

Nobu and After: Westernized Japanese Food and Globalization¹

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Abstract

In my paper, focusing on the case of Japanese Chef Matsuhisa Nobuyuki (Nobu), I outline the cultural and social impacts of the worldwide popularity of Japanese food in contemporary society. In analyzing the whole phenomenon of Nobu, world city theory as proposed by geographers seems effective and insightful. World cities such as New York, London, Tokyo and Los Angeles, are usually considered in terms of their authority as economic and political centers (Friedmann, 1986; Sassen, 1991; Castells, 2002). However, the notion of world cities can also be applied to cultural issues, such as food. The food industry, supported by enormous flows of money, humans, materials, and information, has established the nodes of the networks in world cities (Taylor, Walker and Beaverstock, 2002). In this space, the currents of globalization have been shaped, influencing the foodways of the rest of the world. The popularity of Japanese food is one significant example of a food culture that has developed a global influence particularly through its presence in world cities.

The case of Nobuyuki Matsuhisa, a Japanese chef well-recognized for his success in the United States, gives us interesting insights when we think about the process, in which the global reputation of Japanese food emerged. His food is based on Japanese cuisine with accents of South and North American cooking. His practice has always been to look for some tastes that would be accepted and enjoyed among the local people wherever he has worked. In a sense, his cooking-style can be described as American food since his style has been transformed in America.

The location of his restaurants is another significant point. He opened Matsuhisa in Los Angeles in 1987, and up until now in 2008, he has been running more than 20 restaurants around the world. He has established his own network for running restaurants at the nodes of the world cities. With the Americanized flavor of his Japanese dishes, he has influenced the spread and recognition of Japanese food around the world.

The Nobu-style, based on his training as a sushi chef in Japan and developed through his personal experiences of working in various places on the American continent, can be seen as Americanized Japanese food. He has successfully established a sense of authenticity for his dishes at the nodes of world cities and contributed to the worldwide popularity of Japanese food, a trend which can be described as the globalization of Japanese culinary culture.

1. This paper is based on my master's thesis. I updated information and adopted some new approaches.

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URL: <http://icc fla.sophia.ac.jp/global%20food%20papers/html/imai.html>

Introduction

The rising popularity of Japanese food over the world, especially since the 1970s, has been remarkable, and more recently the case of chef Nobuyuki Matsuhisa stands out as an example of Japan's continuing culinary influence. Nobuyuki Matsuhisa is famous worldwide in very specific ways, and has been immensely successful in presenting his new-style Japanese cuisine. He runs his restaurant business through several branches, mainly in the major cities of the world such as New York, London, Tokyo, and Los Angeles. In this paper, I will explore the cultural and social elements of the worldwide popularity of Chef Matsuhisa with a focus on the geographical perspective, or globalization of Japanese cuisine. Overall, I want to analyze Chef Matsuhisa as an individual of influence in what might be categorized as the new Japanese food rather than just reveal his story in the context of the recent boom of Japanese food taking place in the world.

I argue that Nobu's case is particularly significant in the context of the popularity of Japanese cuisine for two main reasons: first, his approach to cooking, "Nobu-style" is based on both his training as a sushi chef in Japan and his wide experience in various locations in South and North America, the resulting influences of which characterize his cuisine as indeed a form of Americanized Japanese food. Second, the locations of his restaurants in major cities in the United States and elsewhere around the world deserve attention. His main Nobu restaurants exist in major world cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, London, and Tokyo. These world cities exist as nodes in a global space of flow and interaction between people, materials, and information. Nobu has established his own culinary network at these world city nodes, and it is in relation to this global world-city geography that he has created a sense of authenticity for his dishes.

Nobu's cooking style is very different from those discussed in many case studies of ethnic foods, such as Donna Gabaccia's studies of food culture aimed at exploring the relationship between the ethnicity and the food culture of particular ethnic groups in the United States (Gabaccia 1998; Brown and Mussell 1985; Kraut 1979; Lockwood 1991). Accordingly, in order to explore his specific case, it is necessary to adopt a different perspective, especially in terms of authenticity. I would like to outline his case using two key concepts: first, world city networks and second, authenticity.

