence in the world and to stimulate the economy by expanding exports and by attracting more tourists based on culture”³³². Thus, after the surge of popularity of *sushi* that swept the United States and Europe throughout the 1980s and 1990s, food was at last recognized by the Japanese government as a strategic mean to convey the attractiveness and “coolness” of Japan abroad and as an asset to revive the decadent economy of the 21st century.

However, the Japanese government’s first foray into the popularization of its culinary patrimony abroad encountered divisive responses both domestically and internationally and proved itself to be, in hindsight, a complete failure.

As a direct consequence of the inscription of food into the newly-devised initiative of “Cool Japan”, in 2005 the Intellectual Property Strategic Program committee founded the “Japan Brand Working Group” which subsequently led to the establishment of a specialized branch called “Shokubunka Kenkyuu Suishin Kondankai” (“Panel discussion for the promotion and research of dietary culture”), whose main task was to brainstorm viable ways of promoting

³²⁸ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). “There’s something fishy about that sushi: How Japan interprets the global sushi boom”, *Japan Forum*, 23(1), Taylor & Francis Group, p. 110.

³²⁹ Daliot-Bul, M. (2009). p. 253.

³³⁰ Daliot-Bul, M. (2009).

³³¹ Intellectual Property Basic Act, (act no. 122 of 2002) (English Version), 2002, p. 84 as quoted in Daliot-Bul, M. (2009). p. 253.

³³² Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022). p. 120.

Japanese food under the banner of “Japan Brand”³³³ and increasingly demanded to the highest levels of government, in particular to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, to “promote food culture as a state strategy”³³⁴. The end result was that in 2006 the Intellectual Property Strategic Program “listed food culture as one of the cultural assets that represents the gross national cultural power of Japan”³³⁵. At the same time, the proliferation of pan-Asian restaurants that offered hybridized or “fusion” variations of Japanese cuisine, mixing them with elements of Chinese and Korean cuisines, and generally managed by non-Japanese owners brought a wave of concern among the Japanese population, in particular among restaurateurs, regarding the diffusion of “unauthentic” Japanese cuisine and the watering down of the traditional values associated to it. The relevance of these worries was epitomized by Toshikatsu Matsuoka, head ministry of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery in Shinzo Abe’s cabinet, who, during a business trip in the United States, stopped to dine at a Japanese restaurant in Denver and was appalled by the food served to him, allegedly lamenting that sushi was served side-by-side with Korean barbecue in a manner that was completely disrespectful toward Japanese cuisine³³⁶. While this tale has probably been greatly exaggerated by the media, it shows how Japanese concerns over the “unauthenticity” of their food displayed abroad coupled with the ambition of the government to exploit the popularity and recognizability of Japanese food as a vector to improved Japan’s image led to a “government’s plan to put in place a system of authenticating Japanese restaurants abroad”³³⁷. In 2006, then, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery set up its own internal advisory council that, through a series of meetings and researches, looked into the issue of misrepresentation of Japanese cuisine abroad, stressing the non-Japanese ownership of allegedly Japanese eating establishments that served “unauthentic” Japanese cuisine³³⁸. Consequently, the advisory council discussed ways of how to stem the diffusion of this phenomenon and, as a solution, came up with a system of certifications that would “judge which restaurants served the “correct/appropriate” Japanese cuisine in order to protect the cuisine’s integrity”³³⁹. Such a system involved the dispatching of so-called “secret inspectors” to Japanese restaurants in different cities all over the world whose task was to assess the

³³³ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011).

³³⁴ Shokubunka Kenkyu suishin kondankai (2005). “Nihonshoku bunka no suishin: Nihon burando no ninaite”, p. 12 as quoted in Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). p. 110.

³³⁵ Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters (2006). “Intellectual property strategy programme 2006”, p. 130 as quoted in Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). p. 110.

³³⁶ McGray, D. (2002).

³³⁷ Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022). p. 117.

³³⁸ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011).

³³⁹ Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022). p. 117.

alleged “authenticity” of the dishes served by referencing a set of government-mandated guidelines, such as the provenance of the ingredients and the knowledge and familiarity with Japanese cuisine of the chefs involved³⁴⁰. In case the restaurants inspected passed the controls and were deemed as in line with the standards mandated by the Ministry, they would receive an official certification by the Japanese government, evocatively shaped as an “official seal emblazoned with cherry blossoms”³⁴¹, that had to be displayed inside the restaurants in question and they would be added to a “list of approved Japanese restaurants on a government-sponsored website”³⁴². Emblematic of the policing intents of this plan was the dispatching of a number of Japanese food connoisseurs under the guise of “secret inspectors” to Paris to investigate over 80 eating establishments that claimed to serve Japanese cuisine. The end result of such a blitz was that less than a third of the restaurants inspected were found in line with the exacting standards sketched out by the Japanese government. While no penalties were envisioned for the restaurants that did not pass the controls, the initiative encountered a vitriolic backlash both in the domestic and in the international arena, with overt accusations of culinary nationalism waved against the Japanese government. The certification program generated intense debates on newspapers and in the media at large and was subject to public ridicule worldwide, with the provocative and slightly derisive appellation of “Sushi police” ideated by journalist Anthony Faiola in an article for the Washington Post and the broadcasting a decade later of a satirical *anime* titled, catchingly, “Sushi Police” in which a government-picked special branch of investigators was deployed all over the world to protect the integrity of Japanese cuisine. So, while the goal of the certification program envisioned by the government was of guaranteeing a certain standard of authenticity and quality in Japanese restaurants abroad in order to give a more accurate depiction of Japan to customers and, in the process, creating an idealized image of Japan through its culinary patrimony, the program achieved the opposite effect. Instead, Japan found its international image consistently worsened by accusations that saw the project as nothing more than a way of projecting Japanese nationalism abroad, by the satirical depictions through which the program was lambasted on various media and by the domestic backlash that such an idea elicited. As a matter of consequence, the certification program was quickly and completely abandoned.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Cang, V. (2019). “Policing Washoku: The performance of culinary nationalism in Japan”, *Food and Foodways*, 27(3), p. 233.

³⁴² Ibid.

A significant number of contestations waged at the certification scheme revolved around the ultra-nationalist rhetoric behind it, tinged with thinly veiled racist and xenophobic undertones, that assigned the cultural ownership of *sushi* to Japan and its people and regarded foreign people as incapable of understanding or successfully reproducing the complexities and subtleties of Japanese cuisine, unless guided by Japanese expertise³⁴³. Moreover, by establishing a series of criteria for the achievement of a certification, the Japanese government set itself up as the uncontested authority for judging the “authenticity” of restaurants abroad, which entailed policing measures that proved to be deeply unpopular both domestically and internationally. As scholars Sakamoto and Allen state regarding the certification program: “It mobilizes an essentialist and nationalist rhetoric that rejects the value of non-Japanese restaurants (often owned and run by Asian “others”) that “pretend” to be “real” Japanese. It assumes a non-problematic notion of ownership and authenticity regarding what is considered to be Japanese national cuisine and attempts to exert control over it. In this sense, the above quotes demonstrate a clear case of culinary nationalism”³⁴⁴. Moreover, numerous scholars and journalists in Japan questioned what “authenticity” actually meant and repeatedly asked what makes up “genuine Japanese food”³⁴⁵. It was stressed how Japanese cuisine itself was the result of the intermixing of various foreign influences, such as in the case of *ramen* from China or curry rice from India to name just a few, and how dishes that were initially considered foreign had risen to the status of national dishes. As such, the government’s attempt to police a reified version of Japanese cuisine was seen as not only hypocritical but also as not taking into consideration the history of Japanese cuisine itself.

Finally, the government’s effort to mandate a top-down vision of Japanese cuisine ran counter to what made Japanese cuisine popular abroad in the first place. In fact, the boom of sushi was greatly facilitated by its approachability and adaptability, which made it possible to create hybridized versions by attaining to local produce and tailored on the taste preferences of the local populations. As such, allegedly “bastardized” versions of *sushi*, such as the infamous California Roll, functioned as a gateway into a more comprehensive understanding of Japanese food culture, that is, they introduced *sushi* to foreign audiences that were completely unfamiliar with the custom of eating raw fish and made them interested in deepening their understanding of Japan³⁴⁶.

³⁴³ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011).

³⁴⁴ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). p. 109.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Cwiertka, K.J. (2006); Sanchanta, M. (2007). “Japan’s « sushi police » are on a roll”, Financial Times (26 January 2007), available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b2d884e2-ad78-11db-8709-0000779e2340>.

While the accusations of culinary nationalism and xenophobia brought the Japanese government to put an immediate end to their certification program, the failure of the project did not discourage the Japanese government from pursuing their agenda of exploiting the popularity of Japanese food. However, having learnt from the “sushi police” PR disaster, the government tried to readdress the issues that made the previous campaign so unpopular in the first place. First, it readdressed the policing intents of the preceding campaign under which the nationalistic undertones regarding the cultural ownership of Japanese cuisine lay hidden. So, instead of a certification program that involved the dispatching of secret inspectors who would forcefully evaluate the authenticity of foreign Japanese restaurants, the Japanese government switched its strategy by establishing a system of voluntary recommendation.³⁴⁷ The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery formed a private body whose main task was to research Japanese restaurants that wanted to participate in the recommendation scheme and to follow the guidelines sketched out by the newly-founded association. Then, once restaurants directly expressed their willingness in complying with the recommendation guidelines, the private body formed by the government would “survey and inspect them with regard to their use of “primary ingredients” from Japan and “correct” knowledge of Japanese food culture, including proper sanitary management, “restaurant atmosphere”, food and customer service, food presentation and flavor, as well as the capacity to convey “information on Japanese food preparation, ingredients and food culture to guests”³⁴⁸.

