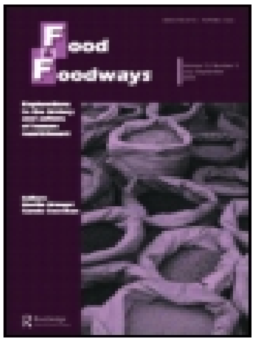

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Sushi in the United States, 1945–1970

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ABSTRACT

Sushi first achieved widespread popularity in the United States in the mid-1960s. Many accounts of sushi's US establishment foreground the role of a small number of key actors, yet underplay the role of a complex web of large-scale factors that provided the context in which sushi was able to flourish. This article critically reviews existing literature, arguing that sushi's US popularity arose from contingent, long-term, and gradual processes. It examines US newspaper accounts of sushi during 1945–1970, which suggest the discursive context for US acceptance of sushi was considerably more propitious than generally acknowledged. Using California as a case study, the analysis also explains conducive social and material factors, and directs attention to the interplay of supply- and demand-side forces in the favorable positioning of this "new" food. The article argues that the US establishment of sushi can be understood as part of broader public acceptance of Japanese cuisine.

KEYWORDS

cuisine; new food; public acceptance; sushi; United States

Introduction

Sushi is now ubiquitous throughout the United States and Europe (the "West"), and indeed across the world. Sushi's initial establishment as a globally enjoyed food originated in the United States, and was borne out of a process with three distinct stages: the consumption of sushi in the US by Japanese Americans after the Second World War, the sale of sushi to white Americans as part of Japanese restaurant offerings from the 1950s onwards, and the opening of sushi bars in metropolitan areas of the US (particularly in California) in the early- to mid-1960s. Growing swiftly in popularity, by the late 1960s sushi had become a staple of high-end US dining. Before long, its popularity broadened, and it began to diffuse more widely throughout the US and beyond.

Many accounts of sushi's establishment in the US foreground the role of a small number of key actors in achieving its widespread Western popularity, and identify the country's first sushi bars as being the genesis point for US sushi (e.g. Feng; Al-Jamie). Yet to do so, I argue, is to underplay the role of a complex web of social,

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political, legal, technological, economic, material, and discursive factors which provided the context in which sushi was *able* to flourish. Building on work that highlights intersecting global flows of people, goods, money, and information in sushi's US (and indeed Japanese) development (Bestor, "How Sushi Went Global"; Issenberg), this article argues that sushi in the US arose out of processes that were contingent, long-term, and gradual. In particular, I argue that the social and discursive context for the US acceptance of sushi was considerably more propitious than tends to be acknowledged in existing research, and suggest that the US establishment of sushi was closely related to the increasing popularity of Japanese cuisine within postwar American foodways.

The present article is based on a critical review of literature pertaining to the introduction of sushi in the US. It also draws on online archival research conducted using a commercial web repository of English-language newspapers (https://newspapers.com). The archival research focused on US newspapers during the period 1900–1970. Search terms were "sushi" and "sashimi": the latter, a Japanese raw fish dish, was included because the consumption of raw fish tends to be framed as the principal conundrum regarding Western acceptance of sushi (e.g. Issenberg). During the research, the sushi bar format emerged as analytically relevant, and so the term "sushi bar" was added. As the research progressed, the focal period of the analysis was narrowed to 1945–1970. Other analytically relevant terms were searched for during this period. "Japan Air Lines" was added to provide detail about the development of jet air services discussed by Issenberg. The terms "ceviche," "seviche," "gravad lax," and "gravadlax" were searched for following indications that the increasing acceptance of raw (or semi-raw) fish extended past sushi and sashimi, although the latter two terms did not yield useful material and were excluded from the analysis. Six early US sushi bars were identified during the research, whose names were also searched.

The archive used had certain limitations. Although at the time of research it contained material from 4,728 separate newspapers (the majority of which were from the US), the archive did not provide a complete record. This precluded systematic, quantitative investigation, which was further problematized by other factors. For example, the search engine returned results that were identified as the search terms but were in fact either analytically nonrelevant uses of them (e.g. "sushi" as a racehorse or a component of people's names) or completely different terms (e.g. "rubber," "$1,000"). The practice of news syndication also complicated quantification: for example, an article about sushi vendors at the Tokyo Olympics (Associated Press) was published in at least 21 newspapers. Rather than attempting to develop a frequency-based analysis (e.g. Ray, "Nation and Cuisine"), qualitative content analysis was employed.

Relevant material returned by the focused search was carefully and systemically examined, and academic judgment was applied, in order to build a picture of prevailing discursive themes during the period under study. The research proceeded iteratively, moving between examination of sources and the gradual development of an analytic framework. Key aspects were the type or focus of articles identified (for example, whether they were recipes, travel pieces, editorials, and so on) and their general tone. Tone was not formally quantified; rather, having observed across the sources a predominantly positive framing of sushi, sashimi, Japan, and Japanese culture, the sources were re-examined in order to verify the general prevalence of more negative coverage, as well as that which on the whole adopted an impartial or ambivalent tone. These relative proportions, the product of judgment rather than quantification, have been indicated in the article where relevant.

As noted previously, the archive was not comprehensive. In light of the primary aim—to provide a broad indication of prevailing discursive themes—this was not deemed to be of significant detriment to the research. Further, the analytic focus on California, and the historical development of sushi there, meant that the archive's most significant lacuna—a lack of material from the *New York Times* beyond 1922, other than when reprinted in syndicated newspapers—did not frustrate the study's objectives. Nevertheless as New York was a significant site for the US establishment of sushi in its own right, and indeed seems to be the earliest location of a US sushi bar, the *Times*' own archive (https://timesmachine.nytimes.com) was also searched for the terms "sushi," "sashimi," "sushi bar," "ceviche," and "seviche" during 1900–1970. Material identified during this search added useful detail to the analysis and has been worked in to the body of the article where relevant.

Despite the primary focus on newspaper articles, some cookbooks are also discussed in what follows. These were identified through the main archival search, and original copies were examined. As with the secondary archival material from the *New York Times*, these were included in the main analysis where relevant.

