

THE "AUTHENTICITY" OF SUSHI:  
TRANSFORMING AND MODERNIZING A JAPANESE FOOD

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2013

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my academic advisor Dr. Brian McVeigh who guided and helped me greatly in my two-year master studies in Japanese Anthropology. He generously lent me books, gave me advice and insights on my research. From his classes, I have learnt a great deal on Japanese anthropology and nationalism studies which benefit greatly to my thesis. Also, I am very grateful to have the opportunity for being his teaching assistant in “Japanese Anime and Visual Culture”, through which, his serious attitudes on teaching and studies and great patience on students deeply inspired me. During the time of my thesis writing, he is always patient and generous to give me precious comments. His encouragement and scholarly guidance are invaluable to my thesis.

I would also like to thank Dr. Noel Pinnington who is always kind and willing to give me help and advice. His assisting on Japanese language helps me being able to read and learn from Japanese sources quicker and more smoothly. I am also incredibly indebted to Dr. Fabio Lanza. The basic inspiration of the thesis came from his class “Introduction to East Asian Studies.” He continuously gave me valuable advice for my thesis and other academic work. I cherish the great opportunity of being his student. All my thesis committee members have been very patient and sacrificed their rest time to advising me. There are no words that I can express my appreciation to their great help.

I would like to show my gratitude to Kyle Burns, who helped me proof reading the thesis and offered many insightful suggestions. Last but not the least, I owe particular debt to my loving parents. They gave me ceaseless support when I am facing difficulties and stress during the thesis writing. Without their help, I cannot achieve this much in my master studies.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sushi is now recognized as a typical Japanese food throughout the world. Being sold in a wide variety of shops including both supermarkets and high-end restaurants, it has become one of the world's most coveted delicacies during the past few decades. This simple food has gained great popularity across the world which has resulted in a cultural phenomenon being shared across national borders and regions. Although some people view sushi as a “traditional” Japanese food because of its long history, others find that the healthy, stylish image of modern sushi to be attractive and as a type of cuisine that conforms to the pace of today’s popular trends. Sushi’s popularity and longevity contribute to both its perceived historical trajectory and its modern transformations. When talking about sushi, neither “tradition” nor “modern” can be ignored. In this thesis I will examine sushi’s changes from its emergence in ancient Japan to the current sushi boom in global markets. I will explore the “authenticity” of modern sushi and its relation to its ceaseless evolution of sushi. I will show that with regulation from Japanese authorities and individuals the “Japaneseness” of sushi does continue.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“What do you want to eat?” almost everyone asks this question and is asked this question every day. Food provides energy for the basic functions of the human body. Food consumption behavior is the most fundamental behavior in daily life. Food is not just important as a supply of daily nutrition, but is also crucial for understanding cultures and how people view each other. Every kind of food conveys social, historical and cultural information since food production involves natural, geographical factors of certain areas as well as labor input. Natural surroundings determine what ingredients are available for use. Based on these ingredients different people around the world came up with certain types of foods that made their bodies adjust well to the climate and geographic surroundings. For example, people who live in cold areas like Russia tend to eat more meat, dairy and food containing more starch to provide them enough energy for the cold weather. However, people who reside close to oceans generally have diets that contain more seafood.

Japan, as an archipelago country, has sufficient fishery sources. With a humid climate, most areas in Japan are suitable for rice production. The geographic environment shaped the basic structure of Japanese cuisine: fish and rice. Japanese have created and developed a variety of seafood-rice cuisines, such as *onigiri* (rice ball with pickled fish fillings), *sashimi* (sliced raw fish) and *sushi* (formed seasoned rice with seafood on top). Among them, sushi presently is the most popular Japanese

food.

Sushi was introduced to Japan from China as a way of preserving fish and rice around the eighth century. Because of the technological limitations on food preservation and transportation, early sushi did not use fresh fish which took a long time to ferment. Based on the development of fermenting techniques, sushi with much shorter processing procedures was invented in the seventeenth century. On the basis of this quick sushi, the prototype of modern sushi emerged in the Edo (modern day Tokyo) region of Japan around the nineteenth century. Through thousand of years of transformation, raw fish finally found its position in sushi making. Sushi itself also changed from preserved food for a long time to a fast fresh food.

Today sushi continues its evolution both inside and outside Japan. Inside Japan, different sushi establishments are opened to cater to the needs from diversified customer groups. Outside Japan, sushi is introduced to different countries and gains its popularity rapidly with its “exotic” and “healthy” image. During the process of globalization, more diversified combinations of ingredients are added to sushi. Focusing on sushi’s evolution over thousand of years, some people still view it as a traditional food in Japan based on its long historical path; some doubt the authenticity of sushi since it has experienced massive changes. The debate on sushi’s identity in relation to the “modern” and “tradition” became fierce with the growing sushi boom. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the relation between the evolution of sushi and its identity.

Starting from the present debate on sushi, in this thesis I will also discuss the two terms “tradition” and “authenticity” to help examine sushi’s identity. “Tradition” generally refers to “anything that is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present” (Shils 1981: 12; Williams 1976: 269). In the dietary context, Den Hartog argues that “tradition is defined as foods considered by a population, or a social group, to be part of their own specific combinations of the consumed foods, regardless of their place of origin, and the ideas and values concerning this food” (Den Hartog 1986: xv-xvi). “Tradition” always relates to longevity and history, but the time period considered to be “traditional” is subjective, that is, different cultures and people define their past and present in different ways. In this thesis, I use “tradition” to relate to things tracing back to what a population conventionally considered to be its past. The adjective “traditional” refers to ideas, things and practices with a sense of historicity that are identified as such by a population from a shared cultural background. Namely, people’s shared ideology of “tradition” is more important than a specific timeline to separate “tradition” from “modern.”

“Authenticity” generally means being genuine or not corrupted from the original; it can also refer to the truthfulness of origins and intentions. But in this thesis, the “authenticity” of sushi does not imply its originality as *nare-zushi* but its character of being a part of Japanese cuisine. The adjective “authentic” is used to distinguish how sushi is in Japan from the counterparts in the overseas markets. I will come back to both terms in the later chapters in explaining the modern identity of sushi.

## **Literature Review**

Food is widely studied by scholars in different specializations. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, anthropologists who study food habits tended to focus on the embodiment of certain food related to social and cultural codes or even the universal pattern of the human mind (Cwiertka 1998: 12) rather than examining the mundane aspects of food consumption behaviors. This academic trend in food study continued until the late 1970s. From the 1980s onwards, the anthropological study on food changed from the macro level analysis to more detailed micro level. Scholars began to pay more attention to the practical issues such as food production, distribution, and preparation. For example, Jack Goody pointed out that the economic and technological changes that affect food industry are the preconditions of changes in consumption (Goody 1982; Cwiertka 1998: 13). Bourdieu was concerned with individual food choices and claimed that function as indicators of social status and can divide people into different social groups (Bourdieu 1986). Furthermore, with the expansion of globalization, research on food also began to look at the impact of certain food items on different cultures. For example, by using rice as a metaphor, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney analyzes the relation between the staple food and Japanese identity.

In the post-war period, with the gaining popularity of Japanese cuisine in the world, research related to Japanese dietary culture also began to be conducted by

many scholars. Japanese authors tend to focus on the history of Japanese food and its consumption behaviors. For example, Minoru Watanabe divides Japanese people's food consumption behaviors into different historical periods and analyzes the relation between certain foods and social, cultural background (Watanabe 1973). Besides using Japanese language, some Japanese scholars also published works in foreign languages in order to provide non-Japanese readers information about Japanese food culture. Ishige Naomichi is one of them. He presents a brief history of Japanese food and diet from the Stone Age to the present. In his book, he also includes contemporary Japanese table manners and introductions of typical Japanese food, such as sushi, sashimi and *natto* (fermented beans) (Naomichi 2001).

Different from Japanese scholars, non-Japanese scholars focus more on the linkage between Japanese food and its national identity. Katarzyna Cwiertka conducted research on how Japanese culinary culture relates to nation building. In *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and Identity*, she pointed out that the term “washoku” (Japanese cuisine) emerged in the late nineteenth century “in response to the growing prominence of foreign cuisines” (Cwiertka 2006: 175). The category of Japanese cuisine is a modern invention whose function is to distinguish Japan from foreign countries. She also argues that the making of modern Japanese cuisine tradition helps to build its Japanese identity (Cwiertka 1998; 2006).

Compared to the studies related to food in general, there is not so much research specifically conducted on sushi. I would like to divide the academic works related to

sushi into two main categories: first, the globalization of sushi and the discourse on its Japanese identity; second, general information about sushi which includes its history and consumption behaviors. Most recent works focus on the globalization of sushi.

Hiroataka Matsumoto states the different transformations of sushi in various overseas markets and emphasizes that the increasing fame of sushi in the global markets relate to its healthy image (Matsumoto 2002). Hiroko Kato's research examined the sushi market in the United States. She explored the newly invented American sushi and the reasons behind sushi's success in American markets. Impressed by the growing popularity of sushi, she shows her appreciation of the creativity and vitality of sushi as a typical Japanese food (Kato 2002).

The sushi boom in the overseas markets has also drawn non-Japanese scholars' attention. Theodore Bestor attributes sushi's globalization to the development of fishing industries. He states "sushi's global popularity as an emblem of a sophisticated, cosmopolitan consumer class more or less coinciding with a profound transformation in the international role of the Japanese fishing industry (Bestor 2000: 57)". He also claims that the longing for fresh tuna contributes to sushi and sashimi's increasing consumption. Katarzyna Cwiertka examines the European sushi markets and illustrates that sushi's fame in the European countries has little to do with the authenticity but a commercial success of the Japanese image (Cwiertka 2005: 260). In terms of how sushi's popularity relates to the national image of Japan and its

cultural policy, Rumi Sakamoto and Matthew Allen give a clear explanation in their research. They argue that both Japanese authorities and popular expressions claim their ownership of sushi as a Japanese cultural item. The proprietary nationalism<sup>1</sup> reflected through the overseas sushi boom is one aspect of Japan's soft power and "cultural diplomacy" (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 99). They conducted another study on the consumption of overseas sushi in Tokyo. They believe that sushi's "reverse import" phenomenon challenges the conventional trend of globalization as Americanization or westernization and shows Asia's significant impact on the "west" (Allen and Sakamoto 2011). Their viewpoint on the reverse import of sushi is very innovative in researching sushi's popularity and has greatly influenced my own research.

Besides the themes of sushi's boom, the history of sushi is another topic being frequently discussed, especially among Japanese scholars. Terutoshi Hibino presents the history of sushi from the third century and introduces specific types of sushi in every region of Japan, which enables readers to have a good knowledge of how sushi changes through the time and what sushi is (Hibino 1999; 2001). Scholars have also studied the behavior patterns and eating manners of sushi consumption. Shingo Fujisaka links Japanese people's sushi consumption to social atmosphere and states that the best taste of sushi does not simply come from the combination of every ingredient but it is also enhanced by the pleasant circumstances when people get

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<sup>1</sup> Proprietary Nationalism: a type of nationalism in which a people claim the ownership over certain behaviors, customs, food, or material culture (McVeigh 2004:19).

together (Fujisaka 2009). Devarahandhi De Silva and Masahiro Yamao conducted a research on the characteristics of Japanese people's sushi consumption in Hiroshima Prefecture and conclude that long term sushi consumption behavior is determined by customs and habits; short term consumption is more determined by the practical factors, such as sushi's price, quality and advertisements (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 74).

As stated above, those previous researches provide important information about sushi. My thesis benefits much from them. However, although some studies raise the question to what degree these continuous transformations will eventually change the nature of sushi so radically that it is not recognizable as such anymore, there is no clear answer to this question. Research relating to this question, especially the relation between sushi's evolution since its ancient period and the protection of its Japanese identity, is still scarce. My thesis examines the changes of sushi from its original version to its present to find out the linkage between sushi's constant change and its Japanese identity.

## **Organization**

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 2 to Chapter 4 describe sushi's history and its situation in today's catering markets both inside and outside Japan. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the history of sushi since its emergence in ancient Japan. Here I will discuss the main transformations of sushi before it comes

to the modern times. Chapter 3 examines the development of modern sushi in contemporary Japanese society, which includes where to eat sushi, the classification of different types of modern sushi and people's sushi consumption behaviors. Chapter 4 will move to the viewpoint of sushi from inside Japan to the global markets. This chapter presents information on sushi's evolution in different regions of the world as well as the "reverse import" of overseas sushi boom to Japan's domestic market. Through these descriptions, I will show how sushi changed from the ancient period until today; from internal consumption to globalization.

Based on the facts described in the previous chapters, in Chapter 5, I will analyze the reasons behind sushi's continuous popularity within the constant changes. Since sushi's transformation never ceases, there raises a discourse whether sushi has lost or will lose its authenticity with the time goes by. In response to this question, in Chapter 6, I will discuss the problems existing in sushi's development and define the meaning of sushi's "authenticity." Also, I will focus on Japanese government and individuals' responses to sushi's identity. In the final chapter, I will sum up the overall results of my analysis on the relation between sushi's evolution and its identity, ending with predictions for the future development of sushi and suggestions for further studies on similar topics.

