From "Isn't It Raw?" to Everyday Food: Authenticating Japanese Food in Perth, Australia

Abstract: With a focus on the role of social media, this article examines the ways in which Japanese food is authenticated and popularized as everyday food in Perth, Australia. Preceding the 2000s, Japanese food was scarcely available in Perth; the city with a small Japanese population was relatively far from Japan. In the 2010s, Japanese food, once mainly known as raw fish (sushi, sashimi) and high-end food, has transformed into everyday food, available at eateries, grocery stores, and farmers markets. I argue that the ever-growing popularity of social media allows consumers to exchange their experiences and knowledge of Japanese food and to create their versions of authenticity of the food. Authenticity is subjective and depends on people's perceptions, and people share these perceptions on social media. Based on my fieldwork at Japanese eateries and one of the local farmers markets, as well as analysis of social media, this article illustrates consumers' stories, authenticity, and their impact on Perth's foodscape.

WHEN I MOVED TO Perth in 2014, I noticed Japanese eateries everywhere—in strip malls, business districts, and residential areas. In the city center, at least twenty-five Japanese eateries were located within walking distance. Students and office workers filled rotary sushi restaurants, formed long lines in front of Japanese take-aways, and sat in office yards with their bento boxes. A besuited man texting on his phone with one hand while holding a sushi roll in the other was a common sight. Several people, including a former Japanese restaurant owner and local newspaper editors, told me that Japanese food—especially sushi—had not been locally popular in the 1990s. In those times, the common attitude was, "Oh . . . sushi? Isn't it raw?" (Etsuyo Bilcich, personal communication, January 17, 2015). However, by the 2000s, Japanese food had become an everyday food in Perth. Perthians often asked me if I knew of any local restaurants that served "real" Japanese food. I would ask my non-Japanese partner to make a recommendation because I did not understand what they meant by "real Japanese food," but I thought my partner might. I have only ever had such conversations—about real or authentic Japanese food—with non-Japanese people.

Sushi is the most recognized Japanese food outside Japan (Cang 2018: 499) as well as the most familiar "glocalized" Japanese food (Farrer et al. 2019: 39). In his documentary film *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (2011), David Gelb portrays the work of Jiro Ono, the owner and chef of Sukiyabashi Jiro, at the time a Michelin-starred sushi restaurant in Tokyo.[1] It is clear that the restaurant serves expensive and high-quality sushi,[2] but, by positioning Jiro as a master, complete with apprentices and family successors, the film depicts something else as well: a place that maintains a tradition of "real"—that is, authentic—Japanese food. In London, Mike Gibson, an editor of *Foodism*, interviewed another Japanese Michelin-starred chef for "The Seven-Michelin-Starred Yoshihiro Murata on Authentic Japanese Cuisine" (2016). In the interview, Murata claimed that until he opened his restaurant Tokimeite in 2015 there were only Japanese fusion restaurants in the city (quoted in Gibson 2016: 2). He emphasized the authenticity of his dishes, which incorporated imported produce from Japan,[3] yet he also served fusion and non-Japanese dishes.[4] What is common to both the film and the interview is that in them, foreigners—an American director and a British editor—authenticate Japanese food.

Authenticity becomes a subject particularly when food is taken out of its original context: signs advertising "real Japanese food" are common outside Japan and seem to be aimed at non-Japanese clients, although the first Japanese restaurants overseas were run by and for Japanese migrants (Farrer et al. 2019: 39). More recently, however, a variety of actors, including Japanese restaurateurs, private businesses, and regional governments, have taken on the work of authenticating Japanese food and restaurants overseas. For example, a restaurateur in London established the Nintei Nihon Restaurant Association to accredit restaurants as authentic (Farrer and Wang 2020: 23–24), and in 2013, the Japanese government nominated washoku[5]—a word to describe Japanese food overseas (Cwiertka and Yasuhara 2020: 49)—for inclusion in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

GASTRONOMICA: THE JOURNAL FOR FOOD STUDIES, VOL.22, NO.1, PP.34–43, ISSN 1529-3262. © 2022 BY THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PLEASE DIRECT ALL REQUESTS FOR PERMISSION TO PHOTOCOPY OR REPRODUCE ARTICLE CONTENT THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS'S RIGHTS AND PERMISSIONS WEB SITE, HTTP://WWW.UCPRESSJOURNALS.COM/REPRINTINFO.ASP. DOI: 10.1525/GFC.2022.22.1.34.

list. These are measures intended to create and deliver a new image of (real) Japanese food to foreigners. At the same time, non-Japanese entrepreneurs and workers have been crucial actors in the introduction, expansion, and familiarization of Japanese cuisines to Europe, the Americas, and other parts of Asia (Farrer et al. 2019). This article also focuses on foreigners and explores how and when consumers abroad authenticate Japanese food in their own ways. As anthropologist Jeff Pratt (2007) explains, authenticity is a quality attributed to foods and cuisines, which can then be consumed to recapture that authenticity (294–295). Extending Pratt's insight, I claim that consumers not only recapture ascribed authenticity but also create authenticity for themselves, and can do so for almost anything. The reason consumers will wait in long lines at old, inexpensive eateries that serve simple everyday dishes is because these dishes and the experience of eating them are "real" and authentic for them.

