Article:
Coates, J. (2020) Between product and cuisine : the moral economies of food among young chinese people in Japan. Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, 48 (3). pp. 381-399. ISSN: 1868-4874

https://doi.org/10.1177/1868102619898927

"Moral Economies of Food in Contemporary China"
guest-edited by Anders Sybrandt Hansen and
Mikkel Bunkenborg

GIGA | Journal of Current Chinese Affairs

Journal of Current Chinese Affairs
1–19

DOI: 10.1177/1868102619898927
journals.sagepub.com/home/cca
SAGE

Between Product and Cuisine: The Moral Economies of Food among Young Chinese People in Japan

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Abstract

Trade and consumption of food in the Sino-Japanese context connects the two countries' tense political relationship to the everyday lives of its citizens. Previous research has shown how food-related incidents have imbued Sino-Japanese relations with political and moral discourse that connects security concerns to everyday fears. This article explores how young Chinese people in Japan navigate multiple moral economies related to food. Through analysis of "products" (*chanpin*/*shipin*) and "cuisine" (*cai*/*liaoli*), this article shows the differing meanings of Chinese moral economies of food from the perspective of young Chinese people living in Japan. In the Sino-Japanese context, products embody more metonymic and nationalised values associated with modernity, whereas the metaphoric possibilities of cuisine afford young Chinese people to negotiate dominant moral economies of food in Japan. Using this example, I argue that greater semiotic attention needs to be paid to the multiple meanings of food and its moral economies.

Keywords

China, Japan, mobility, food, product, cuisine

Manuscript received 8 January 2019; accepted: 14 December 2019

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Introduction

Chinese moralities and economies of food extend beyond the boundaries of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Today, there are few places that are not touched by China's role in global food systems, from the impact of China's demand for palm oil (Schouten and Glasbergen, 2011) and luxury seafood (Fabinyi, 2012), to the frozen produce and rice that China exports to neighbouring countries (Zhou, 2017). The circulation and mobilisation of food in the PRC entangles communities around the world, particularly those who live in China's major food trading partner countries, such as Japan. China's largest food export partner is Japan, amounting to over 5.5 billion US dollars in 2015 (WITS, 2016). Japan is also highly dependent on food imports (Nagata, 2008) receiving consumable processed commodities more so than raw produce. From noodles, cheap soy sauce and snacks to the frozen meals bought in Japanese supermarkets, Chinese products are a significant part of everyday life in Japan. In 2015, more than 61 per cent of Japan's food was imported, making it the largest importer of food in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (Japanese Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Wheat products, preserved vegetables and frozen products (a significant part of the Japanese diet) mostly come from China (MAFF, 2017). Japan's dependence on food imports exposes it to a range of uncertainties and risks that impact on its relationship with its neighbours (Hook et al., 2015). From food contamination scandals to mass purchasing of Japanese consumables, Sino-Japanese food mobilities have spurred moral panics in Japan over the past decade.

Food mobilities intersect with human mobilities and media flows in entangled ways between China and Japan. In this context of growing migration, tourism, media, and trade, food takes on pertinent geopolitical meanings. Alongside food mobilities, human mobility between China and Japan is on the rise. As of 2017, there were over 690,000 registered Chinese nationals living in Japan, making them the largest non-Japanese minority in the country (Ministry of Justice, Japan, 2017). A significant majority of this population are recent migrants, having grown from some 45,000 in 1985 to current figures today. There are also a growing number of permanent residents, naturalised citizens, and people of Taiwanese heritage who, since 2012, have been recorded as a separate population. As Liu-Farrer (2011) has shown, a significant number of these newcomers first arrived in Japan on educationally channelled visas such as study visas and trainee programmes, which served as a proxy labour migration scheme in Japan from the 1990s onwards. Today many of these students have found work or started businesses in Japan since first studying there, attracting relatives to Japan through kin-based "chain migration" (Brettell, 2003). Alongside these migration patterns, favourable exchange rates between the yen and the RMB, has seen a boom in trade and tourism between China and Japan (Bofulin and Coates, 2017). Scouting for "explosive shopping" (爆買い, *bakugai*) opportunities, and the purchasing of consumable products for gifting and re-sale (代购, *daigou*) has become a significant source of revenue for many young Chinese people in Japan.

The multiple intersecting mobilities found within this context and their relationship to consumption, morals, and economic concerns invoke several challenges to how we think about moral economies more broadly. Within this article, I combine ethnographic observations among young Chinese people in Japan with broader analysis of the Sino-

Japanese context to argue that greater semiotic attention needs to be applied to discussions of moral economies in East Asia. My argument is primarily theoretical and follows the call for more East Asia specialists to use Asia as a method for theoretical inquiry (Chen, 2010). To provide an example of what this greater semiotic attention might look like, I draw inspiration from the emic distinction between two differing domains of "food-talk" in the Sino-Japanese context to show how we might trace what Fassin (2009) calls "the double topography" of moral economies.

The data I use in this article are not from a dedicated study about food but come from a wider study of media-use and political identities among young Chinese people in Japan. Nonetheless, I was struck by how often the interviews and observations in this wider study turned to conversations about food. I compare my participants' testimonies and observed practices with wider media debates about food mobilities between China and Japan. Comparing these differing examples, I show how the distinction between discourses of food as both "products" and "cuisine" in everyday Sino-Japanese contexts suggests that the moralities of food economies can be discussed in multiple ways.

