SLURPING CULTURE

TRANSLATING JAPANESENESS TO THE DUTCH CONSUMER THROUGH A WARM BOWL OF NOODLE SOUP

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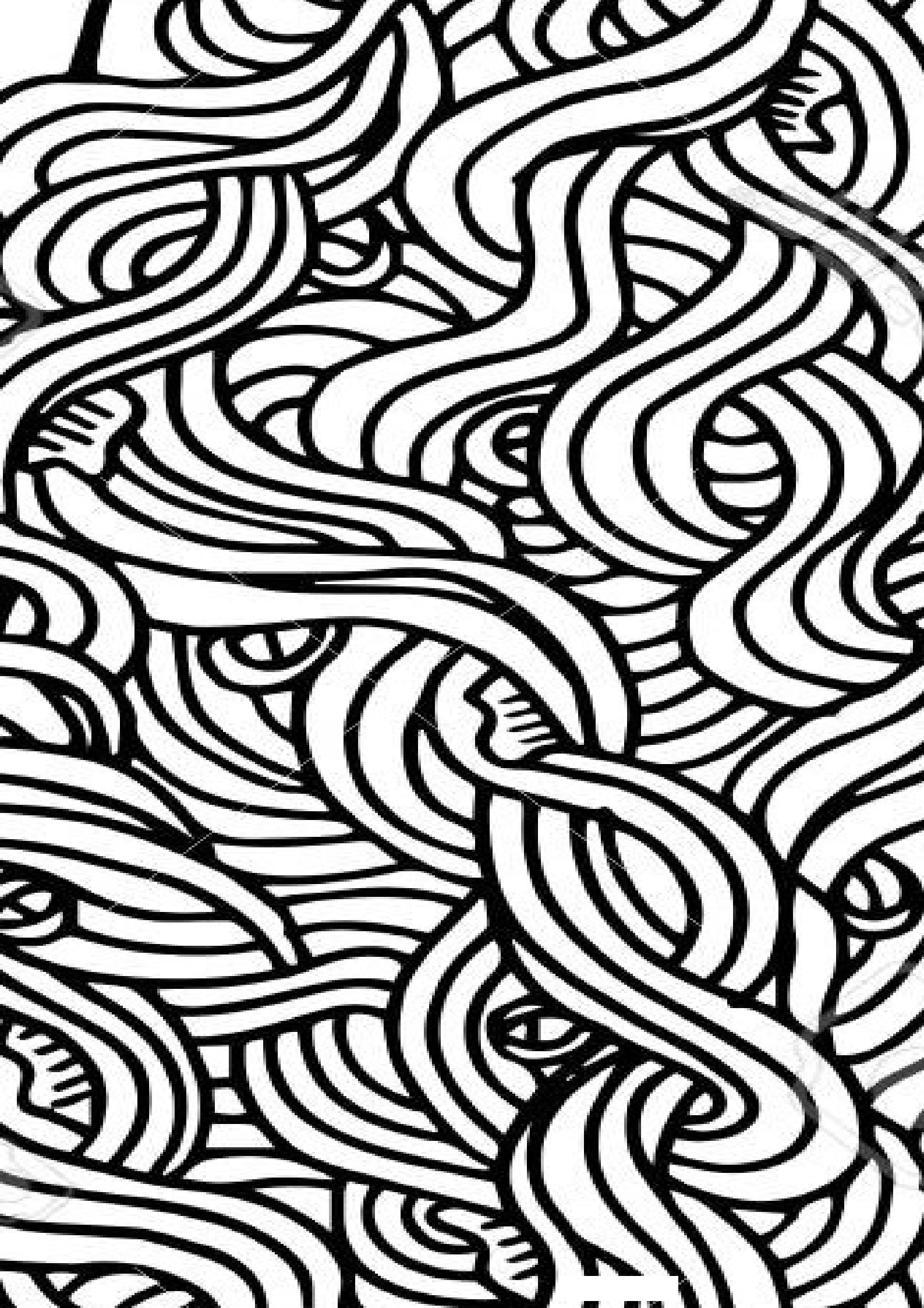
Drawing by Jannah Deden



Slurping Culture: Translating Japaneseness to the Dutch Consumer through a Warm Bowl of Noodle Soup

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Abstract

This research describes the everyday lives of a small group of Japanese migrants in and around a ramen shop during a period of three months. The research is conducted in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. This sensory ethnography has set out to understand the ways in which Japanese migrants translate a traditional Japanese dish, *ramen,* to an Amsterdam audience in a restaurant context. Academic literature on food, translation, memory and the senses, together with ethnographic descriptions are the backbone of this anthropological study. Participant observation and informal conversations are the methods used. This research finds that friction is inevitable in the translation process and that making adaptations to dishes is necessary when the Japanese staff is translating ramen to a Dutch clientele. The research demonstrates that the Japanese participants consciously try to preserve a sense of Japaneseness while preparing and selling ramen. It is argued that memory and the senses are crucial in making the translation process complete. The researcher poses a new term for fully understanding the complexities of the translation process: embodied sensory translation.

Key words: ramen, translation, friction, adaptation, senses, memory, embodied sensory translation.

Foreword and Thanks

On your screen or in your hands you are seeing my thesis. This thesis is the result of three intense months of anthropological fieldwork among a small group of Japanese migrants in a ramen restaurant in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It also is the result of a lot of laughs, tears, doubts, misunderstandings, frustration, revelations, patience, and perseverance.

During the three months of fieldwork I experienced a version of Amsterdam that I had never seen, and after ten years of living here, you would think I would know the place. I got out of my comfort zone and out of my bubble. I experienced Japanese culture from the inside and I got to know a whole new group of people. In moments, I never felt more like an outsider, being surrounded by Japanese men speaking Japanese for a big part of the time. It was refreshing and insightful, being the odd one out. At other times, I felt comfortable and part of the group. In the role of anthropologist, I experienced being both in- and outsider. I saw oodles of noodles. I ate countless bowls of ramen. I left the field with the sweetest nickname, *Koneko-chan,* a small Japanese cookbook in my head, and a knot in my stomach.

It has been a bumpy road. The main location of the ramen shop closed on the first day of my research, which required a lot of improvisation and assertiveness from my side. I also got sexually harassed by one of the research participants, which led me to being in the grip of PTSD and working through my trauma. I almost gave up finishing the thesis, but I flipped that switch and I with renewed courage I picked up where I left off and started writing again.

Arigato to all the lovely, wonderful, funny and warm-hearted Japanese men and women that I got to spend time with. It has truly been a crazy and tasty ride. Thank you for your patience, your jokes, and your hospitality. I want to thank my supervisor Rebecca, and coordinator of the programme, Yvon, for giving me the time I needed and for encouraging me to keep on going despite the hardships. Dankjewel papa, mama en Lex, voor jullie grenzeloze steun. Becz, thank you for repetitively reigniting my fire with your empowering peptalks by phone. I thank Jannah for the mindblowing drawing. Reinhilde, thank you for your feedback and endless enthusiasm. And thank you Herders, for being a powerful support system cheering me on until the very last minute. Lastly, I also want to thank myself for my hard work and for powering through.

No, I did not get tired of eating ramen everyday. And yes, I would still eat it every day if I could.

I hope you enjoy reading this journey into the ramen world of Amsterdam!

Table of Contents

Introduction

Source: Fox News.

Introduction

My first encounter with the Japanese noodle soup called *ramen* was overwhelming. Sitting in a ramen shop in Amsterdam my brain experienced a sensory overload. The menu was saturated with information. My eyes jumped from photographs of bowls of noodle soup to unfamiliar words such as 'tonkotsu', 'shoyu', 'char siu', 'ajitama' and 'takana'. What I could deduct: there are different types of broths, and I can add toppings to my liking. However, I did not know what half of the words meant. I had nothing to compare it to. A big jumble of foreign stimuli was thrown at me, materialized in a hot bowl of noodle soup.

After this first encounter, my sister and I started a quest to eat at all of the ramen restaurants in Amsterdam. My interest in food culture resulted in me having a general sense of what ramen is; that it is not just a regular bowl of soup. That the production of this dish is something many Japanese chefs take pride in. It is serious business. Moreover, ramen is one of the new food trends that has spread to metropolitan areas around the world (Kushner 2012; Solt 2014). This sisterly search has resulted in a serious and academic interest.

While collecting a sensory ramen database, I increasingly started to see the complexity and variety of this noodle soup. I found the different types of broth, noodles and toppings to be endlessly intriguing. Most of the ramen restaurants in Amsterdam mention the Japanese regions where the dish or the noodles originated; some of the menus are even written in Japanese. Many of the ramen shops have an open kitchen. I have always been interested in food culture and the stories behind the dishes. Every kitchen works differently, and I wanted to take a look at a specific one.

Ramen

Ramen "has gained a reputation as a relatively affordable, youthful, and fashionable representation of Japanese food culture (...). Ramen is now an important component of both official and unofficial attempts at remaking 'Japan' as a consumer brand for foreigners"(Solt 2014, 29). Ramen has become a way to consume Japan in cosmopolitan areas around the world. Before it reached this status, it went through different phases, from being an immigrant to being adapted and incorporated into the Japanese context, after which it started traveling, moving to different big cities outside of Japan, only then regaining consumer brand status. Before diving into the history of the Japanese noodle dish, I provide the reader with a glossary on ramen: a small ramen 101 made in collaboration with my research participants. Table 1 gives an overview of the most basic and common Japanese words and ingredients used in ramen production.

Table 1. **What's in a Bowl? The Basics.**

Word	Description
Ramen	Soup with noodles served in a broth of chicken, pork, fish, or a combination. Often enriched with *dashi* and *tare*. The word comes from *laa-mien* or *lamian*, the Chinese word for noodles (Solt 2014)
Tare	Paste or sauce of meat/fish/soy/miso and herbs and spices on the bottom of the bowl.
Dashi	Bouillon or broth, often made of fish and seaweed; tastemaker.
Tonkotsu	One of the most traditional broth bases. Concentrated, fatty, hearty pork broth. Originated in Japan in the beginning of the 21st century.
Shio	One of the three most popular flavorings of ramen. *Shio* means (sea) salt. Often a somewhat lighter flavoring made with chicken and/or fish. Popular in the southern parts of Japan because the milder weather complements the lighter, salty taste of shio.
Shoyu	One of the three most popular flavorings of ramen. *Shoyu* means soy sauce. Flavoring with soy sauce, often somewhat saltier than the shio tare. Popular in the Kanto region of central Japan.
Miso	One of the three most popular flavorings of ramen, and the youngest. M*iso* is a paste of fermented soybeans. Originated in northern Hokkaido. Bold and heavy in taste.
Tsukemen	Noodles and broth are served separately and one dips the noodles in the broth before slurping them.
Cha siu / charsiu	Slices of roasted pork meat. Part of the standard garnish with leek/spring onion and *ajitama*.
Ajitama / ajitsuke tamago	Half-boiled eggs marinated for several hours in soy sauce and mirin. They come out lightly sweet and salty; the egg whites are slightly firm and the yolks are golden, luscious and custard-like.
Kansui	Alkaline water that gives the noodles their yellowish color and their characteristic bounciness.
Just like the Italians are specific about only pairing particular pasta's with particular sauces, Japanese are similar in the ramen world when it comes to their noodles. The chefs will select the noodles based on their ability to cling to broth, their bounciness, the mouth-feel; they search for harmony in a bowl. The noodles can be thick and wavy, or straight, thin and narrow, or wide and flat. A ramen noodle differs from a pasta 'noodle'. These noodles are made with wheat flour, salt, water, and *kansui.*	

Source: Charlotte Ehrhardt 2019[1].