I first discuss what "authenticity" means for different people and what local values and knowledge producers and consumers share to authenticate food. Based on my observations in Perth, I examine how the shift of Japanese food from an unfamiliar foreign food to an everyday food has shaped Perth consumers' ideas about the authenticity of Japanese food. In order for consumers to be able to decide if a food is authentic, they must experience the food and develop a taste for it, and the taste shapes their perceptions of the food. During this process, memories are also formed, and these memories play a role in the consumers' process of authenticating food they encounter in the future. I focus on examining local consumers' claims of Japanese food's authenticity and the importance of individuals' experiences and memories in the authentication process. I particularly analyze the ways consumers display their knowledge of and authenticate specific Japanese food. This article is, in fact, a kind of recipe for the authentication of foreign food by consumers.

In Perth, several factors made Japanese food a familiar food by 2014. First, the city had grown quickly since the beginning of the new millennium. The population of Perth rose from 1.26 million inhabitants in 2006 to over 1.97 million in 2013, mainly due to international migration (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, 2015). A taxi driver from India, perhaps exaggerating, once told me that Perth was like a ghost town when he moved to the city in 2010, and that the few restaurants mostly closed by 9 p.m., even on weekends. Second, the number of Japanese residents in Western Australia had also grown, from 2,836 in 1999 to about 7,744 in 2014, and over 90 percent of them lived in Perth (Consulate-General of Japan in Perth, email message to author, April 22, 2021). Third, Japan had become a popular tourist destination for Australians. They took advantage of the long school holidays in the Australian summer to go to Japan for a winter vacation (e.g., for skiing and snowboarding), even though the shortest flight from Perth to Tokyo was over fourteen hours. According to the Japan National Tourism Organization (2018), the number of Australian visitors to Japan grew from 172,000 to 302,000 between 2003 and 2014. These factors led to the growing recognition of Japanese food in Perth and allowed the city's consumers to discover their own versions of authentic Japanese food.

Authenticity of Food

From a modernist perspective, authenticity means genuineness, accuracy, and originality, while from a constructivist approach, it is fluid and relational (Assmann 2017: 122–123). Elizabeth Vann (2006) explains the relational view in her ethnography of commodities in Vietnam: a counterfeit product in contrast with an original product is not authentic, but it is not unauthentic either as compared to a fake or false product (293). Meanwhile, the post-modernist perspective finds the concept irrelevant (Assmann 2017: 123–124): if characteristics of things or places satisfy individuals as such, then they are authentic. The historian Joan Alcock (2006: 33) offers a conundrum-like explanation that says it well: "To be authentic is to be genuine or real, but it also means to be original, and this may not necessarily be genuine." My understanding of authenticity begins with the constructivist view: authenticity is a cultural process (Martin 2014: 21) and/or a set of qualities on which people agree in a particular time and place (Vannini and Williams 2009: 3). However, individuals' memories of food and my observations of Perth consumers have made me think about the post-modernist perspective. In short, I consider authenticity to be socially constructed but also capable of being individually created (Ceccarini 2014; Lu and Fine 1995; Saxena 2019).

I argue that the authenticity of food *is* illusive, a quality that individuals construct from personal experiences, feelings, and memories and through everyday practices. To advance this idea, I explore Perth consumers' stories about Japanese food to examine how consumers who have no initial familiarity with Japanese food create memories that are tied to terroir, taste, and authenticity. First, I examine the ways in which cultural values form the qualities and meanings of foods and restaurants, and the roles of social media in the authentication of food and restaurants. Second, I investigate how individuals' feelings, memories, and tastes become the qualities and meanings of authenticity and why authenticity matters. Third, I describe what I observed in Japanese restaurants in Perth and compare my observations to consumers' stories shared in social media about the restaurants and foods. Finally, moving to a Perth farmers market, I explore how Japanese food is authenticated through everyday practices of consumers.

Often, the authenticity of a foreign food is a locally constructed invention (Fielding 2014; Liu 2009: 3), and sometimes it is created specifically to meet consumers' expectations of the food (Farrer et al. 2019: 41–44; Leizaola 2006). Shun Lu and Gary Alan Fine (1995) claim that modifying culinary traditions (e.g., ingredients and cooking methods) to transform an unfamiliar food into a common food and to make the exotic qualities of the food pleasurable is required to make ethnic food acceptable (540–541). Achieving this state of "acceptability" transforms foreign food to "normal" for locals so that it may become authentic for them as well. It is understandable that authentic Japanese food means something different inside and outside of Japan. Therefore, "how" a particular food is authentic may be more important than "if" it is (Weiss 2011: 77). For this reason, I examine several ingredients that can go into the making of a food's authenticity, including nature, terroir, artisanship, traditions, heritage, and nostalgia.

