

**The Influence of Japanese Food Culture on Economic  
Recovery and Sustainable Development**

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Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, 2024

## **Abstract**

In this study, we will delve into how Japanese food culture contributes to Japan's economic recovery. The purpose of this research is to explore and deepen our understanding of the impact of Japanese food culture on the recovery of the Japanese economy from various angles, and to consider strategies that will contribute to the future development of the Japanese economy.

The primary research questions are to comprehensively explore the economic impact of Japanese food culture on regional and international economies through tourism revenue and food exports, and how the inheritance of traditional food culture and craftsmanship contributes to the sustainable development of local economies. To answer these questions, we are using a qualitative approach to collect data for this research by interviewing various stakeholders related to Japanese food culture (such as tourists visiting Japan, sushi chefs, local farmers, food exporters, owners of Japanese restaurants), and we will gain a deep understanding of the economic impact of Japanese food culture through their perspectives.

By investigating the mutual relationship between Japanese food culture and the Japanese economy, this research aims to propose a new path toward the economic recovery of Japan by clarifying how Japanese food culture contributes to the recovery of

the Japanese economy, such as by increasing tourism revenue, expanding food exports, and revitalizing local economies. We also aim to provide valuable insights into how the development of Japanese food culture, where tradition and innovation coexist, can contribute to sustainable local communities and international economic growth.

Ultimately, this research will provide a foundation for comprehensively understanding the economic impact of Japanese food culture and is expected to have an impact on the formulation of policies and strategies related to tourism, trade, and regional revitalization.

Keywords: Japanese Food Culture, Economic Recovery, Tourism Revenue, Sustainable Development

# 日本飲食文化對經濟復甦與永續發展的影響

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## 摘要

本研究探討日本飲食文化如何促進日本經濟復甦。本研究的目的是在於從多角度探討並加深瞭解日本飲食文化對日本經濟復甦的影響，並思考有助於日本經濟未來發展的策略。

我們的研究問題是：日本飲食文化透過觀光收入與食品出口如何對日本與海外經濟帶來影響，以及傳統日本飲食文化與工藝的繼承如何促進地方經濟的永續發展。為了回答這些問題，我們採用質化方法來收集資料，透過訪問與日本飲食文化相關的各個利害關係人(例如訪日遊客、壽司廚師、當地農民、食品出口商、日本料理店老闆、消費者等)，獲得他們的觀點來了解日本飲食文化對經濟的影響。本研究發現，日本飲食文化對日本經濟復甦的貢獻在於增加觀光收入、擴大食品出口、以及活化地方經濟等，這也隱含著日本經濟復甦的新路徑。我們也希望透過提供寶貴的見解，讓大家了解傳統與創新並存的日本飲食文化的發展，如何有助於當地社區的永續發展與國際經濟成長。

最終，本研究提供一個瞭解日本飲食文化的經濟影響的基礎研究，並期望能對旅遊、貿易和區域振興相關政策和策略的制訂提供建議。

關鍵字：日本飲食文化、經濟復甦、觀光收入、永續發展

## **PREFACE**

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Ren-Her Hsieh Professor for his invaluable guidance and support throughout this research. His insights and encouragement have been essential to the completion of this study. We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to the data collection.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

On December 4, 2013, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held an intergovernmental committee meeting in Azerbaijan and decided to register "Japanese traditional food culture" recommended by the Japanese government as an intangible cultural heritage. The Japanese government proposed the registration of Japanese food in an effort to restore confidence in Japanese food, whose image had been damaged by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident, and to make it a symbol of reconstruction from the disaster. In addition to the food aspect of respecting diverse and fresh ingredients and their unique flavors, the government has promoted the high cultural value of Japanese food as a healthy diet with excellent nutritional balance, expression of the beauty of nature and the changing seasons, and close connection with annual events<sup>1</sup>. The international recognition of Japanese food culture is expected to increase the number of foreign tourists and expand exports of agricultural products.

Interest in Japanese food is growing worldwide, and this interest extends not only to "traditional food culture" registered as an intangible cultural heritage, but also to popular Japanese cuisine and diverse ingredients such as tempura, yakitori, curry rice,

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<sup>1</sup> The Nikkei. "The Heart of Japanese Food to the World: Intangible Cultural Heritage Registration Decided." Nikkei, December 5, 2013.  
<https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXNZO63626760V01C13A2CC1000/>.

ramen, udon noodle, sake, Japanese tea, soy sauce, and miso. Products from Japanese companies are now sold in supermarkets in many countries and consumed in ordinary households.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries estimates that the number of Japanese restaurants abroad increased from about 118,000 in 2017, to 159,000 in 2021, to about 187,000 as of October 2023<sup>2</sup>. Some figures indicate that the number one "expectation" among foreign tourists before visiting Japan is "food" (62.5%)<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, the popularity of Japanese food is not simply limited to consumption in restaurants, but is also rapidly increasing in supermarkets and food markets. This trend translates into a growing demand for Japanese food ingredients and processed products. Local producers and manufacturers of Japanese food products are being supported by this trend. For example, as demand for Japanese tea and miso increases overseas, the corresponding increase in production at tea plantations and miso factories in Japan will boost revenues to producers. Similarly, an increase in exports of Japanese food products is expected to revitalize Japan's agricultural and fishery industries.

Furthermore, the increased demand for Japanese food products promotes trade relations with other countries. As Japanese food products stimulate demand in the global market, trade volumes will increase and economic exchanges will deepen. This in turn is expected to lead to growth not only in the Japanese food industry, but also in related industries as a whole, as well as increased employment opportunities.

Thus, the international popularity of Japanese food is not merely a matter of food

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. "Approximate Number of Japanese Restaurants Abroad," October 13, 2023.

[https://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/yusyutu\\_kokusai/kikaku/231013\\_12.html](https://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/yusyutu_kokusai/kikaku/231013_12.html).

<sup>3</sup> Japan Tourism Agency. "Consumption Trends of Foreign Visitors to Japan," December 2017.

<https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/content/001217545.pdf>.

culture exchange, but also contributes to the development of local economies and the promotion of international economic relations.

### **Motivation**

For Japanese people, food is more than just a means of nutrition—it's an essential element that brings joy and happiness. From everyday meals to special occasions, enjoying delicious food enriches the soul and strengthens connections with others. We often find ourselves captivated by the deliciousness of food. Furthermore, while the four basic tastes of sweetness, saltiness, sourness, and bitterness have long been known, the Japanese discovered umami as the fifth basic taste in the early 20th century. Experimentation with incorporating Japanese seasonings into Western cooking methods or substituting ingredients with Japanese ones has led to the creation of new dishes tailored to Japanese tastes, such as shrimp fry, omurice, and spaghetti Napolitan. Additionally, dishes that blend Japanese and Western ingredients and cooking techniques have also emerged. While there are many examples of this fusion cuisine, one of the most familiar is anpan, created during the Meiji era, followed by creations like jampan and cream pan, which are Japanese-style pastries. While it's not fair to categorize adaptability and a relentless pursuit of improvement as inherent traits of the Japanese, it's an intriguing cultural phenomenon. Adapting to new things, making slight adjustments, and incorporating them into one's own lifestyle for the better are underlying principles. This mindset may be why Japan has such a diverse range of delicious foods and why Japanese people are open to cuisines from all over the world.

This passion and interest towards food among Japanese people have nurtured the

richness and diversity of Japan's food culture. From the delicate flavors and seasonal sensations of traditional Japanese cuisine to globally renowned dishes like sushi and ramen, and the modern izakaya culture, Japan's food culture is beloved and admired worldwide. Considering this, there is a growing interest in understanding how Japan's food culture benefits the country, particularly amidst the prolonged deflationary period. Firstly, Japan's food culture is not just about dining habits; it is also a symbol of the nation's identity and culture. Its uniqueness and charm contribute significantly to enhancing Japan's image both domestically and internationally.

Furthermore, the protection and promotion of Japan's food culture are closely linked to the development of the tourism industry. Many foreign tourists visit Japan specifically to experience its culinary traditions, and as Japanese companies expand overseas, there is a growing presence of Japanese restaurants worldwide. This trend creates new business opportunities in the tourism and foodservice sectors, injecting vitality into the economy.

Additionally, Japan's food culture contributes significantly to building a sustainable society. By utilizing local ingredients and seasonal produce, Japanese cuisine supports local farmers and promotes environmentally-friendly food production and consumption practices. This fosters sustainable development at the regional level and contributes to the overall well-being of society.

Considering these factors, Japan's food culture holds great potential for contributing to economic recovery. Its unique attributes and appeal can be leveraged to stimulate economic growth and create a brighter future for Japan.

## **Research Purpose**

These are three main purposes of this research. First, promotion of food culture diversity, tourism revenue, and local economy. Second, economic effects of global spread and export of Japanese food. Third, traditional food culture and craftsmen effects of the communication of the mind on Japan's rural economy and sustainable development.

### 1. Promotion of food culture diversity, tourism revenue, and local economy

Since each region has different characteristics of Japanese food culture, it contributes to revitalizing the local economy. In this study, we will investigate the impact of local food culture on the promotion of the local economy and find out how local food culture promotion measures and events contribute to tourism and local industries and reveal details of their effects. We will also analyze the components of Japanese food tourism, knowing the impact of Japanese food tourism income on the recovery of the Japanese economy.

### 2. Economic Effects of Global Spread and Export of Japanese Food

Japanese food culture is highly regarded overseas. The global spread of Japanese food has greatly affected the economy by promoting the export of Japanese food and ingredients. The study analyzes the economic impact of the popularity of Japanese food on the Japanese food industry and related industries. It will also investigate how the overseas expansion of Japanese restaurants and the increase in exports of Japanese foodstuffs contributes to Japan's economic recovery.

### 3. Traditional food culture and craftsmen effects of the communication of the mind on Japan's rural economy and sustainable development

We will investigate how traditional food culture and craftsmanship are inherited,



and how they contribute and influence the local economy. It also analyzes the extent to which the succession of this tradition contributes to the sustainable development of the region. Analyze the effects of Japanese food culture on the recovery of the Japanese economy from various angles and to examine strategies and strategies to contribute to the future development of the Japanese economy.

### **Research Questions**

1. What kind of economic effects will the development of Japan's food culture have on tourism income and local economy?
2. How do Japanese food exports contribute to domestic and international trade and economic growth?
3. To what extent does the transmission of traditional food culture and craftsmanship support Japan's rural economy and sustainable development?

### **Contribution**

Through this paper, we can deepen our understanding of the various economic recovery effects that Japanese food culture has on different aspects. We will gain knowledge about the economic benefits of tourism revenue and local businesses driven by the development of food culture. Additionally, we will understand how Japanese cuisine influences Japan's trade, exports, and economic stability. Furthermore, this study demonstrates how the preservation and revitalization of traditional Japanese culinary practices contribute to the recovery and sustainability of rural economies.

## **Limits**

The topic "The influence of Japanese food culture on economic recovery and sustainable development" is currently under investigation. However, at the time of writing, it is challenging to obtain direct materials from Japan while residing in Taiwan. The main reasons include restricted access to libraries and archives, difficulties in acquiring physical books and materials from Japan, and limitations in international shipping. Therefore, primary sources of information include relevant websites, official sites of Japanese government agencies, tourism associations, and the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, as well as reliable news sources (e.g., NHK, Asahi Shimbun, Nikkei), open-access academic journals, and research papers accessed through university electronic libraries. Additionally, there is limited time to gather interviewees and problems contacting multiple interviewees. In addition, the language barrier exists, necessitating translation for efficient utilization of Japanese materials.

## **Delimits**

Rather than covering the full spectrum of the impact of Japanese food culture on economic recovery, this study will focus specifically on specific aspects of tourism income, local business growth, food exports, international trade, rural economy, and sustainable development. In addition, the Research Question 1 survey cannot cover all tourists who visit Japan. Instead, representatives will be selected through a brief questionnaire survey of specific groups and interviews will be conducted. Therefore, the survey may not perfectly reflect the details of each individual.

Furthermore, Research Question 3, on the extent to which the transmission of traditional

food culture and craftsmanship supports Japan's rural economy and sustainable development, will analyze specific case studies, so the survey results may not represent a comprehensive picture of the situation nationwide.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, we are going to review literatures on the features of Japanese food culture, the issues of Japanese food trade and tradition and sustainability of Japanese food.

### **The Features of Japanese Food Culture**

There are many features of Japanese food culture, mainly encompassing the cultural significance of festive foods, the popularity of Japanese cuisine among foreign visitors, the intricate balance of taste, color, senses, and technique in washoku, the rigorous standards of food safety and hygiene management.