When we think of his case in the context of globalization, which is often understood as a large-scale process that eventually has a top-down impact on individuals and localities, the case of Nobu and his establishment reveals a personality-centered

culinary network that shows how globalization can also emerge simultaneously in a complementary bottom-up direction. Further, in the context of authenticity, in dealing with Nobu's foods, we are dealing with an agent-based authenticity, in which the agents (including their activities and materials) are individuals rather than local or place-based authenticities. With the familiar, Americanized, flavor of his Japanese dishes and spread of his network, he has contributed to the diffusion and recognition of Japanese food around the world, a trend which can be described as a specific case of the globalization of Japanese culinary culture.

Who is Nobu?

Why is Nobu so unique and interesting? We can find some clues in his first cookbook, *Nobu: The Cookbook*, which begins with a detailed biography. Also his websites introduce his interesting personal story.² According to these sources, Nobuyuki Matsuhisa, commonly known as "Nobu," was born in 1949 and grew up in Saitama, Japan. After finishing high school, he was trained as a sushi chef in Matsuei Sushi in Shinjuku, Tokyo. While an apprentice, he always had the idea in his mind that he would work in foreign countries at some point, an idea inspired by his father's well-travelled life. After completing his seven years of training in 1973, he grabbed the chance to work as a sushi chef in Lima, Peru and then worked in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The experience of working in South America for three years was crucial to his later success as a chef in the United States in many ways. Things did not go well initially, however, because his very first restaurant in Anchorage, Alaska burned down, and so he had to start all over again. Finally in 1987, after many years of struggle he opened his Matsuhisa restaurant in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles and eventually achieved enormous success.

It was this restaurant that provided the base for his subsequent worldwide expansion. Gradually, the restaurant started to attract a clientele of Hollywood movie stars who became regular customers, and this connection with celebrities was to become a very important key to his later success. When Hollywood actor Robert De Niro visited the restaurant and tried Nobu's cooking he became a committed fan, suggesting to Nobu that together they start a restaurant business in New York. Though it took a while for Nobu to accept his offer, they eventually opened Nobu New York in the Tribeca district in 1994, and thereafter De Niro continued to be his business partner in the opening of other Nobu restaurants. Eventually the business expanded overseas with such restaurants as Nobu London, which opened in 1997, and Nobu Tokyo, which opened in 1998. Nobu gradually expanded his business to the point where, as of March 2009, he is running more than twenty restaurants

2. For instance, see, <http://www.nobumatsuhisa.com/> (accessed Mar. 31, 2009).

around the world (see Figure 1).³ He manages twelve branches across North America and other restaurants in major cities of the world, such as in Milan, Hong Kong, and Melbourne, and restaurants on Mikonos Island in Greece and in the Bahamas. In addition, Nobu has received many awards and has been recognized in many popularity votes (Matsuhisa 2004a, 252).⁴ As we can see from these examples, he is much admired among the media and people in general, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom.



Figure1: The locations of Nobu's restaurants as of March, 2009. This illustration was modified by the author from the website with permission, <http://www.noburestaurants.com/> (accessed March 31, 2009)

3. The twenty two restaurants are, in order, Matsuhisa (Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, 1987), Nobu New York (Tribeca, New York, 1994), Nobu London (Hotel Metropolitan, 1997), Matsuhisa Aspen (Aspen, Colorado, 1998), Nobu Next Door (Tribeca, New York, 1998), Nobu Tokyo (Aoyama, 1998 and moved to Toranomon in 2007), Nobu Las Vegas (The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, 1999), Nobu Malibu (Malibu Beach, 1999), Nobu Milano (Armani, 2000), Nobu Miami (South Beach, 2001), Matsuhisa Mikonos (Mikonos Island, Greece, 2005), Nobu Dallas (Crescent Court, 2005), Nobu Fifty Seven (57th Street, New York, 2005), Nobu Berkeley St (London, 2005), Nobu Atlantis (Paradise Island Bahamas, 2006), Nobu Intercontinental Hong Kong (Hong Kong, 2006), Nobu Waikiki (Honolulu, Hawaii, 2007), Nobu Melbourne (Australia, 2007), Nobu San Diego (California, 2007), Nobu Los Angeles (West Hollywood, 2008), Nobu Atlantis (Palm Jumeirah Dubai, UAE, 2008) and Matsuhisa Athens (Greece, 2009). Nobu Paris opened in 2001 but closed in 2003. Ubon by Nobu (Canary Wharf, London, 2000) has closed as well. The difference between the restaurant names, Matsuhisa and Nobu, is that the Matsuhisa restaurants are wholly owned by himself.