There probably is no Japanese dish, besides sushi, that has stolen the hearts and minds of food lovers around the world like ramen. In the past two decades, the hype has travelled to American cities, and settled in European cities like London, Düsseldorf, and Amsterdam. This is remarkable, as the delicacy is not very accessible. It asks for a lot of chopstick- and slurp-skills to work oneself through a liquid meal such as ramen if one was brought up eating with forks and knives. The noodles are slippery and wet, the soup is (often) fatty: the unpracticed ramen eater will have drops of broth splashed over his or her shirt and lap. Still, ramen has become a dish that represents Japanese food culture, and eating ramen is a way in which people can consume Japaneseness (Solt 2014, 29).

Taka Kitamura is the ramen pioneer in Amsterdam. He started with his food truck at the

1 The information provided in Table 1 was gathered during the three months of fieldwork research from February until mid May 2018. I gathered most of the information during the beginning phase of the research, by simply pointing at ingredients, asking for a translation and an explanation from the research participants.

Waterlooplein market around 2014, and then moved into the Asian department store Dun Yong in Amsterdam's Chinatown to serve ramen and *takoyaki*[2] in a small and cozy living room setting. According to Taka, the Netherlands is a perfect place for ramen: "The climate is good; the weather is cold often. Dutch people love soup, and they are open to try new things". Besides this, Taka explains two things he frequently sees happening in the Netherlands that are not very likely to happen in Japan. Namely, Dutch people often do not finish their noodles, and they often ask for vegetarian ramen. Although the Netherlands is a perfect place for ramen, the Dutch do eat it a bit strangely (Kamsma 2018).

The first ramen restaurant opened in the Dutch province of North Holland, in the small city of Uithoorn in 2005. Fow Pyng Hu, filmmaker with Chinese parents, opened the first official ramen restaurant in Amsterdam in 2014, called Fou Fow Ramen. After that, it took about three more years until ramen boomed in Amsterdam. Fast forward to 2018 when the thirteenth ramen shop opened in Amsterdam (Kamsma 2018). As I am writing this in the summer of 2019, even more shops have opened up in the meantime.

Research

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research was to understand how Japanese migrants prepare and sell an 'authentic' Japanese dish in a context that is not their homeland, namely a Japanese restaurant. I have taken a particular food as a way of entry into a particular culture (Geertz 1973). Japanese culture is often portrayed as rigid, traditional, and unchanging, and I was curious to see whether or not my experiences would confirm or refute these portrayals. I was interested to see if the Japanese migrants 'compromise' their food in any way for their non-Japanese audience, and if so, why and how. I conducted my research among a small group of Japanese migrants in Amsterdam at a ramen restaurant. Having an in-depth anthropological study of the daily lives of these people fills a gap in academic literature as there is only one anthropological study found on Japanese migrants in the Netherlands[3]. Viewed more broadly, this research gives more insights into what happens when food and people travel.

2 A Japanese ball-shaped snack, in the Netherlands often called the Japanese 'poffertje'. It is made of wheat-based batter, and filled with diced or minced octopus, pickled ginger and spring onion.

3 This research is wonderfully described and bundled in the book *Aardig Anders* by Harriët Kroon (2014).

Relevance

Statistical information on the amount of Japanese people living and working in the Netherlands is available (Statistics Netherlands 2016), but little anthropological research is done on Asian cultures in the Netherlands. Asian (temporary) inhabitants of the Netherlands form a relatively invisible group that. By focusing on migrants from Japan, this research provides more insight into the lives of this lesser documented group of people.

It is important to study the phenomenon of ramen in Japan and across the globe in a way that sees it as more than simple food appreciation (Solt 2014, 28), and this is precisely why this study is relevant. This anthropological research gives an in-depth view of the day-to-day lives of the faces we see, but about which relatively little is known. A focus on food appeared to be a good way into this relatively closed-off community. Food connects us all, as we all eat it. Moreover, this research adds to the uncovering of the surface layer in order to reveal the workings of a particular group of people at particular location at a particular time in history, as anthropologists do. This research tells the stories behind the faces preparing the food in the ramen restaurants.

Limitations

I had to navigate myself through multiple no's, frowned faces, and rejections when looking for a ramen shop to conduct my research. After the umpteenth no, as I was walking out of a ramen shop, a man came walking up the stairs. He had overheard the conversation between me and the chef; we got to talking. This Dutch man had been in the process of putting ramen on the Dutch map, and just like that, I had a gatekeeper, and hereby, a way into the ramen world. He arranged a meeting with a Japanese young man, after which I was accepted to be the in-house anthropologist of a particular ramen shop for the upcoming three. I would be working at a ramen restaurant while doing my research there at the same time.

At the first day in the field, I immediately noticed the difficulties in communicating with the Japanese men. Most of the research participants had little to no knowledge of English, and none of them spoke Dutch; I do not speak Japanese. This meant that the 'conversations' with most of the research participants consisted mainly of a lot of pointing and gesturing. Google translate and Google images were a big help; without the Internet, understanding each other would have been more or less impossible. This language barrier played a big role in limiting the bandwidth of my research. Only with the younger men I was able to converse more easily. These men enjoyed a more privileged upbringing in a high-income family than the others. Their family members worked and

travelled abroad before. Also, these young men had the opportunity of attending university; they even studied and travelled in English-speaking countries. I could more easily communicate with these younger men, as English is my second language, too.

Research Questions

The main focus of my research is the way in which the Japanese staff is trying to preserve a sense of Japaneseness while also making the ramen understandable for the Amsterdam audience. My research question is as follows:

How do Japanese migrants translate a traditional Japanese dish to an Amsterdam audience in a restaurant context?

The following chapters will elaborate on the following sub questions, respectively. How does the friction inevitable in any translation process arise and what does it look like? How do the staff adapt the dishes to cater to an audience that is not from their homeland? How do memory and the senses come into play when preparing and selling the Japanese dishes?

In the remainder of this first chapter, the reader is first provided with a description of the research population and location. Following this, a historical, political and cultural context of ramen. Then, I elaborate on my theoretical framework and the concepts used, after which I give a short description of the methods. I finish this chapter by providing the reader an outline of my thesis.

Research Location and Population

Japanese Bib Gourmand chef Hideto Kawahara had already opened ramen shops in Japan, the United States (New York City), Cambodia, Macau, and Hong Kong after stepping into his father's footsteps, who opened Daruma Ramen in Hakata-ku, Fukuoka over 55 years ago (Hide-chan Ramen 2017). After his experience and international success, Mr. Kawahara joined forces with Japanese investor, friend, and ramen-lover, Nobu, to establish Vatten Ramen, the Dutch branch of Hideto's ramen shops. I conducted my research in and around the three ramen shops of this particular chain in Amsterdam[4].

4While writing this thesis, a fourth shop has opened in Niseko, Northern Japan, and one of the three shops in Amsteram has closed its doors again.

While conducting my anthropological fieldwork, the most contact I had was with the approximately 20 staff members of Vatten Ramen working on the floor. Amongst these staff members are six cooks, among one (Japanese) ramen chef who learned through apprenticeship, three other officially trained chefs (one Japanese, one Hungarian, one Dutch), one Japanese film-maker who switched to cooking professionally a few years ago, and one Japanese cook who learned making ramen when he arrived in Amsterdam four months prior to my research starting. Besides the cooks, there are two younger Japanese men in their mid-twenties to thirties who started off at the managerial and productional side, but moved into an apprenticeship later on when more cooks were needed. Four young women were waiting tables and doing work behind the bar: one Japanese young woman, two Japanese-Dutch young girls and one of their Dutch friends, also female. I also frequently saw and talked with the Japanese investor, Nobu, and the shop manager. Two other Japanese young men were in charge of financial issues and marketing. These men are mid to late thirties and they are college friends who met in Japan. As might be noticeable already, of the Japanese staff, the majority is male[5]. The investor brought all the Japanese staff to the Netherlands when embarking upon this investment spree in ramen, giving all of them a job at the restaurant. He provides the Japanese staff with housing and a job. Some of them had never been outside of Japan, and had no other language skills besides Japanese, so having a Japanese home in Amsterdam was safe and soft landing for them. Besides the staff described until now, there were more staff members that I had little to no contact with during my fieldwork, such as the Japanese woman in charge of the payroll and the Dutch business men who helped with the venues and kitchen design (my gatekeeper). Besides this, I have been in touch with (mostly Dutch) customers in the restaurant, and also with Japanese and other non-Japanese friends in the circle of the research participants as I was invited over to their homes increasingly more often.

I have decided to use pseudonyms for the staff members that I use. This means that all names are fictive. I have done so because of the sensitive information that I have shared concerning sexual harassment. It will be close to impossible to retrace who this person is because of the pseudonyms I use. I doubted on whether or not to make the name of the restaurant anonymous, but for analytical reasons I have left this as is, as it helps me make part of my argument more clear. So far for the research location and population. Now it is time to feed the reader more information on the historical background of ramen.

5A similar gender divide is happening in Asian communities working in the food industry in other places. Only men are working in the kitchens of the Chinese restaurant industry in Northern America, and here, apprentice-like working structures are also common (Smart 2003), just as in my research.

The Historical Background of Ramen

Ramen, an Immigrant

George Solt, ramen researcher, has written about the history of ramen in his book *The Untold History of Ramen: How Political Crisis in Japan Spawned a Global Food Craze* (2014). In this section, I use his work to provide the reader a short overview of how the dish traveled from China to Japan, to the rest of the world.

Ramen is an iconic Japanese dish today. However, ramen actually is an immigrant, and it was not always viewed as traditionally Japanese. Linguistically, the noodles can be traced back to China: the names originally used in Japanese are *chūka soba* and *shina soba,* which basically means 'Chinese noodles'. The Chinese noodle dish was not untouched. The Japanese did not simply borrow the dish from the Chinese. In fact, there is nothing in China that closely resembles today's Japanese ramen (Solt 2014).

Japan opened to the outside world in the late 19th century. Port cities like Kobe and Yokohama attracted Westerners and Chinese, and the latter brought a noodle soup called *laa-mien*. In the late 19th and early 20th century, ramen did not resemble today's handmade artisanal delight. The attraction was speed and calories. With industrialization and urbanization increasing, it was the right food at the right time. It was still seen as foreign food, as this was regarded as being more healthy and more nourishing than traditional Japanese food. Meat, wheat, oils and fats were necessary in order not to starve to death. Indeed, the 1940s knew the worst period of hunger in Japan's modern history, because of the war. After the war ended, thousands of black markets sprang up, including food stands, despite this being technically illegal. U.S. occupation authorities banned outdoor food sellers and continued food rationing. Japan thus became dependent on U.S.-imported wheat flour, because rice was hard to come by. This had several consequences. Firstly, a generation grew up with eating wheat-based foods like bread, and it became a standard part of the Japanese diet. Secondly, ramen became the food that fed people in a time of despair and great hunger and took on almost a mythic status. Memory nowadays seems to contribute to ramen's positive image, but back then, people felt differently about it - it was a symbol of the still-desperate times and it highlighted class differences and a generation gap (Solt 2014).