### **The Cultural Significance of Festive Foods**

Japan has a rich food culture that is deeply connected to its annual celebrations and festivals. These festivals, known as "matsuri," highlight the diversity and traditions of Japanese cuisine. Festivals in Japan are important cultural events, and food plays a central role in these celebrations. Each festival features specific foods that are prepared and eaten only during that time, showing the variety and tradition in Japanese cuisine. These foods often have special meanings and historical importance, often linked to farming and religious practices.<sup>4</sup>

One of the biggest festivals in Japan is New Year's. During this time, families

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<sup>4</sup> Aihara, Osamu. "Tradition of Our Eating Culture and the Ways to Preserve It." *Journal of Business, Nihon University* 87, no. 1 (2017): 5–7. [https://www.bus.nihon-u.ac.jp/wp-content/themes/nichidai/assets/img/unique/laboratory/kiyo/87-1\\_AiharaOsamu.pdf](https://www.bus.nihon-u.ac.jp/wp-content/themes/nichidai/assets/img/unique/laboratory/kiyo/87-1_AiharaOsamu.pdf).

prepare and eat osechi ryori, a selection of colorful dishes packed in special boxes. Each dish has a special meaning. For example, kazunoko symbolizes fertility, and kuromame represent health. Another important festival is hinamatsuri, celebrated on March 3rd. This festival features hina-arare and chirashi-sushi. These foods are believed to bring good fortune and happiness to young girls. Tanabata held on July 7th, also has its special foods. Somen are traditionally eaten during this festival. The noodles' slippery texture symbolizes the weaving threads connected to the festival's legend.<sup>5</sup>

Japan's diverse geography has led to regional variations in festive foods. For instance, mochi are common across many festivals, but the preparation and presentation differ significantly from region to region. In the Kansai region, kashiwa-mochi are popular during Children's Day, while in the Kanto region, chimaki is more common.<sup>6</sup>

Modern influences have also started to shape Japan's festive foods. Globalization and changing lifestyles have introduced new ingredients and cooking methods. Despite these changes, the core values and traditional aspects of festive foods remain preserved. Contemporary Japanese cuisine continues to balance innovation with tradition, ensuring that festive foods retain their cultural significance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ihab, Salma. "Uncover the Rich History of Festive Foods in Japan." *Amazing food and drink*, October 4, 2024. <https://amazingfoodanddrink.com/history-of-festive-foods-in-japan/#major-annual-events-and-special-dishes-in-japan>.

<sup>6</sup> Miura, Yasuko. "The Origins and Meanings of Kashiwa-Mochi and Chimaki, the Differences between Eastern and Western Traditions, and Why Do We Eat Them on the Boys' Festival?" *All about*, March 27, 2024. [https://allabout.co.jp/gm/gc/220707/#google\\_vignette](https://allabout.co.jp/gm/gc/220707/#google_vignette).

<sup>7</sup> Mita, Yukiko. "The Current State of Event Food and Its Transmission." *The Science of Living*, no. 35 (2014): 19–26. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/230634415.pdf>.

## **Popular Japanese Food Culture Among Foreign Visitors to Japan**

Today, the number of foreigners visiting Japan has increased to 25 million<sup>8</sup>, and the popularity of Japanese food is also increasing. This paper will outline existing research on Japanese food, which is especially popular among foreigners visiting Japan, and discuss the factors that affect their tastes and the direction of future research. Many studies have shown that Japanese foods such as sushi, ramen, tempura and sukiyaki are especially popular among foreigners visiting Japan. According to information from the Norin Center Bank<sup>9</sup>, sushi is the most popular, followed by yakiniku and sukiyaki. In addition, Japanese convenience stores and stalls are also popular.

There are many reasons why foreigners in Japan prefer certain Japanese foods. Cultural factors, media influences, and actual experiences play important roles. The fact that Japanese food was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage site on December 4th, 2013 also had a significant impact. In addition, TV programs and social media have had a significant impact on foreign tourists' food choices.

Another reason for the popularity of Japanese food is its beauty of appearance, traditional cooking methods and healthy eating.

It has been found that sushi, ramen, and yakiniku are the most popular Japanese foods among foreigners visiting Japan, but there are differences in preferences depending on their country of origin, age, and cultural background.

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<sup>8</sup> Japan Tourism Agency, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. "Number of Foreign Tourists Visiting Japan / Number of Japanese Leaving Japan," March 22, 2024. [https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankoch/tokei\\_hakusy/shutsunyukokushasu.html](https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankoch/tokei_hakusy/shutsunyukokushasu.html).

<sup>9</sup> Norin Center Bank. "Survey on Japanese Food from the Perspective of Foreign Visitors to Japan," April 27, 2023. [https://www.nochubank.or.jp/efforts/pdf/research\\_2023\\_01.pdf](https://www.nochubank.or.jp/efforts/pdf/research_2023_01.pdf).

## **Taste, Color, Senses, and Technique of Washoku**

Japanese cuisine, known as "washoku," is highly regarded globally for its unique flavors, presentation, and attention to detail. Central to washoku are the principles of "five tastes" (go-mi), "five colors" (go-shiki), "five senses" (go-kan), and "five methods" (go-ho). These principles, originally derived from the Chinese theory of yin and yang and the five elements, have been uniquely adapted in Japan to create a harmonious and balanced approach to food. This paper compiled these foundational elements of washoku and summarizes how they contribute to the culinary and cultural richness of Japanese cuisine.<sup>10</sup>

First, the five tastes (Go-mi) refer to sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and umami (savory). Incorporating these five tastes ensures that meals remain interesting and flavorful from start to finish. The basic seasonings in Japanese cooking—sugar, salt, vinegar, soy sauce, and miso—correspond to these tastes. Second, the five colors (Go-shiki)—white, black, yellow, red, and green—are integral to washoku, ensuring not only visual appeal but also nutritional balance. Third, Japanese cuisine engages all five senses (Go-kan)—sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell—to create a comprehensive dining experience. Finally, The five methods (Go-ho)—grilling, simmering, deep-frying, steaming, and serving raw—provide a variety of cooking techniques that contribute to the diversity and complexity of Japanese cuisine.

The principles of "five tastes," "five colors," "five senses," and "five methods" are not just culinary techniques but also reflect the cultural and philosophical depth of

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<sup>10</sup> Anabuki's nursing care. "The Five Flavors, Five Colors, Five Senses, and Five Cooking Methods of Japanese Food," May 25, 2021. <https://www.a-living.jp/hiroshima/tajime/blog/index.php?id=24138#:~:text=>

Japanese cuisine. By consciously incorporating these elements, washoku achieves a harmonious balance of flavor, nutrition, and sensory pleasure, offering a holistic dining experience. Preserving and promoting these principles is essential for maintaining the rich heritage of Japanese cuisine and sharing its unique beauty with future generations.

### **The High Level of Food Safety and Hygiene Management**

Japan's commitment to food safety and hygiene management is exemplary, contributing significantly to the country's high global standing in food security. The Economist Group's 2022 Global Food Security Index ranked Japan 6th out of 113 countries, an improvement of two places from the previous year.<sup>11</sup> This recognition highlights Japan's ability to secure stable food supplies, even amid global price hikes caused by events like the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This paper compiles information on Japan's food safety and hygiene management practices, the historical context, and the regulatory framework that ensure Japan remains a leader in this field.

**Historical Context and Cultural Practices:** Japan's meticulous approach to food hygiene has deep historical roots. Unlike European cities such as London and Paris, where waste was often disposed of unsanitarily, Japan developed systems for waste collection and recycling early on. Farmers and waste collectors would repurpose waste as fertilizer, significantly reducing the spread of diseases. This long-standing emphasis on cleanliness is a cultural cornerstone that extends to modern food safety practices.

**Modern Food Safety Practices:** One of the most notable examples of Japan's rigorous food safety standards is the widespread consumption of raw eggs. While raw egg

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<sup>11</sup> Arab News Japan. "Food Security: Japan 6th in the World, Finland 1st - British Magazine," September 21, 2021. [https://www.arabnews.jp/article/japan/article\\_76667/](https://www.arabnews.jp/article/japan/article_76667/).



consumption is rare and often considered risky in many parts of the world, in Japan, it is a common practice due to stringent hygiene protocols. The production process ensures that hens are kept in environments that minimize the risk of Salmonella infection. Eggs are thoroughly washed and sanitized before reaching consumers, and they are labeled with a shorter shelf life to emphasize their suitability for raw consumption. Additionally, traditional Japanese ingredients such as wasabi and soy sauce, known for their antibacterial properties, have been historically used to preserve freshness and prevent foodborne illnesses. This practice reflects a deep understanding of natural preservation methods long before modern refrigeration.<sup>12</sup>

**Regulatory Framework: HACCP and Beyond:** Japan's food safety management is supported by a robust regulatory framework. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) is working to implement Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles across all food-related businesses by the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. This system mandates that all food businesses, regardless of size, maintain comprehensive records and adhere to strict hygiene standards to ensure that food products do not pose health risks to consumers. Large corporations in Japan have widely adopted international food safety standards like ISO 22000, FSSC 22000, and JFS-E-C. However, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lag in these areas due to financial constraints and lack of expertise. Despite these challenges, the HACCP system aims to elevate the food safety standards across all levels of the industry.<sup>13</sup>

**Consumer Trust and Market Perception:** Japanese consumers have high

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<sup>12</sup> Akane Farm. "Japan, Where You Can Eat Raw Eggs," n.d. [https://www.akanefarm.com/contents/fan\\_contents\\_07.html](https://www.akanefarm.com/contents/fan_contents_07.html).

<sup>13</sup> MotionMind. "Crisis Management for Food Company: HACCP (Food Safety)," n.d. <https://motionmind100.com/haccp/>.

expectations for food safety, influenced by a cultural phrase, "The customer is God." This attitude has led to extremely stringent food safety practices, where even minor contaminants like a single hair are unacceptable. This rigorous standard is part of Japan's broader commitment to maintaining trust and ensuring that food safety incidents are minimized.

**Challenges and Future Directions:** Despite Japan's high standards, several challenges remain, particularly for SMEs. Common issues include financial limitations, lack of qualified personnel, and time constraints for implementing advanced safety protocols. Additionally, there is a pervasive belief that meticulous hygiene practices alone suffice, potentially hindering the widespread adoption of formal food safety systems like HACCP. Nevertheless, Japan's historical and cultural emphasis on cleanliness and its proactive regulatory approach position it well to continue leading in food safety. Continuous improvement and broader adoption of international standards will be crucial in maintaining and enhancing this leadership.

Japan's food safety and hygiene management practices are a testament to its cultural values and regulatory foresight. The country's ability to ensure high standards of food safety, from traditional practices to modern regulations, has earned it a top position in global food security rankings. As Japan moves forward, addressing challenges faced by SMEs and fully implementing HACCP principles will be key to sustaining and improving its food safety standards. This comprehensive approach not only protects consumer health but also reinforces Japan's reputation as a leader in food safety and hygiene.

In Japan's festivals, "Maturi," certain dishes are prepared for each festival, which has historical and religious significance. "Festivals" are influenced by modern

times, but traditions are also maintained. Sushi, ramen, tempura, and sukiyaki are popular among foreigners visiting Japan, and cultural factors and media influences are significant. Japanese food offers a beautiful and balanced diet based on the principles of "Gomi," "Goshiki," "Gokan," and "Goho." Japan is also highly regarded for its food safety and hygiene management, and its safety is maintained by historical hygiene practices and modern strict rules.

## **The Issues of Japanese Food Trade**

### **Overseas Expansion of Japanese Restaurants**

Japanese cuisine has gained significant popularity worldwide due to its unique flavors, emphasis on fresh ingredients, and cultural appeal. The globalization of Japanese cuisine can be attributed to its ability to adapt to local tastes while maintaining its traditional elements. This flexibility has helped Japanese restaurants thrive in different cultural settings, attracting a wide range of customers. For example, sushi restaurants in Western countries may offer rolls with ingredients like avocado or cream cheese, which are less common in traditional Japanese sushi.

Moreover, the rise of Japanese restaurant chains has played an important role in the global spread of Japanese cuisine. Chains like Nobu, Benihana, Kura Sushi, and Marukame Udon have successfully established a presence in major cities across Europe, North America, and Asia, catering to diverse tastes while maintaining a standardized dining experience. The success of these chains underscores the adaptability of Japanese cuisine to different culinary landscapes without compromising authenticity. Japanese popular culture, such as anime, manga, and J-pop, has also had an impact on the expansion

of Japanese restaurants around the world. These cultural exports have increased interest in Japan's lifestyle and cuisine among global audiences. Japanese-themed restaurants often incorporate elements of pop culture into their decor and menu offerings, creating immersive dining experiences that attract both Japanese expatriates and local enthusiasts.

Furthermore, the perceived health benefits associated with Japanese cuisine have contributed to its appeal abroad. Japanese dishes are often lauded for their use of fresh ingredients, minimal use of fats, and emphasis on natural flavors.<sup>14</sup> As consumers worldwide become increasingly health-conscious, Japanese restaurants offer a viable alternative to traditional fast food and casual dining options.

### **Japanese Food Exports**

This outlines major research on Japanese food exports and discusses factors and challenges in promoting exports, as well as future research directions.

According to data from the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries<sup>15</sup>, Japan's food exports are increasing year by year, especially in the Asian and North American markets. Exports of agricultural, forestry, and fisheries products and food in 2023 reached a record high of 1.4547 trillion yen, an increase of 2.9% from 2022 and an increase of 40.7 billion yen.

