

# From *Sushi* in Singapore to *Laksa* in London: Globalising Foodways and the Production of Economy and Identity

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*Food is an integral part of Singapore's heritage and culture. This can be seen in many aspects of life in the country, from the many food blogs and websites to Singapore's recent bid to inscribe hawker culture on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.*

*In this adapted extract of Professor Lily Kong's chapter in Food, Foodways and Foodscapes: Culture, Community and Consumption in Post-Colonial Singapore, Professor Kong explores the foodscapes in Singapore and the role of food in our identity. Reproduced with the kind permission of the author and publisher, the essay has been further updated to reflect subsequent changes to organisations mentioned and other developments.*

Beginning in the 1970s, the introduction of new foods and cuisines from overseas dramatically altered Singapore's culinary scene. Leung et al (2001) describe the changes that occurred around this period. Previously, Singapore's food scene consisted mainly of street foods, hawker stalls, *kopitiam*s (coffee shops) and "conventional" restaurants. However, the 1970s saw the entry of Western fast food joints into Singapore, and the movement gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s. Specialty restaurants sprang up during this period, Western fast food chains mushroomed (Leung, Ahmed, and Seshanna 2001, 51; Omar 2008) a greater range of international cuisines appeared, Japanese food gained popularity (Ng 2001, 8) and ethnic cuisines such as Thai and Indonesian became more widely available. New dining concepts and ways of serving food were also introduced. The now ubiquitous food court which offers an integrated one-stop spread of different food options was one such concept, as was the concept of fast food franchises offering customers speedy and convenient meals. Al-fresco dining caught on and Singapore's nightlife received a boost with the development of Boat Quay and Clarke Quay in 1993 which enabled restaurants, pubs and

cafes to be built by the Singapore River. By 1998, close to 40% of restaurants in Singapore served Western or "International" cuisine, while around 56% offered "Oriental" cuisine (Leung, Ahmed, and Seshanna 2001, 51–52). Since then, a growing smorgasbord of cuisines and foods from all over the world has established a presence in Singapore. This includes food from Europe, Central and Latin America, the United States, East Asia and other parts of Southeast Asia, ranging from convenience food to gourmet food served at high-end restaurants. In what follows, I elaborate in further detail on the foreign foods that have contributed to the globalisation of food in Singapore.

One key evidence of the globalisation of food in Singapore has been the expansion of Western-style fast food and international food franchises into the country. Henderson (2014) notes that the proliferation of international fast food chains and food and beverage franchises are an indication of how the food industry in Singapore is globalising. The very first fast food joint to open in Singapore was A&W in 1968, perhaps best remembered among Singaporeans for its root beer floats and curly fries. Though it subsequently closed down, A&W paved the way for other American fast food chains in Singapore. Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) was the next to enter Singapore in 1976, followed by McDonald's in 1979 (Omar 2008). Burger King also commenced operations in Singapore in 1982 and Long John Silver's in 1983. By 2008, McDonald's, KFC and Burger King had become leading players in Singapore's fast food sector (Omar 2008). Wendy's re-opened in Singapore in 2009, furthering the proliferation and popularity of typical fast food fare like burgers, French fries and milkshakes. Competition in Singapore's fast food industry is intense, which explains the closure of A&W in Singapore in 2003 and why global brands like Taco Bell have come and gone. Yet this has not deterred more recent entrants. Newer players in the Singapore market include Carl's Junior, Mos Burger and Jollibee.

In addition to global fast food conglomerates, international food franchises have also introduced non-traditional foods to Singapore. American-style pizza has become a common food in Singapore, largely due to the promotional efforts of franchises like Pizza Hut, Domino's Pizza and Canadian Pizza. Relatively smaller pizza start-ups like Sarpino's, Oishi Pizza and Pelican Pizza have entered the mix and enabled more choices for consumers. All these pizza chains usually target younger consumers who tend to be fond of Western food (Wang 2006; *Media* 2010). Similarly, global franchises like Dunkin' Donuts and Krispy Kreme from the United States have heightened the appeal of non-traditional foods like doughnuts among consumers in Singapore.

Another segment of Singapore's food and beverage industry that has witnessed the entry of global players is Western theme restaurants such as Hard Rock Cafe and Planet Hollywood. MacLaurin and MacLaurin (MacLaurin and MacLaurin 2000, 76–77) observe that the theme-restaurant industry grew rapidly in Singapore beginning in 1990. Hard Rock Cafe was the first to open in Singapore that year and was designed around a rock-and-roll theme. The food was mainly Western-style, and customers were able to purchase product merchandise and music memorabilia. Other theme restaurants like Hooters subsequently followed in 1996, and Planet Hollywood also established one of its chains in Singapore in the same year. Consumers thus became acquainted with a new and novel Western/ international restaurant concept.

Aside from Western fast foods and global franchises, European foods—particularly Italian, Spanish and French—are also among the most popular cuisines that have played a part in making Singapore a globalised food hub. Italian food and dessert can be found in the many Italian restaurants here from *trattorias* like Pasta Fresca da Salvatore and Da Paolo, to scoop-shops offering gelato. Pasta Fresca,

which was set up in Singapore in 1988, claims it was one of the pioneering restaurants to introduce fresh pasta to customers here, and that it imports its cheese fresh from Italy and continues to uphold the culinary traditions of the Italian kitchen. Italian fare like pizza, pasta and *tiramisu* is also offered by establishments like Da Paolo which began in 1989 and runs pizza bars, gourmet delis and bistro bars. Even Italian restaurant chains with an international presence chose to expand into Singapore. Jamie's Italian, founded by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and his Italian mentor Gennaro Contaldo (*The Straits Times* 2013), picked Singapore as the location of its first restaurant in Asia. Opened in 2013, it offers fresh *antipasti* and pasta, further adding to the choice and range of Italian foods that can be enjoyed in Singapore. *Gelato*, the frozen Italian-style ice cream, has also become a familiar and popular food in Singapore with numerous *gelaterias* found all over the city.

Besides Italian food, Spanish cuisine has made headway in Singapore as well. *Tapas* bars became a craze in Singapore in 2010 (*CNN Travel* 2010) and well-known favourites like *paella* can be found at Spanish restaurants here. French cuisine can also be savoured in Singapore, whether at high-end award-winning restaurants like Les Amis, or more casual eateries. An interesting concept was introduced when TFS Bistrot—formerly known as The French Stall and started by French chef Xavier Le Henaff—sought to bring affordable French food to Singapore's suburbs/heartlands by opening its eateries in *kopitiams* and food courts. Other European cuisines available in Singapore include Swiss food which, though less common, has been popularised through Marché restaurant outlets in Singapore. Marché in fact chose to establish its flagship Asia-Pacific outlet in Singapore at VivoCity (Marché 2007).