From the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s, during Japan's economic boom, ramen boomed too, becoming a staple for construction workers, students and young people. Moreover, with the growth of the economy, instant ramen - industrialized food pur sang - became popular, while simultaneously the first hints of the modern hand-crafted ramen movement can be seen. The *datsu-*

sara (‘salaryman escapee’) was all the rage in the 1970s. As the name implies, these were men who left successful careers in order to become self-employed - for example ramen cooks or farmers. And what is not possible in a corporate environment - a degree of independence and creativity - was possible when running a ramen shop. The ramen maker was romanticized and this ushered a period of a new symbolism around ramen. The 1980s saw the fashionization of ramen, and hand in hand with this, the specialty ramen shops and a new stereotypical ramen eater: the young, urban consumer. Ramen was not consumed as a means to not starve to death or as fuel for hard physical work. Rather, eating ramen became a hobby. Waiting in line became a thing, as did obsessing over special regional varieties, traveling to distant places with the specific goal of tasting a new kind of ramen. In the 1990s this glorification of a food and its chefs sky-rocketed. Shops stopped having ‘Chinese-ish’ names and decor, and even young ramen chefs began to dress differently, wearing a particular Japanese Buddhist work clothing (*samue*) that craftsmen in 18th century Japan used to wear (George Solt 2014).

This brings us to the present. Nowadays, ramen shops all over the world are presenting what is seen as *kokuminshoku,* a quintessentially Japanese dish - comfort food. The history of ramen shows how no dish is ‘traditionally’ anything, as histories cannot be traced back to a particular starting point. Categories such as ‘traditional Japanese food’ are *constructed*, because there are influences of other people, of other tastes and produces. As people move, food travels too. This research serves as an addition to the timeline of ramen, enriching the timeline with data on ramen in the Netherlands in 2018, as well as on its producers and its consumers.

Theoretical framework

In order to contextualize my research, I focus on academic literature concerning cultural translation, food, the senses, and memory. The overarching theme in my research is translation within the realm of food and culture. In what follows, a framework of is provided for academic contextualization of my the research.

Translation

The field of translation studies has come into being as an interdisciplinary field since the 1970s (Leavitt 2014, 208). One of the most well-known thinkers in the field of cultural translation is Clifford Geertz and his both embraced and critiqued metaphor of the culture-as-text (Geertz 1973).

The widely recognized political-economic critiques state that Geertz is regarding culture not as a process but as a product (Hoffman 2009, 420). Furthermore, the critiques say that Geertz views the 'text' or culture as separated from its social context (Shankman *et al.* 1985). I agree with these critiques as they aptly see that Geertz is viewing culture and translation as rigid and as a product. .

Traditional translation studies focus on the binary distinction between source and target language. These scholars ignore and do not apprehend the complexity of translation. In this school of thought, the translators are choosing between "honoring authentic, original meanings or shifting meaning in the name of making the material feel more comfortable to the receiving culture" (Nida 1964). In my research, this would mean the Japanese staff should choose to either honor the authentic Japanese dish *or* to shift the meaning to make it more comfortable to the consumers. Of course, it is not *or or*.

I view translation as an on-going encounter between humans, an ongoing lived event, 'with implications far beyond the simple transfer of meaning from "source" to target" languages' (Pritzker 2012, 343). A dialogical model of translation challenges the traditional monological, binary view. Result is achieved in the conversion, and in this sense, translation can be seen as an interactive unfolding (Wadensjö 1998). Luckily, many scholars have made inroads into developing a truly anthropological model of translation. I build upon this scholarship in anthropology, translation studies and sociolinguistics. I do this by providing an anthropologically grounded theory of translation that highlights the nature of translation as it occurs in everyday worlds (Pritzker 2012, 343). In my research, I use Pritzker's term "living translation", an engaged human process of interpretation of meaning across linguistic boundaries through conversation (Pritzker 2012, 344) to show the fluidity and processual nature of translation.

Food Is the Way In

This research illustrates the effects of broad societal changes on eating patterns, since I am looking at a diaspora - movements of peoples - and the (increasing) globalization of foods (Mintz and Du Bois 2002, 104). The subdiscipline of food anthropology was born out of the minds of researchers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Jack Goody, Sidney Mintz, Marvin Harris and Arjun Appadurai, to name a few. The first two have made important contributions to a structuralist vision of food and eating, and Mintz' work on sugar illuminates political-economic-value-creation (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). All of these researchers wrote foundational work that makes clear the relevance of studying food to gain key insights into (post)modern social life. Historically speaking, a lot has

changed. In food anthropology, problems with structuralist and Cartesian approaches to mind and body are acknowledged, and dichotomies between the symbolic and the material are viewed as outdated (Sutton 2010, 220). I do not position myself in either a cultural-materialist or a symbolic 'box', since I do not see the two as dichotomous or mutually exclusive categories. Rather, I am moving along the continuum. In practice, this means that I focus on the material - a 'traditional' Japanese dish called ramen - to which symbolic meanings are attached. My research is positioned at the intertwining of the material and the symbolic, and food is the entry point.

Anthropology of the Senses

"From color, steam rising, gloss and texture, we infer taste smell and feel… Taste is something we anticipate and infer from how things look, feel to the hand, smell (outside the mouth), and sound… Our eyes let us 'taste' food at a distance by activating the sense memories of taste and smell" (Sutton 2010, 216).

A growing body of anthropological and philosophical work on the senses is being written. Anthropologists thinking and writing about food and the senses are Claude Lévi-Strauss (1983), Mary Douglas (1971; 1982), Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes (1989), and Nadia Seremetakis (1994), among others. In most societies, vision is often placed higher in the hierarchy of the senses than for example smell or touch. Exploring the synesthetic nature of taste makes room for acknowledging that a full taste experience, besides vision, always includes touch and smell as well, among others (Korsmeyer and Sutton 2011). Using the anthropology of the senses, I am undertaking an embodied subjective exploration of food.

The senses have generally been viewed as existing within a vacuum, apart from another, not acknowledging the synesthesia-like properties that food evokes. David Sutton, anthropologist, describes how the anthropology of food and the anthropology of the senses have run largely on separate, parallel tracks (2010, 210). He connects the two, as a coming together of these disciplines can produce new fields of knowledge. Sutton stresses the importance of focusing on sensory aspects when engaging with food, referring to approaches from the anthropology of the senses, phenomenology, and materiality studies, among others (2010, 220). Nadia Seremetakis is also one of the 'founding parents' who explores food and the senses in relation to memory, to place-making, and to synesthesia (Sutton 2010, 212). There still appears to be a gap between the anthropology of the senses and the anthropology of food. I attempt to bridge this gap.

Gustemology

David Sutton coins the neologism “gustemology” (the study of taste) in order to give concreteness to his new ideas. Building on the model of Steven Feld’s acoustemology, the study of sound, Sutton claims that taste, like sound, can be an entry point for study (Sutton 2010, 215). One of the key aspects of a gustemological approach is the recognition that our experience of food, like all of life, is always inherently synesthetic (Korsmeyer and Sutton 2011, 470). It also recognizes the potential for far more tastes than the standard four - or now five, with the latecomer umami (Korsmeyer and Sutton 2011, 470). A gustemological approach thus is helpful in breaking the hierarchical and limiting way of thinking about the senses. I see the merits of taking the senses and synesthesia as a focus point of analysis. However, I am adapting Sutton's view somewhat by not taking a particular flavor as a jumping point for understanding society and its transformations (Sutton 2010). Rather, I start with a particular dish. Besides this, I also use the term *terroir* as described by Sutton as follows: “taste is associated with a specific local place and practices associated with that place” (Sutton 2010, 216). Attention to memory is also involved in a gustemological approach. Although Sutton even plays with the idea of seeing memory *as* a sense, I would not go as far. I do follow him in his viewpoint that both memory and the senses are creative, active, and transformational cultural processes (Korsmeyer and Sutton 2011).

Next to this gustemological approach, several case studies on diasporic communities are relevant or my research. As described in Janowski's research (2012), food can be a means of remembering the past for a diasporic community, illustrating the ways in which diasporic communities construct a sense of ‘home’ in a *new* home through food. Identity and belonging, elicited through such stories, are lived out through cooking and consuming ‘marker’ foods in a new home (Janowski 2012, 176). This research helps me in understanding the meaning of ramen for my research participants. Another case study describes how a taste of the past is incorporated in Ottoman restaurants in Istanbul, where ‘Ottomanness’ is performed in an urban context (Karaosmanoğlu 2009). This relates to my research, as the Japanese migrants (re)create ‘Japaneseness’. Moreover, it shows that restaurants “also contribute to the endless hunt for the exotic and the authentic from distant geographies” (340), as is the case in my research. A third and last case study focusing on *satay babi* (pork skewers) indicates the importance of taking history, the body, memory and context into account when studying food (Choo 2004). This fits perfectly in the gustemological approach that I am taking. With my research, I position myself amidst these scholars, adding to food literature focused on the senses. I show that food is more than simple

nourishment; food intersects with the negotiation of a liminal sphere between Japan and the Netherlands.

I have used the Harriët Kroon's book *Aardig Anders* (2014) throughout this thesis as a reference work for better understanding the Japanese community in the Netherlands. Kroon covers themes such as hospitality, but also inter-cultural business communications and conceptions of rudeness and politeness, among others. As there are no other anthropological works focusing on this group of people in this country, this comprehensive collage of interviews and reports on the Japanese communities in the Netherlands gave me ground on which to build.

Methods

This research is written as a sensory ethnography. In order to answer my main research question and the accompanying subsidiary questions, I have used participant observation and informal conversations as research methods. These methods are shortly described below.

Sensory Ethnography

In writing this sensory ethnography, I am taking the multisensoriality of experience, perception knowing and practice as starting point (Pink 2009, 1). My senses have guided all of my research. This means that when talking, when going grocery shopping with the research participants, when being in the kitchen with them or when simply sitting with them, my aim has been to be as open to my own senses as I am to theirs. This has been especially interesting when I could not understand the Japanese that was being spoken. Then, I laboriously watched the body language, the facial expressions, and the tones of voice of the research participants. Putting the senses center stage is how this anthropological study has become a sensory ethnography.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is part of writing a sensory ethnography. Participant observation is "done by living with the people being studied, watching them work and play, thinking carefully about what is seen, interpreting it and talking to the actors about the emerging interpretations" (O'Reilly 2004, 206). Modern western academia intellectualizes ethnographic happenings, and this is not a good development. Sarah Pink describes this wonderfully: "We remain embodied beings interacting with

environments that might include discursive, sensory, material and social strands. We do not simply retreat in our minds to write theoretical texts, but we create discourses and narratives that are themselves entangled with the materiality and sensoriality of the moment and of memories and imaginaries" (Pink 2009, 41).

Participant observation places the researcher *among* the participants instead of at a supposedly safe distance with a supposedly objective gaze. Yes, the body of researchers crucial and it holds valuable information. When one is sharing lives with people over an extended period of time, part of what we know of life "is embodied in the way we walk, move, and talk" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 11). Our body language changes, our way of talking. This is all valuable information as the body and the mind are intertwined. Participant observation is a method that forces me to constantly aware of myself, my body, what I might be conveying, how I might be influencing the circumstances; it is a tool that forces one to be reflective of oneself as research instrument, something that is most often ignored or dismissed in other disciplines.

The sensoriality of human experience and therefore also research is linked to another underrepresented aspect of doing research: emotions. Emotions are underreported in the field. Yet, methods cannot function without the personalities wielding them, and emotion can complement the more traditional methods of anthropological research (Davies and Spencer 2010). Giving my emotions free reign is something that happens naturally to me as a person. This is not an important task. However, these emotions have also been interesting, as a traumatic experience during my fieldwork (described later) led to an array of emotions that I had to work through. Besides this, I gave words to my emotions in my fieldwork notes and my diary during my research period, in order to see how my research findings were influenced by my moods. Observing emotions is a great tool for practicing reflexivity.