One of the reasons behind the increase in exports is that income levels in

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<sup>14</sup> Health and Longevity Net. "Why Do Japanese People Live so Long?," January 4, 2023. <https://www.tyojyu.or.jp/net/kenkou-tyoju/tyojyu-shakai/nagaiki.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. "Regarding the Export Performance of Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Products and Food in 2023," January 30, 2024. [https://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/yusyutu\\_kokusai/kikaku/240130.html#:~:text=.](https://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/yusyutu_kokusai/kikaku/240130.html#:~:text=)

developing countries such as Asia have increased and potential buyers have increased.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the inclusion of Japanese food as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage has increased the brand value of Japanese food and increased international awareness. Furthermore, active promotional activities by the Japanese government and companies have had the effect of raising awareness and demand for Japanese foods.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, there are several challenges for Japan's food exports. Development of domestic safety and quality control systems that can be used overseas is essential for expanding exports of agricultural products and foods. However, it cannot be said that Japan is making sufficient progress in dealing with the situation.<sup>18</sup> In addition, it is said that it is difficult to secure price competitiveness due to high transportation costs and tariffs.

### **Enhancing the Brand Value of Japanese Food Products**

Japanese food is highly regarded worldwide for its quality, taste, and health benefits. However, the intensification of competition in the international market and the

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<sup>16</sup> Japan Finance Corporation. "The Current State of Japanese Agricultural and Marine Products and Food Exports," June 14, 2024.

[https://www.jfc.go.jp/n/finance/keiei/guide/column/005.html#:~:text=.](https://www.jfc.go.jp/n/finance/keiei/guide/column/005.html#:~:text=)

<sup>17</sup> Prime Ministers of Japan. "Meeting of Relevant Ministers on Measures to Respond to Import Regulations of Importing Countries in Order to Expand Exports of Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries Products and Foodstuffs," December 25, 2023: 2-3.

[https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/nousui/yunyuukoku\\_kisei\\_kaigi/dai19/gijisidai.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/nousui/yunyuukoku_kisei_kaigi/dai19/gijisidai.html). Resources 3 Implementation Strategy for Expanding Exports of Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Products and Food - Toward a Shift to Market-in Exports -

<sup>18</sup> Honda, Nobuaki. "The Current State of Agricultural Product Exports and the Issues They Face." *The National Library of Japan*, no. 810 (2014). 9.

[https://dl.ndl.go.jp/view/download/digidepo\\_8413011\\_po\\_0810.pdf?contentNo=1.](https://dl.ndl.go.jp/view/download/digidepo_8413011_po_0810.pdf?contentNo=1)

diversification of consumer preferences necessitate further enhancement of the brand value of Japanese food. This paper compiles information on strategies to enhance the brand value of Japanese food.

Brand value refers to the emotional and psychological connection consumers have with a brand, shaped by factors such as product quality, design, reliability, price, and overall consumer experience. In the case of Japanese food, its high quality, diverse regional varieties, and health benefits contribute to its strong brand value. However, challenges such as high prices, low international awareness, and complex export regulations hinder its growth in some markets. To overcome these challenges, effective marketing strategies like digital marketing and brand storytelling can enhance its global presence and consumer loyalty.<sup>19</sup>

To succeed in diverse markets, companies should tailor their products and packaging to align with local preferences, using designs and languages that resonate with consumers. Prioritizing quality and safety can build trust, which can be strengthened through certifications and clear traceability of raw materials and manufacturing processes. Additionally, companies can underscore their commitment to sustainability by adopting eco-friendly packaging and engaging in environmental and community initiatives that enhance their corporate reputation.

To enhance the brand value of Japanese food, it is crucial to leverage strengths such as high quality and diverse food culture while implementing strategic marketing activities tailored to local market needs. Additionally, emphasizing quality and safety and promoting sustainability will help gain consumer trust and aim for long-term brand value

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<sup>19</sup> Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). Market Report on Japanese Food Products in the Global Market. Retrieved from <https://www.jetro.go.jp/jfoodo/activities/>

enhancement. Through these efforts, Japanese food is expected to increase its competitiveness in the international market and achieve further growth.

## **Competition and Challenges between Imported Food and Domestic Industries**

The increase in imported food in the Japanese market has had various impacts on domestic industries. In this review, this paper compiles materials on current status issues, the competitive structure, background, and future measures related to imported food products and the domestic industry.

The Current Status and Overview of the Food Industry reveals that this sector is a cornerstone of Japan's economy, encompassing food manufacturing, distribution, and the restaurant industry. With a domestic production value around 80 trillion yen, the food industry represents roughly 8% of the nation's total industrial output. It employs nearly 7.88 million people, or about 13% of Japan's workforce, reflecting its deep ties to local economies and its influence across communities.<sup>20</sup>

However, in examining the Background and Current Status of the industry, Japan faces a significant challenge in the form of a declining food self-sufficiency rate and a growing dependency on imported foods. Global trade liberalization and the cost advantages of imports, especially from East Asia, have contributed to this trend.<sup>21</sup> Changing consumer preferences, shaped by an aging population and increasing demands for convenience, health, and food safety, have also influenced the industry. This shift is evident in the rising demand for items like soft drinks, seasonings, frozen meals, and

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<sup>20</sup> "The Environment Surrounding the Food Industry." *Food Industry Center*, 2019. <https://www.shokusan.or.jp/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/116pdf2.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Shimowatari, Toshiharu. "Issues Facing Domestic Agriculture in the Context of the Globalization of the Food Industry." *Food System Research* 9, no. 2 (2003). [https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jfsr1994/9/2/9\\_2\\_17/\\_pdf](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jfsr1994/9/2/9_2_17/_pdf).

ready-to-eat products. At the same time, the Progress of Internationalization within the food sector has led to a steady increase in processed food imports and a heightened reliance on imported raw materials. This trend underscores the importance of ensuring product safety and quality while establishing a stable supply chain, particularly in response to international geopolitical risks.

The Factors of Competition in Japan's food industry include the cost advantage of imported foods, which are often produced at lower costs and offer competitive pricing. Imported foods have also improved in quality and provide a diverse array of options that meet Japanese consumer needs. However, with an increasing dependency on imported foods, Japan faces complex challenges related to the stability of supply and quality control, which are further complicated by the potential impacts of international political shifts.

Among the Challenges for Domestic Industries is the intensification of price competition due to lower-cost imported foods, placing domestic producers at a disadvantage. This increase in imported food has led to a reduction in domestic agricultural production and employment, contributing to the “hollowing out” of the agricultural sector. Additionally, domestic agriculture has been slow to improve productivity and adopt new technologies, reducing its competitiveness on a global scale. Shorter product lifecycles also pose a challenge for the industry, as diversified consumer needs mean that the timeframe to earn profits from new products is shrinking. As a result, companies in the food industry rely heavily on advertising and promotion, with food-related industries accounting for over 17% of Japan's total advertising expenditures in 2002. The industry also faces growing Environmental Issues, including the need to recycle food waste and reduce packaging, guided by initiatives such as the Food Recycling Law and the Container and Packaging Recycling Law.



Looking ahead to Future Prospects and Measures, domestic industries will need to focus on adding value and differentiating their products to remain competitive, especially by enhancing the brand appeal of regional specialty products. Productivity improvement and cost reduction through technological innovation and efficient production processes will be essential steps. Finally, government support will play a crucial role in strengthening the food industry and domestic agriculture, promoting structural reforms to decrease import dependency and fostering sustainable practices across the sector.<sup>22</sup>

The competition between imported food and domestic industries is an unavoidable reality. However, by implementing appropriate measures, it is possible to maintain and strengthen the competitiveness of domestic industries. It is crucial to aim for sustainable development through high added value, improved productivity, and policy support. Flexible and strategic responses are required while closely monitoring the trends in both domestic and international food markets.

Japanese food exports are steadily increasing, particularly in Asia and North America, driven by rising income levels and active promotional efforts by the government and businesses. Japanese restaurants are gaining global popularity due to their health benefits, unique flavors, and the influence of Japanese pop culture. High-quality standards, government support, and effective marketing strategies have significantly enhanced the brand value of Japanese food products. However, the growing presence of imported food poses challenges to domestic industries, such as price competitiveness and supply stability. To address these challenges, stronger policy support, productivity improvements, and

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<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. “The Situation Surrounding the Food Industry,” August 2023. <https://www.maff.go.jp/j/shokusan/kikaku/jizoku/attach/pdf/index-13.pdf>.

innovative approaches are needed to maintain and enhance the competitiveness of Japan's food industry in both domestic and international markets.

## **Tradition and Sustainability of Japanese food**

### **The Craftsmanship of Sake Making and Soy Sauce Brewing**

In exploring traditional Japanese craftsmanship from sake making to soy sauce brewing, it becomes evident that these practices are deeply rooted in centuries-old techniques and knowledge. Sake, a type of Japanese rice wine, is made by polishing rice grains, fermenting them with a special mold called koji, and carefully controlling the temperature.<sup>23</sup> This method shows how much skill and attention to detail are needed to create the right flavors and quality.

Similarly, soy sauce is made using traditional methods that require expertise. It's brewed from soybeans and wheat, which are fermented with koji mold and yeast for several months to develop its unique umami flavor.<sup>24</sup> The key to making soy sauce lies in the fermentation process, where specific types of mold and bacteria transform these raw ingredients into a sauce known for its rich taste.

Both sake making and soy sauce brewing highlight the balance between old traditions and new techniques. While producers stick to ancient methods that have been used for a long time, they also use modern technology to make sure the sake and soy

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<sup>23</sup> Kimura, Adachi. "Do You Know the Different Types of Sake? A Simple Explanation of Junmai and Daiginjo." Waraku, September 13, 2019. <https://intojapanwaraku.com/rock/gourmet-rock/11017/>.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. "Soy Sauce Production Method," n.d. [https://www.maff.go.jp/j/syouan/seisaku/c\\_propanol/soysauce.html](https://www.maff.go.jp/j/syouan/seisaku/c_propanol/soysauce.html).

sauce are consistently good.<sup>25</sup> This mix of old and new shows how Japanese craftsmanship adapts to meet modern needs while keeping its cultural heritage alive.

### **Sustainable Sushi Culture Utilizing Local Resources**

Sustainable sushi practices prioritize local fish, which reduces environmental impact by minimizing transportation and supports local fisheries. This approach is widely adopted by sushi chefs in Japan and is increasingly gaining attention globally as a response to overfishing and the depletion of popular fish species like bluefin tuna.

Locally sourced, seasonal fish allows chefs to create unique, regionally specific menus that not only preserve local biodiversity but also strengthen community economies. For instance, using species like skipjack tuna and other locally abundant fish helps to reduce reliance on endangered species.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, as global demand for sushi rises, alternative methods like cell-cultured fish are emerging as potential solutions to reduce strain on wild fish populations. Although not widely adopted yet, this approach may allow the industry to provide traditional sushi flavors and textures without impacting marine biodiversity directly.

### **Sweet Potatoes and Environmentally Friendly Agriculture**

There are several reasons why sweet potatoes are deeply embedded in Japanese food culture. The following is a summary of their history, varieties, and benefits,

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<sup>25</sup> Ono, Yoshio. "Innovation in the Sake Brewing Industry." *Hikone Ronso*, no. 429 (2021): 4–19. [https://www.econ.shiga-u.ac.jp/ebrisk/Ronso-429\\_ono.pdf](https://www.econ.shiga-u.ac.jp/ebrisk/Ronso-429_ono.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Jerusha Klemperer. 2024. "Can Sushi Be Sustainable?" FoodPrint. August 26, 2024. <https://foodprint.org/blog/can-sushi-be-sustainable/>.

concluding with why sweet potatoes have become a staple in Japanese cuisine.

First, sweet potatoes hold a significant place in Japan's historical and cultural landscape. Their introduction dates back to 1609, when they were brought to Satsuma (now Kagoshima Prefecture), which initiated their cultivation across Japan. In particular, during the repeated famines of the Edo period, sweet potatoes gained attention as an emergency crop due to their high nutritional value and ease of cultivation, leading to their widespread adoption. Following World War II, large-scale production reached an annual 7 million tons, but as the food supply stabilized in post-war Japan, production decreased and now stands at approximately 1 million tons annually.

In modern times, sweet potatoes continue to serve a variety of purposes, including use as fresh produce, ingredients for shochu (a type of Japanese distilled liquor), starch, and processed foods. In particular, the Kanto and southern Kyushu regions depend on sweet potatoes as a cornerstone of local agriculture.<sup>27</sup> Kagoshima, the prefecture where sweet potatoes were first introduced, remains the leading production area. In Japan, 65 main varieties of sweet potatoes were cultivated in 2021, with well-known varieties including Koganesengan, Beniharuka, and Beniazuma.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, sweet potatoes are highly valued for their nutritional benefits. They are rich in insoluble fiber, and they contain a compound called jalapin that promotes digestion, making them effective in preventing constipation. Additionally, sweet potatoes provide abundant vitamins, including vitamin C, which retains its properties

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<sup>27</sup> Japan Potato Research Association. "II. The history of sweet potatoes."

[https://www.jrt.gr.jp/spmini/spmini\\_history/](https://www.jrt.gr.jp/spmini/spmini_history/)

<sup>28</sup> Sweet Potato Beauty Institute. "Which prefectures produce the most sweet potatoes? We also explain the varieties with the largest cultivation areas!"