4. In 1998, the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* included him as one of Southern California's rising stars among the chefs in America. In 1993, the *New York Times* chose Matsuhisa as one of the Top 10 restaurant destinations of the world, which was before Nobu opened his first restaurant in New York in 1994. Up to the present he has kept his position as one of the most popular chefs in the United States according to a national restaurant survey in the *Zagat Survey* magazine, which is equivalent to the influential French gourmet magazine, *Michelin*. He was also selected as one of the 10 best chefs in America by *Food and Wine* magazine; for more information about his awards and nominations, refer to the Myriad Restaurant Group's web site. <http://www.myriadrestaurantgroup.com/Restaurants/nobu/Nobu%20Main.htm>.

Along with his work as a chef, Nobu has written several cookbooks, beginning in 2001 with his publication, *Nobu: The Cookbook*, which was then translated from English to Japanese and released in 2003. So far, this work can be called his lifetime masterpiece as a Japanese chef, which includes his biography along with his original and very popular recipes served in his restaurants. His cooking style is, so to speak, *nouveau* Japanese cuisine, which he defines as “Nobu-style.” In his own words, this is a style “firmly based on Japanese cooking—fundamentally sushi—but with North and South American influences.” He also explains, “My intention has always been to draw on the very best of Japanese cooking in my own individual style.” Therefore Nobu-style, he concludes, is “all about bringing out the best in the freshest seafood and drawing out the natural sweetness and textures of vegetables” (Matsuhisa 2001, 10). According to the publisher, this book has received high honors from readers ranging from amateur audiences to professional chefs, and more than 80 thousand copies have been sold worldwide, not only in America and Britain, but also in the Netherlands and Korea.⁵ Thanks to this cookbook, he and his dishes have drawn even more attention, not only from people who have been to his restaurants, but also from people around the world who know about his book.⁶

Following this publication, another cookbook, entitled *Nobu* (in Japanese) was released in 2004 along with an English version, entitled *Nobu Now*. Then came the idea of co-authoring a Japanese book on Japanese-style finger food from the kitchen of Nobu Tokyo, with the head chefs at his various restaurants, which was published in 2006. This was followed by *Nobu West* from the Nobu London restaurant in 2006, and which *Nobu Miami: The Party Cookbook* was published in 2008.

How might we sum up the whole phenomenon of this successful chef and businessman? What kind of perspective or framework would be effective in his case? Obviously, we would need to consider Nobu in the context of changes in perceptions of Japan and Japanese culture from the beginning of the migration at the end of 19th century, to the period of the Second World War, and to the present. With the rise of Japan’s economic power after WWII, Nobu’s case could be seen as one example of the rising worldwide popularity of Japanese food, associated with the spread of other elements of Japanese popular culture, such as electric devices and appliances, movies and cartoons, and fashion (Cwiertka 2001). Another important factor would be the healthy image of Japanese food, especially sushi, that has developed among Americans (Koyama and Ishige 1985). Yet, it is clear that in Nobu’s case there are geographical factors that contribute to his uniqueness. His cooking

5. I referred to the editorial reviews on the web site, Amazon.co.jp (accessed on Aug. 26, 2004). Updated information was left out when accessed 15 Jan, 2009.

6. According to the site mentioned in note 5 above, this cookbook was nominated for Best Food Photography by the James Beard Foundation in 2002.

style is very creative and full of novelty based on his experiences in countries where he has worked. Also, the way of running his restaurants and his culinary works of art deserve particular attention, not only because his worldwide success tells us a great deal about the diverse food cultures we enjoy today, but also because it can open up new approaches to the complex interactive processes of globalization. Therefore, I would like to analyze the Nobu phenomenon by looking at his life as a chef, his enthusiasm towards cooking, and the philosophy in his work, while exploring the characteristics of his restaurants and his cookbooks.