I conducted two periods of fieldwork (2009–2011 and 2014–2016) among young Chinese people in Japan, with a particular focus on the neighbourhood of Ikebukuro in Northwest Tokyo. Ikebukuro is the second busiest train station in Tokyo (after Shinjuku) and has become a major hub for Chinese migrant sociality in Tokyo. During my fieldwork, there were over 300 Chinese-owned shops in the western side of Ikebukuro station, and around 11,000 Chinese residents, with an additional inflow of Chinese people who live in areas that connect to this bustling station. The concentration of Chinese food and Chinese commercial activity has seen Ikebukuro's western quarter unofficially dubbed a "Chinatown" (Yamashita, 2010) despite some resistance from the local government and disagreements among Ikebukuro's Chinese residents. It is nonetheless a hub for Chinese food mobilities in Tokyo, and an excellent site to explore how young Chinese people contend with the daily consequences of tense Sino-Japanese relations and poor media portrayals of migrants in Japan (Coates, 2013, 2015).

The networks of roughly 300 people I conducted participant-observation with were under forty-five years old Chinese urbanites who played, worked or lived in Ikebukuro. Less than a third of my cohort were students at the time, but most had previously come to Japan on student visas before transitioning to work and other entrepreneurial activities. Despite all being under forty-five, it should not be assumed that this cohort were only "newcomers" to the Japanese context. Indeed, the term "newcomer" in Japanese is only used by the oldest in this cohort who had lived in Japan for up to fifteen years, worked in a variety of Chinese-owned and Japanese-owned businesses, had permanent residency, and had started to have young children. The majority of the youngest had lived in Japan for at least two years, with three young individuals who were born in Japan and had resided there on and off for twenty years. Most were not from wealthy backgrounds but earned enough to travel within Japan and experience a variety of cuisines. A few key figures within these networks had become very wealthy over their time in Japan and associated with networks of elite Chinese who rarely came to

Ikebukuro. Perhaps due to their rapid social mobility, these people tended to fall in and out with these other networks, suggesting the social boundaries between those who frequent Ikebukuro, and those who do not.

I use the term "young Chinese people" as an imperfect shorthand to describe this diverse network of people. Despite the limits of my sample, the people I met serve as a cross section of several important and emergent groups that live transnational lives between China and Japan. I managed to speak to many kinds of Chinese nationals living in Japan, from the wealthy to the poor, and a variety of ethnic backgrounds from Han and Li, to Inner-Mongolian and Uyghur. Despite this diversity, they were all sampled from networks that intermingle in Sinophone social spaces in Ikebukuro. My place-based sampling method, rather than a focus on sociological demographic criteria, suggests that we need to look beyond understandings of Chinese migration to Japan that depend on fixed ethnic identities and established migrant communities. In particular, we need to move beyond understanding Chinese migration to Japan as being a predominantly, multigenerational Chinese-identifying minority in Japan who lead lives very much separated from the more recent majority of people from mainland China.

My participants were not merely a reflection of "Chinese" perspectives about the moral economies of food in Japan but rather stood as an emergent Sino-Japanese group that filter different understandings of wider Japanese and Chinese frameworks of moral economy. In this sense, the ethnographic descriptions and contextualising information that follows should be understood as a reflection of fieldwork with young Chinese people in Japan, rather than Japanese perceptions of Chinese food *or* Chinese perceptions of food. The meanings generated by this group of people serve as an important site of mediation between China and Japan and are likely to inform the identities and imaginaries of new communities between China and Japan in the near future.

Mediating Moral Economies of Food in the Sino-Japanese Context

Thompson (1971) originally coined the term moral economy while describing riots in eighteenth-century Britain as people faced spasmodic increases in the cost of food during a time where their livelihoods were simultaneously being dismantled (see this issue's Introduction). These riots were not only a response to the perceived injustices surrounding everyday people's access to food but also a response to inequitable changes in the moral outlook of the economy as Britain entered capitalist modernity. Thompson's account of these events also showed the methodological utility of investigating moments where efforts to address perceived injustices and hypocrisy, reveal something of the logics of moral orders in a given time and place. As noted in the introduction to this special issue, outrage at the contradictions, exceptions, and unreliable nature of food in China today helps us trace the contours of contemporary Chinese moralities.

In December 2013, a Japanese worker in the Aqlifoods subsidiary Maruha Nichiro Holdings Inc. used pesticides to poison a range of frozen foods resulting in the poisoning of over 300 people (Japan Times, 2014; Walraven, 2017). Although the man was arrested for poisoning the produce, the general discourse surrounding the issue related to

questions of mental health and unfair labour conditions for Japanese factory workers. This event caused a stir among several of the young Chinese people I was researching in 2014 because of the way it contrasted with how a similar case was handled years earlier. As a young man from Dalian who had lived in Japan for 10 years reminded me it was not long before then in 2008 that an incident involving poisoned dumplings (餃子, *gyoza*) from China occurred. Comparing the two incidents, my informant recounted how the two poisoning events left many young Chinese people living in Japan with a sense of frustration about the bias and hypocrisy surrounding the different portrayals of the two incidents.