<https://oimobicho.jp/basic/prefectures-with-the-largest-production-of-sweet-potatoes/>

even after heating, as well as potassium and calcium, which are beneficial for health.<sup>29</sup>

Given this background, sweet potatoes have played a complementary role alongside rice in Japanese food culture, supporting the population during times of famine and war. Today, their simple taste and nutritional benefits are being re-evaluated, and they are firmly established as a beloved ingredient in Japanese cuisine.<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, sweet potatoes have become an essential part of Japanese food culture due to their historical background, contribution to regional economies, and nutritional value.

The third part explores the craftsmanship and sustainability of beloved traditional Japanese foods like sake, soy sauce, Sushi, and Sweet Potatoes. These foods combine ancient skills with modern methods to maintain quality and respect cultural origins. Sushi uses locally caught fish, encouraging local consumption, and growing global demand has helped solve a variety of problems. With a history spanning some 400 years, sweet potatoes have shown many different facets and have supported Japan's food culture. These foods show how Japan's culinary history connects with sustainability, enhancing both taste and tradition.

## Summary

The literature review highlights the rich and evolving world of Japanese food culture. Traditional dishes prepared for festivals, or *matsuri*, carry deep historical and

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Agriculture. "Forestry and Fisheries. Please tell us about the nutritional characteristics of sweet potatoes."

[https://www.maff.go.jp/j/heyakodomo\\_sodan/0011/04.html](https://www.maff.go.jp/j/heyakodomo_sodan/0011/04.html)

<sup>30</sup> Akio Kariya. "The Modern History of Sweet Potatoes - The 136-year history of the sweet potato wholesaler Kawako Shoten -," October 29, 2012.

<https://imoshin.or.jp/wp-content/uploads/sp-modern-history-all.pdf>

religious meaning, blending old customs with modern influences. Iconic foods like sushi, ramen, tempura, and sukiyaki are favorites among tourists, with their popularity shaped by cultural values and media. Japanese cuisine is admired for its beauty, balance, and high standards of safety and hygiene, which have been shaped by both historical practices and strict modern regulations. Japanese food exports are growing steadily, especially in Asia and North America, thanks to government support and the global love for Japanese restaurants. However, challenges like competition from imported foods require creative solutions to keep Japanese food industries strong. Finally, traditional foods like sushi, sake, and soy sauce show how Japan combines ancient craftsmanship with modern methods. These foods connect deeply with local traditions, sustainability, and the global appreciation for Japan's culinary heritage.

# **METHODOLOGY**

## **Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of Japanese food culture on the recovery of the Japanese economy. Japan has faced economic stagnation and low growth in recent years. Therefore, we decided to do this research because we thought that food culture should be one of the ways to promote economic revitalization and recovery. This study started with introducing the background of Japanese food issues. Then, relevant literatures were reviewed as the base of developing research methodology.

The authors would like to adopt a few methods to collect data, such as interviews, qualitative analysis studies.

Interviews conducted with visitors to Japan, sushi chefs, local farmers, representatives of food exporters and Japanese restaurant owner in Taiwan, the United States and Korea.

By conducting detailed interviews with each subject, data collection to achieve research objectives can be achieved.

## **Sources of Data**

The data from this study consists of 34 interviews. Answers to the interview were collected from foreigners visiting Japan, sushi chefs, Japanese trade company, Japanese restaurant owner in Taiwan, the United States and Korea, and Japanese farmers.

The survey included 13 foreigners visiting Japan, 1 Japanese working at a trading company, 1 Japanese restaurant owner in Taiwan, 2 Japanese restaurants owners in the

United States, 1 restaurant owner in Korea, 5 sushi chefs, and 11 Japanese working in agriculture. The reason why foreigners in Japan chose it as a data source is that it can reflect the international recognition and attractiveness of Japanese food. It is also suitable for considering the economic impact of tourism consumption. The second reason why we chose Japanese working for a trading company as a data source is that they have a direct knowledge of the development of Japanese food in overseas markets and the actual situation of exports. Through their opinions and knowledge, we can analyze how Japanese food is accepted overseas and the impact of trade on economic recovery. We requested interviews with more than five trading companies in Japan, but all but one declined our request. As a result, we also implemented interviews to people who run Japanese restaurants overseas in an effort to understand the current state of Japanese food exports overseas. Finally, we chose Japanese farmers as our data source because it is a valuable source of information to understand the impact of increased demand for Japanese food on agriculture and the local economy.

### **Research Instruments and Data Collection**

The research instruments and data collection for this study involve structured interviews designed to explore the economic effects of Japan's food culture on tourism income, local businesses, international trade, and sustainable rural development. Interviews were conducted with five categories of Interviewees: tourists visiting Japan, sushi chefs, food export company in Japan, Japanese-style restaurant owners in overseas, local farmers in Japan. The questions and contents of the interviews are in Appendix A. Each interview was tailored to the specific role and perspective of the participant.



First, through questions such as how important Japanese cuisine was in the decision-making process for foreign tourists visiting Japan and whether they plan to seek out Japanese food upon returning to their home countries, we will investigate how Japanese food culture impacts tourism income and local economies. Second, we will investigate the impact of Japanese food exports on trade and the economy by asking Japanese food export companies and overseas Japanese restaurant owners about the benefits and challenges of exporting Japanese food. Third, we will investigate sustainable approaches for the future of agriculture by asking local farmers about the challenges they face in their local agricultural business and the specific measures they are taking to improve sales. Finally, we will investigate the role of traditional Japanese food culture, and in particular, the role of sushi making in supporting local economies and sustainable development, through questions to sushi chefs about how to pass on their craftsmanship and the significance of using local ingredients.

By dividing the interviewees into five categories and asking the same questions to all interviewees in each category, consistency is maintained, the interviewer's bias is reduced, and it becomes easier to compare and analyze the answers, so structured interviews were adopted as the main method of data collection. The standardized format makes the interview efficient and focused, and improves reliability.

TABLE

Table 1 Information of Interviewees (foreign tourists)

Code	Nationality	Number of times visited	Date
FT1	Canada	First time	July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT2	Australia	First time	July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT3	Australia	First time	July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT4	China	Second time	July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT5	Malaysia	First time	July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT6	Malaysia	First time	July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT7	Philippines	Second time	July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT8	Korea	Second time	September 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT9	Taiwan	Second time	September 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT10	United States	Second time	September 6 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT11	Australia	First time	July 7 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT12	United States	First time	July 7 <sup>th</sup> 2024
FT13	United States	First time	July 7 <sup>th</sup> 2024

Table 2 Information of Interviewees (Sushi Chefs, Trade Company worker, Japanese restaurant owners, and Japanese Farmers)

No.	City	Occupation	Date
SC1	Okinawa	Sushi chef	August 28 <sup>th</sup> 2024
SC2	Okinawa	Sushi chef	August 28 <sup>th</sup> 2024
SC3	Okinawa	Sushi chef	October 9 <sup>th</sup> 2024
SC4	Okinawa	Sushi chef	October 10 <sup>th</sup> 2024
SC5	Okinawa	Sushi chef	October 10 <sup>th</sup> 2024
TC1	Kyoto	Trade company worker	September 24 <sup>th</sup> 2024
JR1	Taiwan	Japanese restaurant owner	November 1 <sup>st</sup> 2024
JR2	The United States	Japanese restaurant owner	October 30 <sup>th</sup> 2024
JR3	The United States	Japanese restaurant owner	October 31 <sup>st</sup> 2024
JR4	Korea	Japanese restaurant owner	November 1 <sup>st</sup> 2024
LF1	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF2	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF3	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF4	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF5	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF6	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF7	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF8	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF9	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 13 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF10	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 17 <sup>th</sup> 2024
LF11	Kagoshima	Farmer	August 19 <sup>th</sup> 2024

Table 3 Japanese Terms

1	Tempura	Tempura is seafood or vegetables that have been covered in batter and fried in oil.
2	Yakitori	Chicken skewers
3	Sukiyaki	Japanese dish made of beef, vegetables, tofu and noodles simmered in a sweet sauce.
4	Yakiniku	Japanese barbeque.
5	Washoku	Japanese dishes.
6	Matsuri	Festival
7	Osechi-ryori	Japanese traditional New Year's dish.
8	Kazunoko	Salted herring roe.
9	Kuromame	Black soybeans.
10	Hinamaturi	Girl's day which is a day to wish for healthy growth and happiness of girls.
11	Hina-arare	They are bite-sized sweet rice crackers that also come in pink, white and green.
12	Chirashi-sushi	Scattered sushi. It is a bowl of sushi rice colorfully decorated with seafood, eggs, and vegetables.
13	Tanabata:	It is annual event that is generally celebrated on July 7th. People hang colorful papers where their wishes are written on bamboo branches.
14	Somen	Thin wheat flour noodles.
15	Mochi	Rice cake.
16	Kashiwa-mochi	Oak leaf-wrapped rice cakes.
17	Chimaki	Sweet rice wrapped in bamboo leaves.
18	Udon	Japanese wheat noodles
19	Sake	Japanese national liquor that is made from rice through fermentation.
20	Miso	It is a paste usually made from fermented beans.

21	Omurice	Sweet and savoury rice wrapped with an omelette with a squirt of ketchup.
22	Napolitan	Ketchup-based spaghetti
23	Cream pan	Bun with custard filling
24	Izakaya	Japanese pub
25	Goya	Bitter melon.
26	Anpan	It is a type of bread that is filled with red bean paste.
27	Umami	Savory flavor, fifth basic taste.
28	Koji	A microorganism that is the base of fermented foods used in miso.
29	Taco rice	It is a combination of Mexican and Japanese cuisine, consisting of taco-seasoned ground beef on a bed of rice, topped with shredded lettuce, cheese, tomato, and salsa.
30	Korokke	Croquette. Deep fried mashed potato mixed with minced beef, fried onion and some seasonings.
31	Awamori	Strong Okinawan liquor distilled from rice or millet.
32	Grukun	Sea fish that called pterocaesio digramma
33	Irabucha	Sea fish that called scarus ovifrons
34	Mirin	Japanese sweet cooking wine
35	Unagi donburi	Grilled eel rice bowl
36	Koganesengan	A type of sweet potato. It is spindle-shaped, powdery, has a gentle sweetness, and a fine, fluffy texture. It has a high and stable yield, and its quality does not deteriorate even if it is harvested early.
37	Beniharuka	A type of sweet potato. It is characterized by its moist and sticky texture and sweetness, and storing it brings out the texture and sweetness even more.
38	Beniazuma	A type of sweet potato, it has a fluffy texture and a rich, chestnut-like sweetness and aroma.
39	jalapin	The active principle of scammony, the glucoside with chemical formula C <sub>34</sub> H <sub>114</sub> O <sub>6</sub> , a powerful purgative.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collection was carried out to gain views on the impact of Japanese food culture on the Japanese economy. In the study, data from chefs, foreigners visiting Japan, exporters and farmers were collected through interviews. Interview questions are pre-tested and tailored to provide the information needed for the study.

Answers to all interviews were written and data organized by theme. Narrative analysis (not just answers, but extract and analyze episodes from the background) and theme analysis (based on data, recurring themes identify patterns) were used to identify recurring themes and delve into each interviewer's views. This highlighted the economic impact of Japanese food in areas such as tourism revenue, regional business, international trade and rural economy.

### **Perceptions of the Impact of Japanese Food Culture on Tourist Experiences and Local Economies**

In this section, we divided into three parts to explore the impact of Japanese food culture on tourism and the local economy, based on interviews with foreign tourists who have visited Japan and sushi chefs. First, we will explore the influence of Japanese food on travel decisions. In the second part, we will explore the impact on local economies of tourists experiencing local food culture. In the last part, we will explore the economic impact of Japanese food consumption by foreign tourists after they return to their home countries.

## **Influence of Japanese Food on Travel Decisions**

First, we focused on how interested the foreign tourist interviewees were in Japanese food. When asked how important Japanese food is in influencing their decisions to visit Japan, 80% of foreign tourists answered it was extremely important. They have long had a strong interest in Japanese food, and the desire to actually experience authentic Japanese cuisine was the main reason for their decision to come to Japan.

“Japanese food was a pretty big part of my decision to visit. I’ve always loved Japanese food, but I wanted experience it authentically.”-Interviewee FT1

“It was actually one of the top reasons I wanted to visit. I was excited to experience it in the place where it originated.” -Interviewee FT4

The remaining 20% of tourists answered that while Japanese food was not the only reason for visiting Japan, it was a big part of their enjoyment of the trip.

“I’ve always been fascinated by the variety of Japanese food. While food wasn’t the only reason I came, it was major part of what excited about visiting.” -Interviewee FT2

For people visiting Japan for the first time, eating classic Japanese dishes such as ramen and sushi is an important part of the travel experience. Some repeat visitors answered that their love of Japanese food was the reason for their return visit to Japan. This pattern shows that Japanese food culture plays a key role in drawing tourists and encouraging them to return, highlighting its potential to boost tourism income. For repeat visitors, the appeal is often the chance to experience local and traditional cuisine that they cannot eat in their own country. For example, this includes traditional Japanese breakfasts and Kyoto-style green tea sweets.