Secondly, the new recommendation scheme played down the focus on “authenticity” that characterized the previous initiative and instead emphasized in its guidelines the use of Japanese original ingredients and of Japanese cooking skills as the main points for obtaining a recommendation. Thus, “positive recommendations were to be made on the basis of the use of ingredients imported from Japan as well as Japanese culinary skills, atmosphere, Japanese language, service, presentation and so forth”³⁴⁹. Moreover, it changed its perception of non-Japanese owned and “fusion” restaurants, which previously were looked down upon through a pejorative and slightly xenophobic lens, by taking into account the “possibility of creating a “fusion” category as part of the recommendation programme”³⁵⁰ and actually encouraging

³⁴⁷ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011).

³⁴⁸ Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) (2007), “Proposal for Japanese Restaurant Recommendation Program (Draft)”, p. 4 as quoted in Cang, V. (2019), p. 239.

³⁴⁹ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). p. 112.

³⁵⁰ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). p. 115.

experimentation with Japanese cuisine, as long as it retained the use of imported Japanese ingredients and a connection with Japan's signifier.

Finally, to erase the top-down approach that doomed the certification program, the association commissioned with the recommendations of restaurants was established as a non-profit organization, apparently free of any direct influence from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery or any other kind of political entity. Thus, "it was noted that the program should be pursued by the private sector, with the government assuming a supporting role"³⁵¹. Consequently, after the spectacular debacle of the certification scheme, a series of panels and discussions between the leading figures of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery took place and, in March 2007, "it was agreed that the implementation of the "Japanese Restaurant Recommendation Program" would be proposed to the government"³⁵². Following this recommendation, in the July of 2007 the Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad, commonly abbreviated as JRO, was officially established. In the first year of its existence it focused on the elaboration of a set of recommendation guidelines for restaurants abroad and on the design of its new official logo (which used the common imagery of chopsticks, cherry blossoms and the Japanese national flag) and a recommendation sticker³⁵³. In the next year the JRO would establish different branches abroad in Bangkok, Shanghai, Taipei, Amsterdam, London, Los Angeles and Paris and would start receiving an annual budget, granted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, of 270 million yen³⁵⁴. As the funding for the operations of JRO is provided mainly by the Ministry, it is clear how despite the proclaimed intention of leaving the recommendation program in the hands of the private sector, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery remained a looming presence in the decision-making process. As Cang argues "although JRO is a nonprofit organization on paper, it acts for MAFF and has always been headed by a former MAFF minister"³⁵⁵ and "all of its projects are also exclusively funded by MAFF"³⁵⁶. Then, the JRO embarked in the project of creating "an information page of officially recommended restaurants on its website, which has grown into a database with lists for 26 countries in Asia, North and South America, Oceania, the Middle East and Europe"³⁵⁷ and amounted to more than 2700 restaurants by

³⁵¹ Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022). p. 118.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011).

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Cang, V. (2019). p. 241.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Cang, V. (2019). p. 242.

2017³⁵⁸. However, the activities of the JRO did not stop at the recommendation of certified Japanese restaurants abroad but actually expanded to involve a series of initiatives that, using the recommendation program as a façade, have at its core the expansion of overseas markets for Japanese food, that is, the increase of Japanese food exports. As Sakamoto and Allen acutely observe, “JRO sees itself increasingly as an agency that facilitates commercial activities between overseas Japanese restaurants, exporters and government agencies, rather than as an agency that ensures the authenticity of Japanese food overseas”³⁵⁹. Among the initiatives undertaken by the JRO there are

“the establishment of branches abroad, the publication of materials for information and improvement of culinary techniques, training seminars for human resources development, survey on demand for Japanese food overseas and related public relation activities, information exchange and networking with members abroad, research for the promotion of food exports”³⁶⁰.

So, the JRO, while keeping the recommendation program as its main base of operations, with time expanded its activities and influence abroad to the point of becoming a sort of embassy for Japanese food abroad. However, since the guidelines for the recommendation program emphasized mainly the use of imported and genuine Japanese ingredients and the reliance on a distinctly Japanese knowledge of cooking, it is clear how such a program functioned as a platform to increase Japanese food exports abroad and to assert Japan as the ultimate repository of knowledge regarding Japanese cuisine. Thus, the use of Japanese ingredients was deemed as a *conditio sine qua non* for the inscription in the government-approved list and represented a subtle way to form profitable economic partnerships for the export of Japanese foods all over the world, largely aided by the researches and market analyses conducted inside JRO itself. At the same time, in order to guarantee a correct know-how of Japanese cuisine, JRO frequently organized symposia, seminars, workshops and training courses to which prospecting restaurants were strongly encouraged to participate. In fact, only restaurants whose staff took part in at least one of the JRO-organized activities were considered as viable candidates for the recommendation list.³⁶¹ As such, despite being a voluntary recommendation program, restaurants that aimed at taking part in it had to rely both on food imports from

³⁵⁸ At <http://ironet.org/about/active/> it is possible to consult a list of restaurant guides compiled by JRO. Moreover, at <http://ironet.org/restaurant/> it is possible to research specific restaurants endorsed by JRO, by selecting locality and typology of restaurant, through its database.

³⁵⁹ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). p. 113.

³⁶⁰ JRO: Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad, “Teikan [Articles of Association]” as quoted in Cang, V. (2019). p. 241.

³⁶¹ Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011).

verified Japanese exporters and on the knowledge mandated by JRO-approved activities. Thus, through its guidelines and the activities surrounding them, the JRO, backed by the Japanese government, put in place a system that managed to both increase the amount of Japanese food exports and keep the cultural ownership of Japanese cuisine inside the national borders without attracting the same scathing critics of some years before.

As Sakamoto and Allen aptly summarize, “the certification/recommendation program plan emerged in the context of Japan’s pursuit of soft power and national branding, rather than an outright nationalist agenda to promote the purity and superiority of Japanese national culture”.³⁶² So, the foundation of the JRO represented the first step into the comprehensive gastrodipomatic campaign of the Japanese state. However, while its activities would keep growing over time, a great boost to the gastrodipomatic campaign of Japan would be granted by the inscription of the “French gastronomic meal” into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List, which would represent the starting point for the inscription of Japanese cuisine or washoku into the same List, as analyzed in the next paragraph.

³⁶² Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). p.116.

3.2 – APPLICATION TO UNESCO AND WASHOKU AS “WORLD CULTURAL INTANGIBLE HERITAGE”

In 2003, with the official drafting of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reached a momentous decision in its history by paving the way for a new conception of heritage, as the primary aim of the document was to protect and promote cultural practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and individuals recognized as part of their cultural heritage. In fact, “whereas tangible heritage cultural assets include buildings, monuments, landscapes and artifacts, intangible cultural assets refer to a wide variety of cultural practices that range from folklore, oral traditions, performing arts, language, knowledge and food”³⁶³. The drafting of the Convention has attracted consistent scholarly attention in academic circles and has been regarded as the beginning of the so-called “Asian turn”, that is,

“the hard-won recognition that cultural heritage preservation and promotion should include less durable monuments built of perishable materials and the multiple ways in which heritage is preserved and handed down via oral traditions, rituals, musical performance and many other kinds of intangible cultural practices”³⁶⁴.

Japan was one of the most influential nations supporting the recognition of intangible cultural heritage. In fact, since its birth as a modern nation-state, Japan has always carefully managed and protected its cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, through a wide assortment of policies and national laws. Japan initiated the process of heritagization of its cultural patrimony at the onset of the Meiji era when, in 1871, the Japanese government enacted the first law concerning the safeguarding of cultural objects, among which temples and shrines received particular attention³⁶⁵. The use of heritage sites as a vehicle to promote the nation abroad, a strategy commonly used nowadays under the guise of “nation branding”, was already employed at the time, albeit in a more rudimentary fashion, as “along with the process of nation-building in the Meiji era, Japan sought to establish a global cultural presence and

³⁶³ Assmann, S. (2024). “Culinary heritage in Asia: National and regional identities – Reflections from the field”. *Routledge Open Research*, 3(6), 6, p. 3.

³⁶⁴ Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018). “Washoku, far and near: UNESCO, gastrodiploamacy, and the cultural politics of traditional Japanese cuisine”. *Devouring Japan: Global Perspectives on Japanese Culinary Identity*, p. 104.