Beyond the central arguments explained previously, the article has two objectives. The first is to provide a scholarly account of the initial establishment of sushi in the US, in order to supplement the journalistic sources that presently appear to offer the most comprehensive English-language accounts of the subject (Issenberg; Corson). While these books are engaging, well-researched investigations of sushi's US establishment, the present article seeks to contextualize their insights within a more formalized historical analysis that engages with relevant foodways scholarship. Direct scholarly treatments of the establishment of sushi in the US are scarce. The subject is discussed within some scholarly work, but this is confined to research whose principal focus is on other areas, such as Japanese cuisine (Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine*), the safety and nutritional properties of sushi (Feng), the anthropology of the Japanese fishing industry (Bestor, *Tsukiji*), or particular commodities such as soy (Shurtleff and Aoyagi), tuna (Smith) or seaweed (O'Connor). Various popular sources discuss the establishment of sushi in the US but typically in a brief, partial, and unsystematic fashion (Tosches; Al-Jamie). Work that deals with the spread of sushi either globally (Bestor, "How Sushi Went Global"; Matsumoto) or in particular countries (Cwiertka, "From Ethnic to Hip") does not fully explore sushi's initial establishment in the US.

The second objective is to indicate the continuing relevance of work highlighting the importance of both supply- and demand-side factors in the successful establishment of foods in Western societies (e.g. Mintz, "Sweetness and Power"). Although within food studies, broadly conceived, this point is a relatively well-established one, the present analysis seeks to demonstrate its enduring relevance with reference to a specific historical case study. In light of the tendency to emphasize the role of key individuals rather than broader processes in sushi's US establishment, this point is particularly salient, and will be an important consideration for future research on the establishment of new foods.

Cuisines and their global spread

For the purposes of the present analysis, I conceptualize sushi as a component of Japanese cuisine in the US. Following Cwiertka, I define cuisine as "an expression of culinary activity characteristic of a particular community, which entails *selecting* foodstuffs, *transforming* them according to specific techniques and flavouring principles, and *consuming* them according to particular rules" (Modern Japanese Cuisine 12). Acknowledging that cuisine is both taste and talk (Ray, "Nation and Cuisine"), I further define cuisine as involving *discourse*, which "sustains both common understandings and reliable production of the foods in question" (Mintz, "Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom" 104). Exchanges about "proper" consumption and production are arguably central to sushi (Ku), a point reflected in discursive treatments of the food (e.g. Issenberg 99).

Japanese cuisine in the US can be understood as an "ethnic cuisine," defined as a cuisine which is ethnically marked and commonly understood to be of non-local derivation. As with the present example, the establishment of ethnic cuisines in new contexts is typically spearheaded by the introduction of "ethnic restaurants," which act as an entry point for ethnic food into host cultures (e.g., Barbas). Ethnic restaurants are those which make deliberate efforts to market ethnic cuisine to the majority population (Zelinsky).

The successful establishment of ethnic restaurants (and relatedly of ethnic cuisines more broadly) is the result of the dynamic relationship between both supply-side and demand-side factors. Supply-side factors are those affecting the production, distribution and sale of ethnic cuisine; demand-side factors are those that affect its consumption.

Supply-side factors operative in the establishment of Japanese cuisine in the US (including sushi) are strongly reflected in other studies examining ethnic restaurants. Important aspects are the population size and relative density of immigrant groups (Driver) and migrants' cultural characteristics, such as social networks and entrepreneurial proclivities (Barrett et al.). Adequate supply infrastructure is also crucial, which may be pre-existing (Sabar and Posner) or arise out of the entrepreneurial activities of contemporary immigrant groups (Frost). In the case of US sushi, as I will show, both of these points were applicable: existing supply networks were developed by ongoing entrepreneurial activity, in turn facilitating new Japanese restaurants.

Demand-side factors affecting the success of ethnic restaurants include shifts in prevailing public taste or eating habits among host populations: in particular, increases in dining out, greater receptivity to new foods, and increasingly cosmopolitan consumption patterns (e.g. Cwiertka, "From Ethnic to Hip"; Featherstone and Tamari). The popularity of particular cuisines—including sushi—may partially arise from broader trends, such as those towards healthy eating, environmental consciousness, or vegetarianism (Issenberg; Frost). Changes in public taste may also be associated with sections of the host population being exposed to foreign cuisines during war or colonial occupation (e.g., Featherstone and Tamari), as well as by processes of "culinary globalization," both of which are reflected to some extent in the analysis of sushi that follows. A further point, of particular salience to the present study, is the social and discursive positioning of immigrant groups. As Ray observes, such positioning may preclude the social "ascent" of ethnic cuisines due to "the contamination effect of low class association" ("Bringing the Immigrant Back into the Sociology of Taste" 44). Conversely, the social and economic ascent of particular ethnic groups—or, at least, portions of them—has been associated with the development of elite forms of their cuisine in the host society (e.g., Palat), as was the case with sushi.

Yet supply- and demand-side factors are not discrete but are instead mutually constitutive of ethnic restaurants as successful (and indeed, the positioning of ethnic cuisines more broadly as edible and desirable). An example of how supply and demand may be entwined is the notion of "authenticity." "Authentic food," as Lu and Fine (538) note, "implies that products are prepared using the same ingredients and processes as found in the homeland of the ethnic, national, or regional group."

Notions of authenticity are inherently problematic, and are better conceptualized as relational, constructed, and negotiated than an objective quality (Jackson, "Authenticity"). Nevertheless, authenticity has demonstrably exerted an influence on both the production and consumption of ethnic cuisine, and indeed acted as a locus between the two. As I show, considerable effort was expended in ensuring the ingredients, chefs, and dining environments used in the supply of US sushi were demonstrably "authentic," even if not explicitly framed as such, and there are indications that authenticity was a criterion by which sushi, and Japanese cuisine more broadly, was judged. Supply- and demand-side factors may also be related through notional *in*authenticity: for example, the prevailing discursive positioning of Chinese food in the US as largely "inauthentic" (Ku) appears to relate in part to the practice of substituting "authentic" ingredients for cheaper, locally available alternatives (Lu and Fine).

In cases where ethnic cuisines have become successfully established, supply- and demand-side forces propitiously interact. This involves a process of negotiation between immigrant groups and the host society, which engenders a conducive space for ethnic cuisines' establishment and growth (e.g., Fonseca and Malheiros). Supply and demand are dynamically related and are mutually constitutive of particular ethnic cuisines as successful. This point provides the general theoretical context for the analysis that constitutes the bulk of this article: an analysis of how sushi initially became established in the US.