Consumers in Western and other developed countries often consider natural, wild, or non-industrial food, such as organic vegetables and fruits, foraged fungi, and wild-caught fish, to be authentic and valuable. In certain contexts industrial food is distinguished from organic food, but this is not the case for natural and wild food. Although naturalness and wildness are arbitrary distinctions, wildness is often considered more natural than natural. Satsuki Takahashi (2014) introduces the notion of "wilderness fetishism," a byproduct of the advanced technology and market system of the modern world (10). Her study describes the ways by which Japanese fishmongers define hatchery-bred flounders as natural—if they have dark patches on their skin—or wild—lacking patches; only the "wild" flounders are held to be perfect, original, and authentic. Consumers accept the higher prices of wild foodstuffs not because they can taste the difference but because "wild food satisfies fetishes of the wilderness and claims the authenticity of pure nature" (10). Conveniently, wilderness fetishism ignores human involvement—in hatcheries and fisheries—in the authenticity of flounders (8).

While wildness is the key to authenticating Japanese flounders, terroir fills a similar role for wine and has been extended to other products. We often look for the "original" place of food or drink to decide or understand how to ascribe value to it (Weiss 2011: 77). A French word first used to describe characteristics of wine, "terroir" encapsulates an amalgamation of people, place, cultural tradition, and landscape ecology in food and drink (Paxson 2013: 187). It is thus a social, cultural, political, and economic construction (Crenn and Techoueyres 2007: 2). Amy Trubek (2008) explores how the notion of terroir is acknowledged, or rather built, in the United States, and claims that "the taste of place exists, as long as it matters" (250). I argue that "the taste of place," or terroir, is also created to *make it matter*, much like the wildness of fish. Chantal Crenn and Isabelle Techoueyres's (2007) study supports my argument; they discuss whether terroir has imaginary meanings and whether it was invented to meet the demands of an international market (3). Although having local producers is one of the components of terroir, wineries in France rely on foreign workers to meet the demands of competition with American wineries (5). For many consumers, despite being produced in the absence of local people, French wine still has terroir.

In contrast, the people—the individual artisans—and their artisanship are crucial components of the authentication of cheese in the United States, as Heather Paxson (2013) emphasizes. Among cheese makers, authentic cheese is made from bacteria that the makers individually develop; the makers and the bacteria together make the terroir of the cheese (211). In this case, authenticity arises from the artisans and their artisanship (see Ceccarini 2014), which is what the consumers appreciate. In other words, consumers do not spend extra dollars simply to buy a source of nutrition or even for a particular taste, but for the adventure and pleasure of tasting it as well as the status of connoisseurship—that is, "*having* taste," in Bourdieu's sense (Paxson 2013: 154). For such producers, educating consumers is crucial, as it is how they craft clients who can admire the artisanship of their cheese (154–155). Taste, experience, and education all contribute to nurturing consumers' affection for a specific food, and the affection authenticates the food (Fukutomi 2010).

Stories in their many forms, including history, memory, nostalgia, and conversation, are important tools for consumers to argue that the food served at their favorite restaurants or made by particular chefs is authentic. Deeply subjective, stories can easily manipulate claims of the ownership, origins, and values of a food, thus offering a heritage for it, which is constructed and invented much as terroir is (Assmann 2010; Cang 2019: 509; Crenn and Techoueyres 2007). Carrie Tippen (2016) examines food narratives and claims that authentic southern food is not about an "unchanging product of the past" but about a culture of the present shaped by colonizers' memories (50). Similarly, Krishnendu Ray (2007: 109) illustrates that American stories of the origins of

American foods often elide the roles of migrants and their foods. Andrew Smith (2001) calls invented stories of food origins "culinary fakelore," and explains how easily they emerge because, historically, food preparation is largely based on oral traditions and tends to lack documentation (255).

The authenticity of food is not about its existence in the past but is created by food purveyors and tastemakers based on their choices and feelings (Arendt 2020: 13). Feelings and memories are inseparable, much like synesthesia, in which one sense triggers another, in that feelings invite memories and vice versa—a Proustian moment.[6] The combination of feelings, memories, and sometimes a sense of loss makes a food authentic. Tulasi Srinivas (2006) connects narratives of loss, or a sense of nostalgia, to home food and "mother's food." For many, the food of their home or their mother is comfort food because it supplies narratives of pleasant memories and feelings. Furthermore, "mother's food" does not have to taste like one's actual mother's food as long as the narratives of the food convey that the taste is "right," which I call "imagined taste." Imagined taste is not about the taste of food, but about people's belief that the food tastes as it should, that it fits their memory or satisfies their desire. Srinivas exemplifies imagined taste among the Indian diaspora in the United States and metropolitans in India when she describes Indian women "cooking" popular prepackaged "heat-and-eat" dishes, and then serving these to guests as homemade food instead of following their mothers' recipes. Not only do the guests not recognize the familiar dishes as store-bought, but they praise them as "foods as mother made them" (211). The guests' approval itself makes the prepackaged food even more "authentic."