³⁶⁵ Prough, J.S. (2022). *Kyoto revisited: heritage tourism in contemporary Japan*. University of Hawaii Press, p. 22 as quoted in Assmann, S. (2024).

exhibited arts and crafts at international exhibitions such as the Paris International Exhibition in 1867 and the Vienna International Exhibition in 1873³⁶⁶. After the end of the Second World War, in 1950 Japan drafted the Cultural Properties Law “which focused on the preservation of *mukei bunkazai*, a term translated as “non-form cultural properties”, an earlier term for intangible heritage³⁶⁷. By 1975 the Cultural Properties Law was updated in order to incorporate in its ranks “Intangible Folk Cultural Property”, which comprised customs revolving around culinary traditions, although not food itself. However, while domestically Japan was very proactive in the preservation and management of its cultural heritage, by the start of the 1980s it started to affirm itself in the international arena as one of the leading voices demanding recognition of the centrality and importance of intangible heritage. In fact, during the 1980s, “Japan became involved in international processes of heritage conservation which culminated in co-hosting the ICOMOS (International Conference on Monuments and Sites) conference on authenticity in Nara in 1994³⁶⁸, whose end result was the stipulation of the Nara Document on Authenticity “which opened the dialogue about including intangible cultural heritage and paved the way toward better recognition of heritage outside Europe³⁶⁹. As such, Japan played a decisive role in pushing for the recognition of world intangible heritage and was already well-accustomed to the promotion of it at a domestic level. Such experience proved useful as, since the inception of the UNESCO Convention in 2004, a great number of cultural practices that were already inscribed at the domestic level in the Representative List were slowly added to the UNESCO List for Cultural Intangible Heritage, such as the Yamaboko floats of the Gion Festival in Kyoto, the Noh theater and the Bunraku puppeteering theater.

While the drafting of the Convention opened the doors of UNESCO to the inscription of a wide assortment of cultural practices, food was initially not recognized as a category worthy of World Heritage status, so much so that in 2008 a “UNESCO official was quoted as saying that “there is no category at UNESCO for gastronomy ... I am afraid that the presentation of a dossier on gastronomy will not go any further³⁷⁰. Such a statement would prove itself to be

³⁶⁶ Akagawa, N. (2015). “Intangible heritage and embodiment: Japan’s influence on global heritage discourse”, *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, p. 74 as quoted in Assmann, S. (2024). p. 5.

³⁶⁷ Akagawa, N. (2015). “Intangible Heritage and embodiment: Japan’s influence on global heritage discourse”, *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, p. 76 as quoted in Assmann, S. (2024). p. 6.

³⁶⁸ Assmann, S. (2024). p. 6.

³⁶⁹ Prough, J.S. (2022). *Kyoto revisited: heritage tourism in contemporary Japan*. University of Hawaii Press, p. 22 as quoted in Assmann, S. (2024). p. 6.

³⁷⁰ Sciolino, E. (2008). “Time to Save the Croissants”, *New York Times*, November 10 as quoted in Cang, V. (2015). “Unmaking Japanese food: Washoku and intangible heritage designation”. *Food Studies*, 5(3), p. 49.

short-lived as, at the time of writing, more than thirty items regarding culinary traditions and items have been recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage, spearheaded in 2010 by the “French gastronomic meal” and by the “Traditional Mexican cuisine – ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacan paradigm”. The inscription of the French and Mexican cuisines sparked up a craze for the recognition of culinary patrimony as Cultural Intangible Heritage, subsequently leading many nation-states to vie for UNESCO recognition by emphasizing the uniqueness and particularity of their culinary patrimony. Japan was no exception to this phenomenon, as its know-how concerning the promotion and preservation of intangible heritage, the widespread popularity of Japanese cuisine and its gastrodipomatic campaigns undertaken since the start of the 21st century put it in a favorable position to have its culinary patrimony recognized by UNESCO.

However, the application process was less straightforward as it initially appears to be and the decision to apply for the recognition of Japanese cuisine, while underscored by the goal to increase food exports abroad, was rooted in a multidimensionality of issues that tapped into domestic and international concerns.

First, “the initial idea to apply for the inscription of *washoku* was rooted in fears about the loss of traditional food culture voiced by cooking professionals who were concerned about the lack of successors of young chefs trained in the preparation of *washoku*”³⁷¹. The Japanese restaurateur sector expressed widespread concern regarding the perceived undesirability of working as a *washoku* chef in Japan and about the lack of younger chef approaching the profession, since “the largest proportion of students of cooking schools across Japan is learning to be *patissiers* (pastry chef) followed by those learning Italian, French and Chinese cooking”³⁷². Moreover, a consistent share of government officials was worried about the loss of traditional Japanese dietary culture and the decision to follow through with UNESCO proposal “coincided with the expression of growing concern within Japan at the time regarding the changing eating habits of the younger generation, including their increasing preference for Western foods and style of eating”³⁷³. The concerns regarding the declining appeal of Japanese cuisine among younger generations were already being re-addressed at a domestic level through a series of ongoing policies implemented after the ratification in 2005 of the Fundamental Law on Food Education (*shokuiku kihon-ho*). As scholar Stephanie Assmann accurately pointed out, the Food Education campaign undertaken by the Japanese

³⁷¹ Assmann, S. (2024). p. 6.

³⁷² Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022). P. 152.

³⁷³ Akagawa, N. (2018). “National identity, culinary heritage and UNESCO: Japanese *washoku*”, *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage*, Routledge, p. 207.

government revolved around three essential points: the prominence of the composition and aesthetic qualities of *washoku*, highlighting the centrality of rice as the main staple food in Japan and adopting the *ichijuu sansai* pattern as the basis for the preparation of meals; the restocking of the ideal of familial conviviality, obtained by encouraging “families to eat their meals together, preferably at home”³⁷⁴; the encouragement in the consumption and knowledge of locally-produced foodstuffs³⁷⁵. These objectives were pursued through the establishment of a MAFF-backed organization, named Food Action Nippon, “with the objective to promote the consumption of local agricultural products and to reinvigorate the significance of rice as Japan’s major staple food [...] as opposed to imported products”³⁷⁶ and through the introduction of food education courses into the primary and secondary school’s curricula. However, it was felt that the successful recognition of Japanese cuisine by UNESCO would benefit this process since, as scholar Atsuko Ichijo affirmed, “from the government’s perspective, therefore, the UNESCO application presented an opportunity to address these concerns in the form of promotion of *washoku*, which could also be accompanied by other policies such as the promotion of export of Japanese agricultural produce”³⁷⁷.

Secondly, the nomination of Japanese cuisine as UNESCO Cultural Intangible Heritage would have functioned as a way of re-asserting Japan’s cultural prominence on the international stage, as its status was threatened by the increased popularity of Korean pop culture. Apart from the pervasiveness of K-pop music and the expansive broadcasting of Korean dramas worldwide, at a culinary level South Korea had come out victorious of the so-called “kimchi wars”, an international feud between South Korea, China and Japan over the paternity of the origins of *kimchi* and the right to have an exclusive ISO certification for it, and was awaiting a response by the evaluation committee of UNESCO for the recognition of Joseon royal cuisine in its List. As such, “Korea’s efforts to nominate its culinary heritage in the context of a broader campaign to promote itself overseas is widely believed to have motivated certain sections of Japan’s culinary world to also urge the Japanese government to develop an ICHC nomination for an item of Japanese food”³⁷⁸, in a bid to be the first Asian country to have its cuisine recognized internationally by UNESCO.

³⁷⁴ Assmann, S. (2015). p. 172.

³⁷⁵ Assmann, S. (2015).

³⁷⁶ Assmann, S. (2015). P. 173.

³⁷⁷ Ichijo, A. (2017). “Banal nationalism and UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage list: Cases of *washoku* and the gastronomic meal of the French”. *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity and Belonging after Banal Nationalism*, p. 271.

³⁷⁸ Akagawa, N. (2018). P. 207.

Finally, among the growing concerns regarding the professional future of *washoku* in Japan, the underconsumption of local produce among the population that was compounded by fears about Japan's low food self-sufficiency rate and the climate of international competition with its rival neighbour South Korea, in the March of 2011 the catastrophic Tohoku earthquake and tsunami hit Japan causing the fusion of the nuclear reactors of the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Apart from the incalculable damages wrought on the inhabitants of the tsunami-struck regions, the fear of food contamination derived from the leaks of the Fukushima nuclear reactors was a concern that quickly gained traction among different strata of the Japanese population. While numerous politicians and celebrities were recruited to eat raw food originating from the Tohoku region in order to attest its safety, a large segment of the population refused to buy and consume these products and at the international level numerous doubts were cast upon the security of Japanese food exports³⁷⁹. In this light, the nuclear disaster brought a renewed sense of urgency to the application process as it was foreseen that "UNESCO listing [...] would assist Japanese people in regaining confidence"³⁸⁰ and would have functioned as a guarantee of quality for Japanese food exports. Thus, the decision to apply for the recognition of Japanese cuisine to UNESCO was the result of the intermixing of domestic and international contingencies that highlighted the strategic necessity of achieving international legitimization for Japan's culinary patrimony.