Latin and Central American foods have not quite penetrated Singapore's culinary scene as extensively as European and other cuisines, but can still be found in Singapore. Examples are Mexican and Costa Rican dishes such as *fajitas*, *quesadillas*, *salsa*, *burritos*, *tortillas* and *tacos*. These dishes are not only offered at mid-or up-market restaurants in bustling food and beverage districts like Clarke Quay and Duxton Hill, but humble hawker centres as well, such as at Golden Shoe Food Centre (closed) and Amoy Street Food Centre (*MoneySmart* 2014; *The Straits Times* 2014).

Closer to home, East Asian cuisines, like those from Japan and South Korea, as well as those from neighbouring parts of Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar, present among them some of the more popular cuisines that have spread to Singapore. Japanese food is very well-received in Singapore. *Sushi*, *ramen* (noodles), *teppanyaki* (hot-plate food) and other Japanese dishes are widely consumed in Singapore through a variety of different channels ranging from *ryotei* (formal Japanese restaurants), family restaurants, *kaiten-sushi* (sushi on a conveyor belt) restaurants, takeout *sushi* counters to fast food restaurants like Yoshinoya (Tanimura 2006; Ng 2001). The acceptance of Japanese foods by Singaporeans, however, was not immediate and occurred gradually over time. Ng (2001, 10) notes that Singaporeans' acceptance of *sushi* was initially tepid in the 1980s as locals were not accustomed to eating cold raw fish. However, *sushi* culture gained a strong following in the 1990s and early 2000s after some localisation of taste and reduction in price. Local entrepreneurs recognised the business potential in bringing Japanese *sushi* chains to Singapore, such as Singaporean businessman David Ban who opened franchises of the successful Genki Sushi in Singapore in 1994 (Matsumoto 2006, 18). Sushi Tei, which debuted in the same year, is owned by a Japanese and imports certain ingredients from Japan, while Sakae Sushi was founded

by a Singaporean and also features *kaiten-sushi*. All of them have helped to bring *sushi* to Singapore and popularised it among locals (Ng 2001, 13). Today, *sushi* can even be purchased at counters in supermarkets like Cold Storage, Giant and NTUC Fairprice. *Ryotei* and family restaurants, on the other hand, provide a more extensive menu than *sushi* outlets, with additional dishes such as *bento* (Japanese food served in a lacquered box), *tempura*, *donburi* (Japanese "rice bowl dish") and *teppanyaki*. Prices at *ryotei* are higher as they tend to use higher-quality ingredients and are located in hotels, while Japanese-style family restaurants are less expensive (Tanimura 2006, 43-44).

Korean food is another "well-travelled" cuisine that has made an impact in Singapore. Most Singaporeans have tried spicy *kimchi* (fermented cabbage), hotstone *bibimbap* (Korean "mixed rice") and *bulgogi* (barbecue beef). It is not uncommon to find Korean food stalls in food courts in Singapore, and there is a growing number of Korean restaurants specialising in Korean-style charcoal grill barbecue or offering other traditional dishes such as ginseng chicken soup or *pa jon* (Korean pancake with eggs, vegetable or meat). The first Korean restaurant in Singapore was set up by Singaporean Lim Siang Hee in 1973 and since then, the Korean food scene has continued to develop. A sort of mini "Korea town" formed in Tanjong Pagar from the cluster of Korean restaurants and Korean supermarkets there, and more Korean restaurants can be found within the Central Business District and hotels. Such development may have been aided by Singaporeans' increased interest in Korean cuisine following the Seoul Olympics in 1988 (*The Straits Times* 2005). One of the more recent trends has been the expansion of Korean barbecue chains into Singapore. Three well-known ones—Boss BarBQ, Kkongdon BBQ and Bornga—set up their first outlets in Singapore in 2012, and some have plans to open even more outlets in the country. Two more Korean BBQ restaurants also

popped up in Tanjong Pagar in the same year—Supulae and Mini Korea Bistro & Izakaya. As of 2012, there were at least 150 Korean restaurants in Singapore (*The Straits Times* 2012).

Cuisines from Singapore's Southeast Asian neighbours have also become commonplace in Singapore. Indonesian *nasi padang* (steamed rice with choice of various pre-cooked dishes) is easily found in Singapore. *Nasi padang* originated from Padang, a region in Sumatra, Indonesia, and is particularly common in the area near Masjid Sultan (or Sultan Mosque), a landmark mosque in Singapore around where immigrants set up eateries. Indonesian style *ayam goreng bumbu* (fried chicken) and *gulai kikil* (beef tendon in curry) are just some of the Indonesian foods that can be enjoyed in Singapore (*The Straits Times* 2006). Vietnamese and Laotian food have also entered and become part of Singapore's multicultural culinary market. These ethnic cuisines can be consumed at different places in various settings—from simple stalls at Joo Chiat Road, to more chic and expensive restaurants like the IndoChine chain (Carruthers 2012). Examples of Vietnamese/Laotian dishes available at such eateries are *pho bo* (Vietnamese beef noodles), Sai Kog Laotian sausages, and Laotian *laksa* (spicy noodle soup). Today, most Singaporeans are already very familiar with signature dishes of these ethnic cuisines like Vietnamese rice paper rolls and *pho*. Thai cuisine is popular in Singapore too and the Thai foodscape in Singapore is similarly varied, made up of simple eateries such as those in Thai migrant enclaves like Golden Mile Complex, mid-end restaurants like Sukothai and ThaiExpress situated in more upmarket locations like Boat Quay, Holland Village, the Esplanade or shopping centres (Chua 2003), and restaurants in still more sophisticated settings, like Patara. Though relatively lesser known, Burmese cuisine is nonetheless available in Singapore as well. Most Burmese eateries and supermarkets tend to be concentrated in Peninsula

Plaza, with some restaurants even specialising in minority ethnic cuisines of Myanmar. Examples of Burmese dishes found in Singapore are *mee shay* (rice noodles with meat sauce), *lap pat thut* (Burmese tea leaf salad) and *hsanwin makin* (Burmese semolina cake dessert) (*Makansutra* 2012).