Informal Conversations

A big part of my methodology is talking, as informal conversations are part of the day-to-day experience of being in the field. I have documented all informal talks by making 'mental notes' (O'Reilly 2012) and by jotting down keywords on a notebook. My telephone also came in handy. As I noticed that carrying around a notebook and occasionally stopping in my tracks to write down some key words could be quite eye-catching. After a while, I came up with the idea of sending voice memos to myself through WhatsApp. This way, I could keep track of what was happening during my hours in and around the shop much quicker than with a pen and paper[6].

6 Pen and paper came in handy too in the process of learning some Japanese words. I often asked the research

Mind the Gap

During my research, besides having many informal conversations, I also planned to conduct semi-structured interviews. One of the Japanese-Dutch young women in the company had volunteered to be a translator when I would want to conduct an interview with staff that did not or just barely speak English and no Dutch. Unfortunately, during my first in-depth interview, I was sexually harassed by one of my research participants. This showed how there are "encounters that were disturbing for the fieldworker and that presented an intellectual and, almost as often, a moral challenge" (McLean & Leibing 2007, xi). My boundaries as both woman and researcher were violated and this left me feeling disrespected, angry, and shortly doubtful about my own responsibility in this - which I let go of quickly, fortunately. This was not the first incident of this nature for me. The mindful and purposeful forcing on me by this man triggered unhealed parts of a traumatic experience that I had several years ago. It led me to avoid the man in question for the last weeks of my research period. I did not feel comfortable or safe to conduct other interviews after having had such a frightening and anger-invoking experience. For a long time, it also had me confused about if and how to use this. Do disturbing encounters like this "convey real generalizable knowledge or merely personal reflections on methodology? Are they more than footnotes or asides to the discipline's agenda? The dilemma signals precisely why we must push on, and be careful not to dismiss these accounts from the frontlines" (McLean & Leibing 2007, xiv). Because of time constraints, I did not have the space to intellectualize this traumatic event. And for my research, it means that methodology-wise I am stretched a bit more thinner than I had planned as I was not able to conduct more than one interview because of what happened.

Outline

In the upcoming chapters, I guide the reader through the conducted research by providing the reader with ethnographic descriptions. I link these descriptions to parts of the academic literature that are described above, depending on the theme of the chapter.

The next chapter focuses on friction. As each translation comes with a portion of friction, the same goes when translating something Japanese to Dutch. Both the producers and the consumers of this Japaneseness have different expectations and cultural backgrounds, and this is what I describe using translation literature among others.

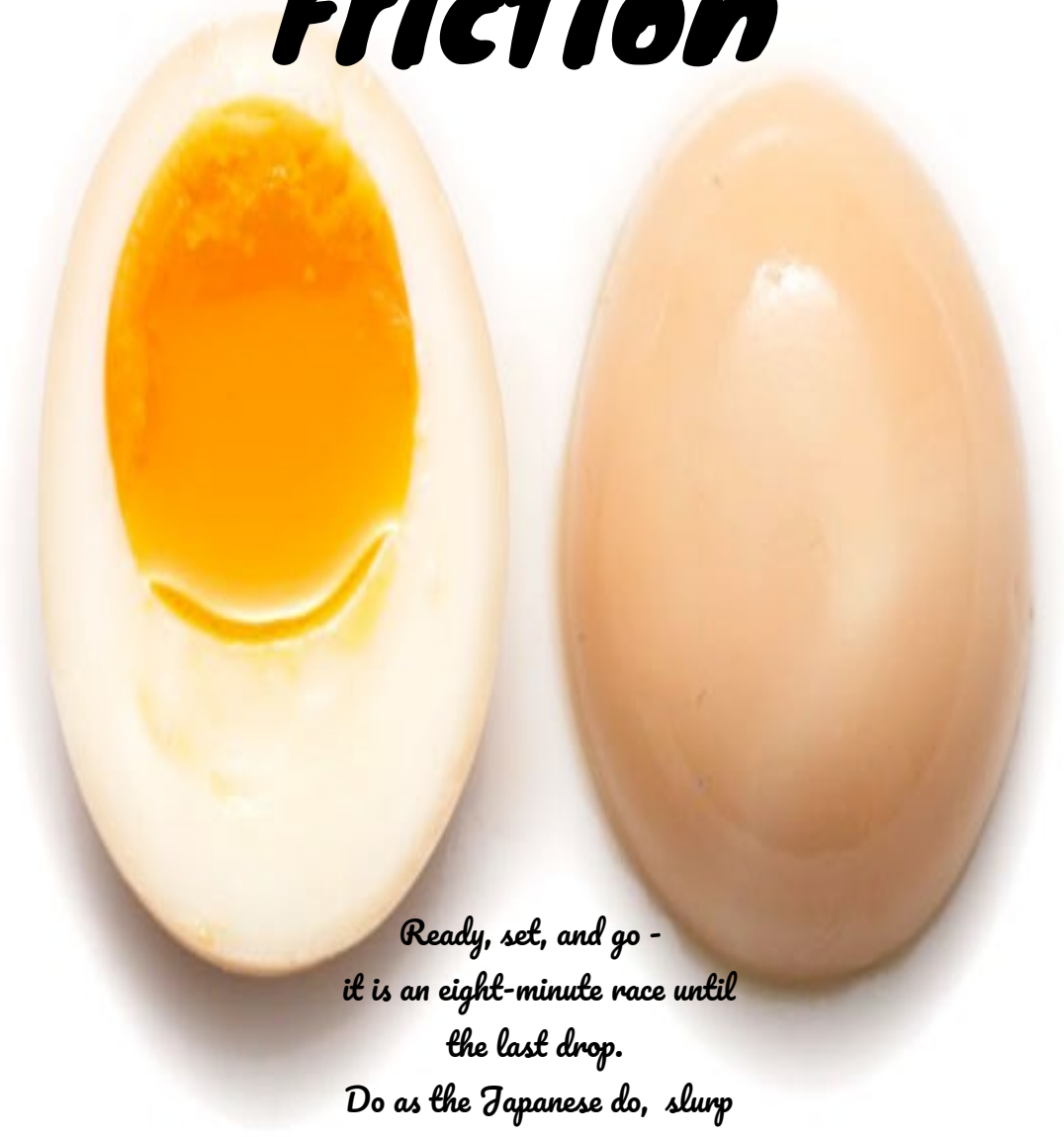
participants if they could write down the Japanese words besides a term that I had just learned and written down phonetically.

The theme of the second chapter is adaptation. Because of the friction involved in translation of culture, or in this case, a dish or idea of Japaneseness, adaptation is inevitable and necessary. I give the reader examples of the ways in which the Japanese staff changes its dishes in order to fit in the local context.

In the last ethnographic chapter, my argument comes together. This chapter is all about the senses and memory. I use the work of (mainly) Sutton and Korsmeyer to contextualize my own ethnographic descriptions of menu development in the case of pork broth and dumplings. I link this to the concept of terroir to coin an original concept called “embodied sensory translation”.

The last and concluding is a short recapitulation of everything that I have described and argued. I then reflect on the research that I have conducted. I round off this thesis by giving several suggestions for further research.

1
Friction



Ready, set, and go -
it is an eight-minute race until
the last drop.
Do as the Japanese do, slurp
your noodles shamelessly.

Tanka by Charlotte Ehrhardt

Source: Serious Eats

Chapter 1: Friction

Introduction

Culture is not static. Food travels, and this means that practices and dishes change, while other aspects of food culture stay the same. There are different histories of eating and concessions or willful adaptations are made. Friction is inevitable and even necessary for a successful ramen restaurant to flourish in Amsterdam. Indeed, there is no copy and paste formula from one culture to another that works smoothly without misunderstandings or knowledge gaps for the customers. I experienced such a misunderstanding myself:

"We serve authentic Japanese ramen soup with local Dutch chicken" (Vatten Ramen 2019). I read this sentence when I was still in my pre-research phase, searching for a ramen restaurant location. It was on their website. 'What? That doesn't sound like a *real* bowl of ramen', my mind went. There is a hunkering for authenticity in today's society, as David Sutton describes: **"**capitalism's need for innovation also no doubt led us (…) to a present where flavor, in ever diverse combinations and 'authentic origins' is once again on the menu" (2006, 101). And in my head, the Dutch element negated the authentic Japaneseness of the dish. A few months later, when I was in the midst of my research, I remembered my earlier suspicion and confusion, and I asked one of the chefs why they explicitly advertised their Japanese soup as being made with local Dutch chicken. One of the chefs told me that it actually is perfectly natural for Japanese people to cook with local products (Makoto, inforrmal conversation with author, April 12, 2018). *Washoku,* the traditional Japanese dietary culture, "favours the consumption of various natural, locally sourced ingredients such as rice, fish, vegetables and edible wild plants" (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage[7], 2013). Using Dutch chicken was not a matter of renouncing ramen's Japaneseness, it in fact was an example of it. I misinterpreted the marketing of the Dutch local chicken. I saw it as proof of unauthentic ramen, when in fact this was perceived by the Japanese staff as traditionally Japanese. In fact, we "mishear sounds, misattribute meanings, and misconstrue grammatical forms in a different language because of our own legitimately acquired prejudices as speakers of our own language" (Leavitt 2014, 203-204).

This chapter focuses on the experienced friction that is inevitable in any translation process. The chefs and other staff want to preserve a Japaneseness in their products, but they cannot sell a

7 UNESCO defines Intangible Cultural Heritage as traditional, contemporary and living at the same time, as inclusive, as representative, and as community-based. For more information, see UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage 2013.

'real' or 'authentic' Japaneseness, in so far as that exists, anyway[8]. This is because the staff is not in Japan, and because the staff is around customers who have different levels of knowledge about the food and the preparation of it, as well as different cultural backgrounds. The staff aims to get as close to a 'real' Japaneseness as they can, while serving their audience something they can understand. "The knowledge generated by the practice of translation (…) is a key factor in shaping the image of a national culture" (Wilson 2013, 78). When translating, what is deemed important is put to the fore; what is translated and how something is translated shows the preferences of the translators and through this process, the image of a national culture can be shaped. The staff commodifies its ethnicity or Japaneseness and they do so through food. The ways in which the Japaneseness is presented *and* experienced can differ. Besides the overt desire for selling a real Japanese product, the Japanese participants also bring their own more implicit or habitual ways of eating and ideas about hospitality to the Amsterdam context. I show that the Japanese staff brings these implicit cultural ideas with them, unknowingly so, and to show how this leads to minor conflicts with Dutch staff or confusion about the non-Japanese, non-knowing customers. I do so by giving examples about hospitality and service, eating culture and etiquette. On the Dutch side, there are other ideas about what constitutes good service and hospitality. Certain things can get lost in translation because of the knowledge gap.

No Cultural Translation without Friction

Translation is viewed, in its broadest sense, as cross-cultural understanding (Rubel and Rosman 2003, 1). Some authors see it as the "communication of cultural knowledge. Every act of translation is a social act, involving social relationships, transforming as well as crossing boundaries" (Silverstein in Rubel and Rosman 2003, 15). Others reverse the thinking by saying that when borders are crossed, cultural translation may result (Bhabha in Pym 2014, 141-142). I do not see it as going either one way or the other. In this research, translation is viewed as bridging boundaries. When people move, cultural translation ensues. "The prime cause of cultural translation is the movement of people (subjects) rather than the movement of texts (objects)" (Pym 2014, 138). The aim in translation often is how the cultural values of the source language are preserved in the translation into the target language (Rubel and Rosman 2003, 6). The question is how the chefs preserve a sense of Japaneseness when translating ramen to their 'target' audience.