“Japanese food was a huge reason for my trip. The first time, I tried a bunch of great stuff, but there’s still so much I want to eat like regional dishes and little local spots.” -Interviewee FT9

“Honestly, Japanese food was a huge reason I wanted to come back! I

loved it so much the first time—there’s just so much to try, and it’s all so good. I was excited to explore more local spots and try things I missed before. The food here is such a big part of this trip.” -Interviewee FT10

### **Impact on Local Economies of Tourists Experiencing Local Food Culture**

First, we focused on what kinds of Japanese food foreign tourists tried while in Japan, and which Japanese food they liked. When asked what Japanese food they tried during their stay and what their favorites were, they answered that they tried a variety of Japanese food, from well-known dishes like ramen and sushi to local specialties like Okinawan taco-rice and korokke. This kind of experience not only helps tourists to understand Japanese culture, but also enables local restaurants to increase their profits by offering major and unique menus. For example, the fact that foreign tourists visited Helios Sake Brewery in Okinawa or took part in a matcha-making experience in Kyoto highlights the potential impact on the economy of niche foods and beverages that are linked to regional characteristics and traditions, such as awamori and matcha. These particular local foods not only attract tourists, but also support the local economy by maintaining a market for local ingredients and craftsmanship.

“My favorite is Macha sweets. When I went to Kyoto, I experienced making matcha in a Japanese-style room. I also had the experience of making a matcha parfait using matcha-flavored rice cakes and jelly that I made myself. I already liked matcha because it's good for your health, but through this experience I was able to learn about the Japanese matcha culture and I like it even more now.” – Interviewee FT9

“Korokke and Awamori are my favorites. Korokke is just tasty and easy to grab while walking around. I was surprised at the korokke, which are completely different from French fries, even though they have similar ingredients. It’s also fun to try different kinds, like curry or cheese. I love Awamori because it has



such a smooth and unique flavor. I've always liked alcohol, and I actually went on a tour of a sake brewery in Okinawa called Helios Shuzo. After visiting there, I love it even more since I got to see how it's made with that special spring water from Kyoda. The brewery tour was super cool, and tasting the different types right there was a blast. It's a great way to connect with Okinawan culture, and it goes so well with the local food." -Interviewee FT10

Second, we focused on how much foreign tourists actually contribute to local economy. When asked the sushi chefs whether they thought foreign tourists would affect their store sales, they answered that foreign customers contribute greatly to sales. For example, there is restaurant where foreign customers account for 40% of customers, and there are many tourists from South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in particular, who are making a significant contribution to increased sales. Other chefs gave similar answers, and it was also clear that sales increase even more during peak tourist season.

"Yes. In fact, 60% of my customers are local people and 40% are foreign visitors. There are many tourists from South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan in particular." – Interviewee SC1

"It is certainly having an impact. In particular, during the tourist season, the number of overseas tourists increases, and sales often increase." – Interviewee SC2

When asked sushi chefs if they had done anything to increase the number of foreign customers, they answered that they had introduced initiatives such as multilingual menus and allergy-friendly menus. These initiatives respond to the needs of foreign customers and directly contribute to the growth of the tourism economy.

"Yes. First of all, we created a menu in multiple languages so that it would be easy for foreign customers to understand. Recently, we have also started offering a sushi menu that caters to vegetarians and those with allergies, and we are trying to cater to a wide range of needs so that we can be enjoyed by a wide range of customers." – Interviewee SC3

It became clear that foreign tourists were making a significant contribution to sales, so we thought that this would also have an impact on the suppliers of sushi restaurants, and so we focused on where sushi chefs were buying their ingredients. When asked sushi chefs where they get their fish, most of them answered they often buy fish at their local fishing port or fish market. By purchasing from local fishing ports, they have created a market for seasonal native fish such as gurukun and irabucha, enhancing the regional characteristics of the cuisine and further increasing the appeal of food tourism in Japan. We believe that supporting the local fishing industry by purchasing fish from the local fishing port means that the income from tourism will circulate within the region. This creates a virtuous cycle in the local economy, where tourism not only boosts restaurant sales, but also indirectly supports other local industries.

“We first buy fresh fish from the local fishing port. The seas around Okinawa are blessed with a diverse range of fish, so we often buy fish that has been caught early in the morning by local fishermen. The big attraction is that we can get seasonal fish. We can also stock up on Okinawa's specialty fish, such as gurukun and irabucha, which will give us a wider range of menu options.” – Interviewee SC1

“We mainly buy fish from local fishing ports. After all, freshness is important for sushi, so I think it's great to be able to get high-quality, fresh fish that the fishermen have caught in the morning.” - Interviewee SC4

### **Economic Benefits and Post-Visit Consumption Patterns**

When asked the tourists if they intended to look for Japanese food after returning home, it became clear that they still wanted Japanese food after returning home. Many tourists answered they intend to exploring Japanese food by going to Japanese restaurants or even trying to make dishes at home, which means that interest in Japanese food

ingredients and products will continue to grow around the world. Furthermore, tourists seeking specialist or traditional foods that are hard to find in their home countries could also drive the market for Japanese exports.

“I’ll be looking for good Japanese restaurants. I’m also thinking about trying to make yakitori.” -Interviewee FT3

“Absolutely! Even after my first visit, I was always looking for good Japanese food back in Taiwan. We have a lot of Japanese restaurants, but it’s fun to see how they compare to the real thing.” -Interviewee FT9

This data shows that Japanese food culture strongly motivates tourists, enhancing their travel experience and sparking lasting interest in Japanese cuisine. As tourists try diverse Japanese dishes and bring this appreciation home, Japan can expect ongoing economic benefits through tourism and growing demand for Japanese food exports. Supporting local producers, expanding food experiences, and promoting traditional Japanese cuisine globally will strengthen the connection between Japanese food culture and economic growth.

## **Perceptions of the Impact of Japanese Food Export Growth on International Trade and Economic Growth**

### **Growing Demand for Authentic Japanese Cuisine in Foreign Markets**

Restaurant owners in various regions highlighted that the increasing demand for Japanese food is driven by health consciousness and cultural interest. At the restaurant in the United States, the diverse local food scene has inspired the owner to provide authentic Japanese cuisine, meeting the demand for unique dining experiences.

“The meals my parents made and the authentic dishes I enjoyed during trips to Japan really shaped my sense of Japanese identity. I wanted to bring a taste of

Japan’s rich food culture here—not just the usual sushi and tempura, but real dishes that use traditional techniques and ingredients.” - Interviewee JR2

The owner of a Japanese restaurant in Taiwan is also meeting the rising demand for Japanese cuisine by using imported Japanese ingredients. They noted that the high quality of Japanese ingredients is well-received by customers, contributing to the restaurant’s premium reputation.

“Japanese ingredients significantly enhance the taste and appearance of our dishes, and elevate the atmosphere of the restaurant. This has led to an increase in repeat customers who value the authenticity of Japanese cuisine.” - Interviewee JR1

### **Use of Japanese Ingredients to Maintain Authenticity**

Many restaurant owners are committed to using Japanese ingredients to preserve the quality and flavor of their dishes. At the restaurant in the United States, soy sauce, rice, and miso imported from Japan are seen as essential for achieving authentic flavors that local substitutes cannot replicate.

“We use soy sauce, mirin, miso, and rice vinegar from Japan to get that authentic taste. While Asian markets sell soy sauces from places like Korea and China, they just don’t taste the same.” -Interviewee JR2

The restaurant owner in Taiwan also noted that customers are often surprised by the unique freshness and flavor of Japanese ingredients, which enhance their dining experience.

“Our Taiwanese customers are amazed by the distinct flavors and freshness of Japanese ingredients, especially in seafood and seasonings.”- Interviewee JR1

### **Challenges in the Japanese Food Export and Import Process**

There are significant costs and logistical challenges associated with exporting Japanese food products. The restaurant owner in Taiwan mentioned that the high costs and occasional delays in importing Japanese ingredients can impact menu prices and quality. Additionally, a trading company employee pointed out that varying regulations in each country make exporting Japanese food complex, as certain certifications are required depending on the destination.

“Shipping takes over two months, and stock shortages sometimes affect our menu. Additionally, shipping costs can be up to three times more than local ingredients, making quality control and cost management challenging.” - Interviewee JR1

“It is necessary to understand the export regulations for each country. For example, Canada has specific rules for shellfish, and countries like Saudi Arabia require Halal certification.” -Interviewee TC1

### **Customer Reactions and Cultural Appeal**

The unique presentation and taste of Japanese cuisine are well-received by a wide range of customers, particularly among younger generations who seek authentic experiences. The owner of the restaurant in the United States noted that customers frequently provide positive feedback, emphasizing the fresh taste, beautiful presentation, and unique atmosphere. At the restaurant in Korea, the owner highlighted that the Instagram-worthy presentation of Japanese dishes appeals to younger customers.

“I get feedback from customers saying things like ‘fresh and delicious,’ ‘beautiful presentation,’ and ‘loving the unique vibe.’ The younger crowd especially seems really into it.”-Interviewee JR2

“Many customers say the beautiful presentation and colorful dishes look great on Instagram. This is particularly appealing to younger customers.” -

Interviewee JR4

### **Popularity of Event Foods and Seasonal Ingredients**

Some restaurant owners noted that Japanese event foods and seasonal ingredients hold special appeal, providing customers with a unique taste of Japanese culture. At the restaurant in the United States, dishes like unagi donburi and chirashi sushi are popular as they allow customers to experience traditional Japanese celebrations.

“We have unagi donburi and chirashi sushi on our menu, which are popular as event foods. Customers appreciate being able to enjoy these traditional dishes even here in America.” -Interviewee JR2

At a restaurant in Taiwan, seasonal Japanese ingredients that reflect Japan’s changing seasons are well-received by customers, contributing to an increase in repeat customers.

“By incorporating seasonal ingredients from Japan, we offer customers an experience that reflects the changes of the four seasons, which has led to an increase in repeat visits.” Interviewee JR1

### **Trust in the Quality and Safety of Japanese Products**

The quality and safety standards of Japanese products are a significant selling point, especially for health-conscious customers. The owner of the restaurant in the United States noted that Japan’s strict inspection standards for agricultural and marine products ensure safety, which appeals to health-focused customers.

“Japanese agricultural and marine products go through really strict inspection standards, so customers can feel good about using them.”  
Interviewee JR3

“Japanese condiments like soy sauce take time to ferment, giving them a deep umami flavor. That’s what gives them a unique taste you just can’t

find in other products.”-Interviewee JR2

The trading company employee also highlighted that Japanese products’ high standards make them highly competitive in global markets.

“Japanese agricultural and marine products are extremely safe and meet high standards for pesticides and additives, making them ideal for health-conscious customers.”-Interviewee TC1

These insights demonstrate that Japanese food export growth supports international trade by fulfilling the demand for high-quality, authentic products. The spread of Japanese food culture contributes to Japan’s economic growth through increased exports and a rising interest in Japanese cuisine worldwide.

## **Sustainable approaches for the future of agriculture**

### **Challenges posed by extreme weather and lack of successors**

Extreme weather and lack of successors are common challenges faced by farmers. Extreme weather conditions have a significant impact on crop quality and yields, and it is particularly difficult to maintain stable quality. It was also pointed out that there are few young people to take over farming, and farmland is increasingly being abandoned. In response to these challenges, farmers are devising various ways to address these issues. For example, they are trying to improve sales by branding their crops as local specialties and utilizing the hometown tax payment system.

“Prices are lower than they used to be, so sales have been declining. Also, without successors, farms are shrinking, and more fields are being left uncultivated.” - Interviewee LF1

“I am growing crops that can be used for hometown tax donation programs, and we also lease farmland to people who have moved to the area.” -

Interviewee LF1

“We participate in the hometown tax donation program and have our products specially displayed in supermarkets.” -Interviewee LF2

“The weather plays a significant role, so managing the crops can be challenging.” -Interviewee LF6

“Water is essential, and the crops are heavily affected by the climate. It’s important to ensure we don’t run out of water for the fields.” -Interviewee LF7

“Abnormal weather is a major issue. It’s challenging to maintain consistent quality year after year, and bad weather can seriously affect our livelihood. Additionally, as farmers, I need to keep producing and selling to earn income, which means fewer days off compared to salaried workers.” - Interviewee LF10

### **New strategies targeting local production for local consumption and tourists**

Sales strategies targeting local consumers and tourists are also important. There are attempts to promote "local production for local consumption," in which locally produced crops are consumed locally, and to sell processed agricultural products in order to secure stable income throughout the year.

“I hire part-time workers. Promoting local consumption of local produce is key.”

-Interviewee LF6

“I primarily grow sweet potatoes (for both fresh produce and for shochu) and carrots. Sweet potatoes are the main crop, with carrots grown as a secondary crop.”

-Interviewee LF10

“In our area, many farmers grow sweet potatoes, so it’s hard to sell at high prices. Many people get sweet potatoes from neighbors for free, so competition is tough.” -Interviewee LF11

“I am expanding sales by offering processed sweet potato products like



chips and baked sweet potatoes year-round.”-Interviewee LF11

### **New Market Development for Agriculture through SNS**

In addition, the use of social media is also playing an important role in agricultural management. Through social networking services such as Instagram, farmers themselves approach consumers directly to spread the appeal of their produce and processed products, thereby opening up new markets. Such efforts are expected to be particularly effective in attracting younger consumers, and are an important step toward the future of agriculture.