Clearly, many different foods from all over the globe have spread to Singapore and contributed to the vibrancy of the country's foodscape, adding to its already internally diverse cuisine. As a result of the influence of these foreign cuisines, the presence of fusion food has been growing in Singapore. Lovallo (2013) writes that fusion food is “both a result and indicator of globalisation” and elaborates on various concepts of fusion food. Fusion cuisine can be viewed as a merging of cuisines or culture. Alternatively called “World Cuisine”, fusion cuisine has also been described as “a sort of culinary globalisation [sic] generally considered to be ‘post-modern’ ... [a] new international cuisine ...” (Clave and Knafou 2012; Lovallo 2013, 3). Both culinary chefs and enterprising restaurateurs have engaged in creative experimentation, mixing elements of different culinary practices, usually based on the similarity of ingredients. For example, some may look for “bridging ingredients” that appeal to the taste buds of both cultures, upon which global flavours and preparation methods can be layered to result in fusion cuisines (Ganeshram, quoted in Remizowski 2010). Fusion food not only involves a combination of different flavours, but inventive culinary techniques as well. Furthermore, it requires an understanding of the culture and history of component cuisines (Lovallo 2013, 22-24). In 1997, “New Asia Cuisine”, a form of fusion cuisine, began to develop in Singapore. New Asia Cuisine may involve combining European culinary techniques with Asian flavours, or fusing Western ingredients with Asian preparation techniques. Singaporean chefs have created interesting fusion dishes that merge local and European foods using modified Asian culinary techniques, and have

played with flavours and ingredients to deliver new tastes. Examples are *risotto* with lemongrass, and yam jelly with edamame foam which demonstrates the fusion of Chinese, Japanese and European ingredients (Chaney and Ryan 2012, 312). In an article for the *Financial Times*, Shoba Narayan similarly noted that “a new cuisine style is transforming Singapore”, led by talented Singaporean chefs like Sam Leong, Galvin Lim at Au Jardin, and Yong Bing Ngen of The Majestic. With their vision and imagination, cuisines are being reinvented and redefined. Chef Milind Sovani, for example, comes up with fusion Indian creations by borrowing from different cultures. The result is dishes like *naan* made into mini-pizza, *foie gras* with star anise, and lobster with lemon-chilli marinade made using Kerala *moily* sauce (a coconut-based sauce) (*FT.com* 2009).

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## Global city, cosmopolitan identity, multi-ethnic history: Provocations to the globalisation of food

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What prompted this globalisation of food in Singapore, and what dynamics have been at play that facilitated the widespread acceptance of foreign cuisines in the country? The ambitions of a global city and the cosmopolitanism that comes with it are deeply implicated. Characteristic of such a city is the existence of a large expatriate community and the presence of unceasing flows of migrants, alongside a population that is well-travelled and open to media flows and influences. While significant, the roots of this openness run deeper, drawing from a historical sense of a diverse society that takes cultural flows and exchanges as a given, borne of the self-definition as a multi-ethnic society and an

entrepôt. These conditions have predisposed its people to welcome a range of cuisines and to celebrate the diversity of foods. Finally, the affluence of the country has generated a foodie culture that translates into food business opportunities. I elaborate on these conditions below.

### Migrant flows, expatriate communities

The city-state's development over the past four decades making it the commercial hub of Southeast Asia and a thriving financial centre of global repute has attracted expatriates from all over the world who have settled in Singapore to pursue work and business opportunities (MAS 2014). Singapore has a large expatriate community which has introduced foreign cuisines to the island and significantly influenced the food industry to provide food choices to satisfy their palates. Today, the expatriate population in Singapore numbers more than one million, with many working as professionals and managers (Henderson 2014, 907). Each nationality naturally introduced its own cuisine, thus expanding Singapore's food scene. Japanese business expansion into the financial sectors and rubber industry during Singapore's early years brought increasing numbers of Japanese workers into Singapore. In the 1910s, large Japanese banks and trading companies sent employees to Singapore. These new arrivals were wealthy immigrants who could afford to live around Orchard Road. There was also another class of Japanese immigrants who came to work as labourers on plantations in Singapore and were therefore poorer. Between 1912 and 1920, Japanese restaurants were set up to cater to these Japanese expatriates and migrant workers. However, the real boom in Japanese cuisine in Singapore only occurred from the 1980s onwards, due to the dramatic increase in the Japanese population in Singapore and interest in Japanese culture. In the 1980s, there were approximately 8,000 Japanese in Singapore; by 1996, this had tripled to 24,000

(Thang 1999; Tanimura 2006, 17-19, 31). Today, the Japanese expatriate community is one of the largest here. As a result, the number of Japanese restaurants in Singapore has risen from around 70 during the 1980s (Ng 2001, 8-9) to over 600 as of 2009 (Yamanaka 2009). Similarly, Korean restaurants mushroomed in Singapore when Korean construction companies sent hundreds of Korean expatriates to the country in the 1990s (*The Straits Times* 2005).

Enterprising immigrants also set up their own restaurants in Singapore to cater to fellow expatriates and Singaporeans, thus helping to popularise their home cuisines in Singapore. For example, Italians Salvatore Carecci of Pasta Fresca da Salvatore and Paolo Scarpa of the Da Paolo Group, together with his family, helped widen the appeal of Italian cuisine in Singapore through their long-running restaurants. Michael Ma, the Laotian-Chinese owner of IndoChine, came to Singapore originally as a finance professional, but instead became a culinary entrepreneur by starting his restaurant chain offering Vietnamese/ Laotian fare in 1999. His elevation of IndoChinese food into an exotic cuisine presented in classy post-modern settings has proven to be a hit with the expatriate community and locals alike (Carruthers 2012).

However, it is not only the entry of skilled expatriates that has contributed to the globalisation of food in Singapore. The increase in number of low-skilled migrants and labourers into Singapore has also played a critical part. More Thai migrants from northeast Thailand have come to work as construction workers or domestic helpers in Singapore (Chua 2003) and have contributed to the growth of Thai eateries in areas like Golden Mile Complex, which are patronised by more adventurous Singaporeans who value the authenticity and affordability of Thai food there. Similarly, Burmese expatriates and migrants

have helped acquaint Singaporeans with their local cuisine. There are around 200,000 Burmese expatriates in Singapore. In addition to Burmese professionals, there is also a community of blue-collar Burmese workers in Singapore (*Makansutra* 2012). Given the adequate demand, Burmese eateries and minimarts have thus appeared in Singapore, particularly at Peninsula Plaza and Excelsior Shopping Centre.

### **A well-travelled people**

As Singapore has prospered, Singaporeans have become more well-travelled; this has in turn boosted the popularity of foreign cuisines in Singapore. The increase in number of specialty restaurants, offering ethnic cuisines in the late 1980s and early 1990s, can be attributed to the fact that Singaporeans were beginning to enjoy greater affluence and could travel overseas more frequently (MacLaurin and MacLaurin 2000, 76). Increased exposure to the cuisines of other countries in this way has widened the demand and market for foreign foods in Singapore. For example, Chua (2003) noted that the rise in popularity of Thai food in Singapore was related to the growth in the number of Singaporeans visiting Thailand. After becoming familiar with and enjoying Thai food in its native country, returning Singaporeans were glad to be able to continue consuming it at Thai restaurants in Singapore.