Nobu restaurants and their location in world cities

Focusing on the locations of Nobu's restaurants, we find his branches primarily in the kinds of large cities that are often described as "world cities," such as Los Angeles, New York, London, Tokyo, Milan, and Miami. In this section, I would like to think about the location of Nobu's restaurants from geographical perspectives. In fact, while there has been a lot of research on world cities, these studies tend to emphasize the economic and political power or influences that world cities have on the rest of the world. It is true that many of these studies mention in passing that there are also cultural phenomena associated with world city status; however there have been relatively few studies, so far, concentrating on the cultural impact of globalization and world cities (King 1995). Nonetheless, the notion of world cities can also be applied productively to cultural issues, such as food. The food industry, supported by enormous flows of money, human output, information, and materials such as food items, has established networks with world cities as centers of distribution—in other words, as the nodes of the networks. Chef Matsuhisa's culinary artworks are worth studying as a representative study of the cultural impact of globalization and world cities, because his method of entrepreneurship shows how his food networks function throughout the world. He has created a kind of a network with key world cities functioning as the nodes of the network, in order to maintain his business as a constant flow of food ingredients, people (including staff and customers), and information (i.e., flavors and cooking methods). I would like to look at the flows in more detail later.

The world city theory has been a topic of discussion among geographers and economists since the publication of John Friedmann's article, "The World City Hypothesis" (Friedmann 1986). Saskia Sassen, focusing on three major global cities, New York, London and Tokyo, describes these three metropolitan cities as the centers of command of the world economy, which together control the structure of whole global societies, and which function as the financial market-places for the buying and selling of securities and as the places offering financial and producer service

industries (Sassen 1991).⁷ The common characteristics of world cities are their scale, the density of their populations, their function as centers of finance and as information or distribution systems for the nation or the world, as well as the fact that they act as sites for the emergence of a “new social aesthetic in everyday living” (ibid., 335).

At the same time, cities cannot be simply defined as fixed places, especially when we think about their characteristic openness from a “relational perspective” (Pryke 1999, 322).⁸ A city is an intangible system and it is difficult to draw lines showing where it starts and ends, because cities are “caught in so many relational webs of one sort or another,” and are “subject to so many changing flows and influences” (Amin and Graham 1999, 35). Manuel Castells extends this argument to world cities, discussing the notion of network spaces. It is important to note that he sees the global city not as a place but as a process. Moreover, according to Castells’ definition, space is “the material support of time-sharing social practices.” Therefore, the space of flows is “the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows” (2000, 411-2).⁹ His network analysis of the world city system suggests a new path in understanding the complicated structures of the world economy between cities based on Sassen’s idea of three major cities as centers for “coordination and control” (in Smith and Timberlake 1995). In a similar way, a number of geographers have constructed a typology of inter-city linkages based upon the form (human, material, and information) and function (economic, political, cultural and social) of flows (Taylor 2000).¹⁰

Taking up the notion of a space of flows, network linkages and globalization, some research has focused on the role of world cities as the distribution centers of the food industry, looking at the circulation of food items and so on. Of course the cultural practice of dining out at restaurants also happens in world cities. Geographers David Bell and Gill Valentine attempt to approach food events in terms of consumption, adopting the geographical spatial scales, body-home-community-city-region-nation-global, to explore the social and cultural theory of eating and food (1997). Particularly in the case of the food industry, information (food culture and techniques), goods (food items and ingredients) and people (cooks and customers) are moving around the networks through the nodes of the world cities on our globe today. The topics of those studies cover not only such brands as Coca-Cola or McDonald’s, but also the

7. She argues that the characteristics of global cities can be seen in these three cities; however different or however similar they are mostly in terms of economic system and structures.

8. Pryke mentions that cities are open systems and “are collections of processes that are formed and reformed through a host of interconnections, which is, after all, a direct reflection of their openness.”

9. The original text is written in bold type by Castells.

10. There is a study group called “the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) Research Network,” whose purpose is to explore the external relations of world cities (centered at Loughborough University).

wider scenes of human food culture in the context of globalization and networks (Ritzer 1993; Watson 1997; Wagnleiter 1994). For example, Sharon Zukin has conducted an empirical study of the restaurant workforce in New York City viewing the restaurant as a localized site of transnational economic and cultural flows with a focus on the structures of both employees and clientele groups (1992). Theodore Bestor has conducted elaborate research on how the fishing industry has developed, with Tsukiji (Tokyo) at its center. He focuses on blue fin tuna and its distribution system and related networks as a case study of globalization (2000; 2004). Ian Cook and Philip Crang discuss culinary globalization through case studies of Japanese food in the UK, particularly in relation to the concepts of commodity and authentication, and in terms of interaction between food providers and consumers (2001).