The first meeting aimed at outlining the contours of the application that would be forwarded to UNESCO was held in July 2011, shortly after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. It was underlined how a successful nomination would facilitate the economic and reputational recovery of local food producers and how it would work as an international proof of validity regarding the safety and quality of Japanese food. Then, an Exploratory Committee was hastily arranged comprising all the major political entities that supervised the sectors of food production and consumption, that is,

"the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF); the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkacho); the Japanese National Tourism Organization; regional government representatives (e.g. from Kyoto, to put weight behind their culinary and other claims of centrality); officials of national agricultural cooperatives and trade groups of chefs, restaurants, and other organizations; representatives of major food manufacturing companies (e.g. the Kikkoman soy sauce company); directors of culinary academies; and culinary historians and food critics"³⁸¹.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Akagawa, N. (2018). P. 210.

³⁸¹ Bestor, T. C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018). P. 105.

Moreover, “this was followed by a series of nation-wide public and expert meetings conducted by a specially appointed group of experts, designated as the “UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage promotion council of Japanese food culture” led by Professor [Isao] Kumakura”³⁸², with the objective of asserting the existence of diverse regional culinary traditions all over Japan and to emphasize cuisine’s centrality in Japanese society. During the first meeting the previous successful nomination files concerning France’s “French gastronomic meal”, Mexico’s “Traditional Mexican cuisine – ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacan paradigm” and the joint application for the “Mediterranean diet” (shared by Cyprus, Croatia, Spain, Greece, Italy, Morocco and Portugal) were examined in order to grasp the bureaucratic framework necessary for writing a successful nomination³⁸³. The French application, in particular, was thoroughly analyzed as it was, for unspecified reasons, the only one to be directly translated into Japanese. The meeting brought to an agreement over a tentative first draft, provisionally titled “Japanese food culture” (*Nihon shoku bunka*), which emphasized two essential characteristics of Japanese cuisine:

“1 – It is based on the bounty of the nature and puts an emphasis on ingredients’ natural taste and seasonality. Although the traditional diet is centered around rice as the basic food, Japanese food culture makes use of more than 1,5000 varieties of other ingredients.

2 – Aside from being a daily necessity, food in Japan is also imbued with sacred functions, as many kinds of food perform important roles in traditional events, rituals and other special occasions”³⁸⁴.

As it can already be observed from this first rough draft, the description of Japanese cuisine remained vague about ingredients and cooking techniques employed in its making but it greatly underlined the spiritual connection of food to traditional social practices in Japan.

Subsequently, a more comprehensive description of Japanese cuisine’s defining characteristics was formulated, which was articulated into four main points:

“1 – the use of a wide variety of abundant and seasonal ingredients, 2 – a nutritionally balanced structure, 3 – Distinct roles played by umami and fermented foodstuffs, and 4 – Links to rituals and annual celebrations, as well as cultural expressions such as *mottainai* and *itadakimasu*”³⁸⁵.

³⁸² Akagawa, N. (2018). P. 211.

³⁸³ Cang, V. (2015).

³⁸⁴ Cang, V. (2015). P. 252.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

After strong campaigning from the representatives of the Kyoto prefecture, which was the only prefecture represented in the Exploratory Committee and the only one to have a culinary style inscribed in the domestic “Intangible Cultural Property” list, the revised proposal was given the more specific title of “Unique and distinctive traditional Japanese cuisine centered on *kaiseki*”. In fact, *kaiseki* cuisine, originating in Kyoto in the 16th century and later popularized as haute cuisine in the 1930s through the efforts of Kitaoji Rosanjin, was seen as perfectly embodying the four essential points sketched out in the proposal and, thus, was unanimously endorsed by the committee members³⁸⁶. A meeting with the French officials that were in charge of the drafting of the nomination proposal for the “French gastronomic meal”, ultimately recognized by UNESCO, was organized in the sequent months in order to receive amore accurate feedback over the Japanese proposal. The visit to France proved to be a particularly inspired choice as the Japanese proposal was met with glowing reviews and widespread approval from the French representatives, who nonetheless relayed some insightful key advice that would render the Japanese proposal a reliable candidate for UNESCO approval. This suggestions, as reported by scholar Voltaire Cang, were:

“1) Japanese food culture must be clearly shown “to be important for the Japanese people and that it has been transmitted through generations while constantly being developed and sustained”, 2) that “due to the character of UNESCO with its non-elitist, ethnological way of thinking the contents must show that [Japanese food culture] is to be preserved for the benefit of a wide, general public” and, 3) that Japanese food culture as heritage must not be touted as a “means for commercialism or as a source of revenue, which is prohibited”³⁸⁷.

While it was envisaged that a more robust support from the general public and, especially, from the food sector would have benefited the proposal, the application centered on *kaiseki* cuisine was regarded as complete.

However, rather surprisingly, in the same year at the Sixth Session of the Intergovernmental Meeting for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held by UNESCO in Bali the South Korean proposal for the Joseon royal cuisine was “referred back” to the South Korean government, officially sanctioning its failure. This news caught the Japanese committee completely unprepared, as they regarded the South Korean application as

³⁸⁶ Cang, V. (2018). “Japan’s Washoku as intangible heritage: The role of national food traditions in UNESCO’s cultural heritage scheme”. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 25(4), pp. 491-513.

³⁸⁷ Cang, V. (2018). P. 500.

a surefire candidate for inscription into the UNESCO List³⁸⁸. The failure of the nomination was then imputed to the elitist character of Joseon royal cuisine in Korean society, as “the Japanese team interpreted this rejection as UNESCO’s stance against proposals that focused narrowly on elite and rarified aspects of cuisine rather than on more populist and inclusive versions of culinary experience”³⁸⁹. Such a conclusion elicited a panicked reaction among the committee members as it was surmised that *kaiseki* cuisine shared the same elitist and representative faults attributed to the Joseon royal cuisine, condemning it to its failure.

It was thus decided to revise the proposal. The previous title, which had *kaiseki* as its keyword, was scrapped altogether and instead was replaced by the rather generic term “*washoku*”, which stands literally for “Japanese food”³⁹⁰. “*Washoku*” was not a term used in common parlance to define Japanese food and it was actually a rather novel term, since it originated at the beginning of the 20th century as a counter to the spread of *yoshoku* (Western) cuisine³⁹¹. However, it was suggested that using a word in the native language for framing the nomination would have appealed to the UNESCO committee and, in addition, “*washoku* was seen to possess cachet as a word to express traditional food culture”³⁹². As Natsuko Akagawa suggests: “It was envisaged that, in time, the word [*washoku*] would become recognized internationally, as the word umami came to be associated with Japanese food and therefore with Japan”³⁹³. Thus, it can be observed how, even though the title revision was dictated by fear of failing the evaluation of the UNESCO committee, the choice of the term “*washoku*” foresaw the nation-branding initiatives that were at the forefront of the Japanese government’s future objectives. Moreover, while the four defining characteristics defined previously were left relatively untouched, “emphasis would be placed on the fact of Japanese food’s close links to annual and traditional events”³⁹⁴ following the suggestion of the French representatives and the connection between *washoku* and New Year’s traditional culinary celebrations were highlighted in the final draft.

Thus, the definitive application file, titled “*Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year*”, was drafted and stated that:

³⁸⁸ Akagawa, N. (2018); Cang, V. (2015).

³⁸⁹ Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018). P. 106.

³⁹⁰ Cang, V. (2015).

³⁹¹ Cwiertka, K.J. (2018). “Serving the nation: The myth of washoku”, *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan*, Amsterdam University Press.

³⁹² Cang, V. (2015). P. 54.

³⁹³ Akagawa, N. (2018). P. 205.

³⁹⁴ Cang, V. (2015). P. 54.

“*Washoku* is a social practice based on a set of skills, knowledge, practice, and traditions related to the production, processing, preparation, and consumption of food. It is associated with an essential spirit of respect for nature that is closely related to the sustainable use of natural resources. The basic knowledge and the social and cultural characteristics associated with *Washoku* are typically seen during New Year celebrations...The basic knowledge and skills related to *Washoku*, such as the proper seasoning of home cooking, are passed down in the home at shared mealtimes. Grassroots groups, schoolteachers, and cooking instructors also play a role in transmitting the knowledge and skills by means of formal and non-formal education or through practice”³⁹⁵.

Despite the relative vagueness employed in describing Japanese cuisine, without any overt references to specific foodstuffs or culinary techniques, at the UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Baku on December 2013 the Japanese proposal was accepted and officially inscribed into UNESCO’s List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Out of all the efforts that the Japanese government put into obtaining the coveted UNESCO Intangible Heritage inscription two conclusions can be observed.

The first one concerns the application process happening inside UNESCO itself. Analyzing the Japanese nomination for “*Washoku*, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year” there are some particular characteristics that come into focus: a remarkable number of similar traits shared with the previously successful French nomination proposal; the strategic adoption of the term “*washoku*” to frame the proposal, envisaged to obtain the favor of the UNESCO evaluative committee; the vagueness employed in defining Japanese cuisine, which did not include any observable references to specific foodstuffs or culinary techniques; and a strong emphasis laid on the spiritual and cultural connection between food and Japanese society. It can be argued that the Exploratory Committee articulated the *washoku* proposal not so much with the explicit goal of accurately defining what constitutes Japanese cuisine per se but, rather, strategically defined Japanese cuisine in a way that would allow it to encounter UNESCO approval. It shows how the Exploratory Committee, through the reliance on a corpus of academic knowledge and the support of the food sector, operated a strategic reconstruction of Japanese cuisine for the purpose of achieving a UNESCO Heritage Site nomination³⁹⁶, as “what the Japanese government indicates as the main elements of *washoku* are nothing more than a forced

³⁹⁵ UNESCO (2014). “*Washoku*, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year”, available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/washoku-traditional-dietary-cultures-of-the-japanese-notably-for-the-celebration-of-new-year-00869>.