### **Popular culture and media influence**

Singaporeans' interest in foreign foods has often also been aroused through exposure to foreign culture via the media and popular culture. For example, Japanese drama series like *Oshin* which was broadcast on television in Singapore in the 1980s was hugely popular and drew a large audience (Chua 2000, 140). Growing interest in Japanese culture through such popular culture motivated Singaporeans to find out more about

Japanese cuisine. Other television programmes like *Japan Hour*, which aired on Channel News Asia, also focused more attention on Japanese food culture. The show introduced viewers in Singapore to regional Japanese specialties from different parts of the country. Even Japanese comic books and cartoons helped generate interest in Japanese food culture among Singaporeans. Tanimura (2006, 89-91) relates personal experiences of how a Singaporean friend came to know of Doriyaki (a Japanese confection consisting of red bean paste between two small pancakes) as it is a favourite food of the well-known cartoon character Doraemon; and how another learnt about Japanese food by reading "Oishinbo", a *manga* (comic) about Japanese cooking.

Similarly, Korean culture is very popular in Singapore, with many Singaporeans being fans of Korean dramas, K-Pop entertainment, and Korean fashion. Interest in all things Korean has naturally generated interest in Korean cuisine as well and seen Singaporeans welcome Korean foods. Some Korean restaurants even merge live K-Pop entertainment with dining so customers can enjoy both elements of Korean culture (*The Straits Times* 2012). Media and popular culture have therefore helped familiarise Singaporeans with foreign cuisines and contributed to advancing the globalisation of food in Singapore.

### **Multi-ethnic community, cosmopolitan identity**

In Singapore, food is used in the construction of a cosmopolitan identity at both the individual and national levels, helping to fuel the acceptance of foreign cuisines and the development of the international food business in Singapore. At the individual level, Singaporeans associate the consumption of foreign foods with cosmopolitan attitudes, and the ability to appreciate foreign cuisines is considered desirable (Duffy and Yang 2012, 69). Consuming foreign foods has therefore

become a way for Singaporeans to identify with and construct a modern cosmopolitan identity for themselves. Varying definitions of the term "cosmopolitan" exist. To be cosmopolitan entails an "openness to otherness and difference" (Young et al. 2006, 1688) or having an international orientation. A cosmopolitan individual is "someone who can claim to be a 'citizen of the world'" (Robbins 1998, 248). Being cosmopolitan therefore connotes a certain level of sophistication and worldliness (Chua 2003). In seeking to belong to this cosmopolitan class, many Singaporeans seek the consumption of foreign cuisines to demonstrate that they have the sophistication to appreciate other cuisines. It is almost a way for individuals to express or project the superiority of their cultural refinement and knowledge. In particular, the consumption of "exotic" cuisines that are viewed as novel or unusual can especially make people feel cosmopolitan.

The appetite and desire for foreign foods is not only reflected in Singaporeans' patronage of foreign restaurants, but at the retail level as well, in the demand for foreign foodstuffs. With improvements in international distribution and food preservation technologies, supermarkets in Singapore have been able to import a variety of overseas foods which were originally targeting expatriate consumers, but have also found a market among local Singaporeans (Duruz 2006, 103). For example, Japanese supermarkets and grocery shops in Singapore brought in Japanese goods and ingredients for the expatriate Japanese community, but as Ng (2001, 9) pointed out, they also enjoy business from Singaporeans. Cold Storage, a chain of supermarkets, began by importing foodstuffs sought after by expatriate Europeans seeking a taste of home, such as Dutch, Swiss, English and Danish cheeses, pickles, jams, custards and fresh produce from many countries. Duruz (2006, 103, 105) writes that Cold Storage offered "meanings of Western cosmopolitanism" to the expatriate community and notes that over the years,

the “cosmopolitan eating” that it fosters was not limited to expatriates but attracted Singaporean customers as well.

At the national level, cosmopolitanism has even become part of the government’s strategy for developing Singapore and strengthening its global profile and competitive economic position. In the past decade or so, the government has worked towards a vision of Singapore as a cosmopolitan city (Bishop 2011, 642), employing a “two-pronged approach .... The first is to make Singapore a place for cosmopolitans and the second is to create cosmopolitan Singaporeans” (Tan and Yeoh, 2006, 148). The latter refers to the development of Singaporeans who possess skills that are marketable worldwide and who have an international outlook, a characterisation forwarded by former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (Goh 1999; Chua 2003). But it is the former – creating Singapore into a place for cosmopolitans – in which food has come to play a significant role. The desire to ensure that Singapore is a place for cosmopolitans has led the government to position food as one of the perks of living in Singapore in order to attract the foreign elite. As Bell and Valentine (1997) note, entrepreneurial cities understand that showcasing culinary diversity is a kind of urban boosterism and in doing so, can increase their attractiveness as a place to live and work.

With Singapore’s street food scene and mid-end restaurant industry already fairly developed, the country has focused efforts on nurturing culinary cosmopolitanism and developing the finer gourmet segment, with the aim of making Singapore a globalised gourmet hub. In this regard, the development of international fine dining at two new hotel and casino complexes—the Marina Bay Sands (MBS) and Resorts World Sentosa (RWS)—provide an example of the culinary cosmopolitanism that is transforming Singapore

in exciting and diverse ways. Eleven internationally renowned chefs opened restaurants at MBS and RWS, though most had since closed down for various reasons. They include legendary Michelin-decorated French chef Joel Robuchon, Guy Savoy from Paris, Kunio Tokuoka from Kyoto, Santi Santamaria from Catalonia, American chef Mario Bartali, Australian chef Scott Webster, and Wolfgang Puck (*The Wall Street Journal* 2010). Collectively, their restaurants bring cuisines from all over the globe—French gourmet fare, Spanish cuisine, Japanese *kaiseki*, Italian gastronomy, and many others. The Singapore government has aided the development of foreign cuisine restaurants by providing a favourable business environment of low tax rates, low import taxes and stable government. Other factors cited by foreign restaurateurs that encouraged them to set up businesses in Singapore were the presence of a large expatriate population, high levels of disposable income, and the use of English as the main language (*The Wall Street Journal* 2010; Maclaurin and Maclaurin 2000: 76). In these various ways, Singapore has been able to harness food as “a badge of sophistication, reach and power” (Duffy and Yang 2012: 64) to project a cosmopolitan image of the city, and as a magnet to attract cosmopolitans to Singapore. Food has thus played a notable role in representing Singapore as a vibrant global city in order to attract foreign talent and strengthen its economy.