> Right here in Japan, exactly the same thing occurred! It was also a worker in a frozen foods factory, and the Japanese one also used pesticides and then he was caught. After that, the Japanese media presented the whole issue in a totally different light to how the poison dumpling incident was represented back then. There was no line of thinking like the 'poison dumpling' scandal, nor was there any major shift in how people thought about frozen foods. But more importantly, there was no concern about the quality of Japanese produced frozen food. It feels a bit like a double standard. (Anonymous 1, 2015)

The incident my interlocutor was referring to started in 2007, when after a series of disputes with his employer, a worker in the Hebei Tianyang food factory sabotaged a batch of frozen dumplings by injecting them with pesticides. Some of these dumplings were subsequently exported to Japan, and roughly ten people fell ill from their consumption in 2008, although reports are difficult to verify due to the sensationalist coverage of the topic (Rosenberger, 2009; Walravens, 2017). The nationalistic governor of Tokyo at the time, Ishihara Shintaro, likened the incident to the 9/11 attacks in the United States and the London bombing (Ishihara, 2008), the term "food terror" proliferated in various media platforms reflecting much of the tone surrounding everyday transnational relations between China and Japan over the past decade. In the end, the man accused of poisoning the dumplings, Lu Yueting, was sentenced to life imprisonment, tense public sentiment in both Japan and China likely fuelling an overzealous verdict (BBC News, 2014). As both my interlocutor and Walravens (2017) noted, there was a disproportionate response to these two incidents of contamination. According to Walravens' analysis, for example, the Japanese newspapers *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* covered the Chinese case more than three times the amount the Aqli foods case was covered (Walraven, 2017: 274).

Food contaminated with poisonous chemicals is a real concern in China as much as Japan. Yet, as Walravens (2017) has observed despite a numeric decline in the number of food safety violations from Chinese importers, Chinese food has become an increasing object of concern within Japanese public discourse. As she notes, the concern about Chinese foodstuffs connects to wider concerns about impurity, violence, and geopolitics, telling us much about the discursive framing of Chineseness in the Japanese context. A concern with the food of "Others" has grown into a small genre of sensationalist reporting in conservative magazines in Japan. For example, *Shūkan Bunshun* (週刊文集) has an ongoing segment titled "overly dangerous Chinese produce!" (危険すぎる中国産食品, *kiken sugiru chūgokusan shokuhin*) (Tokuyama, 2017) which has also been

published as a compendium called "Scary China Food, Creepy American Food" (Okuno and Tokuyama, 2017). At the time of writing in 2018, there were also debates on various Japanese social media about the safety of Chinese produced *unagi* (鰻) eel, a popular dish consumed in the hot Japanese summer. These debates were spurred by an international crackdown on Chinese smugglers. In particular, a case of smuggling glass eels between Spanish, Portuguese, and Chinese farms before exporting them to Japan had diminished public trust (SCMP, 2018). The media coverage acted as an anxious reminder of Japan's dependence on Chinese farmers for food perceived as quintessentially "Japanese" such as *unagi*. In this case, there was no incident of contamination, but questions of food dependence and mobility nonetheless raised anxieties in Japanese social media circles.

Incidents such as these remind us how the geographic or symbolic movement can symbolically contaminate food as much as the literal contamination of food product. Scholars such as Douglas have shown how that which moves between pre-established classifications, or "matter out of place," is seen as unclean and/or imbued with significant power (Douglas, 2002: 36). From the sacred to the dangerous, contamination across classificatory boundaries sparks both fear and awe. To find potentially edible things that are not considered food in one's meal inspires disgust. Yet, in other places or circumstances those same edible things may be considered food. These classical discussions of food suggest the powerful role classificatory schemes play in how "food" is experienced, and the potentially disruptive effects of movement between these classifications. Extrapolated to food relations between places and cultures, particularly between industrialised and post-industrialised settings, it is easy to imagine why the food of the "Other" is a source of anxiety, and increasingly becomes associated with concerns about contamination. In the Sino-Japanese context then, the contaminated and the supposedly "out of place" form a cycle of anxieties about the moral economies of food mobilities and the "Other."

Concerns about food mobilities and contamination map onto everyday life and are part of Tokyo's streets as much as its media. For example, many Japanese restaurants make sure to list exactly where they source their cheap produce at the entrance to their establishment. This practice indicates the ways different produce becomes imbued with affective and moral associations. The use of "safe" Australian and New Zealand meat products is proudly announced, although produce associated with a Japanese locality is still touted as best, such as beef from Hida in Gifu or locally sourced Miso paste. While the ubiquity of "Japaneseness" as guaranteeing safety has been thrown into question after 3/11, several media campaigns, politicians and NGOs have attempted to restore faith in produce from the area, such as the group "Fukushima Farmers and Supporters Unite!" (がんばろう福島、農業者等の会, *ganbaro Fukushima nōgyoshato no kai*) (JNPOC.ne.jp, 2016; Rosenberger, 2016). Chinese produce, in contrast, is typically framed in the negative, where restaurants and grocers state specifically that they "do not use Chinese produce" (中国産食品, *chūgokusan shokuhin*).

The wider media-influenced context of Sino-Japanese discussions of food show how economies of food have multiple moral interpretations that relate to different political imperatives. The frustrations of the young Chinese people I spoke to perhaps pale in

comparison to the sentiments of starving eighteenth-century rioters, or indeed the threat of food contamination in China today. Yet, they tell us something about how talking about food frames the way moral economies of food are understood. My Chinese interlocutors, such as the one quoted above, did not express outrage over the inequitable or unsafe distribution of food. Rather, they expressed frustration over the perceived inequitable distribution of various forms of recognition. For Chinese people living in Japan who contend with Japanese perceptions of Chineseness on a day-to-day level then, we can infer that Japanese discourses surrounding Chinese food in Japan impact on their sense of what it means to be Chinese in the world today. It is a frustrating time for many young Chinese people who are living abroad, seeing the flaws in both their homes and host destinations while often being bombarded with conflicting media messages about China, Chinese people, and Chinese products.

