

Globalization, the Expansion of World Cuisine, and the Emergence of Cultural Influences

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Introduction

Globalization is the intensification of connections across distance through trade, migration, technology, empire, media, and shared cultural awareness. Food makes this process visible because ingredients, cooking techniques, restaurant formats, and ideas about taste constantly move between societies. The original essay correctly uses Manfred Steger's theory of globalization, identifies East Asia as a major influence on world cuisine, and uses sushi as an example of cultural circulation. It also includes inaccurate claims, such as describing tofu as the origin of cheese and suggesting that successful sushi must retain one unchanged presentation. A stronger analysis shows that cuisines are never sealed national objects. They develop through exchange, coercion, adaptation, environmental limits, migration, and commercial power. Globalization can spread culinary knowledge and increase choice, but it can also standardize diets, exploit labor, weaken food security, and obscure the communities that created particular foods (Steger).

Globalization as a Historical Process

Steger describes globalization as the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world space and time. It is not limited to the internet age. Prehistoric migration moved seeds, animals, and food knowledge; ancient trade routes carried spices, grain, tea, fruits, and preservation methods; empires reorganized production; and modern transport accelerated exchange. What distinguishes contemporary globalization is the speed, scale, and regularity of these connections. A crop failure, shipping disruption, trend, or health concern in one region can influence food prices and menus across the world.

Early Agriculture and East Asia

East Asia was one of several major centers of agricultural development. Rice, millet, soybeans, pigs, and other resources supported permanent settlements and increasingly complex societies. Agricultural surplus allowed some people to specialize in crafts, trade, administration, and food preparation. These developments did not occur through one simple path, and they were not isolated from neighboring regions. Migration and exchange spread crops and techniques across ecological

zones. The early movement of food illustrates a basic principle of globalization: local systems develop through contact while adapting imported resources to local conditions.

Trade Routes and Culinary Exchange

Premodern trade connected East Asia with Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Merchants moved spices, tea, rice varieties, fruits, ceramics, and technologies. Foods traveled with religious practices, medical theories, social status, and methods of preparation. A product could begin as a luxury and later become a daily staple. Trade therefore changed meaning as well as supply. It also depended on political protection, taxation, transport labor, and unequal access to markets.

The Columbian Exchange

After sustained contact between the Americas and Afro-Eurasia, crops moved across oceans on an unprecedented scale. Chilies, sweet potatoes, maize, potatoes, tomatoes, peanuts, and cacao transformed cuisines far from their American origins. Chilies became central to Chinese, Korean, Indian, and Southeast Asian cooking, even though they arrived after the fifteenth century. Sweet potatoes supported cultivation in parts of China where rice was difficult to grow. These examples show that foods now considered traditional may be products of earlier globalization rather than unchanged ancient inheritance.

Empire, Labour, and Food Commodities

Culinary globalization was not always voluntary or beneficial. Colonial empires reorganized land and labor around sugar, tea, coffee, spices, and other commodities. Enslaved and indentured workers produced goods consumed by distant populations. Plantation agriculture sometimes weakened local food security by prioritizing exports. The pleasure associated with tea or sugar therefore has a history connected with coercion and commercial power. Cultural exchange should be studied together with the labor systems that made global products affordable.

East Asian Contributions to World Cuisine

East Asian food traditions contributed rice cultivation, tea culture, soy foods, fermentation, noodles, steaming, stir-frying, pickling, and distinctive ideas about seasonality and balance. These contributions are diverse rather than one unified “Asian cuisine.” Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Mongolian, and other traditions reflect different climates, histories, religions, and social structures. Their worldwide influence expanded through migration, restaurants, cookbooks, tourism, industrial food production, and digital media. Recognizing influence should not erase regional

difference or treat one country as the sole origin of techniques found across several cultures.

Rice, Tea, and Soy

Rice is both a crop and a cultural system involving water management, labor, land, ritual, and trade. Tea originated in East Asia and became a global beverage through maritime commerce, colonial production, taxation, and changing social customs. Soybeans support tofu, soy sauce, miso, and other fermented foods. Tofu is sometimes called bean curd, but it is not evidence that cheese-making originated from soy. Modern globalization has also turned soy into a major industrial crop used largely for oil and animal feed, creating environmental effects far beyond its traditional culinary role.

Cooking Techniques as Mobile Knowledge

Techniques move as readily as ingredients. Stir-frying uses high heat, rapid movement, small pieces, and careful preparation. Steaming supports many forms of bread, dumplings, vegetables, fish, and meat. When these techniques enter new settings, cooks adapt them to local equipment, fuel, ingredients, and taste. A technique is not automatically healthy or authentic; nutritional value depends on the complete dish, and authenticity depends on context. Culinary knowledge survives because people reinterpret it rather than reproducing it mechanically (Wilk).

Migration and Diaspora

Migrants are central agents of food globalization. Restaurants, family kitchens, markets, and community events preserve memory while adapting to new environments. Ingredients may be unavailable, customers may prefer different flavors, and business survival may require menu changes. Chinese American, Japanese Brazilian, Korean Mexican, and other hybrid cuisines record histories of migration and cultural negotiation. Such foods should not automatically be dismissed as inauthentic. They represent communities creating belonging under new economic and social conditions.