In one sense, the predisposition to this cosmopolitan identity was already laid in the foundations of the city-state’s multi-ethnic and diverse population. Chaney and Ryan (2012) suggest that Singaporeans are accepting of foreign cuisines because their own local foodways have a tradition of sharing. Nyonya cuisine, for instance, relies on ingredients from Malay, Chinese and Indian cooking. Malay dishes like *nasi briyani* reflect Middle Eastern and Indian influences (Brown and Backenheimer 2006; Chaney and

Ryan 2012:312). This history of openness to other cuisines, and cultural acceptance of “borrowing” or exchanging flavours between different foodways may thus explain why Singaporeans are quick to embrace foreign cuisines and try new fusion foods.

### **Foodie culture**

Another factor that has fuelled the globalisation of food in Singapore and acceptance of foreign cuisines is Singapore’s “foodie culture”, a characteristic made possible by the overall affluence of society. Duffy and Yang (2012, 59) observe that it has become “axiomatic of the Singaporean identity that they are a nation of foodies”, to which Henderson (2014: 904) agrees by pointing out that the keen appreciation of food seems to be a common trait among Singaporeans. Locals are preoccupied with food, and a former Minister for Trade and Industry even remarked at the amount of time Singaporeans spend eating and constantly thinking about food, declaring this fixation with food to be “an inseparable part of our culture” (STB 2004). Singaporeans will queue for hours at stalls and go to great lengths just to procure the foods they desire. Food is almost like a national pastime and locals enjoy looking for new foods and eating places to try out (Wang 2006, 53; Duffy and Yang 2012, 59). So strong is the passion for food that foodies may think nothing of travelling across the island or even to Malaysia to hunt down good food (Wang 2006, 54). Food is also a very popular and frequent topic of conversation among Singaporeans, with people often sharing tips on where to find the best food places. Clearly, food is an important facet of Singaporeans’ cultural identity, with Singaporeans united by a common love of food. Theoretical perspectives on the functions of food support these observations made in the context of Singapore of the social-cultural role of food. Chang (2013, 1) writes that food “is more than nourishment, it offers pleasure and entertainment and serves a social purpose”. Goode (1992, 234) mentions that food can be used in such a way as to “define inclusion”

and encourage “solidarity”. Similarly, Mintz and Du Bois (2002, 109) state that “like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves ... to solidify group membership”, though at the same time, they note that food may also be used as a divisive force to exclude others.

As a result of Singapore’s strong foodie culture, Singaporeans are very receptive to trying out and accepting new cuisines, and they often come to appreciate these new flavours. In one interview, a Brazilian restaurateur commented that Singaporeans’ fondness for trying new things translated into good business for her Brazilian restaurant. Singapore was therefore a good place for her restaurant to operate due to the strong demand (Duffy and Yang 2012, 70). The success of many restaurants offering foreign cuisines in Singapore may further attest to this. Singaporeans are also quick to catch on to the latest food fads, such as US-style doughnuts, Taiwanese bubble tea or French macarons (Duffy and Yang 2012, 59). The national enthusiasm for food is both reflected in and fostered by the plethora of media dedicated to food from local television programmes that search for the best eateries, newspaper articles featuring new dining places or foods, social media applications that rate restaurants, and online food reviews posted by bloggers (Wang 2006, 53; Henderson 2014, 911). Food is so much a part of the national psyche that it is even used in linguistic expressions; for example, *rojak*—the Malay word for “mixture” which is also the name of a local salad—is used to describe any kind of mix, such as the ethnic mix of Singapore’s population (Tarulevicz 2013, 3). Singapore’s dining-out culture has also likely helped the globalisation of food in Singapore. Dining out is very common due to higher incomes, increasingly busy lifestyles, the wide variety of dining options available, and the treatment of dining out as a source of pleasure and entertainment (Tarulevicz 2011, 242; Ng 2001, 9; Henderson 2014, 907). To Singaporeans,

it is a chance to spend time socialising with friends and family; in this way, food acts as a force that binds the community together (Henderson 2014, 908). Ultimately, the inclination to dine outside the home means that Singaporeans are more likely to be exposed to foreign cuisines and to acquire an appreciation for them.

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## Globalisation of Singapore food

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### **The travel of Singapore foods: From Toronto to Tokyo, from Seoul to Sydney**

Globalisation is not unidirectional. It involves multi-directional flows and influences, though worries about more dominant flows are evident in the concerns expressed over cultural homogenisation, which, in the context of food, has led to fears about the development of a uniform “global palate” and “global cuisine” (Symons 1993; Ritzer 1995; Richards 2002). An examination of the globalisation of Singapore food suggests that, just as foreign cuisines from other parts of the world have spread to Singapore, Singapore food has also been making its way to countries abroad. Though these outward flows do not have the global reach of, say, Western fast food joints, they nevertheless demonstrate the dangers of excessive claims about “an ominous homogenisation of the world—where sameness is ubiquitously imposed, and the difference is steadily suppressed or eliminated” (Cheng 2011, 198, in Kikomr 2012).

Singapore cuisine is enjoying growing popularity beyond its shores and gaining greater awareness overseas. Dishes like *laksa*, chilli crab, *char kway teow*, and chicken rice are turning up in places like London, New York, Toronto, Mumbai, Chennai, Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai and even Moscow,

gradually becoming recognised and associated with Singapore by foreigners. Food products like *kaya*, *popiah* skin, curry pastes and seasonings from Singapore are also making their way to the shelves of foreign retail outlets and supermarkets overseas. Food festivals featuring Singapore cuisine are being held in various countries abroad, thus helping to introduce Singapore favourites to residents there. This spread of Singapore food overseas has occurred through the efforts of various agents—chiefly the Singapore government which plans and implements various food events, initiatives and policies to promote Singapore foods internationally, Singapore food manufacturers that export Singapore food products, Singapore restaurants opened by entrepreneurial individuals or businesses, and foreign hotels that seasonally promote Singapore food. Below, I elaborate on the initiatives undertaken by each agent in greater detail and the kinds of Singapore foods that they have helped introduce to the world. In the process, the economic and political roles that food plays become apparent.

### **Government initiatives: Food as tourism resource and culinary soft power**

The Singapore government has actively promoted Singapore food overseas through a range of policies, programmes and events. Food is a valuable tourism resource (Hjalager and Richards 2002) that can effectively be used to increase visitorship to a destination (Fox 2007; du Rand et al. 2003). As Chang (2013, 9) notes, cuisine can serve as a way of differentiating a country from other destinations that compete for tourism arrivals and dollars. Tourism growth in turn contributes to economic growth, and this is significantly so in the case of Singapore. In 2014, the total contribution of tourism and travel to GDP in Singapore amounted to a notable S\$39.7 billion (or 10.9% of GDP) (WTTC 2014). Food therefore plays an economic role and contributes to economic development by boosting tourism. It is a critical determinant of tourists’ choice of destination,

as seen in a 2014 survey in which more than one-third of leisure travellers in the Asia-Pacific region (APAC) said food and drink is the determining factor in where they choose to vacation (*PR Newswire and Hilton Worldwide* 2014). Singapore government bodies have thus sought to raise the profile of Singapore cuisine overseas to encourage more tourists to visit the country.