Sushi's origins and US establishment

Sushi's historical development in Japan was shaped by physical and social geography, ecology, law, and political economy, and different regional varieties of sushi are still in evidence (Issenberg; Corson; Sand). Nevertheless, by the time it became successfully established in the US market in the 1960s, the Tokyo form of sushi predominated, as did the relatively recent innovation of the sushi bar in which it was frequently eaten. Sushi bars in 1960s Japan were prohibitively expensive for many but were patronized by wealthier clients, including businessmen. This relatively exclusive sushi bar format was key in the US development of sushi, although was not the only operative factor (Issenberg; Corson).

Many sources identify the origin of sushi in the US as the opening of several sushi bars in Los Angeles during the mid-1960s (Issenberg; Corson; Feng; Smith). While these sushi bars were important, this account is partial and somewhat oversimplified. Sushi and sashimi had been available in US restaurants for some time prior to this, and sushi bars were established in other US cities more or less contemporaneously. Sushi's US success during the 1960s was the result of a confluence of propitious social, material, and discursive conditions that were relatively long term. Thus the pioneering LA sushi bars were not so much *generative* of the conditions for sushi to be accepted in America, as some accounts suggest (e.g., Al-Jamie), but rather *symptomatic* of them.

The following analysis primarily focuses on California, and in particular LA. This selection is partially practical, as there is simply much more data on sushi in LA than elsewhere. However the choice is also consonant with the theoretical approach of the article. Despite indications of the simultaneous establishment of sushi on both US coasts (e.g. Claiborne, "Japanese Cuisine Invades Gotham from All Sides"), LA has remained something of an epicenter of US sushi (Corson). Given the analytic orientation towards the interaction of local circumstances with global flows of people, money, things, and information in the US establishment of sushi (e.g., Bestor, "How Sushi Went Global"), the selection of one metropolitan area as a case study offers a useful lens through which to observe the interaction of broader social, material, and discursive processes. In these terms, LA was a significant (but not exclusive) nodal point at which these processes attained a productive confluence.

I first examine the discursive context for the US establishment of sushi before explaining other conducive social and material factors, with particular reference to California. I then identify shared characteristics of early US sushi bars and discuss demand-side factors that encouraged the popularity of sushi.

The discursive context of US sushi

Although largely unacknowledged in existing research, it appears that the discursive context in the US during the 1950s and 1960s was a demand-side factor highly conducive to the US acceptance of sushi. Many writers argue that sushi's huge growth in popularity later on, during the 1980s, is attributable to the popularity of the

1980 US TV series *Shogun*, which they argue sparked something akin to a wave of "Japanophilia" (e.g., Issenberg; Corson). I would suggest instead that this program was indicative of a discursive tendency that had developed much earlier. For example, Shearer (28) speculated that "[i]t looks as though 1958 may be 'Japanese year' in the US," citing—inter alia—the popularity of Japanese restaurants in the US, and the prevalence of Hollywood films set in Japan.

Previous discussions of sushi's establishment in the US have suggested that sushi received relatively little attention in the US press until the 1970s (e.g. Feng). Evidence indicates, however, that it was relatively prominent within US journalism in the decade or so leading up to its successful establishment in the US in around 1966. Existing accounts also do not acknowledge the increasing prominence of Japan itself within contemporary travel and food journalism. As noted previously, the following analysis does not attempt a quantification of journalistic accounts and is not exhaustive: rather, prevailing themes in newspaper sources are identified.[1]

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, US newspaper articles discursively framed Japan as an exotic, desirable, and increasingly feasible tourist location. These themes were probably related to the establishment of US–Japan air services in 1947 (upgraded to jet services by the 1960s), and were evident in travel pieces, advertorials, and direct advertisements. Articles from the early 1950s recounted the favorable experiences of US armed forces personnel in Japan during the occupation, and of US diplomats at official functions there. Loring (12) suggested that exposure to Japan during the occupation "accelerate[d] interest in things Japanese" during the 1960s, along with faster and cheaper travel and strong trade relations. Americans reportedly developed a taste for Japanese food—including sushi—while stationed in Japan, and are indeed suggested to have influenced Japanese cuisine themselves (Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine*).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Japanese cuisine was also frequently praised in the US press. Articles vaunted its taste and extolled its virtues in both aesthetic and gustatory terms, as well as emphasizing its adventurousness, freshness, healthiness or variety.

Sushi in particular was framed as something different or exotic for adventurous Westerners to try, and as being both unusual and desirable. Many reports from the period that explicitly mentioned sushi and other raw seafood dishes were framed positively, and others simply reported it was a culinary option without making explicit normative judgments. More ambivalent authors suggested that sushi could be enjoyed after a degree of practice or acclimatization, that it was "delicious despite its appearance" (United Press International 13), or that "when you get right down to it there isn't a great deal of difference between raw octopus and a raw oyster" (Sloane and Sloane 21). Of course, for some writers, the tone remained along the lines of Sherman's remark that "on second thought … I'll take a hot dog" ("Cityside with Gene Sherman" 2), but in general a positive framing appears to have prevailed. Towards the end of the 1960s articles still highlighted the adventurousness and exoticism of Japanese cuisine, but chiefly presented these points as part of its allure and authenticity.

During this period, recipes for sushi also began to appear. Some of these did not specify raw fish, but others mentioned the option, both in newspapers and cookbooks. Irrespective of the extent to which such recipes were actually followed, they—along with the other material discussed—offer an impression of the presence and positioning of Japanese cuisine in the US press at the time (cf. Warde). On the whole, this was favorable, even when raw fish was mentioned. Despite indications that for many Americans, raw fish was still unusual enough to be newsworthy (e.g. Associated Press), its discursive position was beginning to change.