“I always consider which crops are selling for what price, and how much income I'm generating. This helps us focus on the most profitable strategies and cut wasteful actions. I have also started using Instagram to reach more people, and it's brought in business opportunities. I think utilizing social media is essential for the future of farming.”

-Interviewee LF10

### **Potential for growth through collaboration between local economies and agriculture**

Finally, Japanese agriculture must develop in a sustainable manner. Efficient agricultural management and collaboration with local communities are essential to support local economies while coping with challenges such as climate change and population decline. Farmers are striving for sustainable development while strengthening cooperation with the local public and private sectors.

“I promote the "Miyazaki Bell Peppers" brand (called Greenzaurus) nationwide. The biggest advantage is that, since sales are handled by the JA brand, producers can focus solely on cultivation.”-Interviewee LF3

“We talk to local officials about spreading ideas, and they sometimes provide financial support. We can produce 80% of the quality we aim for.” -

Interviewee LF4

This section explains how Japanese farmers are working sustainably to address issues like extreme weather and fewer young people entering farming. Farmers are branding local products, using programs like hometown tax, promoting “local production for local consumption,” and creating processed goods to ensure stable income. Social media is helping them reach new, younger customers, and collaboration with local communities supports sustainable growth by allowing farmers to focus on farming while local brands handle sales.

## **Overview of Findings on Traditional Japanese Food Culture and Rural Economy**

The purpose of this analysis is to investigate the role that traditional Japanese food culture and craftsmanship, particularly sushi-making and its associated practices, play in supporting the rural economy and sustainable development. Data was collected through interviews with sushi chefs who have extensive experience in the industry and deep connections to local fishing communities. The responses were analyzed thematically to highlight recurring themes and significant insights about how traditional food practices support the rural economy.

### **Preservation of Craftsmanship and Skills Transmission**

#### **Learning by Observation and Gradual Skill Acquisition**

A common theme among the chefs interviewed is the traditional method of acquiring skills through direct observation and gradual practice. One chef shared,

“My master taught me the importance of learning by observation first.

It is not uncommon for it to take several years before one is allowed to actually

make sushi, but during that time, I learned the rhythm of how to grip the rice and handle the knife, as well as how to handle fish through practice.”-Interviewee SC2

This approach instills patience and dedication among apprentices, contributing to the preservation of unique techniques.

And they also implement structured training for the next generation to ensure that these techniques are passed down effectively.

“After teaching them basic tasks repeatedly, I teach them practice filleting fish and the techniques for making sushi.”-Interviewee SC1

This method supports the next generation of chefs, equipping them to maintain and enhance traditional practices.

### **Role of Local Ingredients and Regional Identity**

Chefs emphasized the importance of sourcing ingredients locally, which supports nearby farmers and fishermen.

“The most important point I emphasize is how to make the most of locally sourced fish and seasonal ingredients. This is crucial because using local ingredients allows us to create dishes that highlight the characteristics of the region and makes them more relatable to the local people. Additionally, it helps me refine my skills as a chef. By using local ingredients, I can think about how to creatively enhance my dishes, which elevates my creativity and technique. For these reasons, I believe it is extremely important to utilize local fish and seasonal ingredients.”-Interviewee SC2

### **Future Prospects for Sustainability through Collaboration**

The interviews indicate that community collaboration is key to long-term sustainability.

"By working together with fishermen and farmers, I believe we can protect the local economy and open up pathways to tourism."-Interviewee SC2

This collaborative approach strengthens local networks, supports sustainable practices, and enhances economic resilience.

Traditional Japanese food culture, especially sushi-making, significantly supports the rural economy and sustainable development. Key findings include the preservation of craftsmanship through observational learning, the importance of sourcing local ingredients to enhance regional identity, and the necessity of community collaboration for long-term sustainability, strengthening local networks and economic resilience.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the profound impact of Japanese food culture on the country's economic recovery and growth. Through our exploration, it becomes clear that Japan's diverse regional cuisines not only attract tourists but also deepen their connection to the culture. Interviews with foreign visitors reveal that authentic Japanese food is often a primary reason for their trips, encouraging repeat visits and boosting local economies. These culinary experiences enhance tourism revenue while showcasing the uniqueness of Japan's rich culinary heritage. The role of food culture extends beyond economic impact, as it becomes a bridge between international visitors and Japanese tradition, fostering a deeper appreciation of the country's heritage.

The global rise of Japanese cuisine is another key finding of this research. As Japanese food gains popularity worldwide, the demand for food exports and the establishment of Japanese restaurants abroad play crucial roles in supporting Japan's economy. By navigating various regulatory challenges, exporters are able to cater to global tastes while revitalizing local producers and communities back home. The success of Japanese cuisine on the international stage not only strengthens Japan's economic presence globally but also raises awareness of the country's agricultural products, supporting farmers and small producers. This global influence helps Japan to maintain a positive image worldwide, emphasizing the appeal and versatility of its food culture.

Moreover, preserving traditional food craftsmanship is vital for sustaining rural economies and promoting sustainable development. Innovative strategies, such as

branding local specialties and utilizing social media to connect with consumers, are helping farmers adapt to challenges like climate change and a declining workforce. These efforts not only foster local pride but also ensure that traditional practices are passed down through generations. In addition, they encourage younger generations to appreciate and engage in traditional food production, which is essential for the continuation of Japan's unique culinary heritage. Programs that support training and knowledge transfer for these skills are increasingly important to sustain a healthy food industry in rural areas.

In essence, this research confirms that Japanese food culture is a powerful driver of economic recovery. By valuing both innovation and tradition, Japan can harness its culinary heritage as a cornerstone of resilience and sustainable growth. These insights are not only beneficial for policymakers and businesses but also for communities looking to thrive in a globalized world. The future of the Japanese economy is closely tied to its food culture and the pride it inspires. It suggests a model for how traditional culture can be a foundation for economic vitality in an increasingly interconnected world. This study encourages other countries to look at their own cultural assets with a similar perspective, valuing their traditions as potential economic drivers and tools for cultural diplomacy.

## **APPENDIX A - The Transcripts**

### **The Influence of Japanese Food Culture on Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development**

#### **1. Foreign tourist**

FT1

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Sushi especially tuna, Ramen, Takoyaki

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: My favorite so far has to be ramen, especially the tonkotsu ramen with its rich, creamy pork broth. It's super flavorful soup and every bowl I've had was slightly different depending on the region or shop. That's interesting.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: Japanese food was a pretty big part of my decision to visit. I've always loved Japanese food, but I wanted experience it authentically.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: I'll definitely look for Japanese restaurants that serve tonkotsu ramen when I get back home.

FT2

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Ramen, Tempura, Mochi, Sushi

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: Tempura. The texture is nice and really crispy. It's not too heavy, so I feel like I can eat a variety of tempura without feeling stuffed.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: I've always been fascinated by the variety of Japanese food. While food wasn't the only reason I came, it was major part of what excited about visiting.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: I'll look for Japanese restaurants and food markets. I want to try making some dishes myself too.

FT3

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Ramen, Sushi, Tempura, Yakitori

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: Yakitori is definitely my favorite. There's such a variety, different cuts of chicken, vegetables, and even some unique options like grilled liver or heart. I love how simple yet flavorful it is.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: It was a big reason I came to here because I love sushi and ramen. Getting to taste street food like yakitori is a big part of the trip for me.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: I'll be looking for good Japanese restaurants. I'm also thinking about trying to make yakitori.



FT4

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Sushi, Takoyaki, Ramen and donburi

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: Ramen. Each region has its own twist on it, so it's fun to try different styles.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: It was actually one of the top reasons I wanted to visit. I was excited to experience it in the place where it originated.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: I'm already planning to find a good Japanese restaurant.

FT5

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Ramen, Sushi, Yakitori, Tonkatsu

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: Tonkatsu. It's crispy, juicy, and so satisfying. The sauce is amazing.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: Pretty important. Because I saw Japanese food on tiktok and I decided to come here.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: We have some good Japanese restaurants in Malaysia so I'll definitely go there.

FT6

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Sushi, Tonkatsu, Ramen

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: Ramen. The broth is so light and fresh, the noodles are soft and chewy. The variety of toppings make each bowl unique and satisfying.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: It was a huge part of why I decided to visit Japan. From sushi and ramen to street food and sweets, I really wanted to try it all in its authentic setting.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: I'm planning to find good Japanese shop and maybe I'll try to make Japanese dishes at home.

FT7

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Traditional Japanese sweets, Sushi, Tonkatsu

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: Tonkatsu. Because of its combination of crispy, flavorful breading and tender, juicy pork is just perfect. Especially with that savory sauce.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: It was quite important because I love Japanese food, so coming to here to experience it first hand was a big reason for my trip.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: I will be looking for great Japanese restaurants that serve tonkatsu for sure.

FT8

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Japanese traditional breakfast, Ramen, Macha sweets

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: I like Japanese traditional breakfast because there are so many dishes and healthy.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: It's very important because I love Japanese food and I think I can learn culture from food.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: There are so many Japanese restaurants but I've never seen the restaurant that serve Japanese traditional breakfast so I will look for it.

FT9

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Sushi, Ramen, Okinawa soba, Macha sweets

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: My favorite is Macha sweets. When I went to Kyoto, I experienced making matcha in a Japanese-style room. I also had the experience of making a matcha parfait using matcha-flavored rice cakes and jelly that I made myself. I already liked matcha because it's good for your health, but through this experience I was able to learn about the Japanese matcha culture and I like it even more now.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: Japanese food was a huge reason for my trip. The first time, I tried a bunch of great stuff, but there's still so much I want to eat like regional dishes and little local spots.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: Absolutely! Even after my first visit, I was always looking for good Japanese food back in Taiwan. We have a lot of Japanese restaurants, but it's fun to see how they compare to the real thing.

FT10

Q: What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A: Taco rice, Beers, Sushi, Korokke, Soba, Awamori

Q: Which Japanese dish is your favorite and why?

A: Korokke and Awamori are my favorites. Korokke is just tasty and easy to grab while walking around. I was surprised at the korokke, which are completely different from French fries, even though they have similar ingredients. It's also fun to try different kinds, like curry or cheese.

I love Awamori because it has such a smooth and unique flavor. I've always liked alcohol, and I actually went on a tour of a sake brewery in Okinawa called Helios Shuzo. After visiting there, I love it even more since I got to see how it's made with that special spring water from Kyoda. The brewery tour was super cool, and tasting the different types right there was a blast. It's a great way to connect with Okinawan culture, and it goes so well with the local food.

Q: How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A: Honestly, Japanese food was a huge reason I wanted to come back! I loved it so much the first time—there's just so much to try, and it's all so good. I was excited to explore more local spots and try things I missed before. The food here is such a big part of this trip.

Q: Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A: Definitely! After having the real thing in Japan, I know I'll be craving it when I get back U.S. I don't think there are any Japanese restaurants in U.S. that serve korokke, so I'm thinking of making it using the ingredients I can get at the Japanese supermarket.

FT11

Q. What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A. I tried sushi, ramen and fried oysters.

Q. Which Japanese dish is your favorite and could you tell me why?

A. I enjoyed the ramen, I liked the noodles.

Q. How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A. It was very important. The first or second best thing about Japan is the food.

Q. Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A. Definitely I will. I will look for Japanese food when I go back to my home country.

Extra Q. Is it difficult to find Japanese restaurants in your country?

A. No, but the prices are more expensive than in Japan. However sushi is especially popular, and ramen is gradually becoming more popular as well.

Q. I see, thank you.

FT12, FT13

Q. What Japanese foods have you tried during your visit?

A. We've tried Udon noodles, tempura, sushi, ramen, yakitori, katsu sandwiches, matcha and wasabi snacks.

Q. Which Japanese dish is your favorite and could you tell me why?

A. I like vegetable tempura because its crunchy. (C)

A. I like sashimi because that was fresh. (D)

Q. How important was Japanese food in your decision to visit Japan?

A. Definitely, it's important because we love Japanese food and we think it's important to love the food and culture of the country you visit.

Q. Do you plan to seek out Japanese food when you return to your home country?

A. Yes, we eat a lot of Japanese food in our home country.

Extra Q. Is it difficult to find Japanese restaurants in your country?

A. No, you can find many Japanese restaurants.

Extra Q. Are those restaurants expensive compared to Japan?

A. Definitely, a lot more expensive.

Q. I see, thank you.

## **2. Sushi chef**

SC1

Q: Why did you decide to become a sushi chef?

A: I've always loved eating, and I especially like sushi, so actually, it's been my dream since I was 10 years old to become a sushi chef. There's one reason in particular that made me want to become a sushi chef.

For example, in a normal restaurant, the roles of the people who make the food in the kitchen and the people who serve it are separate. A sushi chef makes the sushi in front of the customer, serves it to them, and then listens to their feedback - all by himself.

I thought it was cool that he could entertain the customer all by himself, from the moment he greeted them to the moment they left. The way a sushi chef can make the customer

happy or unhappy is up to him - that was something I really admired.

Q: Do you think foreign customers influence store sales?

A: In fact, 60% of my customers are local people and 40% are foreign visitors. There are many tourists from South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan in particular.

Thankfully, word of mouth has made my restaurant popular, and the number of foreign visitors has increased year by year, and sales have also increased in proportion to this.

Q: Have you ever devised anything to increase the number of foreign customers?