## CHAPTER 2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUSHI

As the most evocative “Japanese” food, sushi has over a thousand-year history in Japan. Compared to other Japanese dishes, sushi is indeed considered more “traditional” because of its long history. Since sushi appeared in Japan it has experienced many changes because of different social influences. Through thousand years of transformations, today’s sushi can be quite different from its original version. In this section, I will introduce the main changes happened to sushi since its emergence and analyze the reasons for those changes through a close examination of sushi’s rich culinary history.

### Sushi in the Ancient Texts

The word sushi was written in differently for various occasions and in time periods. The following chart lists four ways sushi was written in Japanese.

Table 2.1 “Sushi” Written in Japanese

すし	the hiragana of sushi
寿司	the assigned <i>kanji</i> (the adopted logographic Chinese characters) for sushi in the Edo period and is commonly used since then
鮓	<i>Kanji A</i> which was found in the ancient taxation records in Japan around eighth century.
鮓	<i>Kanji B</i> which was found in the historical law records in Japan as the earliest record of sushi in the documents.

Source: *Sushi no Rekishi o Tazureru*, by Hibino Terutoshi, p. 27.

The word “sushi” originally referred to a long-fermented type of fish (Naomichi 2001: 42). References to this can be found in both ancient Japanese and Chinese literary works. Two thousand years ago, sushi was once named with characters A and B in Chinese, but the meanings of these two characters are different. The ancient records can be found in *Erya*, the most ancient Chinese dictionary. Character A originally appeared in *Erya* section “Shi Qi (Explaining Utensils)”, meaning salty and pickled fish; the other character B was mentioned in the section “Shi Yu (Explaining fishes)” and it indicated a kind of food made with fish pickled in rice and salt. Later, another comprehensive *kanji* dictionary, *Shuowen Jiezi* (Explaining and Analyzing Characters), used a similar explanation for character B (Hibino 1999: 27). According to historical records, A and B were differentiated by serving with rice or not, but in the early third century Dictionary Guang Ya (Expanded Er Ya) combined the usages of these two characters (Hibino 1999: 27).

When the two *kanji* were introduced into Japan their meanings had already been combined. The oldest extant Japanese dictionary of *kanji* (*Wamyō ruijushō*) included both of these two characters that were mentioned above for sushi. The *Wamyō ruijushō* dictionary had a large impact in the Heian period and still provides an invaluable linguistic record for Japanese language studies in the present day. Another record of both the characters in the Heian period appeared in the *Ryō no gige* (The Explanation of Laws), in which it is stated that character A and character B had the same meaning and explained each other (Hibino 1999: 27). The meanings of *kanji*

used to write sushi give us a hint as to what the original form of sushi was.

### **The Origins of Sushi: A Form of Preserved Food**

In the seventh century mountain people of Southeast Asia invented the techniques of pickling to preserve food (Feng 2011: 205). As using this method to preserve fish also related to rice-field fishery, it migrated through the traditional wet rice farming zones in Asia (Naomichi 2001:42). This practice was introduced from China to Japan and contributed to the origin of sushi—*nare-zushi*. To make *nare-zushi* ancient Japanese people pressed cleaned fish between rice and salt with a heavy stone for a few weeks and subsequently using a lighter cover for the packing process (Feng 2011: 205). During this time, rice produces a lactic acid through saccharification and fermentation. This acid naturally permeates fish and shellfish, to prevent decay, and can effectively protect the flavor of fish and shellfish. When it is ready to eat, people rinse off the rice and only eat fish part (Mo 2005: 240-241).

*Nare-zushi* is believed to have been eaten throughout the region of Japan during the eighth century (Naomichi 2001: 42). As it was based on pickling techniques, *nare-zushi* can be viewed as a form of storage of animal protein and a way of storing and preserving fish and shellfish. As one type of fermented cuisine in the rice-growing regions of Asia, at that time *nare-zushi* does not have any specific features that would make it “Japanese.” Compared to *nare-zushi*, today’s sushi is not fermented. On the contrary, nowadays sushi is known for being fresh. Placing a slice

of raw fish on top of boiled, vinegared rice enhanced the *umami* (a savory taste, one of the five basic tastes in Japan) of raw fish. The combination of the freshness of fish and moderate vinegared rice became a selling point of sushi.

### **Sushi in the Fifteenth Century**

Since its introduction up until the fifteenth century, sushi in Japan experienced several minor changes. However, from the fifteenth century onward Japanese sushi developed in a direction different from other Asian areas, beginning with the appearance of *namanare-zushi* (Naomichi 2001: 228).

*Namanare* is a word which is related to *honnare*. *Honnare* in Japanese laterally means completed or mature, which refers to one type of *nare-zushi* in the Heian period. In *honnare-zushi*, rice and fish are fermented together. The rice would be discarded when the fish was fully fermented (Hibino 2001: 15). Different from *honnare*, *namanare* means “raw-mature”. And *namanare-zushi* is considered to be half-made sushi (Feng 2011: 206). This means the time of fermenting is much shorter than other types of sushi in the past and the fish and rice would be consumed at the same time. In this case, the fish in *namanare-zushi* is still basically fresh and rice has a vinegary taste which makes its preservation time shorter and taste fresher (Naomichi 2001: 231).

The appearance of *namanare-zushi* is also related to the increase of rice production in Japan at that time. In the Heian period, the development of

manorialism opened more agricultural land; in the following Kamakura period, the agriculture reforms had positive effects as well, which increased the rice production. As more rice consumption became possible, rice and fish became more accessible to ordinary people. Moreover, since fish and rice were eaten at the same time, the emergence of *namanare-zushi* was the point where sushi took on the character of a complete snack, combining staple and side dish (Naomichi 2001: 230). It was very different from *nare-zushi* which functioned more as preserving both the food and the side dish. This is the time when sushi becomes dissociated from the need for preserving fish (Hibino 2001: 17).

### **The Emergence of “Quick Sushi”**

The next new direction in sushi-making happened in the late seventeenth century. Although the time of making *namanare-zushi* had been shortened compared to *nare-zushi*, it still needed some time to ferment in order to acquire an acidic flavor. In order to shorten the fermenting time, fermentation accelerators began to be used in making sushi. At that time, the fermentation accelerator did not have a fixed content; alcohol, salt and vinegar were the common accelerators that were applied in those cases (Hibino 2001: 19).

It is said that a doctor named Matsumoto Yoshiichi was the first to come upon the idea of adding vinegar to rice as a fermentation accelerator in the seventeenth century. However, it could not be fully verified. The common usage of vinegar in

sushi was gradually shaped through different experiences (Hibino 2001: 20). The rice-and-fish combination with a tasty acidic flavor, not through fermentation but by simply adding vinegar to the rice was considered to be *haya-zushi*, literally means “quick sushi” (Naomichi 2001: 231). The lactic acid in the sushi was replaced by acetic acid and the idea is still used in today’s sushi making.

### ***Nigiri-zushi* and its Popularity**

Today, the main type of sushi that is consumed in Japan and around the world is *nigiri-zushi* (hand-formed sushi). This modern form of sushi originated in Edo (Tokyo nowadays) around the beginning of the nineteenth century (Naomichi 2001: 228). It is said that *nigiri-zushi* was created by Hanaya Yohei around the 1820s. Yohei’s sushi was served as a slice of soy sauce or vinegar marinated fish on vinegared rice balls. Instead of putting rice and fish in a box to form sushi, he formed it by his hand in order not to squeeze all the fat of the fish away (Hibino 2001: 28). As this form of sushi did not involve any fermented procedure or a storage technology, it quickly became a popular snack food in Edo (Naomichi 2001: 227).

Because the new form of sushi was easy to make and serve, many shops in Edo began to sell *nigiri-zushi*. At the same time more ingredients were added to make different varieties of sushi. After the mid-Edo period the population of males became larger in Japan. Male labor became comparatively cheaper, and many were hired in

cheap food shops; sushi shops were some of them (Hibino 2001: 29). The popularity of sushi shops in Edo and the employment of male laborers created a special atmosphere for the mass food culture in the late Edo period (Naomichi 2001: 227).

With the development of the economy and commercialism *nigiri-zushi* shops also developed into high rank restaurants. Different from the sushi shops of the past, in high class restaurants customers received special treatment according to their social status. The price of sushi rose significantly as more precious ingredients were becoming used in the making sushi. In the end of the Shogunate period both cheap sushi shops and high-class sushi restaurants coexisted in Tokyo (Hibino 2001: 34, 35). *Nigiri-zushi* was the final major transformation of sushi from a preserved food into a fresh served food.

*Nigiri-zushi* again increased in popularity after the Meiji Restoration. In 1869 the Emperor Meiji moved to Edo, which changed name to Tokyo, and the emperor's residence made the Edo region not only the nation's political and cultural center but also an imperial capital. As one of the representatives of food culture in the Edo area, *nigiri-zushi* became the standard form of sushi as part of the establishment of standard Tokyo culture. The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 severely damaged Tokyo and caused large population movements from the Kanto region to other parts of Japan. These movements helped the dissemination of *nigiri-zushi* making skills outside Tokyo and helped *nigiri-zushi* turn into a nation-wide cuisine (Hibino 2001: 33,34).

From the ancient *nare-zushi* to *nigiri-zushi* originated in the Edo period, sushi never stopped changing in its history. Both the way of making sushi and its usage changed. Through sushi's thousand years of history, its changes also relates to the improvements in Japan's agriculture and food making technologies. Although *nare-zushi* still exists in Japan it is not made for the same purposes as it was a thousand years ago. Some restaurants provide *nare-zushi* at an expensive price for customers as an experience of traditional cuisine.

As discussed above, most consumed *nigiri-zushi* only has two hundreds years history and went through various changes as well. It is inappropriate to classify all types of sushi into one category of "traditional" Japanese cuisine. The emergence of *haya-zushi* to its modern form *nigiri-zushi* shows sushi's developing tendency of becoming a fresher and quicker food. In next chapter, I will keep examining the development of modern sushi in contemporary Japan and Japanese people's sushi consumption behaviors due to various changes.

### **CHAPTER 3:**

#### **MODERN SUSHI IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN**

In the previous chapter I showed that *nigiri-zushi* is the most common sushi found in Japan today. It is the proliferation of *nigiri-sushi* that ushered in the development of “modern sushi.” The creation of *nigiri-sushi* and its increasing popularity took place during Tokyo’s rebuilding after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Also, this Earthquake was also a turning point for the entire Japanese food service industry: the gradual transition from street sushi stalls to the elegant decorated sushi restaurant all started around this period (Moriyama 1981; De Silva and Yamao 2006: 66).

Another major turning point occurred after World War II. Japan’s fall from power and its subordination to the United States during the Occupation had a drastic impact on the Japanese diet. The shortage of food in Japan brought a whole new set of culinary desires. Not only there was a general “longing for food” in the post-war scarcity, there was also a specific focus on the desire for “western” food which was reflected in many Japanese post-war novelists’ works. In Kōbō Abe’s short satirical story about post-war Japan, “The Magic Chalk” (1951), the main character uses magic chalk to draw food that he dreamed of in the many days he spent hungry, food that included, butter, milk, cheese, bread, beef and coffee (Gessel and Matsumoto 1989: 65-66). None of the food he drew was considered Japanese nor was it widely available in Japan at that time. Abe depicted “western” food as unattainable

commodity which could exist only in people's dreams. Nobuo Kojima's story, "The American School" (1954), talked about a Japanese teachers' excursion to an American school during the Occupation and shows a similar desire for "western" food. In the story, the main character who received cheese and chocolate from the passing American soldiers not only felt proud of herself but was also envied by others (Hibbet 1977: 124-125). Changes in the power relationship between America and Japan in the post-war period influenced the desire for food in Japan. During the Occupation, America had the controlling power over many aspects of Japanese society. The idea of taking America as a model in rebuilding Japan exists in many Japanese people's mind. Many of them begin to categorize things related to America as the reasons for its power, food is one of the examples. With this thought, some Japanese believed that foods normally consumed by Americans, such as milk product and red meat, contained more protein and would help to make people stronger. Thus, Japanese needed to change the daily diet more like Americans to improve the physique. For a time, the preference on American food grew over the Japanese food.

Although sushi is commonly viewed as the most representative of Japanese foods by people outside of Japan, in Japan it is far from being considered as central. Like most other Japanese foods, sushi experienced many changes during the Occupation. The American troops introduced their habit of eating red meat to Japan, and it quickly became popular among Japanese. This had an indirect effect on the

sushi market, as richer tasting fish— such as tuna—began to be popular in the making of sushi. Although tuna is now one of the most common fish used in sushi, many sushi chefs disdained the use of tuna before Americans started ordering *nigiri-zushi* after World War II (Mangu-Ward 2007: 62).

Not only did sushi change in relation to shifts in eating habits, but it also changed in reaction to the challenges brought by the competition with international foods in a globalized market. During the mid-1980s and early 1990s overseas fast food restaurant chains began to become popular in Japan. Among them, McDonalds was the most successful; it was ranked number one in total sales among Japan's service companies in 1985 (Ohnuki-Tierney 1997: 162). The increasing popularity of fast food eroded sushi consumption; in the same period most young people and families had stopped eating at sushi restaurants (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 66).

However, sushi became the favorite food in many Japanese cities again in the late 1990s. The idea of healthy eating contributed to the returning popularity of sushi (Japan News 2004; De Silva and Yamao 2006: 66). Additionally, the establishment of sushi shops catering to different income groups attracted a wider scope of customers. With the rebound of the sushi industry in Japan new ingredients began to be added in order to serve a wider range of preferences by increasing variety.