Products and Cuisine

During my fieldwork in Japan, media stories such as those mentioned above often situated food as representing the moral qualities of either China or Japan. Incidents relating to food came to signify nations or the relationship between nations when reported in the media, echoing Walravens' observation that the public Japanese discourse surrounding Sino-Japanese food mobilities often referred to the immorality of Chinese people and institutions. Public discourses of Chinese food, and moral panics surrounding specific incidents, would serve as a backdrop for quotidian negotiations of food among those I worked with. While my participants, such as the person quoted previously were frustrated by international discourses surrounding Chinese food, they also demonstrated other ways of engaging in moral and economic quandaries related to Chinese food in Japan.

On one occasion, a businessman from Singapore had come to discuss a potential business partnership with a Chinese importer in Ikebukuro. The Singaporean had spent some time in Australia, and so my participants thought that I, an Anglo-Celtic Australian who speaks Chinese, would serve as the perfect entertainer for the evening. The host was from Dalian and had just returned from a trip home before hosting his guest. In the hope of impressing the Singaporean businessman, he arranged to take us to a Chinese seafood restaurant close to one of the major bar districts in Ikebukuro. As we entered the elevator for the restaurant, he started to talk about the restaurant telling how this particular place was very good because it used Japanese and Australian imports (Anonymous 2, 2016). He described how the crabs were particularly good, having come from the north of Japan. The phrase "Japanese crab" sparked a short play of words where the Singaporean businessman made a joke about whether or not it is still a Japanese crab if it is prepared in a Chinese dish, ending in him commenting that all seas meet each other in the end, and that Chinese crabs are basically the same as Japanese ones, given the proximity of the two countries. "It's the same sea, but you never know where Chinese produce comes from" replied my interlocutor in describing how he had just come back from Dalian but does not eat seafood in China anymore. He continued that Japan was becoming one of the best places to eat Chinese cuisine because you could have good Chinese chefs with better ingredients.

As my brief experience described above suggests, for many of the people I spoke to, food was not merely one thing, but rather was discussed in various ways that often played off the contradictions between different kinds of economic and social activity. In particular, I observed two common domains of "food-talk" where "products" (产品/食品, *chanpin/shipin*) and "cuisine" (菜/料理, *cai/liaoli*) were juxtaposed. Both terms are related to different kinds of economic activity, from importing and exporting produce to the preparation of specific dishes. As my interlocutor notes, they also relate to different imaginaries, where there are contrasting discussions about where a foodstuff comes from or is manufactured and how it is prepared for consumption. Within this context, food-talk about "products" and trade in goods often acted as a metonym for a territory's modernity, because these references focused on a countries ability to provide safe, reliable manufacturing. In contrast, cuisine was more commonly associated with metaphoric personal and ethno-cultural qualities, where a preference for the qualities of a particular imagined cuisine are loosely interpreted "as if" the people associated with that cuisine embodied those qualities. These linguistic framings of food act as a form of imaginative practice (Appadurai, 1996) where processes of metaphor and metonymy (Jakobson, 1956) come to stand for moral and affective qualities. They also suggest a theoretical point that could be added to discussions of moral economies. While Thompson (1971) and Scott (1977) focus on injustices in food distribution systems, and moral outrage about food safety, they attend less to the ways food-in-itself (rather than food economies) can be deemed "immoral" or come to represent certain moral qualities.

In his overview of the term moral economy, Fassin (2009) suggests that moral economies rest at a "junction of problems" shaped by two different fields' use of the same term. In fields related to political-economy, moral economies relate to two levels of analysis (Scott, 1977; Thompson, 1971). Firstly, moral economies referred to shifts between forms of exchange to elucidate the moral aspects of material relations of production and consumption in different historical contexts (Thompson, 1971). Building on this approach, the term was used to refer to systems of norms, obligations, and expectations that shape the evaluative aspects of material life, such as a sense of injustice in the face of inequality (Scott, 1977). Fassin notes that in contrast to this political-economic discussion of justice and outrage, the field of science and technology studies (STS) has used the term "moral economy" to refer to the distribution and connection between sets of moral judgements. In this sense, moral economies referred to the semiotic and discursive distribution of morals. The STS meaning of the term stems from Daston's reference to moral economies as a collective "web of affect-saturated values that stand and function in well-defined relationship to one another" (Daston, 1995: 4) within scientific circles. As Fassin (2009) summarises, the approach of Thompson and Scott emphasises the economy and its moral consequences, while Daston focuses more on morals and their economy-like circulation. Fassin attempts to smooth over disjunctures between the two field's approaches to moral economies by suggesting that it is constituted by a double topography, where on one level the economic distribution of food conveys moralities while on another level the distribution of morals also has economy-like properties. I see the distinction between product (*chanpin/shipin*) and cuisine (*cai/liaoli*) among young Chinese people in Japan and broader Japanese

discourse as reminiscent of Fassin's double topography. Indeed, my interlocutors' comments above suggest that in as much as scholarly discussions of moral economies are subject to a double topography, everyday businessmen also discuss food with attention to their economies, moralities and the contradictions they produce. Most moral economies research relies on this kind of data, whether as media texts, figures, conversations or ethnographic observations. For example, Thompson (1971) relied on historical documents and media texts, and Scott (1977) combined these with other ethnographic methods. Given the semiotic qualities of this data, I argue that starting from an exploration of food metonyms and metaphors helps us understand the double topography of the moral economies of food more generally.