### **Singapore Food Festival and overseas food events**

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) established an internal Food and Beverage Division specially to develop culinary tourism, reflecting the importance that Singapore places on cuisine as a key theme for tourism marketing (Horng and Tsai 2012, 283). In 1994, STB launched the first Singapore Food Festival. The festival is an annual event showcasing Singapore's local cuisine, and it continues to run in various countries across the world, allowing participants to savour the taste of a tantalising spectrum of Singapore foods. In India, where the festival has been held in large cities like Mumbai and Chennai, participants get the opportunity to try chilli crab, *popiah* (Chinese-style fresh spring rolls), Hainanese chicken rice, *mee goreng* (fried noodles with Malay and Indian flavours and Chinese influence) and *tahu goreng* (fried tofu stuffed with vegetables) (*The Hindu* 1998; *Hindustan Times* 2013). In Japan, the festival also featured Hainanese chicken rice and Singapore's signature cocktail, the Singapore Sling (*CNA* 2006). In London, temporary kitchens were installed at Covent Garden Market for the festival so people could sample fresh *satay*, ice *kacang* (sweetened shaved ice dessert) and the ever-popular Hainanese chicken rice (*CNA* 2005b). Overall, the government's efforts in promoting Singapore food overseas to attract tourist traffic seems to have paid off as Singapore was voted the third favourite culinary destination by leisure travellers in APAC in 2014 (*PR Newswire and Hilton Worldwide* 2014). Promoting a national cuisine, as Singapore is doing, also helps a country gain "urban soft power"

(Farrer 2010, i). As Barthes (1997 [1961]) highlights, food can fulfil a political purpose and "is always bound to the values of power" (Duffy and Yang 2012, 63). Specifically, by building its culinary reputation, Singapore seeks to raise its global profile, using its food as a cultural bridge so foreigners develop positive associations with the country.

In addition to STB, other government agencies have joined in to promote Singapore foods overseas. The main players are International Enterprise (IE) Singapore and SPRING Singapore, which have since merged to form Enterprise Singapore. One interesting initiative borne out of the joint efforts of these government bodies has been a mobile pop-up kitchen launched in 2011 called Singapore Takeout, which looks like a shipping container and travels the globe showcasing Singapore's culinary offerings. The aim of Singapore Takeout is to promote Singapore cuisine in some of the major cities in the world—London, Paris, New York, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Moscow, Sydney, Delhi and Dubai (*Business Times Singapore*, 2011b; *The Asian Age* 2012)—and market Singapore as a key gastronomic destination. It brings celebrated Singapore chefs like Benjamin Seck to these cities where they prepare dishes like cabbage and carrot *popiah* paired with vinegar and sweet chilli dip, prawn curry, *laksa* and other Nyonya specialties (*Mail Today* 2012). They also conduct cooking demonstrations. As Ranita Sundra, a Director at STB shared, the Singapore Takeout global tour seeks to establish Singapore as "a must-visit for foodies" and "Asia's most innovative culinary capital" (*Business Times Singapore* 2011b). To further raise the profile of Singapore cuisine overseas, the government has organised the Global Chef Exchange. This initiative is a culinary immersion programme which invites influential chefs from all over the world to Singapore to become familiarised with the local culinary culture. The programme hopes to inspire these chefs to create Singapore-style dishes back home and thus help to spread Singapore cuisine in more countries abroad

(CNA 2012). STB has sent delegations to other prominent international culinary events as well to strengthen awareness of Singapore cuisine on the world stage. For example, it sent an entourage of talented Singapore chefs to the World of Flavors conference in the United States, a prestigious professional forum on world cuisines, where they were able to showcase Singapore cuisine to other participants from across the globe (*Business Times Singapore* 2011a).

### **Supporting Singapore food exports**

Singaporean food companies involved in food manufacturing have received much support from IE Singapore in expanding into overseas markets. The Singapore government recognises the economic potential of its domestic food exports, which nearly doubled from S\$2.4 billion in 2006 to S\$4.2 billion in 2012 (SingStat 2013), and the value in raising the profile of Singapore food brands and cuisine in markets abroad. IE Singapore aims to help Singapore food products reach the shelves of more foreign supermarkets and restaurants, and for Singapore cuisine to attract mainstream consumers in markets overseas, particularly those beyond Asia and where demand is growing such as the United States, Europe and the Middle East (*Singapore Government News* 2009). It has done so by building global business networks and inter-country alliances, and providing services to help local enterprises export, develop business capabilities, find overseas partners and penetrate new markets (IE Singapore 2008). Prima Taste is one local food company that has benefitted from IE Singapore's support. The company now sells food mixes such as *laksa*, Hainanese chicken rice and Singapore chilli crab in supermarkets and eateries in around 25 countries, and has seen healthy growth in export sales (*The Straits Times* 2009). Tee Yih Jia, another Singapore food manufacturer, has managed to distribute its pastry products, like *roti prata* and spring rolls, in major US cities with the help of

IE Singapore (Today 2006). Similarly, Singapore convenience foods and sauces from Asian Home Gourmet and Tai Hua are available in the Canadian market. IE Singapore also enabled Singapore foods to enter the mainstream UK market by securing an entire aisle at London department store Selfridges for the sale of Singapore food products, such as pineapple tarts from local bakery Bengawan Solo and Hainanese chicken rice mix by sauce manufacturer Chng Kee (*The Straits Times* 2009).

### **Venturing abroad:**

#### **Singapore restaurants overseas**

Another avenue through which Singapore cuisine has spread to other countries is the opening of Singapore restaurants or food franchises in overseas locations. In some cases, these outlets are opened by established food and beverage (F&B) players with the aid of IE Singapore. In other instances, they are initiated by entrepreneurial individuals or businesses of their own accord, without government assistance. An example of the former is when IE Singapore helped Imperial Treasure Restaurant Group, Ya Kun International, and Kriston Food & Beverage open eateries in Tokyo in a prominent retail complex with high customer traffic. IE Singapore managed to ink a deal with the Development Bank of Japan to facilitate the entry of Singapore firms, including Singapore food companies, into the Japanese market. The opening of these eateries helped bring authentic foods found in Singapore like chicken rice, *laksa*, *kaya* toast, and baked *naan* served with *masala* (Indian spices and curry) to Japanese consumers (*Bernamea* 2006; *Business Times Singapore* 2006). Expansion has been rapid. Ya Kun, for instance, established 26 *kaya* toast outlets in six countries within five years (*The Straits Times* 2009). Prima Taste has developed its arm of restaurant franchises in eight cities abroad including Colombo, Ho Chi Minh, Beijing, Shanghai, and Surabaya, familiarising locals there with Singapore foods like *bak kut teh* and *satay*.