### **Where to Eat Sushi –Sushi Sellers in Japan**

With the development of the sushi industry, various kinds of sushi sellers

appeared in Japan. Generally, they can be divided into three main types: sushi restaurant, rotary sushi bar, and retail sushi establishments.

### *Sushi Restaurants*

Modern style sushi restaurants began to appear in Japan after the Great Kanto Earthquake. In these restaurants experienced sushi chefs would prepare sushi for customers seeking “classical” tastes. They can be divided into three groups depending on the price differences and target customers’ income (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 68). But in general, the quality of sushi served in the sushi restaurant is better than those sold in rotary bars and retail markets. Even though those sushi restaurants cater to customers aiming at the classical taste of sushi, some of them also offer newly invented sushi types to fulfill the curiosity of younger consumers.

### *Rotary Sushi Bars*

The sushi industry changed drastically when *kaitenzushi* (rotary sushi bar) became popular. The conveyor belt system was invented by a sushi chef, Yoshiaki Shiraishi (1914-2001). In 1958, Shiraishi opened the first rotary sushi bar, Genroku Sushi, in Osaka (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 73). At that time the rotary sushi bar’s customers were mainly workers from nearby factories (Cwiertka 2005: 254). For the first two to three decades after the rotary sushi bar was invented it did not gain much fame. When Shiraishi first opened Genroku Sushi customers were forced to eat while

standing. This way of eating was considered impolite in Japan, especially for females (Ohnuki-Tierney 1997: 178-179; Cwiertka 2005: 254). Because of this few families would go to a rotary sushi bar. Despite its shortcomings compared to the classical sushi restaurant, it became nationally known after the Osaka Exposition in 1970 and the number of rotary sushi bars increased rapidly in Japan (Cwiertka 2005: 254).

In today's rotary sushi bars, plates of sushi, side dishes and some desserts are put on a machine-driven conveyor belt system. In general, the food plates will have four to five different colors or designs to indicate different prices (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 73). The conveyor belt rotates near the customers' seats thus enabling customers to take whatever they want from the rotating belt. Customers keep their plates and after they finish eating the waiter will count the plates and calculate the cost. In most rotary sushi bars the price of a single plate is around one hundred to three hundred yen (around one to three US dollars) which is much cheaper than at sushi restaurants. However, recently high-class rotary sushi bars have also emerged for consumers who want to experience convenience and high-quality sushi at the same time.

Different from Shiraishi's first sushi bar, the rotary sushi bars of today are family friendly. Furthermore, many innovational strategies were applied to rotary sushi bars. Some shops brought in new technology, like sushi robots, to increase the speed of sushi serving (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 66); some paid attention to

in-store decorations –for instance, they replaced conveyor belt with toy trains to carry sushi to customers (Ota 2001: 11-12). The new strategies helped the sushi bars create a more comfortable atmosphere to satisfy different customers' demands and contributed to its growing popularity. Nowadays, Genroku sushi bar has become a famous *kaitenzushi* chain and has more than two hundred and fifty outlets all over Japan (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 73). Besides Genroku Sushi, other chain *kaitenzushi* bars, like Genki Sushi, Kura Sushi also ceaselessly expanded in Japan (Cwiertka 2005: 254).

The first time I had sushi in Japan was with some friends from Kobe University in a rotary sushi bar. Though my Japanese friends told me that they normally did not eat sushi very often, when they did they preferred to have sushi in a rotary sushi bar instead of a sushi restaurant because it was cheap and had a lively atmosphere. The sushi bar that they took me to did have a really lively atmosphere with many customers and we had to wait to be seated despite the locale being quite large. Different types of sushi were rotating on the conveyer belt. There was a button near every table. By pressing it, customers could talk to the sushi chef directly to request specific sushi and the chef would make it immediately and put it on the belt. I was really impressed by the microphone button. It not only enabled customers and the chef to communicate directly, but also stimulated the lively and happy atmosphere in the sushi bar: all the special orders were made through a fairly happy and relaxing chat with friends. The casual and relaxing atmosphere gave the rotary sushi bar a

completely different feeling from the fine sushi restaurant.

### *Retail Sushi Establishments*

Retail Sushi sellers include takeaway-style sushi shops and grocery stores (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 68). They offer ready-to-eat sushi packages to customers who do not want to spend time eating at a sushi establishment. The takeaway-sushi shops usually are located near transportation hubs and shopping districts. The sushi boxes usually contain two or three different kinds of sushi. Besides sushi boxes, these small shops also offer *bento* (a single portion of take-out meal, usually including rice, meat and vegetables) and other types of quick lunch boxes that cater towards those who do not have the time to prepare meals and aim for convenience. Grocery stores and supermarkets also sell sushi in Japan. They not only offer sushi boxes like those takeaway-style sushi shops but also provide half-made sushi ingredients, such as sliced sushi fish combos, sushi seaweed and seasoned sushi rice. Customers can buy different ingredients separately and make sushi according to their own taste at home. These half-made sushi ingredients are very popular among family based consumers.

Sushi is also an important festival food in Japan. In certain festivals specially-made sushi will be offered as a food for ritual purposes. For example, in *Hinamatsuri* (March 3, Doll Festival), sushi is garnished with red food dye; in *Tango no sekku* (May 5, Boy's Festival), *tazuna kimi sushi* (rainbow roll, a combination of

rice tinted with yellow yolk) is a specific sushi that relates to the festival and is served to family members and customers (Wada, Pogolian, Sato, and Grivetti 1999: 318-321).

### **What Sushi to Eat – Major Types of Sushi**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, sushi experienced many changes since its emergence. Although *nigiri-zushi* is the most common sushi type nowadays, many other kinds of sushi also exist.

De Silva and Yamao classified modern sushi into five basic kinds: *Nare*, *Nigiri/Edomae*, *Chirashi*, *Sugata* and *Oshi/Osaka* (Horibe 2003; De Silva and Yamao 2006: 64). To clarify, *nare-zushi* is the original version of sushi which uses fermented fish instead of fresh raw fish. *Nigiri-zushi* uses ingredients such as sliced fish, shrimp, or squid that are set on a small ball of rice. *Chirashi-zushi* is mixture of vinegar rice and other ingredients for sushi; the rice for *chirashi-zushi* is not as sticky, so this type of sushi is not formed into a shape. In *sugata-zushi*, a whole fish is filled with sushi rice (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 65) and it is usually made with small fish near the Seto inland sea region (Kagawa Ken Nōsei Suisan-bu). And *oshi-zushi* is “sliced fish pressed onto rice inside a wooden box or mould and then cut into equal-sized pieces (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 65)”. Compared to *nigiri-zushi*, *oshi-zushi* is shaped by a mold instead of by hand, so the shape of *oshi-zushi* is more formalized. Also according to De Silva and Yamao’s classification, *maki-zushi* (roll sushi) is a

subcategory developed from *nigiri-zushi*. *Nigiri-zushi* developed from *oshi-zushi* since the Edo period.

This classification is not without its problems. *Sugata-zushi* only exists in certain regions and has more similarities with *maki-zushi* (rolled sushi) rather than a single category. And it is hard to imagine that *nigiri-zushi* and *maki-zushi* (roll sushi) fit into same category since their preparation procedures are quite different. Different from De Silva and Yamao, Hibino divided modern sushi into two main categories: *sugata-zushi* and *hako-zushi* (box sushi; original version of *oshi-zushi*). According to Hibino, roll sushi develops from *sugata-zushi* rather than being a subcategory of *nigiri-zushi*. While *nigiri-zushi*, *chirashi-zushi* and *oshi-zushi* are subcategories of *hako-zushi* (Hibino 1999). Although it is hard to draw a line between different kinds of sushi today, it is clear that fresh raw fish sushi dominates the modern sushi market and among them, *nigiri-zushi* and *maki-zushi* are the main kinds sold in stores. Compared to the other types of sushi, *nigiri-zushi* and *maki-zushi* are the very type to keep the freshest natural flavor of sushi and they are easier and quicker to make which cooperates well with the demands of modern society. However, although sushi experienced significant changes since its emergence that modern sushi is almost nowhere the same as the *nare-zushi*, by examining the classification of different types of sushi, it still can help us understand the linkage between modern sushi type to its historical style and realize why sushi is always related to the term “tradition.”

Additionally, a division on sushi can be made due to different occasions as well.

In the store, *nigiri-zushi* is more prevalent. Because every ingredient is put on the top of the sushi rice it is easy to show chef's skills of arranging different ingredients. For sushi shops *nigiri-zushi* enables more possibilities for decoration which helps attract customers. For families and parties *maki-zushi* and *chirashi-zushi* are common choices.

*Temaki-zushi* (hand-made roll sushi) is easier to make with a family than *nigiri-zushi*. So many Japanese families will buy half-made sushi ingredients themselves and make *temaki-zushi* at home. While staying with a host family during my studies in Japan the first meal that I had with them was *temaki-zushi* because the program required that the families provide students with "typical Japanese food" in order for us to get a better feeling of what Japan is. My host family bought different kinds of fresh fish and seaweed from a supermarket and prepared sushi rice themselves. During dinner we made rolled sushi by ourselves and they told me that the way we had sushi in the dinner is quite common for many Japanese families nowadays. Because all the ingredients can be bought from supermarket and the quality is comparatively good, it is an easy way to prepare food for a family and all the family members can roll the sushi while talking with each other.

*Chirashi-zushi* is another type of sushi usually served at large gathering. I was very surprised that the first time I had *chirashi-zushi* in Japan was in a Christian Church after Sunday's Mass. The *chirashi-zushi* I had contained small pieces of fish, egg and some seasonal vegetable. People in the church told me that they generally

offer *chirashi-zushi* as food for the Sunday event because it is easy and economic to make and serve to a big group of people. Also many people like it with *mugicha* (roasted barley tea).

Compared to the sushi in the past modern sushi is more about freshness and convenience. Different types of sushi are eaten for different occasions. With increasing choices of various sushi types consumers have developed their own preferences for specific stores. This is why in order to attract customers, sushi chefs also make efforts to decorate sushi. In recent years, sushi is not limited to being a food but also its aesthetic properties are also important.

### **Who Eats Sushi – Different Preferences by Customers**

Sushi restaurants and various types of sushi exist in Japan and their numbers keep increasing every year. However, not every Japanese person eats sushi on a regular basis. According to Devarahandhi De Silva and Masahiro Yamao's survey on Japanese sushi market in 2005, the most common frequency of sushi meals among Japanese was between one and less than one time a month (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 63). The sushi consumption habits of Japanese people can be roughly divided according to age groups and gender.

In general, older people who has a steady income appears to eat sushi more often than the younger generation. They also tend to go to classical-style sushi restaurants rather than the rotary sushi bars and usually have a preferred sushi chef

and restaurant. On the contrary, the demand for sushi among the younger generation is low. When eating sushi they prefer rotary sushi bars over sushi restaurants. Since they can hardly tell or do not care about the taste difference between fine sushi and *kaitenzushi*, their choice of sushi shops relies more on advertisements and the special deals of certain stores (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 69-71).

The division of sushi consumption behavior is also seen through gender. According to De Silva and Yamao's study sushi was generally preferred by women rather than men (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 70). Men prefer eating sushi from rotary sushi bar while women tend to buy sushi in retail sushi places, like supermarkets and takeaway-style sushi shops. Traditional sushi restaurants do not seem to be a frequent destination for most sushi eaters (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 69-71).

However, sushi is not just simply a type of food, how it is eaten is also part of sushi culture. Rather than where to eat sushi, what sushi to eat and who eats sushi, how to eat sushi seems to be the crucial way to display one's "Japaneseness." Namely, not only sushi as a food coming from Japan, but how to eat it to obtain the tastiest flavor also generates in Japan. Eating sushi in a proper way shows people have a good knowledge of Japanese food culture and aware of the true flavor of certain ingredients. Thus, in many sushi restaurants, they will recommend customers to follow a certain manner which will help customers to enjoy the true flavor of sushi as much as possible (Sushi Encyclopedism 2007).

During my time in Japan I noticed differences between how Japanese and those outside of Japan eat sushi. Although sushi is bite-sized and could be easily eaten with a fork, chopsticks, or hands, in Japan most people tend to use chopsticks. I also noticed a few interesting things about the habits my friends and host family had when eating sushi. First, it seems that most people pour soy sauce into a small dish and add a little bit of *wasabi* (Japanese horseradish) to create a dipping sauce. Second, although this is common in foreign countries, it is rare in Japan for someone to break sushi into pieces before eating it. One reason is that eating sushi in one bite enables people to enjoy the fully blended flavor of fragrant rice, raw fish and spices flavor. Besides the reason for better taste, in Japan, it also relates to the dining politeness. One of my Japanese friend explained to me, “If the sushi rice falls apart before you eat it than it is the generally considered the chef’s fault for cooking it poorly. Most Japanese will not do this to show respect to the sushi chef.” Third, *amazu shoga* appears to be an “acquired taste” as my host family would add it to their sushi at sushi restaurants but not one of my friends would do so at a rotary sushi bar. My host father also explained to me that *amazu shoga* is used to cleanse the leftover flavor from the previously eaten sushi and therefore might not be very important to those that eat sushi as a fast food. Although these manners differ among people of different age groups and some of them are lost to the young generation, the “correct” way of eating sushi—using chopsticks correctly, having sushi with side dishes in the right sequence, etc.— is still an important way of differentiating

Japanese from foreigners.