³⁹⁶ Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018).

interpretation (if not a real manipulation) of a stereotypical ideal of the culinary tradition of Japan”.

The second one concerns the ripple effects that the successful nomination engendered in the gastrodipomatic campaigns undertaken by Japan onwards. While it is difficult to objectively assess the positive effects that the nomination elicited on the Japanese food export sector, it is nonetheless noted by Katarzyna Cwiertka that, in the months succeeding the announcement from UNESCO, a great number of publications, newspaper articles, TV programs and magazines extensively covered the topic, generating widespread curiosity toward Japanese cuisine abroad and a surge of domestic pride at home³⁹⁷. While a restoking of national pride and a boost of confidence toward the status of Japanese cuisine was definitely achieved, the UNESCO recognition functioned as the stepping stone for the expansion of the gastrodipomatic enterprises of the Japanese government, which will be thoroughly analyzed in the next paragraph, since it gave legitimacy to the authenticating undertones of the previous initiatives. As Voltaire Cang sharply asserts: “*Washoku* as formal Intangible Heritage gave Japan the endorsement it needed from UNESCO regarding its rightful proprietorship of Japanese food, with the added benefit of vagueness accruing from the label that is *washoku*, which at the same time is loaded with much potential for further redefinition”. In conclusion, the example of *washoku* shows how the UNESCO organization functions as an international political platform that nation-states exploit in order to gain legitimacy and cultural capital that can be invested in projects of nation-branding and in the projection of soft power abroad.

³⁹⁷ Cwiertka, K.J. & Miho, Y. (2020). *Branding Japanese food: from meibutsu to washoku*. University of Hawaii Press, Chapter 2.

3.3 – ON THE WINGS OF UNESCO: JAPAN’S GASTRODIPLOMACY AFTER THE INSCRIPTION OF WASHOKU

As argued in the preceding paragraph, the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, on behalf of the Japanese government and with the active cooperation of various other ministries and of the private sector, strategically operated a conceptual reconstruction of Japanese cuisine, re-branded for the occasion under the inconspicuous term “*washoku*”, with the implicit purpose of complying with the standards mandated by the UNESCO Evaluative Committee and obtaining a UNESCO Intangible Heritage nomination. While the UNESCO Convention of 2004 categorically prohibits any form of exploitation of its recognized heritage sites for economic or political enterprises, it is clear how the Japanese effort to have its cuisine recognized by the most influential international body on cultural matters was rooted in a series of domestic issues, which it was hoped were going to be readdressed through the positive effects generated by the successful nomination. As already described beforehand, the successful inscription of *washoku* brought a wave of renewed interest and pride among the Japanese audience regarding their international standing in the world, jeopardized by a decade-long economic recession, a humanitarian and ecological crisis arisen from the Fukushima nuclear meltdown and the perceived uprooting of traditional dietary habits following decades of intense Westernization of eating behaviors. Moreover, in a fortuitous turn of events, the inscription of *washoku* coincided with the recognition of Mount Fuji as a World Heritage site and with the assignment of the organization of the 2020 Olympics (subsequently postponed to 2021 due to the COVID global pandemic) which were going to be hosted in Tokyo, generating a remarkable boost for the international aspirations of the Japanese government³⁹⁸.

However, while partially overshadowed by more pressing domestic concerns, underlying the UNESCO nomination proposal there has always been, on Japan’s part, a clear intent of exploiting the organization’s international renown to further the gastrodipomatic enterprises undertaken since the start of the 21st century by backing them up with a UNESCO-approved patina of legitimacy. In fact, as Theodore Bestor relays, “[Japanese] officials also hoped that UNESCO recognition would neatly mesh with other dimensions of cultural projection that the government had been working on for some time”³⁹⁹. This intention was foreshadowed, in the August of 2013, by the establishment of the Executive Committee for

³⁹⁸ Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018).

³⁹⁹ Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018). P. 107.

the Export Strategy which drafted up the Export Expansion Policy, part of a comprehensive plan called the “FBI Strategy”, whose main objective was to augment Japanese food exports⁴⁰⁰. The newly-devised policy operated a categorization of the foodstuffs for export, by subdividing them in seven main categories, and articulated a diverse set of initiatives, which comprehended:

“the collection of data concerning the export markets; the promotion of Japanese food culture by highlighting the “good quality” of Japanese food and agricultural products; holding regular events to promote Japanese food and logistics network; supporting the creation of overseas sales bases; reviewing the current regulation and help foreign buyers to buy directly from Japanese wholesalers; relax export regulations; and renovate the procedures for food exports”⁴⁰¹.

A consistent bulk of these operations were subsumed into the already sprawling network of activities undertaken by the JRO, along with the recommendation program analyzed earlier, which was accordingly granted increased governmental funding in the following years, “rising from 300 million yen in 2014 to 800 million yen in 2016”⁴⁰². This strategy was compounded by an array of novel initiatives that made use of the cultural capital afforded by the international recognition of *washoku* by UNESCO and that assumed increased vigor year after year. In fact, just some days after the official announcement by UNESCO at the International Conference in Baku, the Japanese government had organized the first “Washoku World Challenge”, held in Tokyo and hosting a cast of renowned chefs who competed in a cooking competition to be recognized as the main exponent of Japanese cuisine⁴⁰³. While the first edition was organized more as a celebration of the widely anticipated UNESCO triumph, due to its resounding success it became an annual competition held in Japan, open to all non- Japanese chefs who wanted to test their skills over their knowledge and ability in traditional Japanese cuisine. The competition revolved around the various core aspects that compose *washoku* and every year a different theme was selected as the motif of the competition, ranging from mainstays like *umami* and the *ichijuu sansai* pattern to more complex concepts such as “*shokkan*, texture and taste in the mouth”. The organization of this event proved to be the starting point of a series of projects and initiatives centered around the publicization and promotion of *washoku* both abroad and at a domestic level, making it a veritable brand in

⁴⁰⁰ Farina, F. (2021). “Chapter: The politics of washoku: Japan’s gastronationalism and gastrodiplomacy” available at <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/56436>.

⁴⁰¹ Farina, F. (2021). P. 103.

⁴⁰² Cang, V. (2019). P. 242.

⁴⁰³ Cwiertka, K.J. (2018).

itself as it encompassed all the various aspects of Japanese cuisine (from, obviously, foodstuffs and beverages to kitchenware) and was at the forefront of numerous promotional campaigns. As Katarzyna Cwiertka argues “the “Washoku, UNESCO cultural heritage” designation can be easily spotted on commercial websites all over the internet, from those of food-processing companies such as Washoku kentei and Washoku Home Cooking, which specialize in teaching their clients *washoku*-related knowledge and skills”⁴⁰⁴. Thus, the intuition of the Exploratory Committee regarding the viability and branding potential of the previously unremarkable noun “*washoku*” revealed itself to be accurate, as it became the leitmotiv of every culinary initiative envisioned by the Japanese government in the subsequent years.

While the Washoku World Challenge encompassed a wide array of practices that compose the core of Japanese cuisine, it is *sushi* that is arguably considered as the quintessence of Japanese culinary culture, as it was regarded across a large body of national surveys as the dish that Japanese people are most proud of and its popularity worldwide is unquestioned. Thus, starting in 2014, a separate competition focused solely on sushi was organized and was catchingly named “World Sushi Cup”. The organization and promotion of this new format was appointed to the newly-formed World Sushi Skills Institute (WSSI), the only organization of its kind that acted as the ultimate repository of knowledge concerning the history and know-how of *sushi*, and was financially backed by the MAFF itself⁴⁰⁵. Even though it was subject to slight variations over the years, the format of the Cup essentially consists of two categories: the Edomae (Edo style) *sushi* category and the creative *sushi* category. The former, steeped in an historical view of *sushi*, involves the preparation of an arrangement of classic pieces of *sushi* with seafood and ingredients directly supplied by the organizers themselves, which are later evaluated by an authoritative selection of judges. The latter, instead, is less bound to such a traditional conception of *sushi* and actually encourages the participating chefs to experiment with the concept, by tailoring it to their culinary and cultural sensibilities and by allowing them to incorporate their own ingredients and decorations in the preparation. The two categories, however, are interrelated, as the Edomae stage is held on the first day and functions as a screening test after which only 20 chefs are selected to advance to the second round, that is, the creative *sushi* one⁴⁰⁶. However, the participation to the Cup comes with a particular caveat. In fact, while in the first edition the only prerequisite necessary for

⁴⁰⁴ Cwiertka, K.J. & Miho, Y. (2020). Chapter 5.

⁴⁰⁵ Cang, V. (2019).