Indeed, apropos of its association with raw fish, sushi was not unique in being positioned as unusual but nevertheless edible. Lesem (28) wrote that many "civilized folk" (the Dutch, Latin Americans, Japanese, and Swedes) ate raw fish in some form, explaining the delicacies specific to those populations. One of these, ceviche, was available in the US at the time, and indeed was relatively prominent in published recipes. Journalists and advertisers noted both that it is "raw" (although the lemon juice it is prepared in performs a form of "cooking") and that it is delicious. Similarly, sashimi had been eaten and discussed favorably by US journalists both in travel pieces and domestic restaurant reviews, and was reported to be popular in US Japanese restaurants. Sashimi recipes had even been published. As such, the wider acceptance of sushi may have been part of a more general discursive shift in which raw fish dishes (or at least, those not "cooked" in the traditional sense) were beginning to be positioned as a viable option.

By 1967 a number of US sushi restaurants had been established and were evidently being well-received, and sushi—along with Japanese cuisine in general—had become something of a trend. In an assessment of New York's dining scene, food writer Craig Claiborne ("Japanese Cuisine Invades Gotham from All Sides" 11) observed that "gastronomically there has been no phenomenon in recent years to equal the proliferation of Japanese restaurants … Americans for whom 'chopsticks' was once a childish piano exercise now wield them with admirable expertise … Some of them dine on the raw fish dishes, sushi and sashimi, with a gusto once reserved for corn flakes."

Two years later, Claiborne was discussing sushi on national television, and newspaper readers in smaller metropolitan areas were enquiring as to its local availability. The symbolic "victory" of unusual Japanese cuisine involving raw fish is indicated by a 1969 restaurant advert from Albuquerque, New Mexico, which alongside explicit mentions of sushi and octopus advertises "Sashimi—Raw Fish" (Taro's Garden). Even though journalists evidently still thought it necessary to explain what sushi was as the 1960s drew to a close, by that point the food had become established.[2]

Before focusing on the case study of California, it is important to note a defining aspect of the social, material, and discursive context of the US during the 1950s and 1960s. That is, what is sometimes termed the birth of "consumer culture," when the loosening of traditional social structures and the flows of globalization ushered in an era in which consumption as a means of lifestyle construction became a defining characteristic (Featherstone and Tamari). Under such conditions, the consumption of "ethnic" food has increased, and eating out has increasingly become a leisure activity (Warde; Cwiertka, "From Ethnic to Hip"). It was during the 1960s that the discursive prominence of ethnic cuisine and of restaurants in general began to increase markedly, a process which accelerated further in the 1970s (Warde; Ray, "Nation and Cuisine"). As such, the positive framing of Japanese cuisine as a novel and exotic choice should be seen in the context of broader social changes.

Sushi in California: Social and material factors

I now turn to an examination of the social and material factors which, along with the discursive context of the period, provided the conditions in which sushi was able to flourish in California in the 1960s. Unlike the discursive context, these social and material aspects were primarily supply-side factors. Although the factors discussed in the following relate primarily to California, I would argue that many are likely to have contributed to the development of sushi elsewhere in the US (for example, sushi bars in Chicago or New York would have been able to use California-grown sushi rice, rather than relying on Japanese imports).

Social factors

A number of social factors aided the establishment of sushi in California, which can be separated into two broad themes. First, the history and characteristics of Japanese migrant groups in the US (*Nikkei*),[3] which help to explain the location and density of Japanese restaurants and associated businesses such as trade networks. Second, a sharp increase in wealthy Japanese business travelers to the US after the Second World War, associated with Japan's postwar "economic miracle." This led to a profusion of Japanese business travelers and short-term expatriates in metropolitan areas of the US, who played a key role in the wider popularization of sushi.

Japanese migration to the US began following Meiji-era reforms (1868–1912), with Hawaii and California being primary destinations. Despite a sharp fall in Japanese immigration following increasingly exclusionary policies from around 1907, the number of Nikkei obtaining legal permanent residence in the US in the period 1880–1939 was 277,158 (US Department of Homeland Security 6–8). Due in part to their concentration on the west coast of the US, Nikkei played a crucial role in the development of Californian agriculture (Sharpe; Graves).

Historically, Nikkei groups have demonstrated a high level of internal organization along social and economic lines. This is argued to be partially due to external factors, predominantly US public and institutional racism (Befu; Little Tokyo Historical Society; Graves), and partially due to Nikkei socio-cultural characteristics, such as prevailing modes of social and economic organization and preferences for Japanese food. Light identifies credit associations, preferences for partnerships rather than solo ventures, wide-membership social organizations, and trade guilds as significantly aiding the establishment and maintenance of Japanese American businesses, despite public discrimination. Light (12) also notes that Asian-owned businesses were advantaged by the "protected markets" created by intra-ethnic demand.

The intersection of US public hostility, Nikkei entrepreneurship, and preferences for familiar products led to the development of "parallel institutions" (Befu), such as restaurants, catering to Japanese tastes. Nikkei groups have been characterized by a high level of "institutional completeness" in this respect (Tsukashima), which along with their internal social and economic organization aided the development of "Japantowns," such as LA's Little Tokyo (Dymski and Veitch; Little Tokyo Historical Society).

A particularly important example of such economic organization was the founding in 1926 of the Mutual Trading Company in LA. Originally a coalition of ten small Japanese food retailers, Mutual Trading was formed as a means of importing Japanese foodstuffs to the US. This was known as the "pickle trade," referring to the supply of foodstuffs with sufficient shelf-life to be imported via existing shipping infrastructure that were otherwise unavailable in the US. These products were sold to Japanese restaurants and the wider Nikkei community. Mutual Trading played a highly significant role in the development of Japanese food in LA during the interwar years (Issenberg; Smith).

Nikkei were interned in camps during the Second World War, and lost property, homes, and businesses. Although decimated by the wartime internment of Nikkei, Little Tokyo was to flourish again as a Japanese American community in the postwar decades (Komai; Konagaya). In 1950, LA's Nikkei population was around 40,000 (Sherman, "By the Way with Bill Henry"), and the city was a significant destination for postwar Japanese imports, immigration, and capital (Davis; Kurashige). Mutual Trading remained a lynchpin of Japanese American food trade and retail (Issenberg).