In order to examine consumers' roles in the authentication of Japanese food in Perth, I analyzed their comments on an online food review site, the websites of Japanese restaurants in Perth, and online blogs, followed by online interviews with some of the reviewers/customers.[7] All of them used screen names, and out of respect I did not ask their ethnicity, which certainly could impact their views on Japanese food, although reading their comments (e.g., fluent English and not fluent Japanese) convinced me that the reviewers were not native Japanese speakers.[8] As physical sites, I selected two Japanese restaurants based on the reviews and interviews, and a farmers market where Japanese food was available. I observed consumers' food choices and conversed with producers. I visited the market every Saturday between November 2014 and January 2016. I became acquainted with many consumers and producers, which helped me to engage in casual conversations and to conduct interviews with them.

My Authentic Japanese Food

Online review sites are rich in stories of food, chefs, restaurants, and memories. Some of the reviews are poetic while others are incomprehensible. After examining the comments on Japanese restaurants in Perth on the online restaurant review site Zomato,[9] I posted questions to the site and conducted online interviews with some of the respondents.[10] I noticed that three qualities were used frequently to define authentic Japanese food: "simple," "fresh," and "made by Japanese cooks." The first two words also appear frequently on Japanese restaurant websites, along with the words "light" and "healthy." James Farrer et al. (2019: 47) note that all of these descriptors have been used to indicate authenticity from the beginning of the global trend of appreciating Japanese food, particularly sushi, that started in the United States. Although none of these terms uniquely characterizes Japanese food or ingredients, French chefs have used them to praise the supposed "aesthetics of simplicity" of Japanese food and to apply it to their own cooking since the 1970s, when Japanese food began to be acknowledged and gain popularity in France (Yamashita 2020: 46–47).

The high praise of Japanese food is due not only to its simplicity, ingredients, or recipes but is also related to the reputation of Japan as a country with a growing economy in the 1970s. Probably, Japanese cuisine was never perceived as a threat to French cuisine, and thus could be fearlessly mined for new cooking flavors and techniques. Yet, as Krishnendu Ray (2007: 103–104) discusses, a nation's status and its food are correlated, and Japan's rising economic and cultural power in the early 2000s contributed to making its food haute cuisine in the United States.

While both consumers and chefs use the word "simple" to describe Japanese food, their aestheticization of the food through this term carries different nuances. Carrie, one of my respondents, commented, "I've grown up eating Japanese food, so for me it's about having fresh, well-respected produce and an execution of a cooking style that matches *what I believe to be authentic* [my emphasis]. Everything is simple, with a focus on great seafood in particular. It's all about *precision in slicing the proteins, and creating clean flavours*" [my emphasis] (Carrie, email message to author, May 26, 2015). She did not elaborate on what "simple" means—if it was about ingredients, flavor, or the presentation of the food—but it was certainly not about cooking, as she pointed out its complexity: "precision in slicing the proteins." Carrie's story resembles a sushi description by Tim Cushman, who runs O Ya, a highly praised Japanese restaurant in Boston. He, too, emphasizes complication in simplicity: "It [fish] has to be sourced properly, prepared properly, stored and served correctly, and cut correctly. It seems so simple, just a piece of fish on rice, and it is enormously complicated" (quoted in First 2012: 1).[11]

For many, being "simple" seems to be crucial for Japanese food to be authentic. Christine, another respondent, used the word to denote a more traditional Japanese dish rather than a more creative one: "If I want an authentic bowl of ramen, the stock is important and the food is simple and homely. . . . Authentic sushi nigiri must have fresh fish, which is not stringy, and it must be cut correctly" (Christine, email message to author, July 14, 2015). The word "simple" carries various meanings, yet Carrie and Christine used it to imply positive attributes such as clean flavors and even sophistication. Their remarks, as well as many similar comments in reviews, suggest that they have sushi in mind when they talk about authentic Japanese food. Nigiri, a slice of raw fish on top of rice, is one of the popular images of sushi. Although in Perth, maki-zushi (roll sushi) is popular in convenience store or coffeeshop lunch boxes, as well as for making at home, people nevertheless imagine nigiri when they talk about sushi. Thus, the appearance of nigiri has become the image of Japanese food and its essential "simplicity."

Both Carrie and Christine underscored chefs' cooking skills that include the ability to find fresh fish and cut it precisely. Freshness and naturalness are also mentioned in UNESCO's heritage of humanity designation of Japanese cuisine, which pointed out "the use of a wide variety of fresh ingredients from nature's bounty" (Cang 2018: 498–499) and "natural flavor, health and the beauty of the presentation" (Cwiertka and Yasuhara 2020: 135). The Sushi World Cup held in Japan in 2013 also included cooking skills in the categories to be judged: the taste and appearance of the sushi, knife techniques, and hygienic management (Cang 2018: 506), aligning with Carrie's and Christine's comments.