A: Since the number of foreign tourists began to increase, we have prepared menus in English and other languages, and added detailed explanations of each sushi topping and dish. We also clearly state allergy information and the origins of ingredients.

Q: Where do you buy your fish?

A: We first buy fresh fish from the local fishing port. The seas around Okinawa are blessed with a diverse range of fish, so we often buy fish that has been caught early in the morning by local fishermen. The big attraction is that we can get seasonal fish. We can also stock up on Okinawa's specialty fish, such as gurukun and irabucha, which will give us a wider range of menu options.

Q: How did you learn the skills and knowledge you have as a sushi chef from your master or senior chefs?

A: I apprenticed at a sushi restaurant in Mie Prefecture 40 years ago to become a sushi chef. Back then, it was an era where the craftsmanship was learned by 'watching and stealing with your eyes.' I handled various tasks such as customer service, cleaning, and preparation while constantly observing how my master prepared sushi and filleted fish right next to me. After the customers left and the restaurant closed, I would stay in the kitchen alone to practice. Looking back now, I realize it was a very demanding job.

Q: How do you teach the skills to young craftspeople? What points do you emphasize in particular?

A: In my time, the approach to mastering craftsmanship was to "steal it with your eyes." However, I believe that this method makes it difficult to nurture skilled craftsmen. Therefore, I have young staff members perform various tasks such as customer service, cleaning, and preparation for a few years before teaching them how to fillet fish and the techniques for making sushi.

What I particularly emphasize is that even young staff can develop skills that surpass those of seasoned professionals. Our restaurant has a wide range of employees, from young to experienced, and we actively participate in external competitions. I believe this is our strength, as it allows everyone, regardless of age, to challenge each other and improve together.

Q: How do your relationships with local fishermen affect your sushi-making?

A: Our restaurant's motto is to source quality fish and provide our customers with sushi at reasonable prices. By building good relationships with local fishermen, we can get closer to achieving this motto. In order to establish a good relationship with them, we sometimes need to accommodate their needs. This attitude helps foster trust between us, leading to them bringing us the fish we desire and, at times, even offering discounts.

SC2

Q: Why did you decide to become a sushi chef?

A: The reason I decided to become a sushi chef was because I was exposed to traditional Japanese culture from a young age and was strongly attracted to sushi, which is one of the most beautiful dishes. I was drawn to the freshness of the ingredients, the delicacy of



the technique, and the spirit of the artisans that went into each and every process. Furthermore, I felt that sushi was not just a meal, but also an art form that expressed the blessings of nature in each of the four seasons, and I wanted to be a part of that.

Q: Do you think foreign customers influence store sales?

A: It is certainly having an impact. In particular, during the tourist season, the number of overseas tourists increases, and sales often increase. Sushi is one of the dishes that represents Japanese culture, and it is very popular with overseas customers, so the impact is significant.

Q: Have you ever devised anything to increase the number of foreign customers?

A: We have prepared menus in English and other languages (Chinese, Korean).

Q: Where do you buy your fish?

A: Our main supplier is the fish market in Naha. It's fun to be able to find rare types of fish, especially as there is a wide variety of fish from all over the country. The market tests our ability to identify good fish, so there are always new discoveries to be made. I enjoy choosing fish that will surprise my customers.

Q: How did you learn the skills and knowledge you have as a sushi chef from your master or senior chefs?

A: My master taught me the importance of learning by observation first. It is not uncommon for it to take several years before one is allowed to actually make sushi, but during that time, I learned the rhythm of how to grip the rice and handle the knife, as well as how to handle fish through practice. Additionally, I learned that sushi is not just about cutting fish and placing it on rice; the selection of seasonal ingredients and interaction with customers are also essential. There were teachings unique to the region as well, and I learned how to utilize locally sourced fish and seasonal ingredients, which I believe is

the most valuable knowledge I have as a sushi chef.

Q: How do you teach the skills to young craftspeople? What points do you emphasize in particular?

A: I educate the younger generation of chefs by demonstrating my skills in filleting fish, shaping sushi, and plating. They mimic these techniques while observing me. The most important point I emphasize is how to make the most of locally sourced fish and seasonal ingredients. This is crucial because using local ingredients allows us to create dishes that highlight the characteristics of the region and makes them more relatable to the local people. Additionally, it helps me refine my skills as a chef. By using local ingredients, I can think about how to creatively enhance my dishes, which elevates my creativity and technique. For these reasons, I believe it is extremely important to utilize local fish and seasonal ingredients.

Q: How do your relationships with local fishermen affect your sushi-making?

A: I believe that the relationship with local fishermen has a significant impact on sushi-making. This is because being directly connected with fishermen allows us to secure fresh ingredients and reliably obtain seasonal fish. Freshness, in particular, is a crucial element that determines the flavor of sushi. Moreover, fishermen have far more knowledge about fish than we do, so by directly speaking with them about the state of the catch and the characteristics of the fish, we can gain detailed information on how to handle the fish to achieve the best flavor and the right timing for consumption. Thanks to this, we are able to create dishes that maximize the potential of the ingredients. Also, by working together with fishermen and farmers, I believe we can protect the local economy and open up pathways to tourism.

SC3

Q: Why did you decide to become a sushi chef?

A: I have been interested in cooking since I was a child, but what really fascinated me about sushi was the fact that it combines deep technique and heart with simplicity. I was impressed by the fact that, even though it uses basic ingredients like fresh fish, rice and vinegar, the sushi chef's hands can create a work of art. Furthermore, sushi is representative of Japanese food culture, and I wanted to be a part of carrying on and spreading that tradition.

Q: Do you think foreign customers influence store sales?

A: Foreign customers have a big impact on store sales. Especially in places close to tourist attractions, many foreign tourists come to the store to try sushi, and this demand supports part of the sales.

Q: Have you ever devised anything to increase the number of foreign customers?

A: First of all, we created a menu in multiple languages so that it would be easy for foreign customers to understand. Recently, we have also started offering a sushi menu that caters to vegetarians and those with allergies, and we are trying to cater to a wide range of needs so that we can be enjoyed by a wide range of customers.

Q: Where do you buy your fish?

A: We use the direct sales store. The fresh fish brought in by local fishermen is outstanding in terms of flavor, and the fact that it's inexpensive is also a great point. We value seasonal ingredients, so we reflect the recommendations for each season in our menu. When we can't get what we need from the direct sales store, we sometimes buy through a wholesaler. They collect fresh fish and provide it to us, so we can maintain a stable quality. We have a long relationship with a reliable wholesaler, so we can buy with

peace of mind.

SC4

Q: Why did you decide to become a sushi chef?

A: The main reason was that it was very simple and just looked cool. When I went to a sushi restaurant, I saw the chef standing in front of me, making sushi and cutting fish, and also talking to customers, and I thought it looked really cool and I wanted to be like him, so I decided I wanted to become a sushi chef.

Q: Do you think foreign customers influence store sales?

A: Our restaurant is located in a shopping mall, so we don't get many tourists. However, during the summer tourist season, about 20% of our customers are from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or South Korea.

Q: Have you ever devised anything to increase the number of foreign customers?

A: As we don't have many foreign customers, we don't offer any special services.

Q: Where do you buy your fish?

A: We mainly buy fish from local fishing ports. After all, freshness is important for sushi, so I think it's great to be able to get high-quality, fresh fish that the fishermen have caught in the morning. We also sometimes purchase fish from agricultural cooperatives in Okinawa. We use farmed fish in particular, as we can get fish of a stable quality, which is very useful. We always try to choose fish that our customers can eat with peace of mind.

Q: How did you learn the skills and knowledge you have as a sushi chef from your master or senior chefs?

A: I attended a sushi chef training school in Fukuoka, where I learned how to fillet fish, shape sushi, and arrange beautiful sashimi over the course of about a year. In addition, I

learned how to evaluate good fish and how to interact with customers at my current restaurant.

Q: How do you teach the skills to young craftspeople? What points do you emphasize in particular?

A: I am still a young sushi chef, so I have not yet taught any techniques.

Q: How do your relationships with local fishermen affect your sushi-making?

A: We have mentioned before that we source fish from local fishermen and local aquaculture farms, and our restaurant values profitable relationships with our partners. By building such relationships, we are able to secure fresh ingredients consistently, which enhances the quality of our sushi. Additionally, we can procure fish that are unique to this region at a lower cost, allowing our customers to enjoy the 'taste of the local area.' This differentiation from other restaurants is a factor that we believe helps increase our repeat customers.

SC5

Q: Why did you decide to become a sushi chef?

A: When I was in high school, I studied abroad, and it was then that I became aware of identity as Japanese, and I decided that I wanted to work overseas in the future. That's when I thought that if I had sushi skills, I could work in Japan and overseas. Now I'm training at this restaurant to hone my skills as a sushi chef.

Q: Do you think foreign customers influence store sales?

A: Thankfully, around 30% of our customers are foreign tourists, so I think they have a big impact on our sales. In particular, there are many hotels around our restaurant, so the number of foreign tourists is increasing year by year.

Q: Have you ever devised anything to increase the number of foreign customers?

A: Unlike conveyor belt sushi restaurants, our customers are foreign tourists who come to our restaurant to enjoy the traditional sushi experience of having sushi prepared in front of them by a sushi chef, so we prepare the sushi in front of them and explain things like sushi-related knowledge in English.

Q: Where do you buy your fish?

A: We don't have a particular supplier, and we always go around to several places to choose the best fish for each day. When we want to buy rare types of fish, we often go to the fish market in Naha, where fish from all over the country are gathered.

### **3. Trading company**

TC1

Q: What kind of food do countries specially need?

A: Our company exports a lot to Malaysia, but also to Vietnam, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Canada, etc. These countries specially need sushi ingredients such as fresh fish, scallops, yellowtail, wasabi, seaweed, soy sauce, etc.

Q: What are the difficulties you face when you exporting food?

A: The difficulty faced when exporting food is that it is necessary to know the export regulations as they differ from country to country. For example, Canada has regulations on shellfish, and Saudi Arabia, which is associated with the Muslim religion, requires certification.

Q: What kind of food exports are you going to focus on?

A: We would like to focus on Halal certified foods and Muslim-free foods.

Q: I see, thank you.

#### **4. Japanese restaurant owners**

JR1

Q: What types of ingredients do you import from Japan?

A: Our restaurant mainly imports seasonings, fish, and meat from Japan. Especially essential for authentic Japanese flavors, we source ingredients like miso, soy sauce, sake, as well as premium-quality kombu and bonito flakes. Fresh fish and carefully selected high-quality meat are also key imports, ensuring our dishes meet a high standard.

Q: How does using Japanese ingredients impact the quality of the food and the restaurant's image?

A: Using Japanese ingredients significantly enhances the taste and appearance of our dishes, and elevates the overall atmosphere of the restaurant. Each Japanese ingredient reflects the meticulous craftsmanship of Japanese producers, and that quality is something our Taiwanese customers can sense. Moreover, sourcing directly from Japan instills a sense of trust and exclusivity, which resonates with our clientele. As a result, our restaurant has a more premium and authentic reputation, and we've seen an increase in repeat customers.

Q: What challenges do you face in importing ingredients? For example, in terms of cost, shipping time, or quality control?

A: There are various challenges associated with importing. For example, it can take over two months to receive ingredients from Japan, and stock shortages can sometimes affect our menu. Additionally, shipping costs are high, sometimes up to three times the local price. Quality control also requires constant attention to deliver authentic Japanese flavors in Taiwan, we implement strict guidelines. Overcoming these challenges often requires

exploring new methods and partnerships.

Q: How do customers react to Japanese ingredients?

A: Many of our customers are surprised. We frequently hear them say, “I didn’t know Japanese flavors could be so different from what we’re used to in Taiwan.” There’s often genuine amazement, particularly regarding the freshness of our seafood and the unique flavors of traditional Japanese seasonings. This distinctive experience is highly valued and recognized by our customers.

Q: Are there any specific dishes or ingredients related to Japanese food culture that are particularly popular?

A. Yes, Japanese seafood dishes are especially popular. In addition to sushi and sashimi, items like seafood bowls and tempura are signature dishes in our restaurant. We incorporate seasonal ingredients, allowing customers to enjoy a sense of Japan’s seasons, which has helped increase the number of regular patrons.

Q: Compared to locally sourced ingredients, how much more expensive are imported Japanese ingredients?

A. Since we exclusively use Japanese products, including all seasonings, ingredients, and beverages, direct comparison is challenging. However, our prices are inevitably higher than other restaurants. Despite this, we pride ourselves on offering authentic Japanese quality, and our customers seem to appreciate it.

Q: How is the supply chain for ingredients structured? (For example, from which regions in Japan are ingredients mainly imported?)

A: Our restaurant imports products from Japanese trading companies through a Taiwanese office. This office collaborates with various regions in Japan—such as Kanto, Kansai, Okinawa, and Tokyo—allowing us to incorporate ingredients that showcase the unique



qualities of each area. Additionally, this office has established a factory in Taiwan to produce processed goods like seasonings, curry, and fried oysters using Japanese ingredients. This setup ensures that we can stably supply authentic Japanese flavors in Taiwan.

Q: How do you build connections and trust with Japanese suppliers?