Authenticity as a Social Claim

Authenticity is often presented as exact loyalty to an original recipe, but cuisines contain regional, family, and class variation and change over time. A traditional dish may itself contain ingredients introduced through earlier trade. Authenticity can refer to honest representation, respect for technique, connection with a community, or fidelity to a particular regional style. Problems arise when companies market a stereotype as the only real version or profit from cultural forms while marginalizing the communities associated with them. Authenticity is therefore negotiated rather than scientifically fixed.

The Global Journey of Sushi

Sushi developed through several Japanese preservation and preparation traditions. Modern nigiri became prominent in Edo, while fermented sushi, pressed sushi, rolls, and hand rolls have distinct histories. Refrigeration, air transport, aquaculture, tourism, and Japanese economic influence helped sushi expand internationally. It moved from specialized restaurants into supermarkets, delivery services, luxury tasting menus, and casual dining. This transition changed ingredients, prices, presentation, and the social meaning of the meal.

American Sushi and Reverse Cultural Flow

Japanese restaurants in North America adapted sushi to local ingredients, regulations, and consumer expectations. Avocado, cooked seafood, sauces, cream cheese, and rice-outside rolls helped unfamiliar customers approach the cuisine. The California roll is a famous example. Rumi Sakamoto's discussion of American sushi in Tokyo shows that movement is not one-way. A Japanese form traveled abroad, changed, and returned to Japan as a fashionable foreign variation. This reverse flow demonstrates that origin countries also consume and reinterpret global adaptations (Sakamoto).

Global Supply Chains Behind the Plate

Sushi depends on fishing or aquaculture, refrigerated transport, rice, seaweed, packaging, restaurant labor, and food-safety systems. Tuna or salmon may pass through several countries before reaching the consumer. High demand can contribute to overfishing, environmental damage, and labor abuse. The apparent simplicity of a plate conceals a complex chain. Ethical consumption therefore requires attention to sourcing, species, worker conditions, waste, and transport as well as cultural authenticity.

Fast Food and Glocalization

Multinational restaurant chains combine standardization with local adaptation. Companies maintain recognizable brands while adding regional spices, rice dishes, religiously appropriate preparation, or locally popular flavors. This process is often called glocalization. It can respect consumer preference and create genuine hybrid innovation, but it can also use cultural symbols superficially to increase corporate reach. A global brand's local menu should therefore be evaluated through who designs it, whose food knowledge is recognized, and who receives the economic benefit.

Standardization and Hybridization

Global food companies use uniform recipes, supply specifications, service procedures, and advertising. Standardization can improve consistency and safety, but it may reduce crop diversity and displace independent businesses. At the same time, globalization produces hybridization as cooks combine ingredients and methods from different traditions. These two tendencies occur together: corporate systems become standardized while menu choices appear increasingly diverse. The result is not simple cultural sameness or unlimited freedom, but a struggle between scale and local creativity.

Cultural Exchange and Appropriation

Cultural exchange becomes ethically troubling when powerful actors take recipes, images, or names without credit, context, respect, or fair benefit. Members of an immigrant community may face discrimination for food that later becomes fashionable when sold by elite businesses. Food cannot always be owned exclusively, yet representation matters. Respectful exchange includes accurate naming, attribution, collaboration, and recognition of labor. It also avoids treating a culture as a decorative theme.

Digital Food Culture

Television, blogs, delivery platforms, and short-form video accelerate culinary circulation. A recipe can become globally recognizable before most viewers taste it. Digital media allow diaspora communities and small creators to teach techniques and correct misinformation, but algorithms often reward spectacle and simplification. Food may be judged primarily by appearance, separating it from history, nutrition, and labor. Contemporary globalization therefore concerns not only who cooks and sells food but who gets visibility and authority to explain it.

Health and Nutrition Transition

Globalization changes diets through supermarkets, processed-food industries, advertising, urbanization, and income growth. In many places, undernutrition coexists with obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Imported food is not inherently unhealthy, and traditional food is not automatically balanced. Health effects depend on affordability, processing, portion, marketing, and access to fresh alternatives. Public-health policy must address the food environment rather than blaming individuals for choices shaped by price and availability (Mintz).

Food Security and Environment

International trade can protect a region when local harvests fail, but dependence on imported staples creates exposure to price shocks, conflict, exchange rates, and export restrictions. Export crops can support farm income while reducing land available for local food. Global supply chains also affect water, emissions, packaging, deforestation, biodiversity, and waste. Local food is not automatically more sustainable because production method often matters more than distance alone. Resilient systems balance trade with crop diversity, storage, fair access, and domestic capacity.

Preserving Local Foodways

Global integration does not require local cuisines to disappear. Seed conservation, geographical indications, farmers' markets, community restaurants, language preservation, and culinary education can sustain regional knowledge. Tourism can provide income but may also stage food for outsiders. Living traditions adapt while remaining under community control. Preservation succeeds when farmers, cooks, and younger generations can earn livelihoods from their knowledge instead of being treated as museum exhibits.

Conclusion

Global cuisine reveals globalization as a multidirectional historical process. East Asian crops, ingredients, and techniques have shaped food across the world, but their circulation occurred through migration, trade, empire, technology, and unequal labor. Sushi demonstrates how a dish can leave its place of origin, change abroad, and return in hybrid form. Globalization expands culinary choice and cultural contact while creating challenges involving standardization, appropriation, worker exploitation, health, environmental damage, and food security. Local cultures neither remain pure nor disappear automatically. They borrow, resist, commercialize, and renew themselves. Food globalization is therefore best understood as the movement of ingredients, labor, and meanings through networks of power (Phillips).

Works Cited

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