The evolution of modern sushi in Japan started after the Great Kanto Earthquake, went through the post-war period, and then was confronted with the challenges of globalization during the economic boom. During several decades' changes sushi shops began to offer more choices from customers of different income ranges: fine sushi restaurants geared towards high income class; rotary sushi bars that cater to the younger generations who prefer convenience and lower cost; takeaway-style sushi shops provide cheap sushi for busy salary men. Furthermore, within the fierce competition of the food industry caused by globalization sushi sellers created new types of sushi as well as brought back overseas invented sushi to compete in markets all over the world. At the same time, many sushi chefs are devoted to the decoration of not only sushi shops but the sushi itself. The evolution of sushi continues going on along with the pace of globalization. Sushi is not simply a food served inside Japan but has already set foot into the global market.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **SUSHI BOOM – THE GLOBALIZATION OF SUSHI**

Japanese cuisine spread throughout the world beginning in the late twentieth century as the economy boomed and transportation technologies improved. Sushi's globalization started in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s and soon took hold in other parts of the world as well (Bestor 2000: 56; Cwiertka 2001: 15). Sushi has become the most popular Japanese food in many cities throughout the world. In the past decades many new combinations of ingredients have come about in sushi making around the world. The appliance of new ingredients keeps sushi industry's vitality and the changes in sushi become even more various through its globalization. In this chapter I will introduce these different types of sushi and how they are consumed in different countries.

#### **Sushi in the United States**

The earliest overseas sushi restaurants were established in cities that have many Japanese immigrants and catered to Japanese. However, in the 1970s sushi began to be popular even with non-Japanese people. This trend started from a few large West Coast cities in the United States and then spread to other parts of the country (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 101).

Because of its newfound popularity sushi chefs began to invent new

combinations of ingredients to satisfy the preferences of American customers. One of the most popular of this type of sushi is the California roll which is made with imitation crab, avocado, mayonnaise and rice (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 102). Obviously, no raw fish is used in the California roll. As well, avocado and mayonnaise were far from being popular ingredients for sushi in Japan at the time. Similar to the California roll, other types of sushi were invented, such as Spider rolls and Caterpillar rolls, which made use of ingredients that are not commonly used in Japanese cooking, like cream cheese. Moreover, sushi made with brown rice has become a popular with health-conscious customers in the United States (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 102).

Sushi in America differs from its Japanese counterpart not only for the ingredients but also for the places where it is sold. Sushi is not only limited to sushi restaurants or rotary sushi bars as in Japan but can also be found in some Chinese buffet restaurants and Korean restaurants as well. While buffets generally take advantage of using cheap ingredients to offer affordable sushi to those not willing to pay the high price of good quality sushi, Korean and Japanese restaurants often take the opposite route and include sushi as part of a special menu. This mixture, of combining sushi with other Asian food, has created a group of restaurants that are offered referred to as “Asian Fusion.” This style of food takes advantage of sushi’s popularity to sell other types of Asian food as well.

Since sushi occupies a large share in the food and beverage industry in the

United States, many non-Asian young people are attracted by a higher and better working environment. According to a survey report of the *Chicago Tribune*: “among one hundred and thirty nine sushi chefs in the Chicago area, forty one is of Japanese descent, thirty one is of Korean descent, two in China and other Asian ethnic, twenty five Mexico and seventeen Ecuadorians (Naka 2007).” This reflects another interesting phenomenon in American sushi restaurants recently: Latino sushi chefs have begun to compete with Asian chefs. Also some diners and the catering industry believe that these Latin chefs add a unique Latin style to Japanese food which will attract customers to sushi restaurants in America (Wen 2010: 46-47). With the popularity of sushi, not only the ingredients keep changing, the sushi chef team also continues to diversify.

### **Sushi in Europe**

Although sushi’s globalization started in the United States, the global fever for sushi did not fully take root until European countries joined the trend. If sushi’s evolution in America has to do more with the ingredients used, the European sushi boom relates to the way it is served. In Europe, the sushi boom started around the 1990s with the opening of a few successful sushi restaurants, especially rotary sushi bars.

Similar to Japanese rotary sushi bars, European ones provide quick sushi with a comparatively low price. Cwiertka commented about Yo!Sushi, a popular European

rotary sushi bar. “This is a noisy hangout for the trendy Pop generation,” and “The techno-pop background music creates an ambiance entirely free from conventional Japanese associations” (Cwiertka 2005: 257). Most of the sushi served at Yo!Sushi is based on American and British new inventions with cooked ingredients rather than raw fish. The Yo!Sushi bar’s success relies on its fashionable, trendy atmosphere which is very different from a “typical” Japanese dining style. The usage of conveyer belts to serve the food helps create a good environment while making it easy and fast to eat. Yo!Sushi is only one representative of the many European sushi bars. This mixing of sushi and “hip” atmosphere created a new popular trend of eating sushi and is a major reason for the success of sushi in Europe.

Also, the typical way that Europeans and Americans eat sushi differs from Japanese convention. Although both groups dip the sushi in soy sauce with wasabi and put *amazu shoga* (pickled ginger in sweetened vinegar) on top, Americans and Europeans often break sushi into pieces before eating (Matsumoto 2010: 128). As mentioned in Matsumoto’s article, this manner of eating sushi is not unusual outside Japan and has gradually become common. Because of the difference in eating manners, the size of most sushi in Europe is slightly bigger than Japanese ones. Almost all aspects of sushi changed when brought to countries outside of Japan: the ingredients, how people eat it, and the places where it is served.

### **Sushi in Brazil**

There are more Japanese immigrants in Brazil than in any other country in the world. Similar to the United States, many Japanese restaurants originally catered to Japanese immigrants. However, nowadays sushi restaurants for non-Japanese are gradually being opened and are more readily accepted by the local population (Matsumoto 2010: 131). These restaurants have made a variety of changes in the ingredients served. For example, to weaken the taste of raw fish, processed fish, such as smoked salmon and bacalhau (dried and salted cod) are used. Besides fish, beef is also a common ingredient in making sushi in Brazil and the sushi rice is comparatively sweeter. *Nigiri-zushi* is often divided into halves and then served to customers (Matsumoto 2010: 131). As Japanese food became more popular in Brazil shopping malls and theaters began to offer it as well. Sushi is sometimes offered as an appetizer in restaurants now (Matsumoto 2010: 131).

### **Sushi in China**

As Japanese culture, and to that extent food culture, spread across the globe, it had a huge impact on some of its closest neighbors, including China. Similar to many of the sushi restaurants in Europe Chinese sushi restaurants are generally expensive and aimed to be special restaurants, the average price of sushi in China is considerably more expensive than most other foods. Even the rotary sushi bars are widely considered “fine dining.” Most of these restaurants are extravagantly decorated with a high-class atmosphere.

While living in China, I only thought of Sushi restaurants as someplace that one would go on a date or out for a special occasion because of the high price. Even in a simple rotary sushi bar the price is around three to four times as much as the Japanese counterpart, which is significant considering the difference in cost of living. One of my classmates did an internship in a sushi restaurant and explained the reason for the high price to me: “Because most of the sea off the Chinese coast is polluted the fish is not fresh enough for sushi. Our restaurant has to order fresh fish from Japan and transport it by airplane every day.” Although I think that her explanation is only part of the reason why sushi prices are so expensive in China, it shows that sushi is remarkably popular despite the extra hurdles that restaurants have to perform in order to offer it to their customers. Despite these high prices, sushi has had much success being a “high class” food and marketed that way though using elegant decorations to attract customers. I remember one day during college when I and a few friends of mine were trying to decide on where to go for lunch. Although no one particularly liked raw fish in our group, when someone suggested a new sushi restaurant nearby none of us turned it down and all of us seemed happy with trying out the new “fashionable” place to eat. It seemed to be understood that eating there was the “trendy” thing to do and we all thought of it as a good chance to have a “fashionable” dining experience.

In recent years the popularity of sushi has resulted in it becoming more accessible to Chinese customers. The publicity of Japanese and Taiwanese

convenience stores, like Lawson and Family Mart, have become important retail markets for sushi (Matsumoto 2010: 129). These convenience stores are generally only located near big companies and universities in large cities and their customers are usually white collar workers who are looking for healthy and quick food for their lunch break. The price of sushi in these convenience stores is usually cheaper than the sushi in restaurants but not as cheap as the outdoor food kiosks. However, because these large convenience stores have only found their way into large cities in China, they have not yet had a noticeable impact on sushi sales in China.

Other than the sushi served in restaurants and convenience stores, sushi is also sold in outdoor stalls in China. However, this type of sushi seller is far more common than convenience stores and almost every city in China. Ham, cucumber, carrots, vinegar rice and seaweed are the basic ingredients used for these types of cheap, low quality sushi. Because of the low cost, it is impossible to use fresh raw fish. This makes it far different from most Japanese sushi. Also, because sushi stalls have wheels they are able to be hauled at any time to places that have more access to customers. Despite this, they usually choose to stay near schools and low-level working places where there are more people looking for cheap and quick food. Making the stalls' sushi rolls does not require the skills of a professional sushi cook and the ingredients are easy to get. This allows these stalls to be very easy to open and maintain. Not only does the low price and accessibility of this sushi help the stalls sell but the product being called "sushi" generally maintains its popularity

among students and blue collar workers.

This popularity of sushi in China is also seen through the media industry. In Hong Kong sushi is not simply limited to its role as food but as a cultural symbol of Japan. Due to the recent success of Japanese restaurants in Hong Kong many TV programs based on Japanese food have been created in the last decade. In January 2008, TVB, one of the largest over-the-air television networks in China, released a new series called *Wasabi Mon Amour*. Set in a Japanese restaurant in Hong Kong, during the course of the show the audience is shown many different types of Japanese food. This series became wildly popular with Hong Kong and mainland Chinese audiences alike and shows just how popular Japanese food has become.

In February 2011 TVB released another famous TV series, *The Rippling Blossom*. Like *Wasabi Mon Amour* the story is based in a Japanese restaurant in Hong Kong, specifically a sushi shop, but this show has much more to do with Japanese food culture. During the show the main characters learned how to make sushi from scratch. This included learning how to make sushi rice, pick out the best tuna, and discerning the proper temperature to preserve sushi and its ingredients to keep the best taste. Besides Hong Kong, around half of the show was shot in Tokyo and Hokkaido to keep a sense of “authenticity.” These TV shows aimed to take advantage of the rising popularity of sushi in recent years and bring it to new markets. *The Rippling Blossom* dominated many ratings lists for the first half year of 2011 in Hong Kong. The rising popularity of TV programs about sushi in Hong

Kong show how much of an impact sushi has made on the city itself.

### **Sushi in the Middle East**

Sushi began to appear in the Middle East region around the end of the wars in the 1990's. Most of the ingredients for sushi making are imported from the Mediterranean area. The sushi cooks are usually from the local people and labor from Southeast Asia (Matsumoto 2010: 130). For Moslem and Jews, sushi, which is made with fish, avoids certain meat eating taboos, such as pork and some other types of red meat. Thus, sushi substitutes some meat to provide proteins and the same time it gives an exotic feeling of faraway Japan. Although sushi's fame in the Middle East is not as big as in other regions previously discussed, the popularity of sushi is still increasing in the area.

### **Sushi Walks Back**

With the spread of sushi boom in the oversea markets, newly invented sushi also made their way back to Japan. Similar to the overseas sushi restaurants, many sushi sellers in Japan offer the roll sushi with cooked fish. Recent years, over than the "reverse import" of certain types of roll sushi, some overseas sushi companies began to open their branches in Japan. Although sushi's popularity extends in many regions in the world and developed various combinations of ingredients in different countries, most of "exotic" sushi and restaurants that travel back to Japan are from the United

States. Rainbow Roll Sushi and Genji Sushi are two examples of those “Americanized” sushi restaurants (Allen and Sakamoto 2011).

Rainbow Roll Sushi was established in 2001 by Yoko Shibata, a Japanese woman returned from the United States (Allen and Sakamoto 2011). According to Shibata’s idea, Rainbow Sushi is set the image as an “American” style sushi restaurant with a “rich and casual” atmosphere (Kato 2002: 218-219; Allen and Sakamoto 2011). Now besides the original establishment in Tokyo, the restaurant opened two other branches in Bangkok and Taipei. Browsing over its website, Rainbow Roll Sushi markets itself as a “stylish and cool space” and a place to “enjoy healthy as well as beautifully presented rolled sushi within a stylish ambience (Rainbow Sushi).”

Different from Rainbow Roll Sushi that has its main market in Asia, Genji Sushi is an American sushi chain restaurant. Its main markets are in the United States and the UK. Its Japanese branch was opened in March 2008 and specifically marked with “Sushi from New York (Allen and Sakamoto 2011).” On its homepage writes Genji Sushi’s slogan “Genji is a premier provider of all-natural sushi and Japanese cuisine. Our mission is to serve food-lovers with delicious Japanese-inspired food and knowledge to lead happy, healthy lives (Genji Sushi).” And they also advertise the origin of their ingredients to show the good quality of their food as well as provide detailed calorie and nutritious information for each type of sushi they offer.