For several of my respondents, to be authentic, Japanese food must be not only simple and fresh but also prepared by a Japanese cook. It is important to mention that non-Japanese sushi chefs have become common around the world (Assmann 2017: 121; Farrer et al. 2019). Unlike the previous two respondents, Claudia, who had lived in Japan, accepted fusion food as authentic (Claudia, email message to author, May 7, 2015). She wrote to me that a fusion restaurant in Osaka was her favorite Japanese restaurant. Whether the dishes were fusion or not was not a concern for Claudia, but the cook's ethnicity was. In response to my questions, she wrote back to me, in Japanese: "Authentic food is food cooked by Japanese people. I ate a lot of Japanese food cooked by Korean people, but it always felt a bit different" (my translation). She gave no explanation of how she knew whether the cooks were Korean or Japanese. Claudia reckoned that even a chef's language skills were important for making Japanese food and could alter its taste: "Japanese food is for Japanese people and made by Japanese people. I feel disappointed if a cook does not speak Japanese" (my translation). In fact, for some, the chef's and even the clients' ethnicity or skin color may be indispensable human elements of an authentic culinary package of foreign food (Fielding 2014; Liu 2009).[12]

Another respondent, Jamie, also stated that a Japanese cook was crucial for Japanese food to be authentic, although she admitted that she could not differentiate Japanese people from Korean people (Jamie, email message to author, May 10, 2015). She claimed to love Japanese food but to rarely go to Japanese restaurants. Instead, she bought a pack of sushi from a supermarket if she felt like eating healthy food. Packaged sushi and bento boxes have become familiar foreign foods among Perth residents. Here, freshness and precision are not important because they are not benchmarks of "everyday" sushi.[13] Jamie and many others separate this "everyday" sushi and "everyday" Japanese food from what they claim to be authentic Japanese food. Authenticity, for them, matters only for "chef's" food, and is not a concern for a food once it is easily available (e.g., supermarket sushi). Their knowledge or experiences of casual and authentic Japanese food, combined with the popularity and the availability of Japanese food in Perth, give consumers the opportunity to become Japanese food aficionados who then authenticate the food.

These aficionados not only provide critiques of restaurants but share their feelings about food and even other people's comments. A customer of the Perth restaurant Mon Taste of Japan (hereafter, "Mon"), who uses the screen name IMONGRY, is specific about the ingredients of the dishes served at the restaurant: "The Japanese chef who prepared my meal even took the time to serve me my sashimi and inform me of where each species of fish was sourced from. What was most exciting for me was the fact that the scallops had been fished from the seas of Hokkaido. . . . A nostalgic food moment was taken prior to diving in" (comment posted to Zomato, October 8, 2014). He then mentions his visits to Japan. It was not the taste of the scallops, but the story about them, that made IMONGRY feel nostalgic about Japan. Carolyn Korsmeyer and David Sutton (2011: 462) write, "It is an adage of the kitchen that we eat first with our eyes." Yet consumers like IMONGRY eat first with a story.

Many aficionados have self-developed knowledge about Japanese food and cooking techniques. Both Carrie and Christine explained Japanese cooking techniques such as aburi (flame-searing), which Carrie described as a method for making food taste smoky or torched, and Christine talked about teriyaki as a technique, explaining that in Japan it is a particular cooking style and not a flavor. She noted that she never encountered teriyaki sauce or teriyaki-flavored meat in Japan, and that teriyaki sauce in Australia tasted like BBQ sauce to her. Fandom kicks in for some reviewers when they criticize others; Lorena says, "Judging by the bad reviews I don't think any of these people have ever been to Japan. Sushi is not the only thing japanese [*sic*] people eat and is never served at dinner most japanese [*sic*] people eat it as a snack not a meal" (Lorena, email message to author, April 17, 2015). Not everybody can visit foreign countries, and those who do may not enjoy all the food there; that is why foreign food is rearranged to satisfy local consumers' palates.

Authenticity is also a quality of experience (Bendix 1997: 13) as well as a quality of people, as Nicholas Silich (2006) points out: "Food in general gets more authentic the more we occupy ourselves with it. Authenticity is a quality of eaters rather than the food eaten" (402). Authenticity matters to some consumers to ensure their aficionado identity. Some feel that knowing Japan gives them the authority to discern whether food is Japanese. Thus, it is the relationship between food and its eater that creates a food's authenticity (Arendt 2020: 13). Perhaps the increased number of Perth residents visiting Japan and the increased number of Japanese residing in Perth have brought the two locales closer, increasing the importance of knowing Japan before talking about the food's authenticity.

"Authentic" and "Favorite"

Because of their frequent appearance on the restaurant review site Zomato, I chose two restaurants, Jaws Kaiten Sushi (hereafter "Jaws") in the city center, and Mon, which is just outside the center, to analyze consumers' opinions about Japanese dishes.[14] From the reviews and my observations, the customers at both restaurants favor kara-age chicken (fried chicken) and teriyaki chicken, neither of which are exactly what any of my respondents had described as authentic Japanese food. What the customers believe to be authentic in the restaurants is not about food per se but about visual and verbal presentations of Japaneseness.