The 1950s saw new waves of Japanese migration following the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act in the US (Kurashige), and in the period 1950–1959, some 40,651 Japanese immigrants obtained legal permanent residence (United States Department of Homeland Security 8). The permitting of Japanese foreign business travel from 1950 onwards by the occupying US authorities (March), in addition to Japan's unprecedented economic growth during the 1950s and 1960s, led to what Issenberg (87) suggests "may have been the largest diaspora of a managerial class in history." During Japan's postwar "economic miracle," the US was a significant site of Japanese foreign direct investment and hosted a large share of Japanese subsidiary companies, which tended to be clustered (Farrell). High rates of commercial immigration may in part be attributable to the Japanese practice of sending entire management teams to run foreign subsidiary companies, rather than only key individuals (Matsuo).

Flows of Japanese labor and capital into the US (including the new international class of business expatriates) established new Japanese communities. Although established Nikkei groups and more temporary commercial residents were distinct groups, the latter patronized Nikkei businesses such as restaurants (Befu; Stanlaw), and indeed sushi bars (Claiborne, "Dining Directory"; Al-Jamie).

Postwar California was thus a region with relatively large Japanese populations, both established and more temporary, with a relatively high level of "institutional completeness." This was the consequence of a number of historical factors, which were—inter alia—US and Japanese migration policy, US racism, the social, cultural, and economic organization of Nikkei, Japanese taste preferences, and Japanese economic growth and commercial expansion. This social context contributed to the circumstances necessary for the establishment of sushi.

Material factors

The availability of the "stuff" of sushi in California was an important supply-side condition for its successful establishment there. Sushi is in one sense rather versatile, as it can accommodate diverse fish and seafood species. In another sense, however, it is relatively prescriptive, requiring soy sauce, specific forms of rice and seaweed, and particular equipment. California in the 1960s was able, for reasons that are ecological as well as legal, technical, political, and economic, to furnish its sushi bars with a regular supply of all the required ingredients.

Sushi requires short- or medium-grain rice, which becomes sticky when cooked and retains its shape when molded. Californian long-grain rice, which does not have these properties, is unsuitable for use in sushi. However in 1948, the Calrose variety of medium-grain rice was developed in California, providing a domestic rice strain suitable for use in Japanese cooking (Johnston; Mutual Trading). This was followed in around 1963 by the premium Kokuho Rose variety, the preferred rice for sushi due to its taste, appearance, and material properties (Matsumoto; Mutual Trading).

A result of both the physical and human geography of California, these rice strains provided the "special type of rice that sticks together when cooked" (United Press International 13) necessary for sushi, at both the right place and time. Indeed, Matsumoto (3) suggests that it was the ready availability of appropriate rice in the US that facilitated a sushi boom there, arguing that "[h]ad it been necessary to import rice from Japan, the prices would likely have been five to ten times higher."

The case of Kawafuku, an LA-based Japanese restaurant that from the 1960s featured a sushi bar, provides a good example of how appropriate fish and seafood species for sushi were made available in the US. Although the fish and seafood used for sushi has often simply been what is locally available (Issenberg; Corson), the postwar standardization of Japanese sushi, discussed previously, seems to have led a degree of standardization of species (particularly tuna). Kawafuku reflects both of these points. Issenberg (88) suggests that the restaurant had built its menu around locally available fish species, such as abalone, flounder, mackerel, octopus, sea urchin, and tuna, which are also staples of "traditional"—that is, postwar Japanese—sushi. Corson (45) complicates the "local availability" thesis slightly, suggesting that not just any fish would do for use in Kawafuku: bluefin tuna reportedly had to be imported from Boston, and special arrangements made to harvest Californian sea urchins. Taken together, these points suggest that the availability of appropriate aquatic species for US sushi was assured, for two main reasons.

First, the US fishing industry was able to supply appropriate species that were either regionally available, such as abalone ("Abalone Prepared Correctly"), or made available through long-distance Pacific fishing, such as tuna. Tuna's availability was itself a product of existing technology, infrastructure, and relatively aggressive US fishing policy, as well as prevailing public tastes (Smith).

Second, the advanced operations of Mutual Trading ensured other appropriate species were available. In addition to the examples of bluefin and sea urchins, Mutual Trading also imported giant clams from Tokyo (Issenberg 88) and shrimp from Korea (Al-Jamie). Indeed, Issenberg (88) reports that in the early 1960s, a Japanese "restaurant could open and find everything it needed, except for real estate and labor, in the Mutual Trading catalog," hinting at the importance of Japanese-owned import enterprises in the establishment of US sushi. Issenberg's exception of labor from Mutual Trading's capabilities may not be justified: the company was reportedly involved with the migration of Japanese sushi chefs to the US for at least three sushi bars (Issenberg 90; Moreno; Smith 90; Al-Jamie). Other contemporary sushi bars were able to "import" trained Japanese chefs as well ("A Guide to the Best Restaurants" 32; United Press International).

Thus, due to a confluence of ecological, technological, and economic factors, expat Japanese sushi chefs were able to move to California (and elsewhere in the US) and were there able to prepare sushi using ingredients with which they were likely to be familiar (and trained). Key supply-side elements for the establishment of sushi were therefore present.

The analysis now moves to another key supply-side discussion: that of sushi's availability in the US. While acknowledging its availability in different metropolitan areas such as New York and Chicago, California remains a particularly important location for sushi's US development.

The availability of sushi in the US

A number of accounts identify the opening of several sushi bars in LA during the mid-1960s as the point at which US sushi became established, and emphasize the role of Mutual Trading Company manager Noritoshi Kanai (Issenberg; Corson; Feng; Al-Jamie). Having joined the Tokyo arm of Mutual Trading in 1952, Kanai began to look for new business opportunities in the US in the early 1960s. Kanai is often credited, along with his erstwhile American business partner Harry Wolff, with having "brought sushi to America" (Al-Jamie 54) by arranging for the necessary materials and chefs to be transported from Japan and encouraging restaurateurs to add sushi bars to their businesses (e.g., Al-Jamie; Corson).