As Jakobson (1956) originally noted, the poles of metaphor and metonymy are an important starting point in understanding systems of meaning because they are a common way of signifying the relationship between differing signs. Under Jakobson's distinction between the two terms, metaphors rely on substitution and similarity, whereas metonyms are contiguous with other phenomena. The metaphoric is associated with a greater degree of play and flexibility, whereas metonyms tend towards reality-affirming statements about the association between phenomena. While both processes are related to how we imagine the relationship between things in the world, Jakobson notes, metaphor is to poetry as metonymy is to prose, with an inevitable degree of tension between these two modes of imagination. The tension between the metonymic and metaphoric has been discussed by Sneath who, in examining how objects and divinatory procedures invoke forms of imagination, defines metonymy as "when one item stands for some other article of thought" (Sneath, 2009: 78). In Sneath's exploration of technology and magic in Mongolia for example, electric light is metonymic for modernity in Mongolia. In a similar way, O'Shea (2015) has argued that food mobilities are symbolic of modernity in the Sino-Japanese context. In particular, he argues that the geopolitics of food show how the intersection between discourses of risk and food produce a state of anxiety where "modernity mitigates traditional risks while simultaneously creating new, man-made ones" (O'Shea, 2015: 304). This state of anxiety, much like Thompson's account of concerns over unequal food access in eighteenth century Britain, show how the perceived morality of food economies takes on new geopolitical meanings in an era of increased transnational food dependency. Given these tendencies, I argue that industrialised food economies posit food produce as a metonym for modernity. This metonymic association is because of the close connection between modernity and its promise of mitigating risk (Beck, 1992), which is a major concern in Sino-Japanese moral economies of food (Walravens, 2017).

Discourse about Chinese Cuisine

The Chinese food mentioned in the Japanese media discourses and observations above largely refers to Chinese "produce" (食品, *shokuhin*), but among the young Chinese people I spoke to, discussions of Chinese "cuisine" as either *cai* (菜) in Chinese, or *ryōri/liaoli* (料理) as a code-switched term between Japanese and Chinese, affords divergent ways of imagining the moralities of food. As Farrer argues "cuisine is a type of

discourse, a way of labelling and organizing the various bodily pleasures and sensations associated with food consumption and food preparation" (Farrer, 2015: 4). While discussions of manufactured products, from crabs and frozen dumplings relate to questions of production and modernity, food-talk about "cuisine" focuses more on questions of consumption and the combination of different products (i.e. preparation). This different focus means that cuisine-related "food-talk" often relates more directly to ethno-cultural ideas of identity, bodily experience and taste. The question of cuisine, as Takeda (2008) has shown in the case of Japan, often has significant political implications. In the case of Japan, Japanese cuisine has been a major biopolitical project where the bodies of citizens, cultivated through particular kinds of cuisine, are represented as embodying the nation as a whole (Cwiertka, 2006; Niehaus and Walravens, 2017; Takeda, 2008). Representationally speaking then, cuisine has often been the domain of discourse and practices where "the nation" is re-scaled and translated to an individual level. Within contexts such as Ikebukuro, where migrants form local Sino-Japanese relations, the sensory qualities of food, and the modes in which food is prepared, were often connected to the affective and moral qualities of an imagined Chinese or Japanese subject. In this sense, while the safety and quality of produce signified moral qualities associated with modernity and trustworthiness, the subject of "cuisine" was often framed in terms of "personality" (性格, *xingge*), affect, and authenticity.

The popularity of Ikebukuro as a hub of Chinese sociality was in many ways premised on distinctions made between Japanese and Chinese tastes and their associated cuisines. My interlocutors were predominantly from China's north with additional representatives from Shanghai, Chengdu, Fuzhou, and Hainan. Addicted to Chilli and strong spices such as Sichuanese pepper, they embraced a broadly omnivorous approach to Chinese cuisine. Ikebukuro's western quarter is home to a variety of foods, from Mongolian stuffed flatbreads *roubing* (肉饼) to *malatang* (麻辣烫), Xinjiang lamb kebabs and a hotpot chain from the mainland called *Haidilao* (海底捞). There are also several barbecue restaurants, such as one named *Dongfanghong* (东方红), which parodies cultural revolution aesthetics in its décor, while serving up large hunks of meat that you grill yourself. Many of these flavours mirrored those you would find in major cities in China, making Ikebukuro seem different to other well-known "Chinatowns" in Japan such as Yokohama. According to the "food-talk" of my interlocutors, Ikebukuro was a place for Chinese consumers rather than Japanese tourists, although this narrative obfuscates the complicated migratory histories of these differing areas. According to many of the Chinese people I spoke to in Tokyo, Yokohama has a long-standing association with groups of Chinese-speaking people who remained in Japan after 1949. In contrast, Ikebukuro's western area is more associated with mainlanders who migrated after 1985 (Tajima, 2003), whose tastes and perceptions of Chinese cuisine align with the post-socialist largess of reform era appetites (Farquhar, 2002; Osburg, 2013)