In discussing how world city theory works in terms of Matsuhisa Nobuyuki's culinary practices, I would first like to show the flows of the products and ingredients that are used in Nobu's restaurants and the places from where those materials come. To begin with, his restaurants obtain rock shrimp, soft-shell crabs, and Kumamoto oysters from the U.S. Pacific coast, and snow crab and king crab from Alaska.¹¹ Tiger prawns come from Australia and Thailand. Kuruma shrimp, sea urchin and octopus are from Japan, and black cod and Chilean sea bass are from Chile (Matsuhisa 2003, 68).¹² These are very important items that distinguish the high quality of Nobu's dishes.¹³ We can assume that a variety of import-transport networks exist to maintain the high quality of Nobu's food, which can change, depending on the season and other situations. These networks could be seen as a space of flows, involving the constant movement of food items. There are also other important flow factors that establish his network including information and human resources, which I will discuss in the next section.

11. According to Chef Kaneko in an interview by the author, Oct.8, 2004, the sources of Kumamoto oysters are in Japan; they are cultivated in a farm off the coast of Washington state. The crabs are the core ingredients in Nobu's popular dishes, such as soft-shell crab roll (Matsuhisa 2001, 160-1).

12. Nobu mentions octopus only in his Japanese-translation cookbook in the sense that since it is very difficult to purchase raw octopus so he imports fresh from Hokkaido, Japan to serve in Los Angeles and New York. High-quality and expensive ingredients such as shark's fins must be imported from China; foie gras and truffles from France; caviar from Iran. Chef Kaneko, who works at Nobu New York, mentioned that freshwater eels and red snappers are also imported from Japan to New York. This and similar information on the sources of ingredients was acquired through personal inquiries at Nobu's restaurants and with the staff.

13. As for alcohol, Nobu exclusively imports sake from one company, Hokusetsu in Sado Island (Niigata prefecture). Now he even puts his original labels on the bottles served in the restaurants.

Nobu-style and its construction

Because Chef Nobuyuki Matsuhisa distinguishes his own cooking style as “Nobu-style,” I would like to take a look at his technique more in detail, taking some examples from his cookbook. His new style Japanese food is based on the traditional Japanese food customs that he grew up with and to which he was apprenticed. At the same time, however, he uses a variety of spices, sauces and ingredients learned from his

working experiences in Latin America in association with western ways of cooking he came to accept while working in the U.S. and Europe. When considering the recipes and dishes Nobu has adopted in terms of flavors, ingredients, and cooking methods, the main influence seems to be primarily from Peru where he spent about two and a half years. He uses many ingredients, spices and herbs adapted from local, homemade cooking methods that he learned while working there. For example, he uses several flavors of chili, lemon, and cilantro, all of which appear in his signature dishes, such as Ceviche, Anticucho, and Tiradito.¹⁴ Ceviche is popular in Latin America and somewhat similar to Japanese *sashimi*, using fresh fish mixed with a spicy-sour sauce made of cilantro, onion and lemon juice. He also introduces this dish to readers as his favorite dish among the many that he discovered in Peru (Mastuhisa 2001, 118; Figure 2).



Figure 2: Seafood Ceviche, Nobu-style.
Photographed by Fumihiko Watanabe. *Nobu: The Cookbook*, 2001, 119.

Additionally, he uses European flavors as an accent to make Nobu-style even more distinctive, particularly olive oil, grape seed oil, and balsamic vinegar. He has also created new forms of dishes such as squid pasta and risotto that originated in

14. Ceviche is “a typical Latin American dish believed to have originated in Peru” (Matsuhisa 2001, 118-9). Anticucho is “charcoal-grilled beef heart on a skewer,” after “being marinated in a red sauce and basted with oil during grilling, the meat is slathered with a yellow sauce and eaten with a salsa of choice,” (ibid., 79). Tiradito “differs from Ceviche in that it contains no onions. In the original South American dish, cut fish (*tirar* in Spanish) is “thrown’ into a bowl and mixed with ceviche seasonings” (ibid., 120).