Scanning over both restaurants menus, they share very similar treats: sushi are

no doubt the main section on the menu; the sushi selections have the divisions in vegetarian sushi, raw fish sushi and cooked sushi rolls, among them, cooked sushi rolls occupied higher percentage; besides sushi, salad and other typical Japanese food such as ramen and pot stickers are also on the menus. Rainbow Roll Sushi also offers customers expensive foreign and domestic wines and beers, and deserts (Allen and Sakamoto 2011). From the information provided on the two sushi restaurants website and their menus, it is easy to get the similar marketing strategy between them: serving “American” stylish sushi with the idea of healthy eating.

By promoting their images as trendy, stylish and healthy instead of the “authentic” taste of sushi, American style sushi restaurants lock their target consumers into the young, well-off urban groups who are interested in foreign culture and prefer trying new things. Besides its food and decoration, those restaurants also use other marketing strategies to show the difference. For example, on Genji Sushi’s Japanese branch’s menu, the main items are written in English with Japanese descriptions. And the average price of sushi from Genji is higher than normal sushi restaurants in Japan (Allen and Sakamoto 2011). They usually locate at lively shopping malls with a group of fine dining restaurants. The English menu, higher price and location are designed to mark its special and upper class dining experience.

The “American” sushi restaurants gained some popularity in large Japanese cities recent years. Its popularities in those regions result from the following factors.

First, Americanized sushi and sushi restaurants advertise the “trendy” and “stylish” images to differentiate from other “traditional” sushi places. The pretty decorations and trendy atmosphere suit well with the young generations’ fashion tastes. Another important selling point for them is the fusion between Japanese sushi and America. For many Japanese, “coming from America” itself is a charming fashion icon. Similar to Japanese popular culture’s influences in the world, American culture is also a “cool” trend for the younger generation to chase. This explains why some mass-market brands in America like Starbucks coffee is considered and consumed as white-collar fashion in some Asian countries. Whereas, the “American” sushi restaurants in Japan are slightly different from other American catering brands such as McDonalds, Starbucks, etc. Sushi is introduced to America through Japan. Admittedly when it re-imported back to Japan, many American elements has been inserted to sushi and the “Americanized” sushi is quite different from the classical Japanese version. The “American” brand might add some exotic and fashion treats to sushi to increase consumers’ curiosity. But for some Japanese customers, sushi remains its signifier as Japanese food. Eating at an “American” sushi restaurant is more like a way of experiencing American trend at the same time to examine others’ perception of “our” food with curiosity and judgment. The comparison between Japanese sushi and the newly invented sushi never ceased. Thus, the “exotic” sushi and American brand sushi restaurants are unlikely to become “mainstream” in Japan’s sushi market. Its popularity is limited in the trendy chasing young generation

who eats sushi with a playful attitude and once again reassures the irreplaceable position of sushi in Japan.

The evolution of sushi still continues. Besides the newly invented sushi by European American sushi chefs, “exotic” sushi is emerging in every part of the world. In China, the Peking roll is made with Peking duck (Matsumoto 2007: 6; Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 102); in Mexico, some sushi rolls contain serrano peppers (Mizrahi 1999: 60); in Australia and New Zealand, avocado is a popular ingredient (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 102). The global sushi boom is largely occupied with sushi rolls with cooked fish or other types of seafood rather than fresh raw fish that is common in Japan. The newly invented sushi combines the shape of sushi rolls and the local ingredients in order to fit the local customers’ preferences. Sushi’s boom in the overseas market also creates the “reverse import” of sushi and sushi restaurants to Japan. The “exotic” culture appealing together with the “Japaneseness” of sushi attracts Japanese customers to the re-imported sushi bars. Marketing sushi with a non-Japanese brand and reverse import in Japan shows a new dimension of sushi’s globalization. Meanwhile, Japanese consumers’ playful and judgmental attitudes towards overseas newly invented sushi also reflect the growing confidence of Japanese on their own food culture.

Sushi as a global food appears to be much more diversified and different from “traditional” sushi in Japan. Even though the two divisions on sushi’s quality and

price in Japan are still applied to the overseas markets, due to its globalization, sushi is made much fancier with various new ingredients and decorations and allows more localization. The dissemination of sushi and the sushi boom is stimulated by the mass media as well, which is not simply limited to advertisements but also includes TV programs. The cheap sushi sold at kiosks was built with the advantages of sushi's fame yet at the same time helped to increase the popularity of sushi among the young generation. The evolution of sushi during its globalization questions whether or not the authenticity of modern sushi is really "Japanese" and what makes sushi still sushi. After all, a California roll in America or a cooked beef sushi roll in Brazil is quite different from a raw salmon roll in Japan.

**CHAPTER 5:**  
**WHY SUSHI?**  
**– EXPLAINING THE POPULARITY OF SUSHI INSIDE AND**  
**OUTSIDE JAPAN –**

Sushi has kept its irreplaceable position as a typical Japanese food both inside Japan and in oversea markets and is now one of the most well-known foods worldwide. With continuous changes over the years sushi has achieved a great increase in its popularity. In previous chapters I examined both pre-modern and modern changes that sushi has undergone. In this chapter I will look at possible explanations as to why sushi went through these changes and has garnered so much attention.

**What Triggered the Sushi Boom?**

*The Images of Sushi*

Perceived characteristics of sushi have done much to help it gain much popularity throughout the world. That is, sushi has three major characteristics that have allowed it to keep its status as a representative Japanese food: the flexibility of ingredients that can be used to make it, the nutritional balance of those ingredients, and its history in Japan.

## Flexible Sushi

Overtime the making time of sushi has been shortened and the process has become much less complicated. Most of the changes over the more than thousand year span since sushi was first created have been mostly to improve efficiency in its production. It is hard to imagine that every modern sushi restaurant would spend several months to ferment fish before serving it to the customers in modern day. Moreover, in ancient times sushi was a result of an attempt to preserve food rather than creating a new food. Past sushi that had been fermented is nothing like modern day sushi which focuses on fresh raw fish and would likely not even be considered as a substitute. The invention of fermentation accelerator shortened the fermenting procedure of sushi making and triggered the emergence of *haya-zushi*. The changes that sushi went through reflect new demands of a developing society and proved to be essential for the longevity of sushi. These changes are a major factor in why sushi continued to exist in Japan but almost disappeared in other Asian countries in the past.

Changes in the last few decades have mostly come from demands from markets. Modern technology has allowed sushi shops to take into account a wide variety of consumer preferences and resulted in a boom of new types of sushi being invented. Not only did the wide variety of sushi shops that appeared expand the consumer base of sushi, but the changes in ingredients that those shops tested resulted in increased popularity as well. The start of using tuna in sushi in the post-war period was

influenced by American preferences. As sushi came to different markets throughout the world, in different regions local ingredients started to be used in “Japanese” food. At first the usage of cooked fish might have seemed strange to Japanese but was a reasonable substitute for people who normally would not eat raw fish. The change from raw fish to cooked fish also reflects sushi’s adaptation to different concepts of what food is.

“The raw and the cooked” relate to people’s viewpoint of foodstuff. Levi-Strauss argues that the human experience and domestication create their relation to different types of cooking (Levi-Strauss 1968: 29). The idea of what food is, is a social concept that is highly related to people’s habit and values. Paige Edwards mentioned that raw foods, especially raw fish, have not always been considered foodstuff in the United States. During the 1950s, “salad” usually referred to potato salad and most vegetables were cooked (Edwards 2012: 217). From “cooked” to raw vegetable salad, the changes happened in people’s concept of what is acceptable and edible. Today, cheese is one of the most popular foods in European American countries. Cheese itself is not cooked but prepared which is similar to sushi. Compared to cheese, although sushi has a preparation process, many European and Americans still do not consider it as food, since some sushi contains raw seafood. Thus, the difference between “the raw and the cooked” does not really relate to the food itself but the acceptable concept in people’s mind. In order to cooperate to the differences in food concept, in some overseas sushi restaurants’ websites, they even warn customers that

the food includes raw fish which may increase the risk of foodborne illness and encourage customers who have compromised immune systems to try the cooked sushi. Considering of different concepts on food, making changes in sushi with cooked seafood is a smart move for sushi's popularity in the overseas markets.

Since there are not many strict requirements as to what sushi is or is not, there exists a wide amount of possibilities for something to be labeled "sushi." It appears that any ingredients that are added to seasoned rice and rolled up together in an appearance that looks like the sushi offered in Japan it will automatically be considered "sushi." This flexibility is not found in most foods around the world and has been a major reason why sushi has become so popular throughout the world today.

### Healthy Sushi

Besides sushi's flexibility another image of sushi is sushi as a "healthy food." Modern sushi is famous for its fresh and natural taste. Generally, the only cooked part of sushi is the rice used to make it; even for most newly invented sushi that uses cooked fish the cooking procedure is comparatively simple and tries to keep as much natural flavor as possible. With the combination of seafood, vegetables, and rice sushi has been known for its good balance of nutrition. Compared to red meat most seafood is low in fat. Because sushi is generally uncooked and oil is not used to enrich its taste, eating sushi avoids the oily fats found in most cooked food. In

addition, seaweeds used in many sushi rolls are rich in iodine and iron and the appetizers used in sushi preparation, such as ginger and wasabi, are said to have antibacterial properties (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 64).

In 1977, the United States Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs issued a report titled *Dietary Goals for the United States* (the McGovern Report). With the concern that sixty percent of Americans that time were overweight, this report urged Americans to change their daily diet that contained too much fat and too few carbohydrates (Watanabe 2006: 3). And it suggested that Japanese diet which includes rice as staple food with fish, vegetables and soy beans on the side is the most balanced and recommended (Matsumoto 2010: 138). With the suggestion from the McGovern Report, many people began to be interested in Japanese food. The nutritious structure of sushi: rice, fish and vegetables fulfill the recommended diet very well. The McGovern Report became an important trigger for the sushi boom in the United States since the 1980s. The increasing importance given to eating healthy has made sushi become competitive with other forms of fast food, such as hamburgers, in many places.

### Exotic Sushi

There is much to be said about “foreign foods” and the exotic appearance that adds to their popularity. Sushi is not an exception to this and many people outside of Japan consider it a strictly “Japanese food.” Different from many countries’ well

cooked food, sushi's preparation procedure is simple and its flavor depends on the freshness of ingredients. For many people outside of Japan eating sushi is far different from their normal diets and can be viewed as quite "exotic."

Additionally, since most people believe that sushi originated in Japan, and the modern form of sushi in fact did, people tend to relate it to Japanese culture. Although sushi has a long history in Japan, in overseas markets sushi has gained an image as a "trendy" food. The invention of sushi robots and the conveyor belt system linked sushi to the image of "techno-Japan." The combination of high technology and food serving has a modern feeling to many customers. As Tamamura comments in "Sushi Conquers the World", "both Americans and Europeans now understand that sushi came from Japan and is part of Japanese culinary culture. Before the images of "Mount Fuji", "geisha", "Honda" and "Sony" were used to be mentioned when people thought about Japan. Now "sushi", "anime" and "karaoke" seems to have a closer connection (Tamamura 2000: 60)." In this sentence it is clear that he separates sushi from tradition and the past and places it on the side contemporary Japanese popular culture which has transnational popularity. Tamamura also suggests that adults eat sushi partly because it is fashionable, but when small children go to eat it with their parents, they simply think that it's delicious. If sushi walks into the diet of the even younger generation, it will most likely become a fully naturalized part of the local food scene in ten or twenty years (Tamamura 2000: 60). In this case, the fashion image of sushi will eventually influence people's regular diets.

Whether traditional or popular, sushi has always found a way to fit in. For the Japanese “tradition” and history lovers, the classical style of sushi restaurants and the raw fish sushi can provide them a way of experiencing Japanese culture. For people who are more interested in Japanese popular culture, the rotary sushi bar and modern style sushi shops with pop music in the background is able to offer a trendy atmosphere. In addition, sushi in those shops might not have the best flavor. However, the decorations and innovative usage of ingredients help these shops keep their trendy images for fashion chasers. Sushi’s image is not unchanged; its flexibility and adaptation sustains its longevity and popularity, especially in oversea markets.

Although images of sushi have been an important to its success, social background changes have also affected sushi a great deal as well. In the modern period, those changes include increased Japanese immigrants to the United States after World War II, Japan’s rapid economic recovery in the post-war period, and the development of high technology and the improvement of transportation triggered by technology.

#### *Japanese Immigration with Sushi Ingredients and Making Skills*

The beginning of sushi boom started from the West Coast of America. The spread of sushi in the United States came from the Japanese immigration in the post-war period. Japanese migrants arrived at the West Coast of America and also

brought in sushi. Gradually, the local Americans began to gain interest in this “exotic” food. Along with the immigration, ingredients for sushi making and the required skills were also introduced to the United States.

One of the most important ingredients for sushi is rice. Before Japanese immigrants came to America most rice in the United States was grown in the southern regions of the country and most of them are the long-grain rice. This type of rice has a high amount of the chemical amylose. Because of this most long-grain rice has a hard texture and is not sticky after steaming. It is hard to form sushi by using non-sticky long-grain rice (Matsumoto 2010: 136). Japanese people tried to introduce short-grain rice to the American market but it did not have much success because the texture of short-grain rice is too sticky and soft after steaming which was not useful for many rice dishes in the United States. In order to make the rice suitable for both American and Japanese tastes, Japanese immigrants invented a new type of rice called “Rice King” in 1962 and began to use it in sushi making (Matsumoto 2007: 3).