Jaws, a Japanese-owned rotary sushi restaurant, receives a wide range of mostly non-Japanese customers: office workers, students, and families with small children. When I visited the restaurant, three cooks were in the kitchen; they spoke unaccented Japanese, so I assumed they were Japanese. Several non-Japanese waitresses, after they asked where I was from, told me I was one of only a few Japanese customers. It is interesting that few Japanese customers dine at the restaurant, which claims to serve the best Japanese food in Perth (Jaws 2020). Of course, it is also possible that the waitresses are not able to distinguish Japanese customers from others, much like customers may not know if a chef is Japanese or Korean (Farrer et al. 2019: 47–48; Krishnendu Ray 2007). The popularity of Jaws may be due to the ease of eating there: (1) dishes and their prices are clearly displayed on the menu; (2) the food can be a snack or a meal, thus it suits any time of day; (3) it is quick because the dishes are already there, much like at a buffet, except the food comes to the customers rather than vice versa. Here, authenticity does not matter. Many solo customers eat and leave quickly.[15] Eating sushi with chopsticks or fingers, rather than with a fork, shows the customers are either accustomed to Japanese food or are flouting good manners.

The open kitchen receives positive notes in online reviews, as it entertains the customers while they wait for their orders. An open kitchen is like a stage where cooks perform their roles. The kitchen at Jaws is a combination of an open and an exposed kitchen because the elements of "backstage" (Goffman 1959) are also visible, such as arguments and gossiping among the cooks. Nevertheless, according to customers' comments, they enjoy seeing the cooks "preparing" sushi for them. A customer who goes by Captain Munchie wrote: "I enjoy the fact you can watch how the chef makes the meals in front of you as its [*sic*] entertaining to watch and also shows the effort that goes into making it" (comment posted to Zomato, September 6, 2012). However, none of the customers mention a machine I noticed, which makes rice into sushi nigiri shapes, replacing a chef's effort. Either they subconsciously ignore it because of the excitement of seeing "a chef" (rather than a cook) making sushi, or they believe it is a regular part of the kaiten or rotary sushi system.

Another common comment is the wide selection of food: sushi, kara-age, noodle soup, and crème brûlée, which is absolutely not a Japanese dessert. Many of the dishes are fried,[16] and many have a spicy or teriyaki flavor that masks the taste of the food and its freshness. From the online comments, the customers enjoy and are even fascinated by the dishes that they post about on their own online blogs: "When the sushi chef starts plating up the freshly fried chicken kara-age [*sic*] (AU$5.20), I feel myself twitching like a cat watching a bird at the window—I want karaage [*sic*]! . . . The chicken is popping hot, succulent and gingery. I burn my tongue with my first greedy bite" (The Food Pornographer 2011). They enjoy the visual elements of the dish and the pleasant surprise of hidden ingredients rather than the taste of a "Japanese" dish. Carrie, my respondent, also mentioned factors not related to authenticity when she talked about her favorite Japanese restaurant: "I like the food here [Mr. Munchies] because it's modern and completely customizable—you can create your own sushi or salad with all the ingredients that you like" (Carrie, email message to author, May 26, 2015). The dishes consumers enjoy at restaurants do not exactly match what they claim to be their criteria for authenticity.

At Mon as well, teriyaki chicken appeared to be a popular dish, as I often saw several customers eating it when I dined in. I ordered grilled salmon (AU$15), which, I thought, was raw inside. When I pointed this out to my server, the chef came from the kitchen to explain that the salmon was fresh enough for sashimi, and that he marinated it for hours and grilled it quickly to maintain the freshness inside. It was difficult for me, even as a Japanese person, to tell if the fish was served as intended or simply undercooked. I failed to ask if other customers ever raised the same question: "...Isn't it raw?" On the review site Zomato, there was no reference to this particular dish, and I wondered if customers are pleased with the medium-rare fish, believing the rareness to be "fresh," or simply order teriyaki chicken instead.

Gyōza Dumplings with Teriyaki Sauce

Leaving the city, I also examined Japanese food and its consumers at a farmers market located seven kilometers (four miles) south of the city center of Perth. Sayaka's Kitchen, owned by a Japanese woman and her Australian husband, is at the market every Saturday between 7:30 and 11:30 a.m. They sell gyōza, fried dumplings (AU$5 for six dumplings), sushi (AU$4 for six tuna or chicken rolls), miso soup with udon noodles (AU$5.50 for a bowl), and bottles of their original teriyaki sauce (AU$10–$15).[17] They offer samples of food made with the teriyaki sauce to promote it, such as a carrot salad and a zucchini dip. Gyōza with teriyaki sauce was the most popular item, selling out quickly (by 10:30 a.m.). The gyōza was very popular among children, who would come to the stall with coins in their hands for their weekend snack. They appeared to truly love the gyōza, ignoring the neighboring crepe and sandwich stalls and expressing disappointment when gyōza was sold out. Children as young as six were fans; one little girl even started crying over the sold-out gyōza and had to be pulled away from the stall by her mother. Another weekend, a mother bought twelve gyōza for her fourteen-year-old son waiting at home.