Figure 3: New-style Sashimi.
Photographed by Fumihiko Watanabe.
Nobu: The Cookbook, 2001, 117.

Italy¹⁵ and uses foie gras and truffles as French chefs do.¹⁶ As for desserts, he has employed special chefs since the opening of his first restaurants and these desserts are very westernized. Some examples include crèmes brûlées, parfait and ice cream, always accompanied, however, by a Japanese flavor or accent.¹⁷

And of course, he has also been influenced by American culinary preferences. He uses avocado as a symbol of California in all his sushi rolls,¹⁸ and he serves Kobe beef, lobsters, and oysters, all of which are familiar to, and popular among, Americans.¹⁹ In addition to these ingredients, he is always on the lookout for what dishes and flavors would be most acceptable to his American customers through continuous interactions with them. Here is an example—an anecdote extracted from his first cookbook—of how a “Nobu-style” dish was constructed:

One day, a Matsuhisa regular refused some white fish sashimi because she couldn't eat raw fish. I wanted to somehow salvage the dish that I'd spent time slicing and arranging. A pan of heated olive oil in the kitchen inspired me. I drizzled the fish with ponzu [a Japanese flavoring sauce] and spooned over hot oil to cook it partially. I begged my customer to give it another try: She ended up eating every scrap of my first serving of New Style Sashimi. (Matsuhisa 2001, 116)

This story is illustrated by an impressive photo that catches the moment of dropping hot olive oil over slices of raw fish and cooking it about half way (Ibid., 117, Figure 3). Other dishes to which this method has been applied include such seafood items as salmon, scallops and raw octopus, as well as Kobe beef and asparagus or tofu for vegetarians. Thus the Nobu-style use of hot oil is characteristic of many of the signature dishes at Nobu restaurants.

15. As for pasta, refer to *ibid.*, 82-3; Soba-soba-soba Risotto is made of buckwheat seeds and Soba Risotto with blowfish, another example of risotto dishes that appear in his cookbook (*ibid.*, 154-5).

16. As for foie gras, refer to the dish, “Freshwater Eel and Foie Gras,” *ibid.*, 138-9; As for the dishes with truffles, see, for example, “Baby Octopus with Truffles and Yuzu Juice” (*ibid.*, 72-3); “Chilean Sea Bass and Truffles with Yuzu”; “Soy Butter Sauce” (*ibid.*, 110-1); “Ginger and Truffle Brûlée” (*ibid.*, 178); “Scallop Filo with Truffle Yuzu Sauce” (*ibid.*, 33-4); and “Steamed Abalone with Mustard Sumiso Sauce and Junsai” (*ibid.*, 28-9).

17. Refer to his dessert recipes (*ibid.*, 177-80).

18. See his recipes for sushi rolls, “Soft Shell Crab Roll”; “House Roll”; “Salmon Skin Roll”; “Sea Eel Dragon Roll”; and sushi (*ibid.*, 158-65).

19. “Oysters with Nobu’s Three Salsas” (Matsuhisa 2003, 38-39); “Spiny Lobster Soup” (*ibid.*, 58-9); “Foie Gras and Kobe Beef Donburi” (*ibid.*, 176-77).

This example is indicative of the highly favorable attitude people have towards the new and exotic Nobu dishes. Given the historical background that until after the Second World War Americans generally had negative images of Japanese people (for example, the Japanese were seen as “barbarians who eat raw fish”), this is an interesting outcome (Koyama and Ishige 1985, 182). Even today, foreigners trying Japanese food for the first time often find the consumption of raw fish, *sashimi* or sushi a special challenge in becoming familiar with Japanese food culture. Understanding this uneasiness towards Japanese food, Nobu effectively recalls the episode in which he changed the seemingly inedible raw fish into a delicious, half-cooked dish, by dripping the “magical” hot olive oil over it, a technique adopted through his work experience in America and which actually depends on ingredients familiar to Americans.