The Japanese immigrants also helped remitting the problem of the lack for sushi chefs. In Japan, it is said that to become a qualified sushi chef requires at least ten years of training. Thus it is hard for an overseas sushi restaurant to train a sushi chef immediately and used for making sushi in a short period of time. Since the immigration trend brought some sushi chefs to America, they contributed to building the first group of overseas sushi restaurants as well as training overseas sushi

makers.

### *Japan's Economic Rebound*

The popularity of one cuisine cannot leave the support from the economic power of that country. Sushi is the same. Although sushi was brought to the United States along with Japanese immigrants it did not gain much popularity until the recovery of Japan's economy. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Japan left behind its downturn period and went through a period of time known as the Japanese "economic miracle." And it became the world's second largest economy after 1978. The rebound of the Japanese economy drew the world's attention to Japan and its culture. With the increasing number of media reports on different aspects of Japan and Japanese life style, more and more people began to gain an interest in Japanese food. Moreover, the development of Japan's economy along with the ongoing globalization brought more requests to the food industry for internationalization. Since that period, more Japanese food companies opened overseas branches to increase their profits and popularity. As a consequence, Japanese cuisine began to gain fame in the overseas markets with sushi being one of its most representative foods.

### *The Development of High Technology and Transportation*

Although immigration helped sushi's developments outside Japan, it cannot solve the problems coming up from the expanding scale of sushi's overseas markets.

The gaining popularity of sushi requires more sushi chefs. The prevalence of high-technology industry helped solved this problem. Since the 1960s the idea of sushi robots began to be put into practice. In the 1980s, sushi robots appeared in oversea sushi restaurants. The debut of sushi robots released the pressure of searching for a sushi chef in many overseas sushi restaurants. Also, the appliance of sushi robots reduced the cost of labor. Thus, it also contributed to decreasing the cost of making sushi and contributed to the second wave of sushi's popularization in the 1990s as being a cheap, accessible populist food (Allen and Sakamoto 2011).

Besides sushi robots the invention of the conveyor belt is another changing point in the sushi industry brought by high-technology. As mentioned in the previous chapter conveyor belts in rotary sushi bars are able to shorten the food serving time and give more freedom to customers. For some young customers, sushi robots and the rotary sushi bar are even more attractive than sushi itself because they represent the trend of the appliance of high-technology to life.

The development of technology also shortens the required transportation time. This change benefits the sushi industry that highly demands fresh ingredients. Nowadays, almost every sushi restaurant in Japan can get fresh fish they need for making sushi. Even in the inland regions of some countries, fresh seafood can be delivered in time by airfreight to keep its fresh. The globalization of sushi benefits from the improvement of transportation. For instance, in China, most sushi restaurants have to get fresh seafood everyday from Japan; most Middle East sushi

restaurants transport the fish from the Mediterranean area. Despite the high cost of air transportation, it solved the problem of ingredients for many places in the world, thus helped the expansion of sushi industry outside Japan. Moreover, the high speed transportation made the exchange of ingredients possible as well. As mentioned by Bestor, Japan imported bluefin tuna worldwide increased from 957 metric tons in 1984 to 5,235 metric tons in 1993. The big increase in importing tuna is because of growing demands for prime quality fish in Japan as well as the development of transportation (Bestor 2000: 57-58).

Sushi's popularity cannot leave its charming self-image of flexibility and health. Other external factors such as the improvement in technology and economic conditions also benefitted the global sushi boom. The consumption of sushi follows the general rule of consumers' consumption behaviors (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 74). Namely, for foreign sushi eaters, the consumption behavior is more determined by price, quality, healthy concerns and product image; while for Japanese, although the factors like price and quality influenced their consumption behaviors too, the long term sushi eating behavior is more concerned with their attitude and customs on sushi. In short, compared to overseas sushi eaters, Japanese people have more attachment to sushi.

### **What is Sushi to Japanese?**

### *Not just Sushi*

An important factor that influences people's food consumption behavior is the atmosphere where people dine. This is true for every person. Fujisaka mentioned it in his article "Sushiya o Ajiwau (Enjoying Sushi Restaurants)" as the "*mikaku no shakaisei*" (the social nature of the sense of taste). He suggested that eating certain food does not mean one will enjoy it. The enjoyment of eating does not simply come from the taste of food but rather the atmosphere they are in and the people they are with (Fujisaka 2009: 225-226). That is to say, the sense of taste is triggered by subjective feelings. For foreign sushi eaters sitting in a sushi restaurant eating the combination of raw fish and seasoned white rice can bring a feeling of experiencing exotic Japanese culture. For Japanese, sushi shops provide a space to share the taste of "being Japanese."

Sushi restaurants are not only places to eat sushi but rather a place to enjoy the whole atmosphere. However, the atmosphere of sushi shops depends greatly on the shops consumer base. For example, modern sushi emerged in the Edo period and, at that time, *sushiya* (sushi eatery) was popular among Edo workmen. The workers in the sushi shops, especially those who prepare the sushi, had inherited the temperament of the *Edokko* (child of Edo, present-day Tokyo). *Edokko* refers to the people from the large merchant and artisan district in Edo and they are known for the characteristics of high-spirited, generous and hot tempered. So in the early days of sushi eateries, when customers came, they would be showered with loud calls of

welcome in order to keep up with *Eddoko*'s enthusiasm (Naomichi 2001: 227). But the spirited fashion in the *sushiya* had a sharp contrast to the soft and quiet local manners of speaking, thus it was not a common place for women or families to go. In recent decades, with the establishments of different forms of sushi eating places, the customer groups became various. Besides workmen, nowadays both women and families have become common consumers in the sushi shops as well. There are more types of sushi offered in *sushiya* nowadays than before, but the major factor that affects the change in the customer structure is the different atmosphere.

Similar situations are apparent when people live abroad. Although eating at local restaurants is not unusual for most people, many people still prefer foods they are familiar with from their home country. Many of the Japanese friends I know living in America often eat at Japanese restaurants because they are familiar with the food and it makes good conversation with their friends. This preference for Japanese food is not mere coincidence nor genetic, but relates to their memories and experiences. As Japanese, they feel a connection to the Japanese food that non-Japanese would not feel despite their being no real link. For many of them "Japanese food" is something that they "own" or can discuss as something that is theirs. These factors that influence Japanese people's eating out choices are not simply determined by the taste of food but also other feelings related to the food. This might be true to people all over the world, but for Japanese, the sense of property seems much stronger considering the attachment to certain ingredients. As mentioned in previous chapters,

when American invented sushi comes back to Japanese markets even the younger generations, who are more focused on eating somewhere trendy or fashionable, still tend to judge the newly invented overseas sushi. Thus, sushi to Japanese is more than just a simple food; it is a combination of memory, experience and attachment.

### *Rice and Japanese*

The attachment created by atmosphere is crucial for keeping sushi shops position in society but the ingredients used in sushi can also create nostalgic feelings for Japanese people. As an island country Japan has a sufficient supply of fresh seafood. Also with its warm and humid climate the land suits for rice production. Relying on these two natural supplies sushi emerged in ancient Japan. Tracing sushi back in history, the original version of sushi functioned as a method to preserve fish related to rice-field fishery. As time went by the seafood used in sushi continued to change. Different combinations of ingredients kept being added into sushi to satisfy customers' preferences. Only rice kept its "steady" position in sushi. As fresh fish can be captured in almost every bay area, the quality of fish in the sea near Japan is not much different than that of many other countries. Although the quality and freshness of fish are usually considered to be the main factors of determining the quality of a piece of sushi, the seasoned rice base is actually the crucial part of sushi's taste. Thus, rather than the continuously changing seafood choices, the unchanging rice needs more attention. Considering Japanese people's special

emotions towards rice, the sushi rice, rather than the other ingredients, contributed to sushi's longevity within Japan. It is important to examine the close emotional bond between Japanese and rice in the discussion of sushi today.

Rice, along with wheat and corn is one of the three most important grains in the world today. In Japan, wet-rice cultivation started from the third century BCE. From that time, Japan turned into an agricultural society and rice began to become the key trading commodity of the Japanese social economy (Naomichi 2001: 17). Since the Early Modern Period (1603-1868), rice began to be consumed three times a day by most Japanese and generally became the staple food on the daily dining table. It is said that "white rice had come to be considered as a part of the birthright of every Japanese by the 1930s (Dore 1973: 58-59)." During World War II, domestic rice was sent to soldiers while the rest of the population did not have enough. The rice shortage triggered the desirability of rice in the minds of Japanese. "A bowlful of white rice" even became the dreamful meal for ordinary Japanese. Almost all lunch boxes sold in stores in Japan contain rice; even "Western" style dishes, such as steaks and pork cutlets, are served with rice. In most Japanese families the evening meal is usually associated with rice. Like Ohnuki-Tierney mentioned in her book, "many Japanese would feel that a meal is not complete without rice or *manpukukan* (the full-stomach feeling) is not achieved without rice, no matter what else is eaten (1993: 41-42)."

Besides the preference for rice in daily meals rice was for a long time considered

to provide sacred energy and power (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 74). Traditionally, people in Japan ate rice cakes when they were about to enter the agricultural season and women after giving birth were also provided rice cakes to gain back energy (Yanagita 1982: 240-258). In addition, it also has a symbolic meaning for having a “good life.” In the past, rice is a crucial food for living. Some folk beliefs in Japan enshrine the Deity of Rice Paddies to pray for a harvest. In others, people who are rewarded with rice live happily ever after (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 77). The symbolic meaning of having a “good life” thus comes from the historical rice-growing culture in Japan. Many contemporary practices derive from the notion that rice can provide people strength and a good life. For example, in festivals like new years, *Hinamatsuri* (March 3, Doll Festival) and *Tango no Sekku* (May 5, Boy’s Festival), rice products, including rice cakes, sushi and rice wine, are offered as ritual foods (Wada, Pogolian, Sato, and Grivetti 1999: 315-319). Compared to the ancient period many people nowadays, especially the younger generation, do not quite believe that rice is sacred. However, the participation as well as the observation of rituals using rice has helped create a sense of the importance of this food.

Besides Japan, many other Asian countries also have long history of rice production and eat it as staple food. However, for Japanese, rice serves as a powerful vehicle to distinguish themselves from other peoples, that is to say, in Japanese point of view, domestic rice is considered different from rice grown in other regions. First, the difference comes from the various species of rice. Asian domesticated rices can

be generally divided into two main species: the *indica* and the *japonica*. The *indica* type is commonly referred to as long-grain rice and it remains separate when cooked, whereas the *japonica* type is a short-grain type that it became sticky when cooked. Although both types of rice are cultivated in Japan, different from other Asian countries, sticky short-grain rice remains far more popular in Japan (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 13). Thus, Japanese rice products are mainly made with short-grain rice.

Even within species of short-grain rice, contemporary Japanese still identify them between Japanese rice and “foreign rice.” More than the differences of the rice, the important factor that determines how Japanese rice differs from other rice is the land its grown on. For instance, the short-grain California rice is identical to Japanese domestic rice because it was cultivated from seeds originally brought from Japan by immigrants (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 109). It was used to make sushi and other rice dishes in many Japanese restaurants in the United States. But for Japanese, the taste of the short-grain California rice is still different from the domestic rice since it is grown in the foreign soil (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 109). The idea here is that the positive features of the domestic rice comes from the Japanese rice paddies. Moreover, the rice production can help protect the Japanese soil and provide nutrients to other agricultural products. Thus, the domestic rice is not only tastier according to Japanese preference, but also helps and represents the positive image of Japanese land. As Inoue echoes a comment expressed in Japanese mass media, “American rice would not clear the air, nor would it adorn the scenery with beautiful

green (Inoue 1988: 103; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 110).” The Japanese preference for domestic rice is rather than its symbolic meaning of nice Japan’s natural environment for rice growing rather than its simple taste.

Japanese special emotions for rice also extend to rice as a product. Sushi’s popularity also benefits from people’s attachment to rice. First, the shape of sushi is determined by the texture of sticky short-grain rice. Rice from other countries cannot provide proper texture for sushi making. Thus, sushi to Japan is unique. Although people seem to give more credit to the seafood and vegetables used in sushi, cooking good sushi rice to match the texture and the whole taste of sushi is not easy. In sushi making a professional sushi chef needs three years for rice cooking training and eight years for forming the rice (Matsumoto 2010: 135). The long training on processing rice shows the importance of rice in sushi. Besides, in sushi eating manners, breaking the formed rice is considered impolite by Japanese. Secondly, even though the fish and rice complements each other, many Japanese believe that the best taste of sushi should be made with domestic rice. Because domestic rice grows only in Japanese soil, it matches better with the Japanese classical food. It also explains why many Japanese do not think that sushi in overseas restaurants have an “authentic” flavor. It is hard to tell to what degree the taste of rice is different, but, to Japanese, the special bond to domestic rice automatically gives a positive image.

Sushi’s long history and today’s popularity is achieved by both internal and

external factors. Its flexibility and adaptation to various changes determined its long existence among the world cuisines. The external changes in the social background assist its popularity all over the world. For Japanese, the special feelings for rice products helped to create their attachment to sushi. With the thousands years of existence in Japanese diet, sushi together with *sushiya*'s special atmosphere has already become one part of "being Japanese." This determined the irreplaceable status of sushi among Japanese cuisine. However, the increasing sushi boom is not without problems. There are always some doubt about how much innovation can happen before sushi stops being sushi anymore; changes destroyed sushi's authenticity and its traditional Japanese image. In the next chapter I will examine the problems related to these questions and look at whether the transformations of sushi will cause it to cease being a symbol of Japanese culture or not.