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

participating in the contest was to possess a minimum of five years of work experience as a *sushi* chef, from its second edition all participants were required to take part in one of the seminars organized by the WSSI itself, in a move remarkably similar to the one that characterized the recommendation program established by JRO years prior⁴⁰⁷.

The presence of the creative *sushi* category certifies the interest of Japan to allow for experimentation with its most famous culinary export, allowing a diverse and multi-cultural selection of chefs to put their own twist on *sushi*, in a bid to further popularize its spread and appeal abroad and, arguably, to distance itself from the accuses of culinary nationalism waved at the “*sushi* police” scheme of a decade earlier through a more flexible and permissive approach. At the same time, however, the prerequisite that forcefully obliges contestants to take part in WSSI-organized seminars and training classes, the handpicked selection of judges and the limited entry granted to international media outlets are emblematic of the will of the Japanese government to retain an unquestioned authority over the “correct” and “appropriate” way of preparing *sushi*, that is, to retain proprietorship of the culinary matrix of *sushi* that is further legitimized by the UNESCO stamp of approval⁴⁰⁸. Thus, albeit in a subtler and less aggressive form, the precepts that underlain the failed “*sushi* police” initiative were still part and parcel of the new course of gastrodiploamacy undertaken by Japan.

If the World Washoku Challenge and the World Sushi Cup had as their key successes the legitimization of Japan as the ultimate authority capable of discerning the “authenticity” of *sushi*, the Japanese government nonetheless strived to expand its culinary presence abroad in order to increment its food exports. Such an aspiration was pursued by embarking in two different, although complementary, courses of action that allowed to showcase the variety and high quality of Japanese food produce: the organization of food fairs and exhibitions all over the world and the showcasing of *washoku* in highly publicized international events.

Regarding the former, in 2017, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and the MAFF cooperated in the organization of the first “Japanese Food” Export Fair, “designated as the most important platform for overseas importers/buyers looking to source Japanese food/beverage products”⁴⁰⁹. The organization of this fair, which takes place on an annual basis, integrated the already well-established initiatives undertaken by the JRO in the preceding years, that saw the establishment of numerous branches in different cities all over the world to function as veritable intermediaries between foreign food stores and restaurants

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Cwiertka, K.J. & Miho, Y. (2020). Chapter 5.

and Japanese food suppliers. This fair represents, arguably, the nexus where these two different casts of actors collide. Moreover, in the same period, the MAFF inaugurated two particular forms of ambassadorial projects: the “Japanese Cuisine Special Goodwill Ambassador” and the “Minister’s Award for Overseas Promotion of Japanese Food”. The former selects remarkable Japanese individuals of the food and restaurants establishments “as a spokesperson to effectively convey the charm of Japanese food and dietary culture overseas”⁴¹⁰. Among the list of appointed ambassadors it is no surprise to see some recurring names, such as Isao Kumakura, President of the Shizuoka University of Art and Science, and of Hattori Yukio, President of the Hattori Nutrition College, who cooperated and had a pivotal role in the drafting of the *washoku* proposal. The “Minister’s Award for Overseas Promotion of Japanese Food”, on the other hand, selects Japanese or non-Japanese chefs who distinguished themselves in popularizing Japanese cuisine abroad and are regarded as “capable of providing appropriate advice on how to spread Japanese cuisine abroad”⁴¹¹. Among this prestigious list there are Hideki Kashimoto, who “was given the award for his service of introducing Japanese cuisine to Russia”⁴¹², and Tetsuya Waseda, that “obtained the award for his service of introducing Japanese cuisine to Australia and Singapore”⁴¹³. Then, if the itinerant food fairs and the network of foreign branches established by the JRO function as prototypical culinary embassies, the individuals awarded by the MAFF are appointed with the role of veritable ambassadors for the spread of Japanese cuisine abroad.

Concerning the second aspect of these foreign-oriented strategy, the Japanese government has dispatched over the years prominent members of its culinary world to take part in popular and highly anticipated international events all over the world. The first instance of this approach can be seen in the exhibition of the Japanese Pavilion at the EXPO of 2015 held in Milan, Italy, generally known for its intensive focus on food and on the culinary sphere at large. The Japanese government made use of this acclaimed international platform to further emphasize the peculiarity and appeal of Japanese cuisine, as the

⁴¹⁰ Lusiana, Y.; Widodo, H.; Rukhiyat, A. & Koirunnisa, R. (2022). “Japanese government effort to preserve washoku as national culinary heritage”, *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Literature Innovation in Chinese Language, LIONG 2021*, Purwokerto, Indonesia. P. 10.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Lusiana, Y.; Widodo, H.; Rukhiyat, A. & Koirunnisa, R. (2022). P. 9.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

“sophisticated electronic exhibits within the pavilion focused on interrelationships among traditional agriculture, especially rice cultivation, the environment, and the cultural practices and symbolism that surround food production and consumption”⁴¹⁴.

Moreover, famous Japanese chefs were invited to “open pop-up restaurants at the Japan Pavilion, providing cooking demonstrations for the culinary press and visitors from the European industry”⁴¹⁵. The exhibition proved to be a resounding success as it was awarded the gold medal for the best exhibition of the EXPO and attracted a crowd of more than two millions of visitors, with long lines that stretched indefinitely and waiting times of hours.

This pattern was repeated the following year as in 2016 there were the Olympic Games of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The Japanese selection of athletes that qualified for the Olympic games was accompanied by a team of highly specialized Japanese chefs and numerous Japanese food companies sent their best produce to Brazil. According to Bestor, this initiative had a two-fold objective: on the one hand, it was to support Japanese athletes “with the finest Japanese cuisine possible to boost their morale and nutritional fitness”⁴¹⁶, all in all a reasonable endeavor for another vehicle of soft power such as the Olympic games; on the other hand, it “was to promote Japanese cuisine to the international audience attending the Olympics as part of the general effort to heighten global awareness of *washoku*”⁴¹⁷.

The same year the JRO updated its recommendation scheme by incorporating two new and separate certifications: the “Certification of Japanese Food and Ingredient Supporter Stores Overseas” and the “Certification of Cooking Skills for Japanese Cuisine in Foreign Countries”.

The former’s scope is to award food stores and restaurants that use or sell certified Japan-sourced produce, such as foodstuffs or beverages. The guidelines of this new certification state that restaurants and food stores are required to show at any time the provenance of the ingredients, by using specific labels, accurate descriptions in the menus or by conveying them directly to customers⁴¹⁸. “Once certified, JRO presents the establishment with an official seal stating “Japanese Food Supporter” specially made for the new certification program”⁴¹⁹.

⁴¹⁴ Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018). P. 111.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Cang, V. (2019).

⁴¹⁹ Cang, V. (2019). P. 243.



Fig. 1: Sticker “Japanese Food Supporter” awarded to all restaurants deemed in line with the new certification guidelines.

Courtesy of: <https://japan-food.jetro.go.jp/en/supporter.html>

The latter, instead, focuses on organizing seminars and training classes all over the world to convey to foreign chefs the appropriate knowledge necessary for a “correct” preparation of *sushi*, including “comprehension of Japanese dietary culture and hygiene management, knife skills (such as slicing and peeling) and cooking techniques (heat management, seasoning, broth making, etc.) as well as ability in “*omotenashi*” (Japanese hospitality and service)”⁴²⁰. The certification is subdivided in three different categories (bronze, silver and gold) “granted according to the chef’s level of experience and knowledge”⁴²¹ and, once obtained, “certified chefs are to be given an official seal decorated with cherry blossoms and the words “Authentic Japanese Cuisine” and “Taste of Japan” on it, which the establishment may display in their premises”⁴²². The new certifications represented the crowning achievement of the gastrodiplomatic enterprises taken up by JRO a decade earlier, since they supplanted the recommendation programs put in place previously and established an evaluative system that allowed at the same time to increase the quantities of Japanese food exports abroad and to assert the authority of Japan regarding its culinary patrimony by mandating a Japan-centric view of it.