Gyōza is a popular restaurant dish as well as homemade food in Japan, where the dumplings are typically stuffed with minced pork and vegetables and lightly fried. Sayaka's Kitchen used chicken instead of pork in order to satisfy a broader range of customers, said the owner (Etsuyo Bilcich, personal communication, January 24, 2015). This was not only about making the exotic familiar (Lu and Fine 1995) but a conscious effort to make the food available to people whose cultural backgrounds (e.g., religious food restrictions) would disincline them to try a dish made with pork. Japanese people might not consider Sayaka's Kitchen's gyōza "real" because of ingredients like chicken and teriyaki sauce.[18] However, for the children who came every week, this gyōza with teriyaki sauce was the gyōza they looked forward to eating on weekends. I suggest that this phenomenon, in which a consumer's experiences make a food authentic to them, is relatively common. Lu and Fine (1995) discuss how a particular Chinese dish is authentic in a small southern U.S. city but not in New York, while also being "American" food in China (543); however, I would argue that some consumers likely remember the dish as Chinese food, the one that shaped their taste and perceptions of what Chinese food is supposed to be. Much like this Chinese dish, the chicken gyōza for the children and even adults may be, or become, authentic Japanese food.

The website of Sayaka's Kitchen states that it was "the first food manufacture[r] to produce handmade authentic Japanese sushi and teriyaki meals to schools and retail outlets in WA [Western Australia]" (Sayaka's Kitchen 2021a). Nevertheless, the dishes available at the farmers market are Japanese food with a twist, such as udon noodles in miso soup (rather than the soy sauce soup common in Japan), chicken sushi rolls, and various dishes made with teriyaki sauce. The owner told me that she liked to think outside the box and enjoyed creating new dishes. I wonder if Christine, who claimed that any dish with teriyaki sauce was not authentic Japanese food, would approve of Sayaka's Kitchen's food, or simply enjoy it as everyday food.

Sayaka's Kitchen's teriyaki sauce, according to the shop website, is a family tradition with a history of over a hundred years. Teriyaki sauce—a combination of soy sauce, sake, sugar, and mirin (a sweet cooking wine)—is used for the cooking technique of teriyaki, in which meat or fish is broiled or grilled. The proportions of ingredients vary by family if it is prepared at home. All homemade teriyaki sauce, particularly if individuals believe the recipes have been passed down in the family for generations, is authentic to them. On the other hand, some customers may think factory-made sauces are not authentic, much like store-bought BBQ sauce. I want to contextualize authenticity in a historical milieu; for example, the notion of authenticity carries the meanings of home and traditions, but not the inclusion of foreign ingredients or invention of new techniques (Saxena 2019). Emily J. Ardent (2020), in a study of one of America's oldest recipes, argues that "historical authenticity is a feeling, a celebration of a food past that never actually existed" and that what makes an experience "authentic" will be different in the future (13).

Terroir and localization are also evoked by the teriyaki sauce of Sayaka's Kitchen, which the owners explain is from Kanazawa, which is 450 kilometers (about 280 miles) northwest of Tokyo. The physical distance from Tokyo—a modern and metropolitan city—creates a sense of mental distance from modern life, although Kanazawa itself is also modern and metropolitan. This teriyaki sauce is localized to a particular place to create authenticity, just the opposite of what Elitsa Stoilova (2015) found in her study of the Bulgarianization of yoghurt, in which she illustrates how a village yoghurt was delocalized to become an authentic national food. However, I cannot take my eyes from one line on the Sayaka's Kitchen website: "Now gluten free" (Sayaka's Kitchen 2021b). This must mean that Sayaka's Kitchen's original teriyaki sauce contained gluten—but then, this new version of the sauce is no longer authentic, is it?

Conclusion

In this article I have examined how changing Japanese food from an unfamiliar foreign food to an everyday food in Perth shaped Perth consumers' ideas about food authenticity, how authenticity matters in some foods but not others, and how everyday Japanese food might form an individual's taste for authentic Japanese food. Consumers with no prior experience of Japanese food in Japan have created their own perception of authentic Japanese food based on the notion of origin, the creation of memories through dining experiences, and reviews on social media sites. In contrast to Assmann's (2017: 124) post-modernist tourists looking for inauthentic, imagined, and fantasized experiences to satisfy their desires, Perth consumers, particularly the online reviewers and my respondents, look for characteristics that would authenticate food, chefs, and restaurants—much like the constructivist view of authenticity. Yet authenticity is a form of interpretation based on social context and individual memory. Thus, authentic food is not a special food; rather, we create authenticity for a specific food. Authentic food may not be easily available, but neither is it unreachable; it's not your mother's food, but it may taste like it, or like your memory of it; or it may simply supply a reminder of a memory that has nothing to do with taste.