Although the role of Kanai and Mutual Trading were undeniably important in the development of LA's early sushi bars, sushi had actually been available in the country for some time previously: indeed, it was available during the early twentieth century, both at Japanese cafés and elite society functions (e.g. Miller). This stopped with the wartime internment of Nikkei, but after 1945, sushi was once again available in the US.[4]

Sushi made fairly regular appearances at bazaars and other events held by Asian immigrant groups throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and seems to have been available in LA's Japanese restaurants since at least 1949 (e.g. Issenberg). Yet other than at occasional society events or official functions, there is little indication that white Americans were eating it. American consumption of Japanese food in the immediate postwar years was largely confined to the familiar dishes tempura (battered and fried seafood), teriyaki, and sukiyaki (stew-type dishes containing meat and vegetables).[5]

However by the late 1950s, restaurants began to advertise sushi among their specialties in California and Oklahoma, and in 1961 Chicago's Naka-No-Ya began selling sushi. Opening in 1963 in San Mateo, California, San Raku was quickly praised by a local journalist as "delightful" (Johnson, "Bright Lights" May 31) and "a new dine out experience" (Johnson, "Bright Lights" July 12). New York's Aki restaurant was by 1963 a "long-time favorite" of Columbia University students and staff, offering sushi on its "reasonably authentic" menu ("Directory to Dining" 29). In the same year Nippon, a restaurant featuring a sushi bar which Claiborne placed in the "grand luxe category," also opened in New York ("Japanese Cuisine Invades Gotham from All Sides" 11). Sushi bars, modeled on the Tokyo variety (i.e., a handful of high stools at a counter top), were distinct from the earlier phase in which sushi was simply included on broader restaurant menus.

Between 1964 and 1966 (dates vary between accounts, e.g., Issenberg; Corson; Shurtleff and Aoyagi; Feng) sushi bars were established in three restaurants in LA's Little Tokyo: Kawafuku, Eigiku, and Tokyo Kaikan. These reputedly sparked the trend for sushi, although by 1966, sushi was being served "faster than hot cakes" at the longer-established Fuji Sukiyaki restaurant in San Mateo (Johnson, "Bright Lights: Entertainment and Dining") and the same city's San Raku had been receiving favorable reviews for some years. Contrary to most existing accounts—and assuming that the early sushi restaurants did not have sushi bars—the first LA sushi bar outside Little Tokyo was the Imperial Garden restaurant in West Hollywood, which opened in 1966. During the period 1967–1969, sushi bars in three separate New York restaurants were reviewed in the *New York Times*. Sushi bars were established in Chicago in 1968 and Gardena (southern California) in 1969. In 1969, restaurants in Chicago, Soquel (central California), Fresno (central California), and Albuquerque (New Mexico) advertised sushi on their menus, and the Osho restaurant was founded in West LA.

Many accounts identify Osho as the first LA sushi restaurant outside Little Tokyo (Issenberg; Corson; Feng; Smith). Although the evidence suggests that Imperial Garden was in fact selling sushi in Hollywood several years earlier, Osho may have been important in the US establishment of sushi due to its clientele, many of whom were film stars (Issenberg 91). Such people may have played a role as "cultural intermediaries" in the popularization of sushi (cf. Ray, "Nation and Cuisine"). Although the patrons of Osho alone would scarcely be sufficient to enact large-scale changes in public judgments of cuisine, sushi's association with Hollywood "tastemakers" perhaps has roots here.

Throughout the 1970s, sushi bars and restaurants proliferated across LA and the US more broadly, following flows of Japanese people and capital as well as catering to high-end American diners (Issenberg 91). By 1972, the New York Times reported the opening of a sushi bar in the city's elite Harvard Club (Bestor, "How Sushi Went Global" 56). During that decade, reviews written by prominent New York restaurant critic Mimi Sheraton reflected sushi's increasing canonization as a gourmet food (Smith 93). By 1978, sushi was established enough to be pilloried in a comedy show on US national television (Issenberg 98).

The establishment of sushi in the US was a gradual process, in which three broad stages are evident. Sushi had been available in Japanese restaurants catering to Japanese or Nikkei clientele from at least 1949 onwards. Then, around 1959, Japanese restaurants began advertising sushi among their offerings, but aimed "outwards" at the host society. From around 1963, sushi *bars* began to be established.

The shift from first to second stages reflects Zelinsky's distinction between "indigenous" restaurants, aimed primarily at an intra-ethnic clientele, and "ethnic" restaurants, in which an ethnic cuisine is marketed to a wider audience (i.e., one comprised of other ethnic groups than those typically associated with the cuisine).[6] This was an important early stage for US sushi involving both Nikkei entrepreneurs and American consumers, reflecting Cwiertka's argument that the popularity of ethnic restaurants is as much the result of ethnic proprietors' commercial efforts as it is consumers' search for a novel dining experience ("From Ethnic to Hip" 244). Starting in the 1950s, US sushi purveyors made clear efforts to attract non-Japanese custom, as is evidenced by their newspaper advertising. There are also indications that some proprietors may have "wined and dined" journalists in exchange for favorable coverage (e.g., Johnson, "San Raku's Authentic Japanese Food and Wine,", "Fuji Sukiyaki Reopens Thurs."). In any case, such activities took place in the context of a likely quest for novelty among American diners as well. The third stage, when US sushi bars were established, is typically identified as the genesis of US sushi. Although these sushi bars were not the absolute origin of US sushi, their role in its development was important.

Direct evidence of the extent to which sushi bars were popular among white Americans is limited. In 1968, Kawafuku's weekend customers were reportedly 90% Caucasian and mostly willing to try sashimi; however, the most popular dishes were noted to be tempura and teriyaki, with sushi not discussed ("A Touch of Japan in Downtown LA"). A later source suggests that the clienteles of both Kawafuku and Eigiku were primarily Japanese (Rossman). Tokyo Kaikan's more mixed clientele also reportedly stuck mainly to dishes other than sushi (Issenberg).

Nevertheless, the early US sushi bars may have helped to facilitate the high-end positioning of sushi, due to their relative expensiveness and their reported popularity amongst Japanese business diners (Claiborne, "Dining Directory"; Issenberg; Al-Jamie). As Issenberg (87) suggests, "[u]nlike their blue-collar predecessors, the postwar Japanese in America came with per diems and the tastes of Japan's wealthy elites." It was this managerial demographic that is argued to have acted as a "gatekeeper" of sorts, introducing US colleagues to sushi (Al-Jamie). This mode of entry may have obviated the association with lower classes that has been argued to hinder the establishment and consecration of other ethnic cuisines (Ray, "Bringing the Immigrant Back into the Sociology of Taste").