**CHAPTER 6:**  
**SUSHI AND ITS JAPANESE IDENTITY**  
**– HOW DO THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT AND**  
**INDIVIDUALS CONSTRUCT SUSHI'S IDENTITY –**

If there is any major factor contributing to sushi's persistence and popularity in modern times it would be its "evolution." Nowadays sushi is a "global food" and can be found not only in Japanese restaurants but in Asian fusion restaurants and grocery stores throughout the world. However, not only was sushi's ability to adapt over the years been a reason for its current popularity, but its very popularity has been a reason for even more changes to occur. This leaves us with an important question, how much can a food change before we start thinking of it as an entirely different food?

In this chapter, I will examine what was lost during sushi's development and clarify the meaning of sushi's authenticity in contemporary Japan. This chapter will also discuss how the Japanese government's and individual responses relate to sushi's transformation and authenticity. Then I will move on to the linkages between sushi's identity and both its history and globalization in order to find out how sushi kept its "Japaneseness" in the frequent changing food industry.

**What is Lost?**

When discussing the authenticity of sushi it is important to look at what has been lost during sushi's evolution. In the previous chapters I examined how sushi has changed and the reasons behind sushi's longevity and popularity. However, change implies that some traits have been lost. As a former Japanese agriculture minister, Toshiba Matsuoka, stated, "What people need to understand is that real Japanese food is a highly developed art. It involves senses; it should be beautifully presented, use genuine ingredients and be made by a trained chef" (Faiola 2006). The existence of sushi relied on its ability to adapt, but the preparation technique behind sushi is also important.

The development of high technology has been a double-edged sword. It made producing sushi much easier and less costly. This in turn made it more accessible to consumers. However, it also led to a decrease in well-trained sushi chefs, since many modern sushi restaurants prefer using sushi robots. This is because sushi robots are able to produce sushi at two to three times the speed of veteran chefs in traditional sushi bars. Also, specially designed sushi robots can measure the strength of forming sushi rice with incredible accuracy (Matsumoto 2010: 136). In modern sushi restaurants, with the usage of sushi robot, chefs just have to layer the sliced fish and adjust the shape of sushi on the robot-made sushi rice before serving it to customers (De Silva and Yamao 2006: 66-67). This simple procedure does not need years of training unlike chefs that do not use robots. As a consequence, the number of professional sushi chefs has fallen greatly. In response to this loss, Makoto Fukue,

the head of the Tokyo Sushi Academy, showed his concern that the reason overseas customers do not like certain types of sushi might be because unqualified sushi chefs have been preparing them wrong. This is a major concern because it can influence the overall image of sushi. Although the quest of economic profit constitutes the main driving force behind most establishments of sushi restaurants, some people believe that the image of sushi as a Japanese food cannot be sacrificed for economic gain.

With the advances in high-technology, the skills to make sushi have been neglected. Furthermore, in the previous discussion of sushi's globalization, new types of sushi were created to cater to local's preferences by using different combinations of ingredients. Some overseas sushi restaurants started to advertise sushi with brown rice and multi-grain in order to promote a healthy image. Despite these changes sushi is still strongly considered a Japanese traditional food.

### **To Keep the Authenticity of Sushi**

Perhaps the most important overlooked question that needs to be asked before discussing the authenticity of sushi is, "What is authenticity?" As stated in Chapter Two, modern sushi is quite different from original sushi in Japan and even modern sushi has experienced hundreds of years of changes. However, the "authenticity" that I mean here is not the originality of sushi itself, but sushi as a Japanese food. Although modern sushi is far different from its "traditional" counterpart, it still

retains much of its “authenticity” as a Japanese food. Sushi’s Japanese identity has only become stronger during its changes and it has become a symbol for Japan.

### *Flexible Sushi in Flexible Japanese Culture*

As mentioned before, one of the features that determined sushi’s longevity is its flexibility. Sushi’s simple structure enables different combinations of ingredients. The flexibility does not only exist in sushi but is also a characteristic of Japan’s cultural background. Despite the view of many people that Japan protects its traditions well, Japanese culture is unique or even exclusive, in fact in many respects Japanese culture is open and flexible. From the ancient period till nowadays, the process of absorption, modification and transformation never stops shaping different cultural phenomena in Japan.

Japanese language is a good example of Japan’s flexibility. The Japanese vocabulary has been constantly enriched by borrowing words from other languages throughout history. This includes the borrowing from Chinese words in early phrases in its history and the absorption of “western” languages in modern times (Shibatani 1990: 120-121). The process of absorbing from others and modification to fit in Japanese language never ceases. For example, in today’s Japanese, we can see words like “*pasokon* (パソコン)” which comes from the English phrase “personal computer”. Japanese combined the two words “personal” and “computer” together and made it into Japanese pronunciation. Such examples can be commonly found in

modern Japanese. Also with the trend of globalization, Japanese have more access to foreign words. More and more foreign words and phrases from foreign language, especially English, appear in Japanese language nowadays.

Another representative cultural item in contemporary Japan is manga (literally, funny pictures). Manga has a long history in Japan that begins with caricature. The caricature pictures usually used to criticize or slander the defects and shortcomings of society (Ito 2008: 27). During hundreds years of changes, the criticizing function of manga still exist but is not its main function anymore. Japanese manga is more for entertainment and has developed to various genres to fit with different age and gender groups. The characters in manga are not limited in Japanese bio-racial features: blond hair, blue eyes figures are not rare in today's Japanese manga. The trend of making manga characters "stateless" enables readers from different countries to relate to them easily (Napier 2005: 24-25).

Other than the art forms, among today's Japanese food, many of them do not originate in Japan. Although rice is the main staple food of Japan, Japanese supermarkets and convenience stores offer various types of bread as well. Despite the fact that bread was introduced to Japan through Europe, Japanese people still made innovations on this imported food. In Japan, one can find the "Japanized" breads that cannot be found in any other countries in the world, such as *yakisoba pan* (fried noodle bread), *kare pan* (bread with curry).

These aforementioned cultural phenomena share the same characteristic as sushi,

because they all belong to the general category of Japanese culture. Although it is hard to give a clear definition of what Japanese culture is, those specific cultural items are still able to reflect the shared features of the culture. Sushi is not the only item that keeps changing since its emergence and it will not lose its Japanese identity because of transformations. The flexibility of sushi matches with the whole Japanese culture at the same time verifies its position as being Japanese.

#### *Government's Strategy to Reinforce Sushi's Identity*

Although sushi's flexibility is proven to be one element of Japanese culture, the rapid changes of sushi in the global markets still draw the attention of Japanese authorities and make them concern whether overly changed overseas sushi will influence the image of Japan. With being aware of sushi's popularity, Japanese government intends to protect sushi's Japanese identity and use it to promote a positive image of Japan throughout the world.

In order to protect sushi's authenticity as being Japanese, Japanese government and organizations took actions to regulate the sushi market as well as the image of Japanese food since early 2000s. In November, 2006, the *Washington Post* published an article on Japanese government's plans to offer of approval to overseas eateries deemed to be "pure Japanese." The plan started with a concern that despite many overseas restaurants describing themselves as Japanese, the food on their menu is usually an "Asian fusion." A quote from the Japanese Minister of Agriculture,

Forestry and Fisheries, Toshiba Matsuoka, in the article illustrates the Japanese government's purpose of pushing for food purity: "We must protect our food culture." The news article comments on this governmental plan as "another expression of resurgent Japanese nationalism" and warns America, "the Sushi police are on their way (Faiola 2006)."

The article reflects that Japanese government's attention to overseas Japanese cuisine's authenticity as well as their awareness of the food culture's influences on the nation's image. In fact, the Japanese government has already begun to consider the "purity" of the overseas Japanese cuisine before the *Washington Post's* article. In Rumi Sakamoto and Matthew Allen's article, "There's something fishy about that sushi: how Japan interprets the global sushi boom", they mention that "since 2005, the dissemination of Japanese food and food culture abroad became part of the government's Intellectual Property Strategic Program." This program aims to "increase Japan's share in foreign markets by fostering soft power industry and pursuing a 'Japan brand strategy' (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 110)." In 2006, the program listed food culture as one of the "culture assets" of Japan (Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters 2006: 130 cited in Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 110) and MAFF was given the task to promote Japanese cuisine in the overseas markets to help build a positive image of Japanese culture. In response to this request, MAFF began to make standards to regulate Japanese overseas restaurants that only the restaurants meeting their criteria would be qualified as 'genuine' Japanese

government approved restaurants (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 110).

However, this plan did not actually take place because of the complaints and arguments from media and overseas restaurants owners. The criticisms are centered on Japanese government's nationalistic attitude toward food; also some non-Japanese owned restaurants worried that they would be out of business if the plan got put into practice. Confronting those criticisms, MAFF changed the plan into a "recommended" program (Japanese Restaurant Recommendation Program). The final proposal for the program focused on the influence of Japanese cuisine in the world and pointed out the existing problems of the overseas Japanese restaurants such as not using proper ingredients in certain meals, the incorrect way of processing fish, lack of well-trained Japanese chefs, etc. Thus, it gives suggestions to the situation like using ingredients imported from Japan, training chefs with more professional cooking skills and creating a "Japanese" atmosphere in the stores by using Japanese language and symbolic decorations (Kaigai Nihonshoku Resutoran Suisho Yushisha Kaigi 2007: 3-6). Although MAFF gave up making up the specific standards of regulating overseas Japanese restaurants, they still show their concerns on the identity of Japanese food by recommending using more Japanese elements to maintain the authenticity.

Japanese government backed down on certifying "genuine" Japanese food directly by itself, but it created a non-profit organization called Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad (JRO) based on the proposal in the

recommendation program to substitute its job on supporting the image of Japanese cuisines. On JRO's homepage presents a message from the director of the organization, Yuzaburo Mogi, illustrates the importance of Japanese cuisine, its overseas influences and the purpose of JRO. It describes Japanese restaurants abroad serving as "showrooms" for communicating Japanese food and culture to the world and believes that if people everywhere around the world come into contact with Japan's food culture and share a common food experience, it will help promote an understanding of Japan. And the message also states that JRO will "work to accelerate and promote the proper dissemination of Japan's food culture to the world (JRO)." In order to achieve its goals, JRO conducts six main activities that are listed on their websites. From those activities, JRO shows its emphasis on the ties between local and overseas restaurants and the information exchange between them. From its message and the main activities, JRO's main goal is to support the overseas Japanese restaurants than to judge the authenticity based on certain aspects.

Since JRO is funded by the Japanese government, its attitude reflects Japanese authority's will to some extent. The attempts on protecting overseas Japanese restaurants change from drafting regulating standards to the "soft" recommendation, then move towards the establishment of non-profit organization. This does not indicate that the Japanese government totally abandoned the idea of preserving Japanese food's image. However, it shows their different attempts to achieve a similar goal. Since MAFF's early proposal, criticisms have in the global markets. If

the Japanese government insisted on launching it, it will only hurt Japan's image as being too protective and nationalistic. If that happens, the purpose of promoting a positive image of Japan through emphasizing the authenticity of certain food will fail. Thus, the replacement from government ministry to JRO aims at weakening the political overtones of regulating the identity of Japanese cuisines. Moreover, by disseminating information on Japanese cuisine through the non-profit organization will make consumers know more about Japan and Japanese food in order not to be misunderstood sushi as Korean or Chinese food in the restaurants with "Asian fusion" menus. Here the idea is that the authenticity is not achieved by strictly regulated the taste of certain food but from acknowledging customers what type of food belongs to Japanese. The food offered in certain restaurant cannot be one hundred percent "authentic" as it is in Japan, but if it has a good reputation as being "Japanese", marketing the positive image of Japan can also be achieved by assuming that the overseas customers do not know about Japanese food too much. In this case, the original "sushi police" change to "sushi guide" to inform the overseas customers that sushi is from Japan. No matter how many changes are made to sushi, if it is served in a Japanese restaurant or is labeled as sushi, it is part of Japan. Due to government's push and the promotion of national brand, when sushi is known and consumed as Japanese food, its "authenticity" will not be removed during constant evolution.

*We Own Sushi: How Japanese Individuals View Sushi*

Other than the government's attention on the image of Japanese cuisine abroad, ordinary Japanese also care about sushi's image. Their concerns and attitudes toward sushi also help protecting sushi's identity.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, compared to the foreign sushi eaters, Japanese people have special attachment to sushi because it can relate to their experiences, memories and diet habits. Those attachments provide Japanese the confidence on judging their own food. Even for those trendy-loving Japanese, when eating at an "American" sushi restaurant, they will still hold a "judgmental attitude" towards the newly invented sushi. Although they may be not fond of "traditional" sushi restaurants or care about certain manners of eating sushi, they are still able to feel the difference between Japanese sushi and foreign inventions. In the same way that Japanese feel impressed when they hear foreigners speak fluent Japanese, when viewing non-Japanese eating raw fish with rice, the idea of "they are eating our food" also comes out (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 102). Thus, viewing food culture as one part of Japanese culture assets is not simply a concept put forward by the government, but a proprietary nationalism existing in the Japanese mind.