Among my interlocutors, the variety of Chinese cuisine available in Ikebukuro was often contrasted with Japan's adaptations of Chinese cuisine, called *chūka ryōri* (中華料理). As Farrer (2018) notes, *chūka ryōri* restaurants are statistically the most popular restaurants in Japanese neighbourhoods, with over 55,000 counted in 2014. Yet, most

chūka ryōri restaurants today are not owned or staffed by Chinese people. Many favourites typical of everyday Japanese diets today, such as noode soups (ラーメン, *ramen* and pan-fried *gyoza* are seen as having Chinese origins, although they have a long and complicated history in Japan (Kushner, 2012). In particular, after Japan's wartime expansion into East Asia in the first half of the twentieth century, and a subsequent cultural shift in the post-war era, dishes such as *ramen, gyoza* and other dishes became extremely popular. These dishes are not necessarily seen as Chinese by many Japanese consumers but are ambiguous in their "Japaneseness" and are often seen as somewhat "Chinese." As Kushner (2011) notes, every part of Japan has its own story about how *ramen* became popular. For example, in Yokohama migrant businesses such as *Rairaiken*, are said to have popularised *ramen*. Similarly, it is often rumoured that Japanese returnees from China in the post-war era brought different kinds of *chūka ryōri* with them. During Japan's colonisation of Korea and Northern China, many Japanese people were encouraged to immigrate and settle in territories occupied by Japan's imperial regime, such as Manchuria, other parts of northern China and Taiwan. One of the stories around *ramen's* popularity in post-war era argues that after Japan was defeated in the Asia-Pacific war in 1945, these settlers were repatriated to Japan bringing new cuisines with them. Kushner doubts the validity of this story and argues that this tale is likely to be only one small factor in a much wider trend for rich, convenient street foods in Japan's post-war period. Nonetheless, this story about the rise of *chūka ryōri* is common among both many Japanese and Chinese people I have spoken to. Regardless of its origin stories, during Japan's boom years, the *chūka ryōri* market became a common business for working class and rural-to-urban migrants in Japan. As Aoyama (2003) notes however, the post-war boom in *chūka ryōri* inspired a generation of Japanese readers and budding chefs to see a love of food such as *chūka ryōri* as masculine and egalitarian. Consequently, *chūka ryōri* became an important form of "Class B gourmet," a household comfort food, and a staple of working men's drinking culture in Japan. As a consequence however, *chūka ryōri* today is often seen as cheap and unrefined, although there are notable exceptions within Tokyo's amazing array of gourmet restaurants.

As Farrer (2017) has noted in his research on the reception of Japanese food in Shanghai, Chinese consumers increasingly value and debate the authenticity of food. In particular, the popularity of photographing, reviewing, and posting about food through platforms such as WeChat has seen global cities such as Shanghai become a major hub in a transnational Japanese culinary field. As Farrer notes, many of these restaurants rely on seafood imports from places such as Nagasaki and further afield, not only because they distrust local providers but also because it enhances the perceived authenticity of the dishes prepared. For elite Chinese diners, an appreciation of "authentic" cuisine is one among many performances of cultural capital. The under 45 years old I spoke to living in Japan had a similar appreciation of Japan's emphasis on the authenticity of its cuisine. Yet, much like my informant's indignation over the discrepancy between representations of the Aqli Foods case and the poison dumpling incident, "food-talk" about the perceived acceptance of "inauthentic" Chinese cuisine, or in other words *chūka ryōri*, were contrasted with the right to authenticity in discussions of Japanese cuisine.

The majority of the young Chinese people I spoke to in Ikebukuro were vaguely aware of the history of *chūka ryōri* but would often simplify the narrative to one where *chūka ryōri* was a poor copy of Chinese cuisine. They would joke about how Japan "forgot" the Chinese origins of dishes such as *ramen* and *gyoza*, transforming or inventing other dishes that were "bland" and inauthentic. As one young man said to me while drinking in a local tapas-style bar called an *izakaya*:

> Like so many things here (in Japan) that originally came from China, they (Japanese) don't want to admit that they borrowed so much. All the little restaurants sell *gyoza*. Is that not Chinese? And why'd they have to make them so tasteless! (Anonymous 3, 2015)

As this testimony suggests, many young Chinese people demonstrated a combination of indignation and bemusement about the role of Chinese cuisine in everyday Japanese life. This perspective meant that *chūka ryōri* was typically discussed in dismissive tones. For example, the most ridiculed dish among those I spoke to was "Tianjin rice" (天津飯, *Tianjin fan*, or *tenshin han* in Japanese), a seafood omelette spread over rice and then drowned in a gloopy cornflour soup. The dish has no direct connection to Tianjin, and in the eyes of my interlocutors, little appeal to young Chinese appetites. As a woman in her thirties from Shijiazhuang once said to me "it looks like someone vomited in a bowl" (Anonymous 4, 2016).