Further, the general historical evidence suggests strongly that it was this particular mode of dining that ignited US interest in sushi. Although sushi had been available in the US prior to 1963, the years immediately following the establishment of US sushi bars saw a sharp increase in both the number of US vendors and the discursive coverage of the food. Thus, while 1960s sushi bars were not the origin of US sushi (whose roots went much deeper), they were clearly a major aspect of its supply-side development. They also played a significant role in encouraging US public interest in the food, and its rapid growth in popularity among Americans.

Shared characteristics of early successful US sushi bars

The pioneering sushi retailers during the 1960s were not only successful because of Nikkei promotional activities and increasing American amenability to the idea of sushi. The restaurants also shared a number of characteristics that helped to ensure their success. I compare the establishment of sushi bars in Nippon (1963, New York), Kawafuku (1964–66, LA), Tokyo Kaikan (~1965, LA), Eigiku (~1965, LA), Imperial Garden (1966, LA), and Yue's (1969, Gardena).[7]

All of the aforementioned restaurants featured a sushi bar as a single component of their offerings, and many were also situated within established restaurants. I would suggest these factors are important due to their likely role in reducing commercial risk. Kawafuku had five floors and could seat several hundred people, and was reportedly the most successful Japanese restaurant in LA. Its sushi bar only had six or seven seats, and as late as November 1971, the restaurant was still being advertised in newspapers as a sukiyaki house, with no mention of sushi. When Yue's opened its sushi bar in 1969, the 250-seat restaurant had already been open for twelve years and gained a prestigious critic's award. Eigiku was a long-standing Little Tokyo restaurant that acquired a sushi bar when it re-opened in 1965 (Issenberg 91): contra Issenberg, photographs from the period suggest that it retained conventional restaurant seating as well (Japanese American National Museum), and thus re-opened *with*, rather than *as*, a sushi bar. Imperial Garden opened its sushi bar in 1966, at the same time it announced its 14th anniversary. The restaurant was spread over several floors, and its sushi bar was located at the back of its second-floor cocktail room. The sushi bar at Yue's restaurant was situated in a new "Japanese Room" opened in 1969, around the time of its twelfth anniversary.

Tokyo Kaikan and Nippon were both new restaurants, although were otherwise comparable to the restaurants mentioned previously. Tokyo Kaikan's sushi bar, as one of four restaurant sections, was responsible for only around 20 percent of revenue (Issenberg 89). Nippon featured a sushi-tempura bar alongside "Western style tables" and various other dining rooms (United Press International 1964: 13).

The commercial advantages of being a "first mover" in a particular industry are tempered by the possibility of failure (Semadeni and Anderson). Superficially, opening a sushi bar—"a completely new concept in the serving of Japanese food" ("A Guide to the Best Restaurants" 32)—would seem something of a risk. Yet it appears that early US sushi retailers substantially minimized risk by segmenting restaurants and adding sushi bars to long-established and large premises: thus, an incipient trend could be tapped into without jeopardizing proprietors' livelihoods. The use of established restaurants to trial sushi bars also capitalized upon existing customer bases, which in some cases were primarily Japanese (Rossman; cf. Cwiertka, "From Ethnic to Hip"), and in others included white Americans ("A Guide to the Best Restaurants" 32; "A Touch of Japan"). Early sushi bars were sites of confluence for a range of supply-side factors, which were nevertheless appropriately structured in a way that ensured relative longevity and thus provided the opportunity for a gradual increase in demand.

US demand for sushi

The foregoing analysis explains the supply-side conditions necessary for sushi to be available as an option for white Americans. However, if any newly arrived food or cuisine is to be successful, there has to be some demand, or at least the presence of factors conducive to stimulating such demand. The discursive factors outlined previously can partially account for this, but other factors were also at work in the popularization of sushi. Corson and Issenberg both highlight trends towards "natural" or healthy eating during the 1960s and 1970s as significant in this respect. Tosches' slightly more eccentric analysis attributes sushi's US popularity to the prevalence of sugar among its ingredients. I would suggest two further relevant factors: the experiential dimension of sushi consumption and the enactment of social distinction.

As Zelinsky notes, dining at ethnic restaurants is as much about their experiential quality as it is their food. The experience of eating at a sushi bar, during which the chef prepares a succession of small, aesthetically pleasing dishes in front of diners, has a performative dimension. This experience—which Issenberg memorably refers to as a "parade of small joys" (ix)—provided the opportunity for 1960s Americans to have a dining experience that was new and exotic (e.g., United Press International). The relative rarity of this experience may also have contributed to sushi's appeal. As Lu and Fine (536) argue, "[e]thnic businesses can succeed by providing desired 'exotic goods' and opportunities for 'internal tourism' … that other organizations cannot provide as cheaply or as authentically … The scarcity of the experience contributes to its marketability."

Second, sushi consumption has an enduring association with the attainment of social distinction. Ku (32) suggests that a definitive quality of sushi is the emphasis on both chefs and diners "getting it right, of knowing how it is supposed to be done and doing it properly." Sushi connoisseurship reflects typical means of culinary distinction such as the cultivating of demonstrable knowledge, preferences for particular dishes, varieties or restaurants, and the ability to discriminate between "good" and "bad" examples or "(in)authentic" renderings. At the time sushi became established in the US, authenticity was clearly a criterion by which it—and indeed

Japanese cuisine more generally—was both advertised and judged (e.g., "Directory to Dining"). More specific opportunities for social distinction are conferred by ordering in Japanese (e.g., Issenberg 99) or by customers' readiness—contra to the dictates of the prevailing form of Euro-American dining—not to order anything specific at all, as in the *omakase* mode of dining where the chef simply prepares dishes for you (e.g., Dwan). Of course during the 1960s simply *knowing* about sushi, as a white American, would arguably confer some degree of distinction. Claiborne's ironic characterization of US sushi consumers would certainly suggest so ("Japanese Cuisine Invades Gotham from All Sides"). The connection of 1960s US sushi bars with business diners, highlighted previously, may also be considered in terms of social distinction, as familiarity with restaurants may confer instrumental benefits for those in managerial occupations (Erickson).