Japanese scholars' works on overseas sushi also proved this point. Kato Hiroko, in *Sushi, Purizu: Amerikajin Sushi o Kuu* (Sushi Please: Americans eat Sushi), examined sushi's development and influence inside America. She mentioned that some Americans customers do not know what sushi is: in some restaurants even the

food using seaweed to roll the ingredients in the shape of sushi roll without adding rice is considered sushi. She also pointed out that Japanese would be astonished when seeing some overseas sushi served in the desert menu (Kato 2002: 27). Although she feels that many of the overseas sushi cannot be counted as real sushi and many foreign customers do not know what sushi is, the key theme of the book is still proud and happy with the overseas sushi boom. Sakamoto and Allen's article summed up the basic idea of Japanese scholars' works on sushi in first decade of the twenty-first century. It states that those works generally connect current global "sushi boom" to trends and fashion, but some of them point out that foreign sushi is "strange" and "odd". For example, the article mentioned a Japanese perspective on overseas sushi, "they (non-Japanese) do not think it odd to put mayonnaise in sushi, but we (Japanese) do, and we know what we are talking about because sushi is Japanese (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 103)." It gives out an idea of Japanese authority on commenting sushi. Although judgments on overseas newly invented sushi exist, Sakamoto and Allen claimed that the overall tone of these scholars' works is still "appreciation of the creativity and vitality of sushi" (2011: 104). The scholars are not worried about the "exotic" sushi violating Japanese sushi's image because the creativity and innovation of sushi will also give credit to sushi; more importantly, they believe that Japanese have the prerogative to decide "genuine" sushi. With this idea of Japanese owning and understanding sushi, sushi will not and cannot lose its Japanese identity.

*Do Sushi's Tradition and History still Matter?*

As mentioned above, sushi's authenticity cannot be traced historically since modern sushi is nowhere near the original *nare-zushi*. However, the "tradition" of sushi still matters in locating sushi as a cultural symbol in modern Japan. As the previous agriculture minister Toshiba Matsuoka said, Japanese food is a highly developed art; the food is not only included ingredients but preparation skills and beautiful presentation as well (Faiola 2006). In the case of sushi, the combination of ingredients is important as well as the rice cooking techniques, sushi forming skills and certain eating manners shaping from the ancient period. Also, when the government gives sushi a "national cuisine" label to promote it as a Japanese brand, tradition and history are always brought up to reassure sushi's "Japaneseness". As for Japanese individuals, the sense of owning sushi also locates sushi in history. The nationalistic idea of treating sushi as part of Japanese culture assets is not built on the globalization of sushi, but gradually formed in the Japanese people's mundane sushi eating since the ancient period.

Besides the internal factors that shaped sushi's Japanese identity, globalization also contributes to labeling sushi "Japanese". La Cecla argued that for Italian cuisine, it was the introduction by the immigrants that give Italians an identity of Italian cuisine and suggested that national cuisines could be formed abroad and then

reflected back onto the original nation (La Cecla 2007; Edwards 2012: 222). Similar to pizza and pasta, sushi's Japanese image also were emphasized during its globalization. According to Hirotaka Matsumoto's figure based on the information from the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, there are roughly 20,000 to 23,000 restaurants serving Japanese food throughout the world. Among them, seventy or eighty percent are sushi restaurants (Matsumoto 2007: 2). Most of the sushi shops sell other Japanese food as well, but using "Sushi" in the name of the restaurants can increase customers' interests. With the international fame of sushi, the sushi restaurants seem to have the similar prestige as "authentic" Japanese cuisine. For people who do not know much about Japanese food, sushi has become a synonym for Japanese cuisine. In this situation, sushi's Japanese identity was emphasized with the extension of overseas sushi restaurants in the overseas customers' minds. In addition, if sushi is only consumed within Japan, without the comparison with other cuisines in globalization, perhaps neither Japanese nor the government will pay much attention to its identity. For Japanese customers, the re-imported newly invented sushi helps themselves be aware of the specialization of sushi being Japanese and the popularity of sushi as a Japanese food in the global markets. The overseas sushi boom stimulated the government to notice the market value of sushi and its influential impact on building Japanese culture as a brand in the global markets. Sushi, along with other Japanese popular cultural items, such as manga, animation, and high-technological products, contributes to the new image of

Japan.

In sum, with the government and Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad's promoting sushi with a Japanese brand, individuals' concept of owning sushi, Japanese authorities and the masses work together to build and reassure sushi's Japanese identity. Moreover, the explanation of sushi's global success in terms of its innate flexibility that matches characteristic of Japanese culture serves to reinforce Japan as the origin of sushi at the same time, implying that others are imitators. In the process of globalization, sushi's Japanese identity became emphasized with the increasing number of Japanese restaurants using "sushi" in their names. The internal factor from Japanese government and individuals, and external globalization impact also affect and facilitate each other in labeling sushi with a "Japanese" brand and expand the influences of the brand. With the influences of those factors, no matter how much innovation changes sushi, with its name sushi can never lose its Japaneseness.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Sushi originated in Southeast Asia and spread from China to Japan around the eighth century. At this time sushi appeared because of the low productivity and underdeveloped techniques in agriculture and fishery: sushi acted as a way of preserving rice and fish at the same time. Early sushi used fermented fish instead of fresh raw fish. Although sushi emerged in most rice-growing regions in south and east parts of Asia it developed in new ways after arriving in Japan. From *nare-zushi* to *namanare-zushi*, from *haya-zushi* to today's *nigiri-zushi*, through thousand years of changes, sushi gradually lost its function to preserve food and became a quick food famous for its freshness.

Modern fresh sushi also experienced various evolutions in relation with its developments, especially in its globalization. Sushi went global around the late 1960s and began to gain popularity in the 1980s. When sushi was introduced to different countries, local sushi chefs adjusted the ingredients to cater to the local concepts of food and preferences. One of the most representative changes on sushi is replacing fresh raw fish with slightly cooked fish in some European countries and the United States. Although raw fish sushi dominates among all types of sushi, roll sushi with cooked fish is not rare in the sushi market nowadays. Innovative inventions kept sushi's vitality and made sushi prevalent outside of Japan. Overseas variations of sushi were re-imported to Japan and helped enrich sushi variety in

Japan's domestic market as well.

Not only did sushi's ingredients change over time, the evolution on sushi also expresses through establishments that sell it. Sushi restaurants began to be widely opened all over Japan with the increasing popularity of *nigiri-zushi* after the Great Kanto Earthquake. The invention of sushi robots and improvements on transportation reduced the cost of sushi preparation and made sushi more accessible among people with lower income. The establishment of *kaiten-zushi* bars is another crucial achievement in sushi's development. The new method of serving food by using conveyor belt instead of waiters raised both customers' curiosity and provided them more freedom in choice. Compared to conventional restaurants, *kaiten-zushi* bars offer more convenient and new dining experiences that match well to modern consumers. Today, whether cheap or expensive, conventional or trendy, one can always find a sushi establishment that fulfills one's needs.

Sushi's popularity is due to its own characteristics, such as good nutritious combination and flexibility to cater to different changes. Besides these features of sushi, outside factors also contribute to its growing fame. As mentioned before, sushi robots and conveyor sushi bars are important changes in modern sushi industry. The combination of high technology and sushi serving gives it a more "popular" image in the "techno" age. Also, the appliance of technology reduced the labor cost for sushi establishments which enables them to provide sushi for a lower price.

For foreign sushi eaters, sushi is rather a famous "Japanese" cuisine rather than a

simple food. Sushi's fame is based on the total image of Japan to some extent. People's enthusiasm towards Japan spread to their interests in sushi. Because of this, the increasing international attention on Japan due to its economic recovery also drew a worldwide interest to all aspects of Japan, including its food.

Different from foreign sushi lovers, for Japanese people eating this type of food represents sometimes a special attachment to being Japanese. This attachment relates closely to Japanese people's love for rice. White rice has a long history in Japan as a staple food. In Japanese folk beliefs, rice conveys power to provide people strength and healthy life. Also, some Japanese believe that rice paddies can help the whole agricultural ecological cycle system. Namely, Japanese soil and climate is suitable for rice growing; rice production can enrich the soil as well as benefit the environment. With this idea, Japanese rice is quite different from overseas rice because it is a product of Japan's particular climate and natural environment. Thus, for some Japanese, consuming rice is not only for filling the stomach but also a special way to attach themselves to their country. As a food based on rice, sushi also conveys Japanese people's special attachment on rice.

The evolution of sushi maintains its vitality, but it also challenges sushi's identity in some ways. People tend to worry about the authenticity of certain thing when it undergoes changes. Sushi definitely went through a sufficient number of changes to cause concern. In the case of "authenticity" it is important to clarify its meaning. As for modern sushi, as discussed in the previous chapters, no matter which form it

belongs to, it is completely different from its original version –*nare-zushi*. Even for the restaurants that serve *nare-zushi* today, it is impossible to make sure that what is offered is exactly the same as *nare-zushi* in the past. Thus, there is no way that we can find the “originality” of sushi after thousand years of changes and it is meaningless to equate “authenticity” with “originality”.

When sushi first appeared in history it was not a typical Japanese food but one shared among rice-fishery areas in Asia. However, from *nare-zushi* to *nigiri-zushi*, the modernization process of sushi only happened and existed in Japan which creates the idea that sushi is a typical Japanese food today. Real sushi is not determined by its ingredients inside but rather the long historical path it went through inside Japan and its ongoing development as a Japanese food. Today’s sushi might not qualify as being a “traditional” Japanese food, but it is definitely “authentic” as being Japanese. The “authenticity” of sushi is a concept related to the image of Japan than a simple food made with rice and seafood.

With this concept, sushi is unlikely to lose its authenticity. First, being aware of sushi’s popularity and influences in the global market, Japanese authorities began to promote sushi along with other Japanese cultural items. They use sushi’s fame to expand a positive image of the nation. They have included food culture as one of the Japanese “culture assets” and created the non-profit organization JRO to disseminate information of Japanese food to overseas markets. By doing this the government expects more foreign customers to know and consume more Japanese food and gain

interest in Japan through its food culture. From the government's point of view, sushi has already become a cultural symbol of the nation. The promotion of Japan's general image and sushi's Japanese identity benefit each other in increasing Japan's international influence. Besides Japanese government's efforts, people's viewpoint is also significant in maintaining sushi's identity. Although most of the Japanese are aware of newly invented sushi from the global markets and willing to try it, in many of their opinions, the re-imported sushi is not a "foreign" food as hamburgers and fries, but a creative even "weird" reinvention of Japanese food. The idea that Japanese own sushi and have the right to judge the quality of sushi is quite strong. Thus, the overseas "exotic" sushi only works as proof of sushi's popularity. They might not know exactly what an "original" sushi is, but they know what they believe to be "real" sushi from Japan.

Because sushi's authenticity is located in its Japaneseness, the frequent changes will not influence its identity. Some argue that globalization will cause the homogeneity of products and create a global image rather than various regional identities. But in the case of sushi, its ingredients and restaurants' settings might become similar and unified in different countries, but with a Japanese background as well as the highly valued sushi's Japaneseness by its government and people, the globalization will be unlikely to violate sushi's Japanese identity. On the contrary, the expanding popularity of sushi in overseas markets will enlarge the awareness of sushi's "nationality." The localization of sushi and reverse-importation from the

United States to Japan also implies multidirectional transition between different cultures. Globalization is not only limited to “Westernization” or “Americanization.” The cultural impact from non- European American countries is also influential.

### **Prediction of the Development of Sushi and Sushi Studies**

Considering sushi’s changes in the past, a rough prediction of sushi’s future development can be made. Sushi’s evolution will not stop, which might include more combinations of ingredients. In overseas markets sushi might not only be offered in Japanese or Asian restaurants but begin to blend in the local food. Such phenomena have already appeared in some American countries that sushi is served as an appetizer or side dish with other local cuisines. In sushi making and serving, restaurants will apply more high technology to become more convenient at the same time be more attractive for having a “techno” image. For example, few sushi restaurants have already replaced paper-based menu with computer screens to shorten the order time. I think that this trend will continue, especially in those restaurants targeting younger generations.

Because of its increasing popularity, sushi is likely to become prevalent in many countries in the future. When the combination of raw fish and steamed rice is not considered “exotic” anymore, the concern of how to make sushi more “Japanese” will be brought up again. In response to this, both the Japanese government and organizations might put more efforts in disseminating Japanese culinary knowledge

to non-Japanese customers like the differences between “authentic” Japanese sushi and newly invented sushi. Also, the Japanese government will keep promoting its cultural items to global markets in order to improve its international image with this “soft power.” They may categorize sushi with other successful Japanese cultural icons together to promote the nation’s image.

In addition, more overseas sushi restaurants might follow America’s steps and re-import their own brand of sushi and establish branches in the Japanese market. It will be necessary to look at their marketing strategies and different age groups’ reaction to this phenomenon. Besides sushi, some other foods such as ramen (Japanese noodle soup), Japanese curry, do not have a long historical path in Japan but are still popular as “Japanese” foods. As these foods are sometimes served in sushi restaurants as well, it will be interesting to explore how Japanese cuisines reinforce each other in the global market and the differences in shaping Japanese identity between sushi and other popular Japanese foods.

Although these predictions are made based on the analysis of today’s sushi boom, the general path of sushi’s development will not change. Similar to what was stated previously, I believe that no matter how many transformations happened to sushi, it will not lose its Japanese identity. Also it is likely that the future evolutions of sushi will only enhance the sushi’s authenticity as being Japanese. Sushi, as a cultural symbol of Japan, presents a way to maintain self-identity and popularity at the same time in the age of globalization.

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