The young Chinese people I spoke to often connected other moral and affective qualities to the perceived deficiencies of *chūka ryōri* and the generally milder approach to flavours in Japanese life. In particular, complaints about the bland and subtle qualities (清单, *qingdan*) of Japanese food were speculatively linked to ideas that Japanese social life was somehow timid and/or cold. Contrasted with the spicy, varied, and hot qualities of Ikebukuro's various foods, discussions about "authentic" (真正, *zhenzheng*) Chinese cuisine would focus on the "warm sentiment" (热情, *reqing*) embodied in its powerful flavours, or something that was interesting or "had meaning" (有意思, *you yisi*). Even among those who had lived in Japan for a while and had come to appreciate the understated flavours common in Japanese cuisine, there was still a sense that these "cuisines" reflected something of the "personality" of each nation. A man in his mid-thirties from Suzhou who worked as an events organiser for fashionable international companies such as Chandon once commented on this while we walked to pick up several boxes of pan-fried steamed buns from a store near the Northern gate of Ikebukuro (Anonymous 5, 2015). He explained that he had come to appreciate Japanese foods, particularly raw dishes, for their subtle qualities and even joked that it is much easier to appear refined while eating. "I would not usually take a client to a *zhenzheng* Chinese restaurant" he said, describing how it is too risky to subject Japanese clients to strong flavours. Also, he added, he found it easier to keep his weight down by eating Japanese food more regularly. "But" he continued "when I want to treat a friend to a meal, or communicate that I want to be friends with someone, I will usually take them for Chinese. It is comparatively more *reqing*."

Contrasting Product and Cuisine

Within the Chinese-speaking world, Japan has often been posited as the most proximate "alternative modernity" within East Asia (Iwabuchi, 2004). This perception among

Chinese people has ensured that Japanese products, from food to fashion brands, are generally praised as trustworthy, often in contrast to Chinese products. Much like my informant who discussed the quality of seafood in China and Japan, many people would present Chinese dishes as best when not prepared with Chinese produce. The preference for non-Chinese "produce" I observed in Ikebukuro was not simply signposted by Japanese businesses but was adopted by a variety of establishments concerned about safe food. For instance, a popular meat-stuffed Mongolian flatbread shop run by a middle-aged couple were proud of the fact that in producing a "cuisine" dubbed highly authentic they could use imported lamb and beef from Australia, displaying a sign near the small kitchen they had at the front of the shop. Although they said the best flavours came from stronger flavoured inner-Mongolian mutton, they were happy to allay their customers concerns by using imports from "trusted" places. Instances such as these suggest that the metonymic qualities of "produce" in the global food economy predicate trust in countries more closely associated with modern food industries.

As a metonym for civilisation and modernity, discussions of the quality of produce in China and Japan among my interlocutors would often reveal sticky associations between national perceptions of produce, and the qualities of Japanese and Chinese personhood. As one young man from Nanjing said to me while staring into a nice glass of Japanese whiskey and reflecting on the differences between China's alcohol industry and that in Japan, "if the people who make the alcohol's quality (素质, *suzhi*) is low, of course their produce (*chanpin*) will be low quality" (Anonymous 6, 2010). This mode of framing personhood in terms of "quality" has been a well-recognised aspect of popular and governmental rhetoric in China over the past thirty years (Anagnost, 2004; Kipnis, 2007). The logics of *suzhi* also often adhere to the local, such as in Jacka's work where the "quality" of migrant workers in China is questioned because of the places they were raised (Jacka, 2009). Applying similar logics to the Japanese context, widespread recognition of the high quality of Japan's produce among my interlocutors were often connected to Japan's population, suggesting that purity of food and behaviour were the product of, and the reason for, Japan's civilised (文明, *wenming*) quality of life. For example, in the blog entry "When you see this [you'll realise] Japanese people are truly terrifying!" (这么看来日本人真的非常可怕, *zheme kanlai ribenren zhende feichang kepa*) the author provides a litany of ways Japan is clean, safe, and ordered, a large part of which centred around the high *suzhi* of Japanese human resources (人才, *rencai*).

Many of the people I worked with also embodied these sentiments in their own consumption practices. Every time one of my close informants went home to China for example, the first thing she would crave on return to Japan was fresh seafood, arguing that she did not dare to eat anything raw or fresh while in Shenyang (Anonymous 7, 2016). It would be inaccurate however to equate discussions around produce as simply "Japan = good" and "China = bad." Rather, it was the promise of a neutral, risk adverse modernity that my interlocutors valued. Japan often embodied that modernity, but at times contradictions in discourses and practices surrounding food production provided opportunities to reflect upon their perceptions of Japan.

More often than not, young Chinese discussions of food were peppered with playful critique rather than outright complaints. For example, a group of young entrepreneurs

who had lived in Japan for 10 to 15 years had aspirations of furthering their businesses into the field of media production, and as a Chinese-speaking Australian they would occasionally ask me to join their short film productions. A group of them had started posting films about life in Japan on Bilibili.com, focusing particularly on food in Japan. During the heat of summer, they filmed a party where they would try a very expensive square watermelon they had bought for around USD 200. They filmed a sketch where the price tags of various Japanese products were counted in "I fucks" (卧槽, *wocao*) rather than currency. One bottle of wine was one *wocao*, champagne was two *wocaos* and the watermelon was countless *wocaos*. After filming the sketch, they proceeded to cut the watermelon open revealing a pale yellow flesh that was relatively tasteless. Turning to the camera one of the young men then said: "This watermelon is like Japan. Everything is beautiful, and expensive, but it has no flavour. How boring!" (Anonymous 8, 2015).