Absolute sameness in translation is impossible and this opens a horizon for a new

8 There is a lot of interesting research within the anthropology of authenticity that I would love to go into. See for example Ryang 2015. However, to the limited amount of words available to me, I unfortunately will not be able to.

performance of cultural identity; this cultural identity is a dynamic exchange motivated by movements of meaning and identity and non-hierarchical openness (Longinovic 2002, 7-8). In other words, "a perfect translation is a utopian dream" (Jones in Rubel and Rosman 2003, 15-16). There can be no fully exact translation (Nida 1964). Owner of Amsterdam's Fou Fow Ramen explains that the Dutch context is very different from the Japanese context, as the Dutch water gives a different taste to the ramen (Q&A with Fow Pyng Hu at movie screening of 'Ramen Heads', March 18, 2018). Besides this, the access to certain products in Japan and the valuation of the Japanese audience is different than it is here in the Netherlands. Ping sometimes tweaks recipes in a time-consuming matter, and these go unnoticed. This would not happen in Japan.

As there is no one-on-one translation possible, there also is no translation possible without friction. One has to keep in mind that friction does not necessarily mean something negative or unwanted. A balance between the need to be comprehensible and the need to convey as much of the original as possible is needed (Rubel and Rosman 2003, 11). It is a matter of balance or trade-off when regarding the ramen dish in the Amsterdam context. On the one hand, the staff aims not to neglect the authenticity or origin of the dish, while on the other hand they avoid drifting too far away from it. The spirit and manner of the original should be conveyed and one must be sensitive to the original's style, according to Nida (Venuti 2000, 134). A good translation should have the feel of the original (Rubel and Rosman 2003, 8-9). Placed in my research context, a bowl of ramen should have a feel of Japan.

In the following chapters, I write about the Japanese side of things and the real or authentic Japanese ramen, as well as the Dutch consumer's side. This might invoke the idea that I am working within the source and target binary paradigm. However, I write about translation as a *process* instead of a product (Pym 2014). Cultural translation can be understood as a process in which there is no start text and usually no fixed target text; the focus is on cultural *processes* rather than products (Pym 2014, 138). So, the source and target categories are simply necessary to describe the process, however one must keep in mind that these categories are not rigid or static. Neither the original nor the translation are fixed and enduring categories (Buden *et al.* 2009, 200). Indeed, in this globalizing world, 'start' and 'target' sides are neither stable nor entirely separate (Pym 2014, 138). Moreover, I do not agree with the idea that there is an original. Neither sides of the paradigm "have an essential quality and are constantly transformed into space and time" (Benjamin in Buden et al. 2009, 200). All in all, translators do not have to choose between honoring the original *or* shifting meaning to make the material more comfortable to the receiving culture, as some say (Schleiermacher 1813; Nida 1964). It is not a matter of *or/or,* but *and/and.*

This case study is situated in the global metropolitan context in which popular foodie culture

likes ‘exotic’ and ‘different’ foods (Bloemink 2016; Consultancy.nl 2016; Hoogerbrugge 2014; van Rhee 2018). This exoticism in the form of Japaneseness is one of Vatten Ramen’s USP’s. The following paragraphs on service and hospitality and on eating culture and etiquette illustrate the ways in which the constructed, commodified and implicit Japaneseness meets a non-Japanese audience. In this cultural interaction, friction can be found.

Service and Hospitality

“*Irasshaimase*!”, A Japanese Welcome

When customers walk into the ramen restaurant, the chefs loudly shout something in Japanese. When the customers are Japanese, they respond back in Japanese. The most commonly observed reaction from non-Japanese is a slightly confused look, but followed with a smile. During a slow and cold afternoon, I asked the manager, Haruto, what they were happily shouting at all of the customers. He told me that they say *irasshaimase.* “It is something that people in Japan say when welcoming someone in their shop. It is something very traditional” (Haruto, informal conversation with author, March 23, 2018. Another chef told me that the investor instructed the (Japanese) chefs to greet customers in this manner. He did follow by saying he did not feel very comfortable doing this. Why, I asked, during an informal conversation. “Customers don’t understand”, he replied (Takumi, informal conversation with author, March 13, 2018).

In this situation, a Japanese saying is purposefully deployed to convey a sense of traditionality and Japaneseness. However, there is a partial acceptance and a partial resistance to this instruction from ‘above’. This shows that translation “certainly does not mean that participants play identical interactional roles or that through interaction asymmetrical social relations fall away into an egalitarian utopia” (Ochs and Jacoby 1995, 178). The construction and commodification process is not a shared instrument on which all the Japanese staff agrees. The producers of culture are *also* its consumers, “seeing and sensing and listening to themselves enact their identity - and, in the process, objectifying their own subjectivity” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 26). The staff is living, enacting, and selling Japaneseness, while similarly consuming it. And whether or not they like saying it or whether or not the customers literally understand the saying, greeting customers with irasshaimase *does* convey a sense of authenticity[9] to the Dutch customers.

[9] Another interesting observation concerning authenticity is that even though most Japanese staff had never made ramen before, and the Hungarian chef making ramen has years of experience in Japanese restaurants, the former are judged as being able to be more skilled in cooking up Japaneseness.

"Why Are We Not Being Served?"

"You do not disturb the customers while they are eating. You wait out of respect, because you do not want to bother them. They already are so busy" (Akio, informal conversation with author, April 4, 2018). It is common to wait until the customer makes it known that they would like to be served. The same goes for customers eating. The Japanese staff does not ask customers if everything is according to their wishes; they consider this impolite.

Harriët Kroon describes in her research that in Japanese culture, everything is taken care of from the minute a customer walks in: taking the coat, handing over the menu, making sure everything is at hand and taken care of (Kroon 2014, 336; 384-385). This differs from the experiences I had and observed in the ramen restaurant in Amsterdam, perhaps because this ramen shop is not a high-class restaurant. The experiences described in Kroon's research are situated in the high-end Okura Hotel in Amsterdam, so this could explain the difference in ideas concerning hospitality.

Not only the staff experiences miscommunication and cultural differences. There are also other interactions occurring between the customers and the staff. What came to the fore during my months of research is that the Dutch customers could be impatient or slightly annoyed with the Japanese staff[10]. A ruling idea about Dutch people is that they "do not know a thing about service" (Kroon 2014, 396). The Japanese staff was often regarded by customers as being rude when they let customers wait after they had gotten a seat.

The above two examples illustrate how ideas about what is considered 'Japanese', right, rude, or polite can differ, and that these cultural differences often lead to friction. This friction is inevitable in a translation process. In what follows, I will further my argument by focusing on eating culture and etiquette.

Eating Culture and Etiquette

The Slurp

Slurping is met with disgust by many Dutch people in the restaurant. It also took several weeks of

10 This was most apparent when the Japanese staff that had never lived outside of Japan and who were not used to 'Western' ideas about etiquette and service were working. There was less friction between staff and customers with the bilingual Japanese staff, and the bilingual and Dutch staff often functioned as translators. The friction lessened over time, I observed, as the staff learned more about 'Dutch' service and the translation process went more smoothly. More on this adaptation in the next chapter.

eating with the Japanese men until I could eat without wincing and to have these loud slurping sounds not really bothering me as much. “In the mid- to late 2000s, food writers were unable to resist pointing out the seeming oddness of the Japanese slurping while eating and thereby breaching European-American table manners” (Solt 2014, 248). In the Amsterdam ramen shop, I saw uncountable side glances, eyebrows pulled down, noses wrinkled, upper lips pulled up, eyes squinted, from non-slurpers (see Youssef *et al*. 2017). The ‘foodies’ or customers who were more knowledgeable of the Japanese way of eating this dish were seen slurping, too, as this is a Japanese norm when eating noodle soup. Indeed, “slurping does help the noodles act as a vessel for better transporting the soup from the bowl to your mouth” (Ramen Beast 2017). Pulling in the air makes one taste the flavors better, as the nose is more involved. Plus, slurping makes it possible to eat the soup more quickly as the air cools the noodles down.

Kroon describes similar miscommunications or misconceptions concerning the slurp. When Van Lier, a Dutch businessman, met with two “real Japanese gentlemen in suits” in the Holiday Inn Hotel in Utrecht for a job interview regarding a CEO position, he saw that they were obviously very well prepared and a hundred percent involved in their jobs (Kroon 2014, 519-520). Then, something unexpected happened. The CEO started slurping his tea. Van Lier was appalled because he was raised learning that slurping is a mortal sin (Kroon 2014, 520-521). Then, he remembered the research he did beforehand about slurping, and the coin dropped (Kroon 2014, 520-521).

The Dutch businessman was prepared before meeting with the Japanese people, so he knew what to expect, even though his first reaction was disgust. In the Netherlands, people are brought up with other ideas about what constitutes decent eating, as it is considered best not to make a sound, and audible slurps are more often than not regarded as filthy, uncivilized[11]. The slurp is something that takes getting used to for most non-Japanese, in and outside the ramen restaurant.

Need for Speed

Eyes opened wide, eyebrows raised: “Why are they taking so long? Why are they talking so much? This is not good for ramen!” (Haruto, informal conversation with author, March 27, 2018). Before starting my research, I could easily sit for twenty to thirty minutes before having finished my bowl. Taking my time, I caught up with my friends in the meantime. During my research, I observed the staff is dumbfounded when noticing how long Dutch customers can sit with their bowl of ramen.

[11] Although, interestingly, slurping is normalized and even valorized in Europe in the context of wine culture.

Ramen falls into the category of the Dutch kroket: '*hap, slik, weg*' (bite, swallow, gone). Ramen is fast food (Solt 2014, 203). This goes for the consumption of ramen only. Producing ramen is time-consuming: "The procedure for making ramen involves making the noodles and the soup and flavoring the meat, each of which takes a great time of deal and effort. It is fundamentally the world of Slow Food" (Okuyama Tadamasa in Solt 2014, 203). When eating ramen, slurping the noodles and broth until the last drop is ought to be done in a jiffy. The bowl needs to be empty within eight minutes, otherwise the noodles will overcook. The noodles are in piping hot soup, which means the noodles get softer and softer. The looks of surprise and incomprehension, paired with the amount of hits when typing 'how to eat ramen' into a search engine are indicative about something not (yet) having landed in the minds and bodies of (non-Japanese) ramen eaters.

In Japan, ramen shops are fast food restaurants (Ramen Beast 2017). Moreover, eating ramen is "a private communion more than a social experience" (Pitock 2017). This is where friction arises. The Dutch are relatively new to the dish itself, but also to the way of eating it. And the utensils are another possible obstacle to finishing the dish in a timely fashion.

Clumsy Chopsticks

When being brought up eating with a knife, fork and/or spoon, using chopsticks can be challenging. First, one should be able to use the fine motor skills of the hand to hold the chopsticks correctly without noisily dropping them onto the floor. Secondly, one should be able to grab the slippery noodles out of the broth. Thirdly, one should be able to have the correct hand-eye coordination to bring the noodles to one's mouth without having them slip away, hereby splashing and making an oily mess. When not used to eating with chopsticks, it can feel like going through an obstacle course. Eating ramen within eight minutes can be a challenge then.

The staff did not compromise utensil-wise. One simply does not eat Japanese food with Western utensils, as chef-in-training Jiro told me. "We eat European style food with a fork. Spaghetti... fork. Japanese food... chopsticks. Maybe look the same. But eat different. It depends on style of food" (Jiro, informal conversation with author, April 25, 2018). No compromises utensil-wise means that there are no forks in the restaurant[12]. And this often led to situations in which the non-practiced chop-sticker clumsily took well over eight minutes to finish this Japanese fast food dish.