A: Our restaurant maintains close coordination with Japanese suppliers through the Taiwanese office. Both sides are committed to carefully selecting products, and regular exchanges and suggestions for new items help deepen our trust. For example, we receive recommendations for seasonal ingredients, allowing us to consistently offer the highest quality. Information and insights from Japan are also shared, supporting our partnership and strengthening our connection.

Q: Do you plan to increase the variety or volume of imported ingredients in the future?

A: Yes, we plan to expand our range of imported ingredients based on recommendations from the Taiwanese office. The office suggests trending or high-quality products from Japan, which allows us to continually enhance our menu offerings.

JR2

Q: What made you decide to run a Japanese restaurant?

A: I decided to run this restaurant for a few key reasons. Growing up in Chicago as a Japanese person, I was always surrounded by traditional Japanese flavors and culture thanks to the food we ate at home. The meals my parents made and the authentic dishes I enjoyed during trips to Japan really shaped my sense of Japanese identity. On top of that, I noticed how diverse Chicago's food scene is, with so many people eager to try new things. So, I wanted to bring a taste of Japan's rich food culture here—not just the usual

sushi and tempura, but real dishes that use traditional techniques and ingredients. I hoped it would be a way to connect cultures through food. That's what inspired me to start Sushi Kushi Toyo.

Q: Please tell us about your customers' attitudes towards Japanese food. Also, what do you think is the reason for the growing demand for Japanese food in your area?

A: Running Sushi Kushi Toyo in Chicago, I've really noticed that the demand for Japanese food is growing every year. There are a few reasons behind this. One big factor is the rise in health awareness—more people are looking for meals that are balanced and healthier, and Japanese cuisine fits that perfectly.

There's also an increasing interest in Japanese culture overall. With more exposure through movies, anime, and travel, people are wanting to try authentic Japanese food for themselves. This has boosted interest in dishes beyond just basic sushi rolls and tempura, like unagi donburi and seared mackerel.

I get feedback from customers saying things like “fresh and delicious,” “beautiful presentation,” and “loving the unique vibe.” The younger crowd especially seems really into it.

Q: To what extent are Japanese ingredients and seasonings used? Also, what is the reason for using them?

A: We try to use Japanese ingredients and seasonings as much as we can. The amount depends on the menu and what's available, but for key dishes and flavors, we stick to Japanese products. For example, we use soy sauce, mirin, miso, and rice vinegar from Japan to get that authentic taste. While Asian markets sell soy sauces from places like Korea and China, they just don't taste the same, so we make sure to get Japanese soy sauce. We even use high-quality rice imported from Japan for certain dishes.

The main reason we use Japanese ingredients is to give our customers a true taste of Japan. The subtle flavors, aromas, and textures of Japanese food rely on the quality of those ingredients. Things like the kelp and bonito flakes we use for dashi are packed with flavor and really boost the overall taste of our dishes.

Customers don't just want "Japanese-style" food; they want something that's as close as possible to what they'd get in Japan. That's why using Japanese seasonings that add depth and richness is so important—it helps us offer the real deal and stand out from other places. Of course, we balance this by using fresh local ingredients when we can, but for certain dishes, using Japanese products is non-negotiable.

Q: Are there any points where you feel that Japanese imports are superior to products from other countries?

A: I really believe that Japanese ingredients and seasonings are made with strict quality control, so they always deliver great quality. They're also super pure and safe, with high standards for pesticides and additives in Japan's agricultural and marine products, which is perfect for health-conscious customers.

And also they stick to traditional production methods. For example, Japanese soy sauce takes time to ferment, giving it that deep umami flavor and rich aroma. The same goes for kelp and bonito flakes, which are made using techniques passed down over the years. That's what gives them a unique taste you just can't find in other products.

And reliability. Japanese food manufacturers really focus on packaging and shipping, so it's easy for restaurants to get high-quality ingredients without any worries.

Q: What challenges do you face in importing ingredients? For example, in terms of cost, shipping time, or quality control?

A: The biggest challenge we face is the cost. Japanese ingredients are generally pricey,

especially fresh fish and certain seasonings, which can drive up our menu prices. There are also distribution issues to consider. Getting goods shipped from Japan takes time, and freshness is key for things like seafood. We need to ensure proper temperature control during transport and quick delivery, or else the quality could suffer. Plus, if shipping costs go up, it can really impact our final prices, which is definitely a concern.

Q: Please tell us about the Japanese dishes and ingredients that are particularly popular. Why are these so popular?

A: As expected, fish dishes such as sushi, sashimi and grilled fish are popular. We also have event foods such as unadon and chirashi-sushi on our menu, which are eaten at celebratory occasions, and these are also quite popular. Even if you go on a trip to Japan, the time and place where you can eat these event foods is limited, so I think that being able to experience them here in America is valuable, and that's why they are so popular with customers. The ingredients used for event foods are mostly imported from Japan, as they can't be purchased locally, although the prices are higher.

JR3

Q: What made you decide to run a Japanese restaurant?

A: First of all, California is a region where many different ethnic groups live, including myself, and there are many Korean-style yakiniku restaurants, but there are not many Japanese-style yakiniku restaurants. However, there are many Japanese people living there, so I thought there would be a lot of demand and that it would be the perfect place to open a yakiniku restaurant.

Q: Please tell us about your customers' attitudes towards Japanese food. Also, what do you think is the reason for the growing demand for Japanese food in your area?

A: Like I mentioned before, California is a melting pot of different cultures, so there's a big Asian community here. People of Asian descent are already familiar with Japanese food, and others are getting into it too because of the overall popularity of Asian cuisine. Plus, healthy Japanese food is really gaining traction, especially since Californians tend to be health-conscious and look for organic, fresh ingredients.

Q: To what extent are Japanese ingredients and seasonings used? Also, what is the reason for using them?

A: At Anjin, we actively use Japanese ingredients and seasonings. Specifically, this includes meat, the sauce used for yakiniku, rice, soy sauce, miso, and some vegetables and shellfish. These account for around 40% of the total ingredients. The main type of rice in the US is Thai rice, and as the texture is completely different to Japanese rice, we import rice from Japan to make it closer to the real thing.

Q: Are there any points where you feel that Japanese imports are superior to products from other countries?

A: I believe Japanese products are super safe. Since we import meat and shellfish, Japanese agricultural and marine products go through really strict inspection standards, so customers can feel good about using them. For today's health-conscious consumers, knowing they're getting safe, high-quality food is a huge plus.

Q: Please tell us about the Japanese dishes and ingredients that are particularly popular. Why are these so popular?

A: As it is a yakiniku restaurant, yakiniku is the most popular dish. The appeal is that customers can enjoy grilling their own food. We have two types of yakiniku sauce, one soy sauce-based and one miso-based, so I think that the popularity of the restaurant is due to the fact that customers can compare the two.

JR4

Q: What made you decide to run a Japanese restaurant?

A: Since I was in junior high school, I've loved Japanese food, culture and anime, so I've always wanted to work in a job related to Japan in the future. I wanted to start a Japanese restaurant because I was good at cooking, and I wanted to let Koreans know about the appeal of Japan.

Q: Please tell us about your customers' attitudes towards Japanese food. Also, what do you think is the reason for the growing demand for Japanese food in your area?

A: I think the demand for Japanese food is increasing because it is similar to Korean food, contains many fermented foods, is highly nutritious, and is familiar. In addition, I often hear that the beautiful presentation and colorful dishes look great on Instagram.

Q: To what extent are Japanese ingredients and seasonings used? Also, what is the reason for using them?

A: About 20% of the ingredients in my restaurant are imported from Japan. Specifically, we import miso, soy sauce and sake. Korea also has soy sauce and miso, but the taste is slightly different, so we use Japanese imports to get closer to the authentic taste. After all, sake goes best with Japanese food, so we import all of our alcohol from Japan.

Q: Are there any points where you feel that Japanese imports are superior to products from other countries?

A: Many Japanese condiments and sake are made from recipes that have been passed down through generations, so I think they have a different depth of flavor than products from other countries.

Q: Please tell us about the Japanese dishes and ingredients that are particularly popular.

Why are these so popular?

A: I think yakitori is the most popular. It can be served immediately after ordering, and while in Korea there are only skewers with sauce, in Japan there are also yakitori with salt, and the reason for their popularity is that the sweet sauce goes well with the yakitori. Also, there are various styles of Japanese sake, from dry to sweet, and it is popular because you can enjoy choosing the right one to match the food.

## **5. Local farmers**

LF1

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. I grow sugarcane, sweet potatoes, and rice on Tanegashima Island, some for personal consumption and some to sell to the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives (JA). I focus on early rice, with new harvests in July and October.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. Prices are lower than they used to be, so sales have been declining. Also, without successors, farms are shrinking, and more fields are being left uncultivated.

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve sales)?

A. I am growing crops that can be used for hometown tax donation programs, and we also lease farmland to people who have moved to the area.

LF2

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. We use organic farming to grow garlic, ginger, komatsuna, mini tomatoes, water

spinach, and more.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. Since it's organic farming, we can't produce in large quantities, and the costs and labor are high. Balancing this with customers' purchasing needs is difficult.

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve sales)?

A. We participate in the hometown tax donation program and have our products specially displayed in supermarkets.

LF3

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. I sell within the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives, commonly known as JA, so I'm leveraging the JA brand.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. My vegetables are mainly contracted to markets in the Kanto and Kansai regions, so there are no significant difficulties.

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve sales)?

A. I promote the "Miyazaki Bell Peppers" brand (called Greenzaurus) nationwide. The biggest advantage is that, since sales are handled by the JA brand, producers can focus solely on cultivation.

LF4

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?



A. I sell leftover vegetables at roadside stations, growing various crops such as daikon radishes, carrots, cabbages, etc. Initially, we grew 52 types, but now it's down to 20 varieties.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. Sometimes we fail with certain crops

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve sales)?

A. We talk to local officials about spreading ideas, and they sometimes provide financial support. We can produce 80% of the quality we aim for.

LF5

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. I grow goya (bitter melon), cucumbers, okra, and eggplant.

LF6

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. I grow goya, eggplants, cucumbers, and okra.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. The weather plays a significant role, so managing the crops can be challenging.

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve sales)?

A. I hire part-time workers. Promoting local consumption of local produce is key.

LF7

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. I grow goya, eggplants, cucumbers, and okra.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. Water is essential, and the crops are heavily affected by the climate. It's important to ensure we don't run out of water for the fields.

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve sales)?

A. I inspect the fields daily and rotate crops. I currently grow 9 to 10 types in season, and 30 varieties throughout the year.

LF8

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. We grow vegetables and feijoa (a type of fruit).

LF9

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. I grow eggplants, bitter melon, chrysanthemum flowers, and tea.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. Selling the products is difficult.

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve sales)?

A. I try to avoid producing food waste.

LF10

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. I primarily grow sweet potatoes (for both fresh produce and for shochu) and carrots. Sweet potatoes are the main crop, with carrots grown as a secondary crop.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. Abnormal weather is a major issue. It's challenging to maintain consistent quality year after year, and bad weather can seriously affect our livelihood. Additionally, as farmers, I need to keep producing and selling to earn income, which means fewer days off compared to salaried workers.

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve sales)?

A. I always consider which crops are selling for what price, and how much income I'm generating. This helps us focus on the most profitable strategies and cut wasteful actions. I have also started using Instagram to reach more people, and it's brought in business opportunities. I think utilizing social media is essential for the future of farming.

LF11

Q. What kind of agriculture or local business do you do?

A. I grow sweet potatoes and okra. Sweet potato yields are declining due to stem rot disease, and okra production is down due to heat damage.

Q. What are the difficulties of local business?

A. In our area, many farmers grow sweet potatoes, so it's hard to sell at high prices. Many people get sweet potatoes from neighbors for free, so competition is tough.

Q. Is there anything special you are working on to develop your local business (to improve

sales)?

A. I am expanding sales by offering processed sweet potato products like chips and baked sweet potatoes year-round.

## APPENDIX B - Consent Form

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Japanese food culture contributes significantly to economic recovery

Primary Investigator: Akari Noda, Aika Yamashita, Azumi Oyamori

Institution: Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages

The purpose of the interviews is to gain a multifaceted understanding of the specific impact of Japanese food culture on the economy through the opinions of people from different perspectives. Participation is voluntary, and responses are for academic purposes only and will not be made available to the public. Discussion time for questions is expected to be 20-30 minutes. Please read this form carefully before agreeing and do not hesitate to ask any questions you may have.

I have been provided with a detailed explanation of the purpose and nature of this study. I understand that this research aims to contribute to knowledge in the field of education and has received approval from the Department of International Affairs at Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages.

Yes  No

I acknowledge that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and I am under no obligation to take part in it.

Yes  No

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage for any reason, without the need to provide an explanation.

Yes  No

I understand that all information I provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. My responses will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers. Only in cases where statutory obligations of the agencies working with the researchers necessitate, confidentiality may be b

Yes  No

I agree that the bodily samples (audio recordings) taken during this study can be stored for future research.

Yes  No

If "No" to the above, I confirm that the bodily samples taken during this study can only be used for this study and should be disposed of upon completion of the research.

Yes  No

I have read and understood this consent form.

Yes  No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation and all my queries have been addressed to my satisfaction.

Yes  No

I willingly agree to participate in this study.

Yes  No

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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