Humorous discussions of food were the most common and applied to both jokes about cuisine and produce, however on occasion discussions of produce and its reliability also afforded more critical comparisons between life in China and Japan. The hypocrisy of Japanese media representations of Chinese produce occasionally brewed suspicions that Japan's modernity did not guarantee any more safety than China. For example, although based on hearsay, many of the young people I spoke to suspected that the cheap "all you can drink" (飲み放題, *nomihōdai*) deals that many Japanese establishments offered sold fake alcohol. More seriously, since the 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster (東日本大震災, *Higashi nihon daishinsai*) and subsequent Fukushima nuclear meltdown in 2011, significant anxieties and media panics occurred surrounding suspected radioactive contamination in foods from Eastern Japan (Kleeman, 2018). After a few Chinese-language news reports sparked concerns about food and water from Fukushima (Wang, 2013), there were online debates among users of a Chinese-language media service called *XiaochunWang* about where it was safe to buy vegetables (XiaochunWang, 2013). Different areas close to Tokyo were compared, with Saitama deemed the safest cheap option and online importing from Kyushu as the most expensive. As Farrer (2017) noted in relation to the 3/11 disaster's effect on the field of Japanese cuisine in Shanghai, despite an immediate panic about Japanese food safety concerns about radiation in food were short lived in China. Similarly, despite debates online, few of the people I spoke to in Ikebukuro seemed particularly concerned about radiation, seeing the capacity to deal with food system problems as ostensibly being a question of development. As a young woman from Liaoning stated in a follow-up comment online after I wrote to some of my former contacts while preparing this article "Japan's problems still pale in comparison to China's, because China is still too chaotic (乱, *luan*) to be able to solve its problems. Imagine if this had happened in China? Good heavens!" (Anonymous 9, 2018).

Conclusion

Within this article, I contrasted two different ways food embodies moral imaginaries in the Sino-Japanese context from the perspective of Chinese people under the age of 45 in Japan. I discussed how moral imaginaries emerge when the movement of "products"

in the Sino-Japanese context create anxieties about food mobilities, the promises of modernity, perceptions of risk, and the media portrayal of Chinese food safety. The friction (Tsing, 2005) caused by these anxieties place young Chinese people in Japan in the awkward position of often agreeing with the criticisms of Chinese produce while also being particularly sensitive to contradictions within discourses about Chinese food. Discussions of Chinese food as "cuisine" in the Sino-Japanese context often ameliorated the negative connotations of Chineseness, as did playful discussions of food in Japan more generally. The metaphoric, recombinant, and mutable qualities of cuisine allowed my interlocutors to frame their experiences of food in ways that connected personal and ethnic identities to a moral economy more focused on "affect-laden values" (Daston, 1995) of cosmopolitan-consumerism and authenticity rather than concerns about safety and trustworthiness. Distinctions between cuisines were matters of national and regional pride, connecting affective and sensory experiences of food, such as boredom, distaste, or even disgust (Durham, 2011), to everyday theories about the personality of particular cultures and ethnicities. Yet, these differences were posited in ways that were typically relativistic or humorous. You could learn to appreciate a cuisine over time, or at least respect its difference, and in the process of learning about these differences there were many jokes to be made.

The disjuncture between different framings of food in the Sino-Japanese context in many senses mirrors Fassin's (2009) observation that moral economies research is subject to a "double topography" where some researchers focus on the economy of moralities, or in other words their distribution, while others focus on the morality of economies, or in other words whether an economic system is moral. My argument is that everyday people, much like researchers, also contend with this double topography in the way they discuss food in both media and social settings. Caught at a "junction of problems" reminiscent of scholarly discourse about moral economies, young Chinese people found themselves navigating multiple domains of food-talk that focused on either food production and safety, or cuisine, authenticity, and ethno-nationalist ideas of sentiment. Concerns about the quality and safety of produce seemed to hit a nerve in ways that cuisine did not however, spurring reflections about China's place in the world and occasional frustrations about unequal treatment in Japanese discourse.

These ethnography-based reflections suggest that more semiotic attention needs to be paid to how the *moralities* of moral economies are framed. As one possible approach, I have shown how looking for metaphors and metonyms allows the researcher to compare different kinds of morally oriented "food-talk." Metonymically, Chinese products represent the extent to which China is seen as modern in young Chinese food-talk. In contrast, Chinese cuisine serves as a metaphor for perceptions that Chinese culture is "warmer" and better at promoting "human feeling." While much has been discussed in relation to modernity and the geopolitics of food safety in the Sino-Japanese context (O'Shea, 2015; Walravens, 2017), and the geopolitics of cuisine (Farrer, 2017), there is still considerable need for theoretical approaches that try to address these differing domains of discourse and practice. As Oxfeld states "food powerfully communicates and fulfills moral obligations and is also a potent symbol that is used to judge morality in others" (Oxfeld, 2014: 63). Considering this communicative power, the terms and

frameworks for moral economies of food warrant further attention. Given the plural and conflictual nature of moral imaginaries, such as those presented by young Chinese engagements with food related discourse in Japan, it is worth questioning how we define the boundaries and topography of moral economies. Do we occupy single moral economies or are we constantly moving between different fields of moral contestation? As Zigon (2007) argues, points where moral orders appear to no longer work are often the best places to uncover the inner workings of morality in a specific context. Exploring the tensions, slippages, and moments of hypocrisy found within the fields of food discourse is thus a useful way to trace the contours of Chinese moral economies of food in transnational contexts such as Japan.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This project was funded under a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) postdoctoral fellowship.

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