12 The Chinese restaurants once started with chopsticks, but gradually gave in and now one can also eat with forks around Amsterdam's Chinatown. Japanese ramen shops are new, and not every ramen shop is as strict as the one where I conducted my research, utensil-wise. Most ramen shops have forks if you ask for them. Vatten Ramen simply does not have them laying around.

Hierarchy

One of the biggest recurring annoyances of the Dutch staff during my research period was the supposed laziness and dumbness of the Japanese staff. I had a hard time understanding the lazy label as most Japanese staff worked every single day. I went to one of the two houses in which the Japanese staff lives when the production kitchen was temporarily closed, and I came to understand how they were keeping the production going. Kazuki and Kaito had been making the broth in their home on a small burner stove. These two men had been cooking broth for several weeks. They were keeping the fire burning twenty-four hours a day, taking shifts. If one slept, the other was monitoring the soup, preventing the fire from going out and the broth from boiling too hard.

As the above indicates, laziness would not seem like the adequate label. Another explanation that could make these annoyances understandable is that most Japanese staff had not worked in a professional kitchen before and therefore they did not know the workings of such a workplace inside and out. However, more interesting than those labels and judgments going back and forth is something else. Often heard phrases, mostly uttered during or after work, were: "I have told them several times", "they say they understand but they just don't do it", and "there is no structure with these guys". Underlying these statements is the language barrier. The Dutch and Japanese staff often literally did not understand each other[13]. I found out that different cultural ideas on hierarchy explains the friction.

In Japan, solving conflicts is done via hierarchy: your position determines in how far you are entitled to being right, and this is something completely different than when assuming some sort of universal truth on which you can take a stance (Kroon 2014, 807-808). I made the (Japanese) investor lash out at me. He did so indirectly, by angrily calling the Hungarian chef. What happened? I had asked in the Facebook group chat if we could have some small notebooks brought from one location to the other, to write down the orders and to avoid making mistakes. The Hungarian chef told me about the angry phone call. I was out of line. This chef often naturally functioned as a mediator because of his knowledge of Japanese language and culture. Another time, when in the first opening days of the second location, the financial manager had gotten angry because we had taken initiative to buy a water cooker - we had teas on the menu and we had no way to sell them. Apparently it was not okay to do this so 'out of the blue' without discussing with the boss and asking for permission. These examples indicate that there is friction between differing (internalized)

13 In the Facebook group chat through which most communication between Dutch and Japanese staff went is another example of language barriers and misunderstandings – of friction. Around 70 percent of the messages were in Japanese. Most of the English messages written by Japanese staff had obviously gone through an online translation machine, as the often strange sentences gave away.

cultural ideas about hierarchy, leading to sometimes less efficient and more time-consuming processes in the eyes of the Dutch staff.

Taking time and being patient is crucial when wanting to do business with Japanese people. I got to talking to a self-labeled westernized Japanese woman who had been living in Germany for years. She was working on an online portal to gather information on Japanese food for non-Japanese customers and she had been meeting with a lot of Japanese shop owners in the Netherlands. When I noticed she had been waiting around the ramen shop for more than an hour, we start talking. She told me that this waiting is business as usual in Japan - being flexible to accommodate the wishes of the boss. She found this Japanese, hierarchical way of dealing with each other time-consuming. Dutch people are used to less complicated decision-making. In Japan, the whole hierarchical pyramid needs to be worked through (Kroon 2014, 375-376). Otherwise, you are disrespecting this person. When not taking your time, the efforts are perceived as counterproductive. This Japanese woman told me she had been strategically thinking about ways to have some shortcuts to talk to food shop employees, to avoid 'wasting time', but in vain. The (Japanese) harmony - preserving versus the (Dutch and American) individual-oriented society (Kroon 2014, 338) is a reality to be reckoned with.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that whenever cultural translation is happening, friction is unavoidable. In the case of Japanese food culture being translated to the Dutch context, friction arises. There is a lack of knowledge in Amsterdam on the historical context of ramen and about the fact that ramen is fast food. The anti-social aspect of ramen culture is not perceived as normal in the Netherlands either. Besides this, there are other ideas concerning hospitality and etiquette, which lead to some misunderstandings. Add to this that this type of food is relatively new, and the ways of eating, at least for the non-practiced chopstick eater, are too. The common denominator here is a knowledge gap. Some things get lost in translation, because the historical, cultural and sensorial context of the dish differs from the place in which it is being prepared and sold. Plucking a food with a specific cultural and political history from Japan and planting it into another space that has its own histories of food, friction is bound to arise. There is little to no frame of reference for (most) Dutch consumers, and because of this their expectations and experiences will be different from those of the Japanese staff. As friction is part of every translation, every translation needs to be adapted to the local audience in some way or another. A one-on-one translation is not possible

because no two languages are the same. To deal with the friction, adaptation is necessary, otherwise, things would get lost in translation. The next chapter goes deeper into the adaptation practices of the Japanese staff in the ramen shop.

2
Adaptation

Milky-looking broth
and pork smell greet eyes and nose,
lost in translation.
Confused Dutch ramen eaters will
understand five years from now.

Tanka by Charlotte Ehrhardt

Source: Amazon

Chapter 2: Adaptation

> As we produce ramen in Amsterdam, we have achieved in combining Japanese traditional cooking methods and modern Western tastes, which results in 'a beautiful fusion of food art in bowls' being made. This mixture of good parts from both cultures is our core value in our restaurant, as we appreciate and respect all people living in the beautiful city of Amsterdam as well as our traditional values back in Japan. The Vatten Ramen crew aim to serve the best ramen bowls, to bring out the smiles of every customer (Vatten Ramen, n.d.).

The noodle soup of Vatten Ramen is not simply advocated as 'Japanese'. Preparing and selling something Japanese in a non-Japanese environment, the culturally different clientele is taken into account. Some ramen shops in Amsterdam advocate their ramen as being traditionally Japanese, mostly by simply stating that their ramen is 'traditional' or 'authentic' on website, and/or social media (Sapporo Ramen Sora 2019). However, other ramen shops are not even mentioning the word 'Japanese' in their story (Fou Fow Ramen 2019). The dish has been globally rebranded in conjunction with national identity, and it has become the quintessential Japanese dish for a hip crowd around the world (Lee 2016, 208). The marketing strategy or 'story' of Vatten Ramen is different. It is an example of how foodways may be de-territorialized by global projects, but simultaneously re-embedded in a place (Philips 2006, 45). Most ramen shops neglect the locality when selling ramen, while Vatten Ramen transparently and consciously acknowledges 'modern Western tastes', while not neglecting the 'Japaneseness' of the dish and the cooking methods. Even the name of the shop is inspired by the triple cross symbol of the city flag of Amsterdam (Vatten Ramen, n.d.).

Vatten Ramen is actively adapting the dish and mixing parts of both cultures, as examples in this chapter will make clear. Translation is "a metaphor for understanding how the foreign and the familiar are inter-related in every form of cultural production" (Papastergiadis 2000, 125 in Pym 2014, 153). In a similar vein, the Amsterdam ramen shop recognizes and acknowledge the Dutch-Japanese trading history as well as the Dutch influence on Japanese culture during isolation[14], especially in the area where the investor and owner of the shop come from (Vatten Ramen, n.d.). The interrelatedness of the foreign and the familiar are thus apparent and recognized in this case. As there is friction in every translation, adaptation is needed, too. Several ethnographic examples from my research, ranging from vegan food options, to the composition of one's ramen bowl, to bike deliveries, will show how the staff of the ramen shop adapt the dishes to fit the local space and its customers.

14 Japan had an isolationist foreign policy for a period of over 220 years, from mid 17th century until mid 19th century. Japan was not completely isolated under this policy, though. There was extensive trade with China, and the only European influence permitted was a Dutch factory (Kroon 2014; Solt 2014).

Adapting Food and Menu to Fit

Vegan Options

Vatten Ramen has developed a vegan broth as well as vegan *gyoza* (dumplings):

> At Vatten Ramen we also put a continuous effort in perfecting our Vegan Menu for our vegetarian and vegan fans! The Vegan Ramen and vegan gyoza have become an instant hit and we are exploring other options to expand our healthy and environmental friendly counterparts! (…) Our chefs have also developed a broth that is completely animal-product-free, made out of mushroom and *kombu* [kelp, own translation], for our vegetarian fans (Vatten Ramen, n.d.).

The ramen shop not only advocates fusing Japanese traditional cooking methods and modern Western tastes, they also follow through. The broth of Japanese ramen has traditionally and historically been created with the bones of animals, and/or with *katsuobushi* (dried, fermented, and smoked skipjack tuna). In informal conversations with the staff as well as with Japanese customers, it became apparent that it is unusual to have vegetarian or vegan options in Japanese ramen shops. These options are more common and findable in big cities across the world, Japan included. |In Tokyo, there maybe is veggie ramen, but the rest of Japan, no", the manager confirmed (Haruto, informal conversation with author, May 8, 2018). The staff thus adapted to local tastes.

Vegan ramen has become very popular very quickly among the vegetarian, vegan and flexitarian customers at the ramen shop in Amsterdam. During my research, I observed customers asking the staff about vegetarian and vegan options when visiting the shop. The customers responded very well to the vegan ramen, and it was not uncommon that they would tell me and other staff that it was the best veggie ramen they had eaten in Amsterdam yet. In other words, the adaptation appeared to be fruitful. In response to the good reception of the vegan ramen, the staff started developing vegan gyoza to add to the menu and to cater to their clientele.

Adapting the ramen dishes to fit Amsterdam's vegetarian tastes can be viewed in the context of translation. Pritzker talks about "living translation", describing it as unfolding in a constant stream of interaction and social action, as an engaged human process of interpretation of meaning (Pritzker 2012, 344). Translation is a living thing; it is an ongoing process. And within this living translation processes, a continuous navigation between what to keep and what to adapt is unfolding[15]. Adaptation then is emerging in a translation process, and constantly resulting from it.

15 For a short and sweet elaboration on the uncountable evolutions of ramen, see Rosner 2018.

"You Dutch People Like to Choose"

(Haruto, informal conversation with author, May 8, 2018)

When ordering ramen in Japan, the chef's creation is served; you are coming to him to eat his creation that was created with his blood, sweat and tears. Specific pairings of broth and noodles in the case of Japanese ramen are as important as Italian pasta and sauce pairings. Most online ramen etiquette guides explain that customers should not alter the creation without first trying it as it was intended (Ramen Beast 2017). A sense of respect for the craft and the chef seems to be natural and expected in Japan. George Solt describes the way in which ramen traveled to the United States and gained popularity among hipster youth in gentrified areas (2014, 242-245), and how the Japanese chef transformed from performing a show to conducting business on his own terms, "refusing to speak English and using an artisanal bowl of noodle soup as a way to relate the value of his work" (Solt 2014, 245). A what-you-see-is-what-you-get attitude and a demand for respecting the art of ramen and its creator is easy to find when reading and hearing about ramen and its makers.

In the Amsterdam ramen shop, the Japanese staff is open to the local context and audience and willing to change their dishes somewhat to meet the wishes of their customers. The way the menu is set up and the amount of flexibility in choosing the customer is given is an example of adaptation to the local context. The customer's freedom in choosing how to eat their authentic Japanese noodle soup is elaborated upon by the manager:

> You Dutch people like to choose. You like to have power for own decision. You want to have freedom to choose your perfect combination - perfect combination of flavor. So… that's why… you can choose broth, noodles, toppings… you can do whatever you want! We want make you smile! (Haruto, informal conversation with author, May 8, 2018).

I encountered a more flexible and open Japense mindset than the rigid Japanese stereotype and the general portrayal of Japanese culture as among others described by the blog and Solt in the above. The Japanese staff carries a willingness to adapt the dishes to cater to the wishes and taste preferences of their customers.