There are also enterprising Singaporean individuals or businesses who have set up restaurants by themselves overseas. Chef Chris Yeo left Singapore to open four Asian-style restaurants in the United States which offer Singapore dishes like *roti prata* and *laksa* (*The Straits Times* 2009). Boston's first Singaporean restaurant, called Merlion, was opened by Alfred Chua and serves hawker favourites such as *kway chap* (a mix of pork belly, eggs, tofu and rice noodles in a dark sauce), oyster pancake, *lor mee* and *rojak*. It is not only frequented by Singaporean patrons, but American customers as well (*The Boston Globe* 1995). In Australia, Dumpling Republic—a Singapore cuisine venture—opened its first restaurant on the Gold Coast in 2013 (*The Gold Coast Bulletin* 2013), where Singaporean chef Sim Kim Kwee and his team prepare dishes like steamed dumplings and *wonton* soup (dumpling soup). At Ginger & Spice Singapore Restaurant in Sydney, one can find *char kway teow*, *ngoh hiang* (fried pork rolls wrapped with beancurd skin), and *assam* fish (fish in tamarind sauce) (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 2007). Other eateries in Australia have made Singapore dishes like *laksa* very popular among Australians. Similarly, Singapore cuisine is making its mark in China, where a growing number of restaurants in cities like Shanghai offer favourites like *chai tow kway*, *laksa*, and chilli crab (*Shanghai Daily* 2011; *CNA* 2005a). In Chengdu, Singaporean company Old Chang Kee has introduced curry puffs and other local Singapore snacks since opening an eatery there in 2008 (*The Straits Times* 2008). Homegrown restaurant Jumbo Seafood has penetrated the South Korean and Japanese markets through joint partnerships and agreements, thus helping to introduce Singapore's famous chilli crab in these countries. It signed a memorandum of understanding with a key restaurant association in South Korea in 2007 to pave the way for partnership opportunities, and it opened restaurants in Tokyo and Osaka in collaboration

with other Singapore business owners (*The Korea Herald* 2007; *The Straits Times* 2009).

### Marketing Singapore foods: Hotel promotions

Hotels overseas hold promotions of Singapore food from time to time, and though relatively smaller in scale, these events are another way in which Singapore cuisine is being introduced overseas. Singapore's rich and diverse culinary offerings have a wide appeal that would satisfy a range of consumers. With Singapore's foods becoming better known, hotels likely realise that Singapore food promotions would be well-received and be met with healthy demand. As tourism traffic to Singapore grows, more travellers become familiar with Singapore cuisine and those who enjoy it will probably take advantage of opportunities to taste Singapore food again in their home country. For example, the JW Marriot Hotel Mumbai held a Singaporean food promotion, specially flying in a chef from Singapore to prepare Singapore-Chinese dishes like braised duck and claypot chicken (*Daily News & Analysis*, 16 Aug 2008). Several hotels under the Copthorne Hotel chain in London and Britain offer popular Singapore dishes like *hor fan*, *nasi padang*, and *laksa* (*The Straits Times* 1998). Even in Dubai, the Park Regis Kris Kin Hotel recreated Singapore delicacies as part of a seasonal promotion. It invited a Singapore celebrity chef to work with its own chef to design a menu featuring dishes like chicken rice and *rojak* (*Islamic Finance News* 2011). The InterContinental Eros, New Delhi, holds an annual Singapore food promotion that brings many Singapore hawker favourites to guests—oyster omelette, radish cake, *otak otak*, barbeque duck and chicken rice, mutton *rendang*, chicken *satay* and others (The Pioneer 2009). Closer to home, the Regent Kuala Lumpur similarly held a Singapore food fair during which guest Singapore chef Calvin Ow dished up hawker delights like *satay bihun* (rice noodles served with a chilli-based peanut sauce), prawn noodles, fried

carrot cake, and seafood *char kway teow* (*Weekend Mail* 2006). Such hotel promotions have therefore contributed to growing awareness of Singapore cuisine overseas, whether in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia or the closer neighbouring region.

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## Conclusions: Changing foodways

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Foodways—“what we eat, as well as how and why and under what circumstances we eat” (Edge 2007: 8), or the patterns and practices related to the production and consumption of food—are not static. Cuisines are not fixed things (Cook et al. 2000, 113); rather, they are “dynamic phenomena” which “evolve and interact” (Henderson 2014, 904, 906). Indeed, in Singapore, globalisation has changed and continues to alter foodways—foreign foods have become part of the Singaporean foodscape and diet, new forms of cuisine have emerged from the interaction of different cuisines, and culinary practices and technologies continue to evolve. In addition, localisation practices have led to some modifications to foreign cuisines introduced in Singapore. The first wave of migration to early Singapore already demonstrated how foodways can change. It brought the mix of cuisines from different migrant ethnicities that laid the foundation for Singapore’s now diverse, varied and hybrid cuisine. In more recent times, Singapore’s ambition to be a global city has meant a great openness to flows of people, goods, services and ideas from all over the world. With this has come some Westernisation of taste buds among Singaporeans (Henderson 2014, 907) and more changes to foodways in Singapore. Western fast food and international food franchises have become very popular in Singapore. Such foods have become ubiquitous and are regularly

consumed by many Singaporeans. A 2004 National Nutritional Survey showed that respondents consumed fast food around once every two weeks (Health Promotion Board 2004). Even in hawker centres which are thought to offer a close representation of common local foods that Singaporeans eat regularly, one can usually find a few stalls offering Western cuisine such as fish and chips, steak, pasta and burgers. Towards the gastronomic end of the spectrum, higher-end restaurants and chefs exposed to the influence of Western cuisine have merged Western and Asian culinary elements to create fusion or New Asia Cuisine, or a style that has also been called a “culinary global third culture” (Scarpato and Daniele 2003).