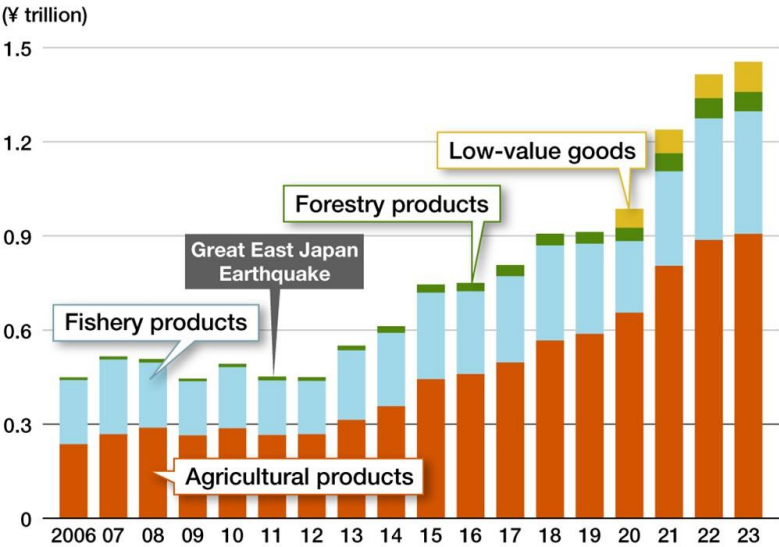
⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

While the aforementioned initiatives represent only a moderate sample of the gastronomic initiatives undertaken by the Japanese government since the inscription of *washoku* into the UNESCO Representative List, they give a clear picture of the goals and strategies adopted by Japan to project its appeal abroad, increase its economic revenues through the double channels of food exports and tourism and enforce the cultural proprietorship of Japanese cuisine’s codes. Even though numerous and diverse factors have to be taken into account when looking at the following data, such an intensive promotion of *washoku* without a doubt elicited positive yields in the fields of food exports and tourism numbers. In fact, it is calculated that “food and agricultural exports increased from 445 billion yen in 2009 to more than 750 billion in 2016”⁴²³ and a steep increase in tourism dictated by gastronomic interest can be observed, as in a 2017 survey regarding the reasons for which tourists come to visit Japan 68.4% of the interviewees answered that “[they] came with the anticipation to “eat Japanese food”⁴²⁴. According to more recent data, published on the websites www.nippon.com, “Japan’s 2023 exports of agricultural, forestry and fishery products and foodstuffs increased by 2.9% over the previous year to 1.45 billion yen. [...] Meanwhile, the popularity of sake has been rising, with exports increasing by 18.2% in 2022”⁴²⁵.

Values for Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Exports



Created by *Nippon.com* based on data released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. Low-value goods are items worth ¥200,000 or less, not recorded in trade statistics. [nippon.com](http://www.nippon.com)

⁴²³ Lusiana, Y.; Widodo, H.; Rukhiyat, A. & Koirunnisa, R. (2022). P. 2.
⁴²⁴ Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018). P. 112.

⁴²⁵ Available at: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h01900/>

Fig. 2: Data published on www.nippon.com regarding the food export rates of Japan from 2006 until 2023. Image courtesy of: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h01900/>⁴²⁶

Moreover, according to a research of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the Japan Travel and Tourism Association and Gurunavi “gastronomy tourism in Japan has been enjoying strong growth over recent years, providing economic benefits and acting as a tool for development and social inclusion”⁴²⁷. According to the UNWTO Report on Gastronomy Tourism: The Case of Japan, which could not be accessed in its totality, “research carried for the report found that 38% of Japan’s prefectures include or plan to include gastronomy tourism in their future plans, while 42% of municipalities reported that they already have examples of gastronomy tourism-related activities”⁴²⁸.

As Voltaire Cang aptly states:

“The plethora of new washoku promotion and certification schemes in the most recent years testify to a renewed vigor on the part of Japan, with MAFF at the helm, to assert its control over Japanese food. [...] This control now exceeds the old “sushi police” program in terms of the comprehensiveness of coverage and the systematic manner in which Japan engages in its schemes. Indeed, the nomination of washoku gave Japan the opportunity to reassert its authority over Japanese food; successful inscription legitimated such authority”⁴²⁹.

Thus, if the intention to exploit the cultural attractiveness of its cuisine in order to gain advantages in the economic and cultural diplomacy realms was present in the Japanese government’s agendas since the establishment of the “Cool Japan” policy at the beginning of the 2000s, it was only through the successful recognition of it by UNESCO that these projects, that previously encountered widespread and scathing criticisms, managed to shroud their political undertones through the veil of legitimacy afforded by the apolitical nature of UNESCO.

⁴²⁶ Data available at: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h01900/>⁴²⁶

⁴²⁷ Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/global/press-release/2019-05-27/new-unwto-report-gastronomy-tourism-case-japan>

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Cang, V. (2019). Pp. 249-250.

CONCLUSION

In the last two decades, Japan has effectively adopted its traditional cuisine, *washoku*, as a tool of gastrodiploamacy in order to modify and improve its international image and to significantly boost its economic sector through increased food exports and tourism. The case of Japan offers an interesting example of how a nation can exploit its culinary heritage not only to foster a sense of national identity and pride in its population but also to appeal to the wider global community, projecting its values, culture and economic potential on the world stage in the process. One of the pivotal moments in this process was the inscription of *washoku* into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2013. Such recognition functioned as a way to legitimize *washoku* as a central component of Japan's national brand. Japan's gastrodiploamatic campaigns attempted to reshape Japan's global image by showcasing the finesse, healthiness and appeal of its culturally rich culinary patrimony. Through government-supported initiatives, the Japanese authorities undertook a comprehensive effort to promote Japan's foodways abroad, in particular through the establishment of cultural outposts abroad under the guise of restaurants, food festivals and culinary exchange programs. These "culinary embassies" functioned as platforms where a foreign public could engage with Japanese culture in an accessible and pleasurable manner. Through the emphasis laid on the authentic, natural and historical roots of its culinary patrimony, Japan was able to create a sense of exclusivity and desirability around its food. This authenticity was the result of a careful strategic reconstruction of Japanese cuisine, which blended narratives of tradition with the contemporary realities of globalization. Despite *washoku*'s relatively recent appearance, it became framed as an ancient culinary practice, completely intrinsic to the Japanese way of life. Such a process had direct economic benefits as well. As foreign audiences developed an increased interest around Japanese food, they also required the proper ingredients to recreate authentic Japanese meals. This process was further supported by Japan's attempts to regulate what constitutes "authentic" Japanese cuisine abroad, through the establishment of specific certification programs ensuring that Japanese restaurants abroad used genuine and domestically produced ingredients. By establishing itself as the ultimate authority over the alleged "authenticity" of its cuisine, Japan made sure that the economic benefits deriving from its food culture appeal flowed back to its domestic agricultural and food production sectors. Moreover, the boom of popularity of Japanese cuisine also contributed to a larger surge in culinary tourism. The gastronomic appeal of Japan, further reiterated through the showcasing

of its cuisine at international exhibitions and events, helped the country to stand out as a global gastronomic destination, diversifying its tourism industry which started to put food culture at its forefront.

Japan's success in exploiting its cuisine as a tool to improve its international profile and to increase its food exports showcase the growing popularity of food in global politics. Thus, gastrodiploamacy has become a central element in how nations attempt to define themselves and engage with foreign audiences. Through the promotion of its cuisine, Japan has managed to create a positive, distinctive and influential brand that is instantly recognizable and resonates both with cultural values and economic interests. In conclusion, Japanese cuisine, under the appellative of washoku, played a distinct role in recent years in enhancing Japan's international image and in revitalizing its economic influence. Through a carefully orchestrated gastrodiploamacy campaign, Japan managed to raise its food culture both as a symbol of national pride and as a major export commodity, blending in the process soft power with tangible economic dividends. The success of Japan's gastrodiploamacy showcases how food, as a cultural, political and economic tool, can be positively wielded to improve a nation's profile in the international realm while fostering global connections through the universal and instantly comprehensible language of cuisine.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WEBSITES

- Aaker, D.A. (1996). *Building Strong Brands*, Free Press, New York.
- Akagawa, N. (2018). “National identity, culinary heritage and UNESCO: Japanese washoku”, *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage*, Routledge, pp. 200-217.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections of the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso Books.
- Appadurai, A. (1988). “How to make a national cuisine: Cookbooks in contemporary India”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30(1), pp. 3-24.
- Assmann, S. (2011). “Beyond sushi and tempura: An overview of the Japanese food market”, *Japanese Consumer Dynamics*, pp. 165-184.
- Assmann, S. (2015). “The remaking of a national cuisine: The food education campaign in Japan”, *The globalization of Asian cuisines: Transnational networks and culinary contact zones*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, pp. 165-185.
- Assmann, S. (2024). “Culinary heritage in Asia: National and regional identities – Reflections from the field”, *Routledge Open Research*, 3(6).
- Aykan, B. (2016). “The politics of intangible food heritage and food fights in Western Asia”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 22(10), pp. 799-810.
- Belasco, W. (1999). “Food and the counterculture: A story of bread and politics”, *Food in Global History*, pp. 217-234.
- Bendix, R. (1997). *In search of authenticity: The formation of folklore studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bessière, J. (2013). “Heritagization, a challenge for tourism promotion and regional development: An example of food heritage”, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 8(4), pp. 275-291.
- Bestor, T. (2009). “How sushi went global”, *Foreign Policy*, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/19/how-sushi-went-global/>
- Bestor, T.C. & Stalker, N.K. (2018). “Washoku, far and near: UNESCO, gastrodiplomacy, and the cultural politics of traditional Japanese cuisine”, *Devouring Japan: Global Perspectives on Japanese Culinary Identity*, pp. 99-117.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*, SAGE Publications.
- Cang, V. (2015). “Unmaking Japanese food: Washoku and intangible heritage designation”, *Food Studies*, 5(3).