Delivery on Bike

The ramen shop where I conducted my research is one of more ramen shops in Amsterdam that provide the luxury of having the ramen bowls delivered to be ready to eat at home. In cosmopolitan (mostly) urban areas, the residents, or consumers, are increasingly getting used to having various types of resources at hand in a heartbeat. The digitalization of capitalist society has contributed to

this need for constant gratification. One of cosmopolitanism's pillars is this preferred experience - the consumer demand for quick and easy. With a few clicks on your laptop or a few taps on your phone, a bowl of ramen is on its way to you. Ramen-lovers in Amsterdam are not restricted to eating in the restaurant. Online platforms such as Deliveroo, Foodora and UberEats have made it possible to get food deliveries at your door, and the Amsterdam ramen shop is no exception.

Ramen is perhaps one of the more unlikely dishes to be delivered, because it has to be piping hot, and because it has to be eaten quickly before the taste of the broth evaporates or gets slurped up by the noodles. Both the Dutch and the Japanese staff has repeatedly advised customers *not* to have it delivered; they advised them to eat in. However, the option to order is still there - it is a business trying to make a profit - and this is a sign of adaptation to the local markets and demands. Somewhat surprisingly, ramen deliveries have also gotten a foothold in Japan. The difference is that the noodles and broth are delivered frozen. This way, people with busy family lives, people who said they hate waiting in long lines in front of shops, and women who feel uncomfortable entering ramen shops where customers are often mostly men, can enjoy ramen from one of their favorite shops at home (Takaguchi 2013). Although ramen is a somewhat unlikely dish to be delivered, this development is an indication that food practices everywhere are being adapted to fit in localities.

The examples of adaptations made by the Japanese staff in Amsterdam in order to fit the local customer base as described above show how in every translation, adaptations are made. Below, another example of adaptation in translation is given, showcasing the aliveness of translation, to remain in Pritzker's language. The following example on the development of the pork broth and the gradual adaptation and implementation of it, perfectly illustrates how the Japanese staff is smoothly moving with the customer base in order to educate their senses.

Oink: a Five-Year Plan

'Real' tonkotsu ramen is almost nowhere to be found in Amsterdam, and not only because of the smell. The cooking process takes at least 24 hours and most restaurants that sell tonkotsu ramen often cut corners by reducing the boiling time and adding artificial MSGs. The ramen shop where I conducted my research has taken its smelly chances, however. After having opened two shops, they were in the midst of renovating a new, location that would mainly focus on tonkotsu. This meant that a good broth needed to be developed! In what follows, the reader will have an insight into my

fieldwork routine, after which I elaborate on the ways in which the staff adapts the dish while in the midst of creating it, continually searching for the right translation.

I arrive at the ramen shop at 19:30. The bike ride through Amsterdam on this drizzly, dark evening in March has soaked my clothes, face and hair. As I open the front door, I am welcomed by the pungent smell of pork. It feels as if I'm looking through glasses that fog up when suddenly walking into a warm room - and I'm not wearing any. No chance of drying up here, I'm afraid. Cloud formations of steam drift through the restaurant. The source? Two ninety-liter pots of boiling soup on a high fire. I only see Japanese men. About nine of them; all have black hair and all are wearing all-black outfits. Making my way to the kitchen, where the action is, I greet them one by one. Some nod and smile, others give a soft handshake, two chefs likes to fist-bump and a few others are huggers. Arriving at the steaming pots, I am greeted with big smiles and happy hello's by two of the chefs who have been in the kitchen since last night. 'Hi, hello, Koneko-chan[16]*! Happy you are here! Welcome to tasting party number two! So… please remember difference, think good… memory… and tell me best taste!'* (Kazuki, informal conversation with author, March 8, 2018). *I ask several of the other staff what they think of this batch. A chef says: 'I don't like it. Too traditional'* (Daichi, informal conversation with author, March 8, 2018). *Akio nods, frowns his eyebrows, and adds: 'Too smelly. My belly is not happy'* (Akio, informal conversation with author, March 8, 2018).

As this note from my fieldwork might already have made clear, I was at a tonkotsu tasting party. Kazuki invited me via Instagram Direct Message to come by and taste batch number two. I had sampled batch number one a few days before at the other location. The taste of the first batch was relatively light and mild. From the looks on the staff's faces, and the intensity of the smell that greeted me with when I walked in, batch number two promised more pungency, creaminess, heaviness, and fattiness. I had a quick flash-forward to the laundry-process that I had to go through, as the smell of this Japanese pork broth settles in all fabrics, winter coat included[17].

To everyone's surprise, I actually liked the taste of this traditional tonkotsu sample. Interestingly, the staff seemed to take my flavor profile to represent all Dutch flavor profiles. "You like it? So Dutch people like it? It's good for selling in the shop?" (Haruto, informal conversation with author, March 8, 2018). I tried to make clear that everyone has different tastes and that I could

16 Koneko-chan was a nickname the staff had given me during a dinner at their house. *Neko* is Japanese for cat, and *ko* is a prefix that indicates smallnes: little cat. *Chan* is a Japanese honorific among other used for adults who are considered to be *kawaii* (cute or loveable). In other words, I was the cute, sweet, small cat of the ramen-family. The cat-part of my nickname might perhaps seem random. This piece of information might clarify it: I have a tattoo of a cat on the inside of my upper arm.

17 In fact, months after my research period, some people still caught a whiff of tonkotsu on my coat when hugging me.

imagine many Dutch people finding this flavor too strong, just as many of the Japanese staff did. I perhaps was the odd one out. After hanging around for a bit longer, Jiro came standing next to me. A third batch was coming up in a few days, he told me, because the flavor had to be toned down a little: "It is too much" (Jiro, informal conversation with author, March 8, 2018). The broth needed some more tweaking.

Five days later, the third batch landed somewhere between the first and second in terms of complexity and intensity. If the first batch was too light, and the second one too heavy, this one seemed to hit the spot. The Japanese staff unanimously regarded this broth as the most delicious batch. The Dutch tasters, some friends and colleagues, agreed. A conversation between me and one Jiro shows the intricacies and thoughtfulness of this adaptation process:

JIRO: 'Kazuki-san wants to build up flavor in the next five years or so. Like a five-year plan' [laughs wholeheartedly].

CHARLOTTE: [smiles] 'What do you mean?'

JIRO: 'Well… Dutch people can not eat *real*, traditional Japanese tonkotsu. In Japan, with tonkotsu, more smelly, more delicious taste…'

CHARLOTTE: 'Hm… maybe a little bit like blue cheese? It's smelly, and… it stinks… [curls up nose and squints eyes] …but I like the taste. It means it will taste good.'

JIRO: 'Aaah… yes! Understand. It's same with tonkotsu' [smiles widely].

CHARLOTTE: 'Aah, yes… okay' [smiles].

Jiro: 'So tonkotsu… It's too smelly. You don't know taste. So… you don't like. So… okay… need time to get used to tonkotsu. But *slow*. So slowly change tonkotsu… so Dutch customer can taste… and *enjoy*, real Japanese tonkotsu. But needs little bit time'

(Jiro, informal conversation with author, March 8, 2018).

The ramen staff is consciously and continuously working to create a broth that is accessible to the Dutch consumers. They are even having the broth grow into the future, along with the education process of the customers' senses. These examples show that translation enables people to access foreign cultures as it fosters mutual understanding (Wilson 2013). Translation is necessary to

convey Japaneseness to a modern audience. However, "the exotic should not be too odd for us. It has to be somewhat familiar" (Karaosmanoglu 2009, 347-348). The staff is willing to adapt the flavor to fit the local context, but to a certain extent. The adaptation is done while preserving a sense of Japaneseness, as the next chapter will show.

When I would tell friends, co-students and family members about the adaptation and flexibility of the Japanese staff with regards to ramen both during and after my research period, I was always met with disbelief. People, me included, were trying to make sense of the flexibility, as there appeared to be an image of Japanese people, culture and food practices as being rigid and unchanging. I have found a possible explanation for this puzzle when taking Japanese food history into consideration and the role and place of ramen in this timeline.

Japan is often described with words such as tradition, rigidity and structure (Kroon 2014, 769), and this makes sense when viewing Japanese food culture only through the lens of its traditional cuisine. *Washoku*, traditional Japanese cuisine, is a culmination of centuries of cooking practices in Japan. I believe Japan's food history and washoku cuisine possibly contribute to these stereotypes and mentally constructed ideas of traditional, or even stuck in time; they possibly even reinforce them.

Interestingly, a whole aspect of Japanese culture is ignored when generalizations linked to the past and tradition are viewed as the whole truth - Japanese culture is of course also modern. However, this modern conceptualization of Japanese culture and society has only recently come to life in the minds in Western culture: Japan is cool now. Solt even devotes a chapter to 'Cool Japan'[18] (2014, 242-261). Indeed, "the ramen shop reflected the new image of Japan, which was a global center of taste making through design, food, and art" (Solt 2014, 246).

Even though the ramen shop reflected the new image of Japan, ramen is often portrayed as traditional too:

> But it's kind of weird to talk about ramen in terms of 'tradition'. Ramen is a new food group, as traditional as the salad bar or McFlurry. (…) There is very little room for personal expression in Japanese cooking. It's a cuisine whose recipes were developed long ago and are in many ways locked in time by a culture set in tradition. But ramen is different. Ramen isn't traditionally Japanese, so it allows chefs to play and grow. And there's a whole lot to play with (Holzman and Rodboard 2016).

Ramen only arrived in Japan in the 1880s (Solt 2014, 23), so it is a relatively new dish, especially when comparing it to the long heritage of washoku. If washoku is the wise old grandmother, then

18 Not to be confused with the exhibition currently on display in Amsterdam's Tropenmuseum. The exhibit 'showcases the world's fascination with all things Japanese' (Tropenmuseum 2019).

ramen is the rebellious teenager, when viewing the dishes on Japan's culinary timeline. This is to show how authenticity and tradition cannot be traced back to a point of origin, as these categories are rather always under (re)construction.

The relative newness of ramen might explain the flexible attitude and the willingness to adapt of the Japanese staff in my research context in Amsterdam. My point is that old and new, traditional and progressive are not mutually exclusive categories. Indeed, the ramen staff in Amsterdam is selling 'traditional' ramen soup while at the same time they are adapting the dishes to fit a local customer base. And flexibility is not 'un-Japanese': in Japan, the dish is also continuously being reinvented and changed (Goldfield 2019). They adapt the dishes with an 'un-Japanese' creativity and playfulness, openness and flexibility, while both they and customers are experiencing the ramen soup as authentic and really Japanese[19].

This chapter has already hinted at the simultaneous existence of categories such as old and new. The staff is continuously trying to find a balance between preserving and changing. I have focused on adaptation in this chapter, and I will go into deeper detail concerning the preservation practices, the ways in which the staff is saving or retaining a sense of Japaneseness in their dishes.

19 In how far customers experienced the ramen as authentic is information I gathered by asking customers this question after having finished their bowl as often as I could during my research period.

3
Senses and Memory

A taste of home lost,
a sense of Japan far away.
Close your eyes and trust.
Memory will guide you and
mother will bring Japan back.

Tanka by Charlotte Ehrhardt

Source: Nihon Yasai.

Chapter 3: Senses and Memory

"Culinary issues introduce new ways of dealing with the construction of history and the processes of differentiation, commodification, and exoticism. (…) Cuisine refers to everyday spaces/times and is related to sensory experiences. We smell and taste the past, which means that we create a past through taste" (Karaosmanoglu 2009, 340).