The ideas of authenticity, distinction and taste naturally lead to a central issue pertaining to sushi: the question of raw fish. Why was this acceptable to US consumers when it had not been before? I would suggest that the appropriate place from which to address the issue is the assumption that (dis)taste for particular foods is acquired, socially constructed, and shaped by geographic and political-economic forces (e.g., Rozin and Rozin). The factors described above indicate how both supply- and demand-side conditions were met for sushi to be available and to be positioned not just as "edible" but also "authentic" and "exotic." Further, as I have suggested, the consumption of raw or semi-raw fish was evident elsewhere within US gastronomic discourse. Japanese food had also already been eaten in the US for some time in the form of the ubiquitous sukiyaki, teriyaki, and tempura, with Vanderbilt (5) remarking in 1965 that "Oriental foods are now served in American households as often as the great favorite, Italian pasta of some kind."

In the context of these factors, the dynamics underlying the "progression of acculturation" (Wank and Farrer 94) noted in 1970s California—from familiar Japanese dishes such as sukiyaki to "exotic" ones such as sushi and sashimi—become clearer. Yet such a progression was not one of simple linearity. Rather, the social, material, and discursive factors that led to the general popularity of Japanese cuisine were *also* constitutive of the establishment of sushi, albeit in conjunction with more specific factors such as sushi's relative novelty, exoticism, and opportunities for social distinction. If the desirability of culturally unfamiliar food is predicated on its being "different, but not too different," sushi appears to have fitted the bill, by offering Americans the opportunity for an "exotic" venture into culinary territory whose edges were nevertheless relatively proximate.

Discussion

In sketching out a history of the initial establishment of sushi in the US, I have sought to emphasize three key analytic points. The first of these is that the establishment of sushi in the US, and its acceptance by white Americans, were the product of a complex and long-term web of social, cultural, political, economic, legal, technological, and ecological factors. Although this point is in quite general terms a fairly established one (Bestor, "How Sushi Went Global"; Issenberg), previous accounts do not account for the full range of factors that appeared to be operative in the US re-enactment of sushi. These, as I have indicated, are a confluence of factors on both the supply side and the demand side. In particular, existing accounts have tended to ignore or underemphasize the propitious discursive context into which sushi was gradually established.

The second point is that these factors were congruent with those that, in a more general sense, contributed to the popularity of Japanese cuisine in the US in the 1950s–1960s. Put another way, the establishment of sushi can be seen as part of the broader establishment of Japanese cuisine in the US, which by the mid-1960s was a feature of both mundane domestic cooking and high-end restaurant dining. The establishment of its more "exotic" components, while still relatively unusual, nevertheless took place within the context of Japanese cuisine's position as an increasingly accepted and enjoyed part of American foodways.

The third point is that—while important—the role of individual "heroic entrepreneurs" in the US popularization of sushi, such as Mutual Trading's Noritoshi Kanai, must not be overstated. Innovators of any kind always operate within the bounds of the existing social, material, and discursive context in which they are situated (cf. Garud et al.). In the case of sushi, the successful entrepreneurial activities of pioneering US sushi retailers occurred within a highly propitious context. Alongside myriad supply-side factors contributing to the necessary conditions for the establishment of sushi in the US, favorable social and discursive tendencies were in evidence in the US at the same time, helping to stimulate demand. Thus, the conditions for sushi's establishment were already present at the time entrepreneurs such as Kanai made efforts to market sushi to Western consumers. As I have suggested, such innovators were likely to be responsive to prevailing socio-cultural tendencies, rather than generative of them.

In the case of sushi, as elsewhere (e.g., Fonseca and Malheiros), it appears that contingent and opportune processes at considerable scale are at least as responsible for the successful diffusion of ethnic cuisine as individual entrepreneurship. The implications of this for the study of how new ingredients, foods, and cuisines diffuse are significant. Attention to both the cultural and political-economic factors underlying the success of culinary innovations is necessary in order to understand how they become established and widely accepted. Culture and political economy can more usefully be thought of as mutually implicated within circuits or networks rather than as a simple binary (Jackson, "Commercial Cultures"; Cwiertka, "From Ethnic to Hip"). Efforts to focus solely on one "half" of the production–consumption nexus may be necessary as an heuristic tool or to aid analytic clarity, but it is unlikely that an account that does not consider both aspects will be able to furnish anything approaching a full account of the development of particular cuisines or foods in new contexts.

Notes

1. Due to constraints of space, I do not supply detailed bibliographic information about newspaper sources consulted here. I can provide details of sources consulted via e-mail.
2. Many accounts (e.g., Corson; Feng) suggest that the popularization of sushi in the US is attributable to the development of the California Roll, a sushi roll made without raw fish and in which the seaweed is "hidden." While this dish may indeed have served as an introduction to sushi for reluctant diners, it is not mentioned in print until 1979 (Smith), by which time Americans had been eating sushi for 20 years. Thus, the role of the Roll is possibly overstated.
3. The term *Nikkei* refers in general to Japanese immigrants in the United States. More specific terminology designates particular generations of Japanese–US migrants, such as *Issei* (first generation) and *Nisei* (second generation). For present purposes, these distinctions are not employed.
4. This section draws heavily upon contemporary newspaper sources, for which—as in the foregoing discussion of discursive context—I have omitted extensive bibliographic information.
5. An exception to this was Hawaii, a place with a large Japanese population where sushi (and sashimi) had long been available. US travel pieces and advertisements promoted Hawaii's diverse and exotic culinary scene, which included Japanese food of various kinds. However, such developments appear to have been largely independent of those on the mainland, where the broader establishment of sushi originated in metropolitan regions. Nevertheless the discursive place of Hawaii as "somewhere to eat sushi" may well have been important in the food's US establishment, a point which would certainly merit further investigation.
6. This distinction does not encompass all possible varieties of restaurants selling ethnic cuisine. It simply indicates the general orientation of a restaurant, in which efforts to mark ethnic distinctiveness are made. As Zelinsky (54) explains, "a Mexican café in an all-Mexican section of San Antonio, Texas would not qualify [as an 'ethnic' rather than 'indigenous' restaurant] unless it went to the trouble of advertising its menu to attract persons from afar; but a restaurant offering Mexican specialties in Edmonton, Alberta would qualify almost automatically."
7. This section also draws upon newspaper sources.

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