Nobu also noticed that many Americans like the combination of soy sauce and *wasabi*, so he made new varieties of sauce, such as Wasabi Pepper Sauce.²⁰ In these ways, his recipes accentuate his novelty and his attempt to transform the traditions of Japanese cuisine into a novel and creative “Nobu-style.” In short, Nobu has introduced a new way of Japanese cuisine to American people, which they have accepted as a trendy and sophisticated new style of Japanese cuisine. Nobu intentionally put the story of the invention of New Style Sashimi into his book in order to show that his exclusive and unique style of Japanese food, based on Japanese traditions but adopting Latin American and Western flavors at the same time, is a cuisine developed through interactions with his local customers. Putting it another way, his Japanese food can be described as a hybridized, or Westernized, Japanese food. Or, to reverse the emphasis, one might describe his food as Americanized-Japanese food, which combines the influences of both Latin and North American culinary culture.

Information about Nobu’s food-style and techniques continually circulates within his networks through Nobu and his staff. He trained all the employees of his first three restaurants (Matsuhisa, Nobu New York, and Nobu London) personally, and they eventually learned his methods of serving his customers as well as his philosophy by working and interacting with Nobu himself.²¹ This could be analyzed as the dissemination of an understanding of his goals among his employees, made in the process of duplicating Nobu. Taking as a whole the influences of flavor and ingredients imported from all over the world, along with his constantly moving lifestyle (he travels on a weekly basis to check his restaurants scattered around

20. Other kinds of sauce like Spicy Lemon Dressing and Matsuhisa Dressing are made with the similar ideas so as to be preferable among Americans. As for sauce, refer to the section of “Nobu Sauces and Basics” (Matsuhisa 2001, 168-74).

21. Interview by author. Oct.15, 2004.

the world), we can see how Nobu's networks were constructed and continue to be maintained. This involves the flow of food items, his staff, and Nobu himself. This construction of networks has been a determining factor in Nobu's worldwide success.

The authenticity of Nobu's food

So far, the focus of this paper has been on presenting Nobu-style as an Americanized or hybridized Japanese food in the context of the network of his restaurant business in major world cities. This section moves on to engage with the important issue of authenticity as it applies to Nobu-style food. In general, the authenticity of ethnic foods seems to be somehow associated with a strong connection to an original place or region, where the ethnic food is supposed to be authentic. Geographers Ian Cook, Philip Crang, and Mark Thorpe mention in regard to the linking of authenticity and place in ethnic food that "in short, most [producers] claim that the right combination of key inputs—factory equipment, manufacturing techniques, ingredients, recipes and/or personnel—have been imported from the right parts of the world" (2000, 122). Lisa Heldke emphasizes the importance of how exotic the food seems for people enjoying eating ethnic food, in the sense of trying something different and seeking for novelty (2003, 17-22). That is, ethnic foods are supposed to have their origins in different regions of the world, use different ingredients, and be prepared by different people, all of which strengthens the sense of authenticity. In acknowledging that there are many kinds of ethnic foods, we show a strong feeling or consensus about the definition of our mainstream food, located in our 'home' place; for instance, while Japanese food in Japan is not ethnic, in America it falls into the category of ethnic food. In fact, the process of figuring out the authenticity of other food cultures could be seen as a process similar to that by which we recognize the identity of others and also our own. What we eat, how we eat, and how we feel about food reminds us of how we perceive ourselves in relation to others (Mintz 1986). At the same time, "a group's eating habits is one clue to which side of the boundary the strangers should be placed" (Kalčík 1984, 47).

However, Nobu's cooking style, though based on his native knowledge of Japanese cooking, has been constructed through his experiences outside of Japan in response to the cooking and dietary customs and influences of North and South America (as well as his familiarity with other ethnic foods such as Italian, French and Chinese, encountered through his work and travels). Nobu himself described his way of cooking in an interview in this way: "We have to make [our food] close to local food, not completely separated," indicating that he tries to use local ingredients as the local people do and to give his customers the feeling of comfort and of being at

home in each different location.²² Therefore, his food is served in different ways depending upon the location, even though all of the dishes—with variations—are considered as Nobu food with certain characteristics in common. In this sense, the notion of location in relation to the authenticity of Nobu's food cannot be identified as originating from a certain place; rather it is unclear or unfixed, as if the origins of authenticity are floating within his worldwide food network. For instance, Nobu's signature sole dish is served differently in London partly because he prepares it with the local Dover sole (Matsuhisa 2000, 123). Moreover, what makes it "Nobu food" is not just that he uses the same ingredients or follows the same recipes, but that he uses the fresh ingredients available locally. In fact, we can find many dishes using tropical ingredients in the Miami cookbook (Matsuhisa and Buckley 2008). As mentioned, Nobu himself travels all around the world throughout the year to visit his restaurants and to check regularly on the management of each restaurant, thus maintaining the taste and quality of his foods. His travels also provide opportunities to look for new tastes to add to the Nobu-style. Accordingly, Nobu's cuisine does not have a particular local origin, and in a sense, Nobu himself is always unlocated.