- Cang, V. (2018). "Japan's Washoku as intangible heritage: The role of national food traditions in UNESCO's cultural heritage scheme", *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 25(4), pp. 491-513.
- Cang, V. (2019). "Policing washoku: The performance of culinary nationalism in Japan", *Food and Foodways*, 27(3), pp. 232-252.
- Chapple-Sokol, S. (2013). "Culinary diplomacy: Breaking bread to win hearts and minds", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 8(2), pp. 161-183.
- Constantinou, C.M. (1996). *On the way to diplomacy. (Vol. 7)*, U of Minnesota Press.
- Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO.
- Cull, N. (2008). "Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and history", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 61(6), pp. 31-54.
- Cwiertka, K.J. (2006). *Modern Japanese cuisine: Food, power and national identity*, Reaktion Books.
- Cwiertka, K.J. (2018). "Serving the nation: The myth of washoku", *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan*, Amsterdam University Press, pp. 89-106.
- Cwiertka, K.J. & Miho, Y. (2020). *Branding Japanese food: From meibutsu to washoku*, University of Hawaii Press.
- Daliot-Bul, M. (2009). "Japan Brand strategy: The taming of "Cool Japan" and the challenges of cultural planning in a postmodern age", *Social Science Japan Journal*, 12(2), pp. 247-266.
- DeSoucey, M. (2010). "Gastronationalism: Food traditions and authenticity politics in the European Union", *American Sociological Review*, 75(3), pp. 432-455.
- DeSoucey, M. (2016). *Contested tastes: Foie gras and the politics of food*, Princeton University Press.
- Di Fiore, L. (2020). "Heritage and food history: A critical assessment", *Food Heritage and Nationalism in Europe*, Taylor & Francis.
- Dower, J.W. (2000). *Embracing defeat: Japan in the wake of World War II*, WW Norton & Company.
- Edensor, T. (2002). *National identity, popular culture and everyday life*, Oxford: Berg.
- Ehara, A. (1999). "School meals and Japan's changing diet", *Japan Echo*, 26(4).
- Fan, Y. (2010). "Branding the nation: Towards a better understanding", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 6(2), pp. 97-103.

- Farina, F. (2017). “The 1970s global food crisis and the securitization of food in Japan”, *Global Realities: Precarious Survival and Belonging*, International Academic Forum, pp. 17-29.
- Farina, F. (2021). “Chapter: The politics of washoku: Japan’s gastronationalism and gastrodiplomacy”, available at <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/56436>.
- Farrer, J.; Hess, C.; de Carvalho, M.R.; Wang, C. & Wank, D. (2019). “Japanese culinary mobilities: The multiple globalizations of Japanese cuisine”,
- Ferguson, P. (1998). “A cultural field in the making: Gastronomy in 19th-century France”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 104(3), pp. 597-641.
- Ferguson, P.P. (2010). “Culinary nationalism”, *Gastronomica*, 10(1), pp. 102-109.
- Fox, J. & Miller-Idriss, C. (2008). “Everyday nationhood”, *Ethnicities*, 8(4), pp. 536-563.
- Good, B. (2011). “The Taisho pattern: How beef became an integral piece of Japanese cuisine”, *Indiana Food Review*, 1(1).
- Grasseni, C. (2013). “La patrimonializzazione del cibo: Prospettive critiche e convergenze sul campo”, *Voci*, 10, pp. 87-110.
- Green, H.S. (2015). “The soft power of cool: Economy, culture and foreign policy in Japan”, *Toyo Hogaku*, 58(3).
- Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge University Press.
- Holt, D.B. (2004). *How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding*, Harvard Business Press.
- Hopson, N. (2020). “Ingrained habits: The “kitchen cars” and the transformation of postwar Japanese diet and identity”, *Food, Culture & Society*, 23(5), pp. 589-607.
- Ichijo, A. (2017). “Banal nationalism and UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage list: Cases of washoku and the gastronomic meal of the French”, *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity and Belonging after Banal Nationalism*, pp. 259-284.
- Ichijo, A. & Ranta, R. (2022). *Food, national identity and nationalism: From everyday to global politics*, Springer Nature.
- Ishige, N. (2014). *History of Japanese Food*, Routledge.
- Kaneda, H. (1968). “Urban/rural contrast of consumption patterns and consumer preferences in postwar Japan”, *The Economic Studies Quarterly*, 19(2), pp. 21-31.

- Koikari, M. (2018). “LOVE! SPAM! Food, military and empire in post-World War II Okinawa”, *Devouring Japan: Global Perspectives on Japanese Culinary Identity*, pp. 171-186.
- Long, L.M. (2012). “Culinary tourism”, *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, pp. 389-406.
- Lusiana, Y.; Widodo, H.; Rukhiyat, A. & Koirunnisa, R. (2022). “Japanese government effort to preserve washoku as national culinary heritage”, *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Literature Innovation in Chinese Language, LIONG 2021*, Purkowerto, Indonesia.
- Matta, R. (2017). “Unveiling the neoliberal taste: Peru’s media representation as a food nation”, *Taste I Power I Tradition: Geographical Indications as Cultural Property*, Gottingen University Press, pp. 103-117.
- Matta, R. (2019). “Gastro-diplomatie: Un soft power (pas si soft) ”, *ESSACHESS – Journal for Communication Studies*, 12(1(23)), pp. 99-120.
- McGray, D. (2002). “Japan’s gross national cool”, *Foreign Policy*, 130.
- Nakano, S. & Zhu, Y. (2020). “Heritage as soft power: Japan and China in international politics”, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 26(7), pp. 869-881.
- Nye, J.S. (1990). “Soft power”, *Foreign Policy*, 80, pp. 153-171.
- Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (1997). “McDonald’s in Japan: Changing manners and etiquette”, *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia*, pp. 161-182.
- Omori, I. (2017). “*The redefinition of washoku as national cuisine: Food politics and national identity in Japan*”, *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, pp. 729-734.
- Parasecoli, F. (2017). *Knowing where it comes from: Labelling traditional foods to compete in a global market*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Parasecoli, F. (2022). *Gastronativism: Food, identity, politics*. Columbia University Press.
- Park, R.E.S. (2010). “Duanwu Festival: National heritage and cultural ownership in East Asia”, *Stanford Progressive (Summer)*, pp. 117-224.
- Pascua, F. (2014). “Dim-sum over milk tea: Taiwan’s 21st century gastrodiplomacy and some lessons for the Philippines”, *Sciences*, 130.
- Portincasa, A. (2019). “*Cookbooks and the representation of Italian ways of food*”, *Italians and Food*, pp. 203-235.

- Rath, E.C. (2015). “The invention of local food”, *The Globalization of Asian Cuisines: Transnational Networks and Culinary Contact Zones*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, pp. 145-164.
- Rath, E.C. (2016). *Japan’s cuisines: Food, place and identity*. Reaktion Books.
- Rockower, P.S. (2012). “Recipes for gastrodiploamacy”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 8, pp. 235-246.
- Rockower, P.S. (2020). “A guide to gastrodiploamacy”, *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Routledge, pp. 205-212.
- Ruddy, B. (2014). “Hearts, minds and stomachs: Gastrodiploamacy and the potential of national cuisine in changing public perceptions of national image”, *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, 11(1), pp. 29-34.
- Sakamoto, R. & Allen, M. (2011). “There’s something fishy about that sushi: How Japan interprets the global sushi boom”, *Japan Forum*, 23(1), Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 99-121.
- Sammells, C.A. (2016). “Haute traditional cuisines : How UNESCO’s list of intangible heritage links the cosmopolitan to the local”, *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*, Routledge, pp. 141-158.
- Scrolavezza, P. (2021). “Changing food landscapes in contemporary Japan”, *Italy-Japan: Dialogues on Food*, 94.
- Stalker, N.K. (2018). “Rosanjin: The roots of Japanese gourmet nationalism”, *Devouring Japan: Global Perspectives on Japanese Culinary Identity*, Oxford University Press, pp. 133-149.
- Solt, G. (2014). *The untold history of ramen: How political crisis in Japan spawned a global food craze*, Univ. of California Press.
- Suntikul, W. (2019). “Gastrodiploamacy in tourism”, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22(9), pp. 1076-1094.
- UNESCO (2014). “Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year”, available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/washoku-traditional-dietary-cultures-of-the-japanese-notably-for-the-celebration-of-new-year-00869>.
- Wilks, R. (1995). “Learning to be a local in Belize: Global systems of common difference”, *Worlds Apart*, Routledge, New York, pp. 110-133.

- Wilson, R. (2011). “Cocina Peruana Para El Mundo: Gastrodiplomacy, the culinary nation brand, and the context of national cuisine in Peru”, *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 2(1).
- Winter, T. (2015). “Heritage diplomacy”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 21(10), pp. 997-1015.

WEBSITES

- Hong, D. “The Game of Gastrodiplomacy”, *Vittles*, 15 January 2004, available at https://www.vittlesmagazine.com/p/the-game-of-gastrodiplomacy?utm_source=publication-search
- Sanchanta, M. (2007). “Japan’s « sushi police » are on a roll”, *Financial Times* (26 January 2007), available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b2d884e2-ad78-11db-8709-0000779e2340>.
- Scharf, S. (2016). *The campaign to make you eat kimchi*, available at [The Campaign to Make You Eat Kimchi - Priceconomics](#).
- “Thailand’s Gastro-Diplomacy”, *The Economist*, 21 February 2002, available at <https://www.economist.com/asia/2002/02/21/thailands-gastro-diplomacy>