Our cultures, senses, and memories play more important roles in authenticating food than the food itself. Each of us appreciates food for its taste, aroma, look, texture, and even the sound of eating or cooking it in our unique way. Through production and consumption, we make memories of food and share them. Other elements of food, such as its naturalness, terroir, heritage, and artisanship, also appeal to us. With our selective histories, memories, and even feelings, we can transform a mundane food into an authentic one. Food authenticity is a custom-made attribute crafted by and for individuals.

Perth consumers authenticate "chef's food" but not everyday Japanese food. This is because these consumers create a cultural distance between themselves and "chef's food" that makes it easy for them to authenticate the food with stories, in much the same way that the temporal and spatial distance of a diaspora changes how its members authenticate "mother's food" (Srinivas 2006). When consumers authenticate food and restaurants, they are also authenticating themselves, particularly in online social media. Social media has become a common tool to obtain information and reviews of food and restaurants. Consumers often share their experiences and stories of food, and describe restaurants in detail—the décor, menus, ingredients, chefs, and waiters—in online reviews; the reviews become virtual word of mouth. Their reviews are not only for other customers but also for the restaurants, as the consumers' stories can be transformed into a commercial strategy, and therefore they speak to producers, too (Lamla 2009: 182). Perhaps consumers are a new component of terroir in food authenticity. I reiterate that authenticity is not about the food; it is about people (Arendt 2020; Shelton 1990).[19]

In the case of Japanese food in Perth, its becoming everyday food has given Perth residents opportunities to experience it in different ways, including at supermarkets, Japanese restaurants, and through online reviews. Authentic food is not the food that consumers eat frequently because they separate it from everyday food. Nevertheless, because it is not everyday food, individuals *think* about the food instead of simply eating it. At the same time, everyday food is also easily transformed into authentic food through consumption practices, experiences, and stories. We encounter food stories in films, restaurant websites, and online reviews, and they evoke memories and a sense of nostalgia that can accelerate our desire for authentic food or make the food authentic; stories form the nexus between authenticity and people. "Authentic" Japanese food is food that an eater desires because of its story, whether that story is a memory carrying nostalgia or their imagination of Japan.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Stephanie Assmann, Laurie Durand, and two anonymous reviewers for critically reading this manuscript and providing insightful comments and suggestions, and Hirofumi Katsuno for intellectual discussions.

NOTES

1. In 2019, Sukiyabashi Jiro was removed from the Michelin Guide because the restaurant was no longer open to the general public (McCurry 2019).
2. Diners were expected to spend at least 40,000 yen (approximately AU$360) at Sukiyabashi Jiro (McCurry 2019).
3. Murata imports beef, rice, and sake from the National Federation of Agricultural Co-operative Associations, Zen-Noh (Zenkoku Nōgyō Kyōdō Kumiai Rengōkai).
4. For example, Tokimeite's "superfood salad" is made of "fresh curly kale and mix leaf salad tossed with goji berry, pumpkin seeds, edamame and baby beetroots" (Tokimeite 2021).
5. The word "washoku" has no connection to home cooking and is used in contrast to "yōshoku," Western-style food (Cwiertka and Yasuhara 2020: 48).
6. For Marcel Proust's (1982 [1913]) protagonist, it was the taste of the madeleine dipped in tea that brought up, or perhaps constructed, his childhood feelings and memories that made the madeleine authentic.
7. Based on the comments, I selected five respondents to conduct intensive email interviews.
8. Online identity is a big topic that I do not cover in this article.
9. Zomato is an information platform for local restaurants in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
10. I use pseudonyms for all respondents.
11. Like Murata of Tokimeite restaurant in London, Cushman, too, serves innovative Japanese dishes, such as sushi tacos (Gogo Ya 2021).
12. Haiming Liu (2009) discusses American customers' demand that chop suey, an American invention, be prepared by Chinese chefs as proof of the authenticity of the "Chinese" dish. Stephen Fielding (2014) found that white respondents in England would not eat at a curry house if there were no brown-skinned customers (45).
13. Katarzyna J. Cwiertka (2006: 182–183) discusses the trajectory of the sushi boom in the United States, where sushi became popular first among sophisticated consumers, came to be known as "yuppy food," and finally developed into the ubiquitous supermarket sushi.
14. Lunch prices at Jaws are slightly higher than at Mon, although many consumers say Mon is relatively expensive.
15. I observed customers who stayed for only five to ten minutes, not even taking off their jackets to eat three to six plates on average.
16. For example, fried dishes include teriyaki chicken, tempura nigiri/rolls, chicken kara-age, and fried crab meat balls.
17. The prices in 2015.
18. Chicken and shrimp gyōza are available in Japan, but pork is the most common or "original" filling.
19. David Beriss's (2007) study examines authenticity and waiters.

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