I would surmise that Nobu's success and characteristics cannot be interpreted in the context of the usual ethnic food categories. Rather, I would like to conclude with the suggestion that Nobu's continual movement within the network of his branch restaurants, as well as his creation of a Nobu-style, hybridized Japanese food, are the distinctive factors that affirm his authenticity. Regardless of its location there is a special quality to his cuisine that enables customers to recognize the restaurant as "Nobu." Most of his restaurants are located in world cities and those cities function as the nodes of his networks. Although the restaurants are geographically separated, each one of the branches is connected to all of the others by the flow of people (his staff and Nobu himself), materials (food items), and information (his theory, philosophy about work, and flavors). His authenticity also depends on layers of other social networks made up of a myriad of customers, including celebrities and business people, and readers of his books, all of whom travel and move within the network, as well. This kind of authenticity can be interpreted as deriving from the aura of Nobu's figure and performance.²³ Nobu-style, with its key notion of not being located in one place, is effective in maintaining his authenticity worldwide within a single network, because it has the potential to expand and add newer factors as Nobu constantly travels around the world and looks for something different.

22. See the article published in 1999, "Asian Sensation." *Tycoon Magazine*, Premier Issue.

23. This idea was inspired by Professor Krishnendu Ray at the Sophia University Symposium on February 21-22, 2009. As for the concept of the aura, see Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (2001), <http://www-dev.dxarts.washington.edu/coupe/wk1/benjamin.pdf> (accessed on Apr. 20, 2009), and Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge, 2006).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the success of Chef Nobuyuki Matsuhisa, especially in the United States, gives us some interesting and very positive insights about the emergence of Japanese food. His practice has always been to look for some tastes that would be accepted and enjoyed among local people wherever he has worked. His food creations are based essentially on Japanese cuisine, accented by the flavors, ingredients, and cooking customs of South and North America acquired through his experiences of working in these countries. In this sense, his cooking-style can be described as Americanized Japanese food, since his discipline is Japanese while his style is a cross-section of North and South American influences.

Based on his creation of Nobu-style, hybridized Japanese food, Nobu has developed and established a sense of authenticity for his dishes which in turn has contributed significantly and in very particular ways to the worldwide popularity of Japanese food. In fact, Nobu-style food can be understood as one distinctive form of the globalization of Japanese culinary culture, mediated through the experiences and business strategies of a single chef. Although this paper's focus has not been on culinary globalization as such, my intention has been to show a detailed case study of Nobu's culinary phenomenon. His case clearly has much to reveal about the cultural process of the globalization of Japanese food.²⁴ In fact, one of Nobu's recent anecdotes suggests an additional perspective on this matter of dissemination. In his latest cookbook, *Nobu Miami: The Party Cookbook*, Nobu recalls coming across some of his signature dishes, such as Soft Shell Crab Roll, and Yellowtail Sashimi with Jalapeño in a Cape Town, South Africa restaurant, commenting that "my first encounter with Nobu cuisine overseas came as a great surprise" (2008, 9). It is interesting that he refers to Cape Town as "overseas" in relation to other places where he already has been or where he owned restaurants at that time. Cape Town existed outside his own network of restaurants; it was somewhere he had never been before and a place where he did not expect to find any influences on, or connections with, the culinary network he had developed.²⁵ Nonetheless, when he discovered "Nobu-style" cuisine outside his empire, he felt honored rather than upset at being copied, because it was a testament to his worldwide influence on other chefs and on the restaurant business in general.

24. As for the process of cultural globalization, some insightful researches have been conducted, for instance, see Roland Robertson's "Social Theory, Cultural Relativity and the Problems of Globality," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-system*, ed. Anthony D. King, 69-90 (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York, 1991); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); and Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996).

25. In fact, on April 3, 2009, a new Nobu branch opened in Cape Town.

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