Besides Western-style foods, other foreign cuisines are also becoming less “foreign” to Singaporeans and are being incorporated into local foodways through increased consumption and the localisation of flavours. Evidence of such changes into the traditional foodways of Singaporeans can be seen in everyday food spaces—food courts not only offer the staples of Chinese, Malay and Indian options, but often include Japanese, Thai, Korean and Western cuisines as well. Foreign foods once viewed by locals as alien, exclusive or exotic when first introduced into Singapore have become familiar foods and more easily accessible to the average Singaporean. Japanese food like *sushi*, for example, was initially perceived as an exotic food consumed exclusively by Japanese expatriates, or wealthier and more adventurous locals due to its high price. Over time, however, the price of *sushi* has become more affordable, enabling more of the local masses to consume *sushi* on a more frequent basis (Ng 2001). In addition, the types and flavours of *sushi* in Singapore have been adjusted to fit the preferences of locals, increasing more Singaporeans’ acceptance of the food. As not all Singaporeans are receptive to *sushi* containing raw fish, Japanese eateries in Singapore tend to offer more types of *sushi* made with cooked ingredients.

Furthermore, they add a twist to traditional sushi by incorporating Singapore-inspired flavours or creating unconventional combinations, such as *otak-otak sushi*, *maki* with *achar* (fruit and vegetable pickle in spiced oil—an appetiser common in Singapore) filling, and *sushi* with corn mayonnaise (Ng 2001, 16). Similarly, Thai food was previously considered a very exotic and special cuisine when it first entered Singapore’s food scene, but high tourism levels between Singapore and Thailand and the increased influx of Thai migrant labourers have somewhat diminished its lofty exoticism in Singapore. It is now seen as a commonly available food in Singapore and the increased number of Thai eateries targeting the mid-end market, like ThaiExpress, have enabled more Singaporeans to consume Thai cuisine. Overall, the changes in foodways have therefore involved two aspects—the foodways of Singaporeans have altered to include the consumption of more foreign cuisines, and original traditional cuisines from foreign countries have also undergone some modifications following their introduction into Singapore.

That foodways are fluid and temporal has led sociologist Allison James (1996, 78) to question whether food in a globalised world can still be used as a distinguishing marker of cultural identity. The fact is that cross-cultural consumption frequently occurs as people belonging to one group consume foods from across different cultures. For example, to say that Singaporeans eat mostly Chinese, Malay and Indian foods, or that Singapore food consists of mainly Chinese, Malay and Indian elements, does not capture the fact that the traditional foodways have altered over time to include global influences and that the food scene has been internationalised to include a wealth of culinary and dining options from all over the world which locals themselves often indulge in. Neither does it acknowledge the essentialisation of “Chinese”, “Malay” and “Indian”, failing to recognise the multiplicities that these categories hide.

On the other hand, proponents of the cultural homogenisation thesis argue that culinary globalisation will lead (indeed, has led) to the standardisation of local food cultures and tastes, ultimately resulting in the erosion of traditional foodways. This frequently debated perspective has invited its own detractors who believe that globalisation does not necessarily produce uniformity among local cultures. Instead, they argue that people adapt global culture to suit their local culture (Metcalf 2002; Allison 2000; Watson 1997; Barber 1992; Tanimura 2006, 75-76). Robertson’s notion of “glocalisation” reframes the idea of globalisation as an opposing force of the local. To him, “the local is essentially included within the global” and globalisation involves both homo and heterogenisation (Robertson 1995; Tanimura 2006, 76). He and other authors have pointed out that food is often modified to fit local cultures and palates. McDonald’s, a symbol of globalisation, is a commonly cited example used to illustrate this point. Its localisation strategy sees it regularly feature items that incorporate local flavours and ingredients. In Singapore, for example, McDonald’s launched its *Shiok Shiok* Satay Burgers, based on the flavour of the Singaporean dish *satay*, served with peanut sauce. Other Western fast food chains have similarly introduced localised or “Singaporeanised” versions of items on the menu. Burger King came up with a *Rendang* Burger, and Pizza Hut has promoted *Satay* pizza, Curry Chicken pizza, and Sweet and Sour pizza (*The Straits Times* 1994).

Still, a key concern is whether the external forces of globalisation will “dilute” Singapore’s traditional foodways and cause local foods to become less significant. Henderson (2014, 92-93) argues that this is unlikely, given that traditional foods are “too deeply embedded in Singapore society and culture to disappear”, but recognising that they will keep evolving as the country modernises and progresses. While globalisation has indeed

led to the proliferation of foreign cuisines in Singapore, she observes that this has not overshadowed the prominence of its local cuisine, and that both international and local foods can “co-exist and coalesce” (Henderson 2014, 904). Global food franchises and restaurants offering cuisines from all over the world may be enriching Singapore’s dining scene, but have not yet diminished the relevance and importance of Singapore’s traditional local foods. Rather, they co-exist with the local, and have added variety and vibrancy to Singapore’s food scene. While foreign foodways have influenced Singapore’s food culture, there is a limit to the extent of this influence. Chua (2000, 144) notes that while foreign cuisines are more widely consumed in Singapore especially as a leisure activity, internationalised foreign foods “have seldom, if at all, been incorporated and domesticated into the family kitchens and dining tables of Singaporeans”. At home, traditional cuisine and local foods still largely make up the daily meals of Singaporeans. Perhaps because food represents familiarity and continuity (Henderson 2014, 913), Singaporean families usually choose to have local dishes for everyday meals in the home. While traditional foodways in Singapore look set to stay, there are still real challenges they face. There is concern that the quality of local foods served commercially is declining due to the use of “short cut” strategies of food preparation techniques and lower quality ingredients. The hawker trade, which produces some of the best local favourite dishes, is suffering. Retiring hawkers have no one to pass their skills to as young Singaporeans are not interested in entering a low-paying trade that requires hard work. Migrant workers are taking their places, but there have been complaints that they cannot reproduce Singapore dishes to the same standards of authenticity and quality (Henderson 2011; 2014, 912). Thus, more attention has recently been directed to preserving Singapore’s traditional foodways, especially local street food, to ensure its continued longevity and to protect Singapore’s food heritage.

At the same time, the globalisation of Singapore food—or—spread of Singapore cuisine overseas—is occurring. Local favourites like chicken rice, *satay* and *laksa* have made their way to numerous cities around the world. The international profile of Singapore food is growing through various efforts. Government initiatives play an important part. The government realises that food is a vital tourism resource that can increase visitorship to the country and increase economic revenue in the tourism sector, as well as build its culinary soft power. It also recognises the value of domestic food exports to the country’s economy.

Though disappearance of local favourites in local eating outlets does not seem imminent, it would be ironic—not to mention sad—should the day arrive when local foods so commonly available today in hawker centres and coffee shops are largely replaced in such settings by foreign imports, even as they become available mainly on special celebratory occasions in local commemorative and heritage events or as part of overseas “travelling shows” and exports. Amidst the globalisation of food, the commitment to support and retain local foods through continued production and consumption within the home and beyond it signals appreciation of their symbolism and meaning, reminding Singaporeans of “who they are, and where and how they are to be located in the world” (James 1996, 92, cited in Lim 2011, 89). □

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