The staff of the Amsterdam ramen is adapting its dishes to fit the local culture and customers. However, this adaptation does not mean the staff is fully catering to the Dutch customers and solely focusing on the locality in order to sell their food. Desiring to save an authenticity or originality in the dishes is a continuous process and concern for the staff. Adaptation of tastes and dishes is only done to a certain extent, and only in certain cases. The research participants are continually working to stay close to a 'Japanese' version of ramen, or to stay as close to Japanese tastes as possible.

"The chef of Atisane works very seriously not to spoil the 'originality' or 'authenticity' of the dishes (...) to test and finetune the dishes, adhering faithfully to its original methods while also adapting them to the modern palate" (Karaosmanoglu 2009, 348). A back and forth between preserving originality and changing dishes to fit the present moment and audience is described in research on an Ottoman restaurant in Istanbul. In a similar vein, the chefs in the ramen shop work very seriously not to spoil the authenticity of the dishes, while also adapting dishes to the Dutch palate. During my research period, I came to find that the senses play a big role when chefs were working to preserve the 'originality' or 'authenticity' of the dishes. I will be going deeper into the ways in which this ramen shop preserves, creates and performs Japaneseness knowingly and unknowingly by using their senses and their memory. How do they evoke the senses to translate Japaneseness to a Dutch context?

A Taste of Place through Sensorial Memory

I use the term *terroir* to think about the senses and memory. Writing about terroir, Sutton says that "taste is associated with a specific local place and practices associated with that place" (2010, 216). In a gustemological approach, attention to memory is naturally involved. "Sensory memory is certainly critical here, and scholars have begun to explore the Proustian phenomenon of the sensory experience of food leading to an unlocking of key personal and social memories" (Korsmeyer and Sutton 2011, 470). Ethnographic descriptions of research participants eating Japanese food and

descriptions of several tasting parties are given. The ethnographic descriptions show in which ways the senses and memory are part of preserving a sense of Japaneseness in the ramen restaurant context in Amsterdam. I finish this chapter coining my own term, "embodied sensory translation".

Akio

27/05/2018 - King's Day in Amsterdam East

Outside of the shop on the terrace, me and two colleagues have improvised and transformed two tables into mini shops, one selling cans of beer for two euro each, the other selling Japanese masks. We have drawn some colorful words and prices on cardboard and placed them in front of the beer cans and masks. King's Day is a national holiday in the Netherlands, and on this day, one of the characteristic sights on the streets is people selling their things in a flea-market manner. It is not busy outside yet. Amsterdam is still waking up. An opportunity for us to eat an early lunch. Akio is sat down inside, in front of him a piping hot bowl of vegan ramen. Most of the ramen noodles contain egg, so the vegan ramen comes with rice noodles. I ask Akio: "Do you like eating ramen with rice noodles?" He replies: "Mmm yes! I really like it. It fits too, it's a little bit like phở[20]"Five minutes into slurping his noodles and drinking the broth, he suddenly stops in his tracks. His body falls back into the red chair. He puts his hands in the pouch of his grey hoodie: "I feel chill". Then, a big, long groan comes out of his mouth. I ask him what is up. "I miss home now". I ask him why. He then goes: "Because of the dashi. *It reminds me of mornings in Tokyo. My mom used to make miso soup... she prepared fish and* nattō[21]".

First, one could think: can it still be viewed as ramen if the noodles are not ramen noodles but rice noodles? Secondly, if Akio says it tastes like phở, what is it, then? The rice noodles seem to make it un-ramen-like. However, this apparently was not detrimental to the Japaneseness. It was the *dashi,* the smell and taste of the soup stock that reminded him of home. Slurping this warm liquid evoked a familiar scene, going back to his childhood, when his mother used to prepare Japanese breakfast.

Sensory perception and embodied experience assist in cultural interpretation; these are 'the means through which cultural, personal and historical memories are encoded within foods and they enable a Proustian "remembrance of things past" (Choo 2004, 203). By eating this dish, Akio's memory is activated and he remembers things from his past in Japan. His embodied experience of

20 *Phở* is a Vietnamese noodle soup with rice noodles, and usually, beef.
21 *Natto* is a traditional Japanese food consisting of fermented soy beans; some eat it as breakfast food.

eating Japanese food reconnects him with a home departed, as well as flavors from the past, and these are then relived and experienced in the present (Choo 2004, 206). Sensory triggers as described in the above are indicative of spontaneous awakenings of memories. Eating a simple bowl of ramen reconnects him to his home and family life in memory, albeit briefly. Both of these examples show how, "where people move to a new place, 'marker' foods can take on a particularly powerful position in restructuring life" (Janowski 2012, 177). The Japanese 'marker' foods in the context of the ramen shop are a big part of the lives of the Japanese staff in Amsterdam. In Janowski's research, food becomes central to people's stories about belonging and identity in connection to the 'homeland' (Janowski 2012, 177). In my research, these marker foods are *part* of their stories, as they are missing their homes and lives in Japan less than the subjects in Janowski's research. The Japanese young men are actively living and constructing their lives in Amsterdam, finding their place and creating stories in connection to their *new* homeland.

Takumi

13/05/2018 – Amsterdam in the afternoon hours

Takumi has invited me to join him for grocery shopping in his favorite shop in Amsterdam's China Town. Walking along the isles, he is showing me his favorite Japanese products. Each one of them has memories of home encapsulated in them, and stories are flowing from his mouth through the materiality of the Japanese products. After filling up our shopping basket, we bike to my home through the drizzly, grey weather. He walks in after me. Then, he freezes and takes a few steps back. With his soft and husky voice, head bent to the floor, he says: "I forgot to take off my shoes when entering your house. It is a Japanese custom and a sign of respect. I am so sorry". He bows. Just like the shoes he is removing from his feet, his clothes have earth tones too. Over his dark grey sweater he is wearing a vest with a floral pattern. He bought this during his travels in India. Takumi's hair is long, almost reaching his lower back, but he often wears it in a bun that relaxingly hangs in his neck. His single dreadlock is hanging straight down his back. On the table, the ingredients are exhibited: firm tofu, ginger, leek, onion, shiitake[22]*, nira, sesame oil, soy sauce and* mirin[23]*. I show him the shiitake mushrooms that have been resting in water overnight. He nods and hums approvingly. He reminds me that a long 'bathing time' is necessary to bring out the umami flavor. His Dutch colleagues do not do this correctly, he says, shrugging his shoulders in disbelief. After cutting some ingredients for the gyoza filling, he asks me to mix them together. "Use your*

22 *Shiitake* is an edible mushroom native to East Asia, often sold in a dried variety.
23 *Mirin* is a Japanese sweet rice wine used for cooking.

hands", he says smilingly. I squish the big block of tofu with my hands, and it disintegrates as I knead it together with the rest of the ingredients. Among these ingredients is nira. Why did he want to use this particular ingredient, and not just 'regular' spring onion? The two look alike and smell almost the same, in my experience. He thinks about it for a moment and then says: "When a Japanese person smells nira, he thinks of gyoza". I ask him if the smell reminds him of anything. "It reminds me of home. When I was five or six years old, I started helping my mother folding the gyoza…" (Takumi, informal conversation with author, May 15, 2018).

Something similar to Akio's story is happening in the case of Takumi. The only difference is that in this case, a sensory trigger was not even necessary to evoke a memory. Simply thinking of the (originally Chinese) garlic chives is bringing back smells and scenes from the past. This intertwining of the senses and memory is described by Choo, who conducted research on *satay babi*: "Sensory experiences of food contain memories, feelings, histories, places and moments in time. (…) There is a symbiotic relationship between senses and memory with sensory experiences contained within memories and at the same time memories contained within sensory experiences, a tantalising co-dependency" (Choo 2004, 209). As described here, there is a symbiotic relationship between the senses and memory. By thinking of nira, Takumi is transported back to his five or six year old self, learning the skill of folding gyoza from his mother. The making of gyoza, just as the making of satay babi, "offers a means of "regaining touch" through sensory (re)location" (Choo 2004, 212). When Takumi is touching the gyoza papers, placing filling in the middle of the small circle and then skillfully, quickly and smoothly folding them, more (hi)stories of learning to make gyoza come to the surface.

Tonkotsu Tasting

Tuesday 13/03/2018 – Ramen shop

Kazuki, the ramen chef, sent me a message through Facebook the night before to let me know that there would be another ramen tasting as part of the tonkotsu development process. I arrive at the shop around 14:00. After waiting around for a bit, talking with the staff and the other guests, it is time to sample some of the broth. I share the bowl of ramen with three other Japanese staff members. We huddle around the square table and hover above the bowl, chopsticks and soup spoons in hand. One by one, we dig in. We all agree that this is the best one so far. Then, the investor – the boss – walks in. His taste is the most valued one of all. A bowl of ramen is placed in front of him within minutes, followed by a deep bow by the ramen chef. I see the chef looking at the

*boss from a distance, in anticipation. I hear multiple cries of "*oishii[24]*" coming from the big round table where the investor is sat, alternated with loud slurps. When I look at him and catch his eye, a big teeth-showing smile greets me and he connects thumb and index finger: approved. "Mmm... This is real ramen, man", I hear his low, upbeat voice say. "This is real Japanese tonkotsu"* (Nobu, March 13, 2018). *In the meantime, the Dutch chef is also tasting the broth and he says this batch really reminds him of the ramen he ate in Tokyo. "The previous batch was no good. The pork was almost rancid and the broth was too salty and too heavy. This…" He closes his eyes, leans back, smiles, and continues: "This really takes me back to Tokyo, eating ramen there"* (Matthijs, March 13, 2018).

The tonkotsu for the soon to be opened third ramen shop became a fact that day. Both the Japanese and the Dutch staff were content with the broth, happy to have found the sweet spot. According to the Japanese staff, this batch tastes like 'real' ramen, while they are also taking into account the Dutch customers, placing this batch at the starting point of the 'five-year plan'.

The development of the tonkotsu broth is part of a purposeful process of preserving or developing a sense of 'authenticity' or Japaneseness. Although the evoking of memory might have come spontaneously, they were in search of this authentic Japaneseness, that which makes the dishes 'real'. The senses are thus more consciously used than in the two examples described in the previous section. Let me link these examples to a gustemological approach focusing on constructions of senses of place or place-making projects (Sutton 2010, 216), or a taste of place. In the context of my research, the taste of this particular batch of tonkotsu was associated with Tokyo, and the ramen eating culture there. In this instance, "taste comes to define place and the other way around" (Trubek 2008 in Sutton 2012, 216). This local taste of a local place was sought after in Amsterdam, and then consumed and sold in the Amsterdam context.

A practical example of terroir can be seen in the following statement: "People from Russia like Russian tastes" (Caldwell 2002 in Sutton 2012, 307). Taking Caldwell's words and translating it to fit the current research context: People from Japan like Japanese tastes. If one for example grew up eating a specific local pork meat in particular dishes, those create an 'authentic' taste. Building on these ideas, when people who originally are from Japan are living in another country, in this case the Netherlands, their valorization of Japanese tastes and dishes can be intensified. The taste of place is a helpful concept in understanding the meaning of a Japanese dish in a Dutch context[25].

24 *Oishii* is Japanese for 'delicious' or 'tasty'.

25 It is interesting that the construction of Japaneseness does not solely evoke national feelings. The feelings and memories evoked are also regional; the familiar associations can also be linked to a region *within* Japan: a taste of

Gyoza Party Number One

Part of the continuous development and improvement of the menu were the gyoza parties. The Hungarian chef explains:

> In Japanese, they like to put the word "party" behind everything. In the beginning, I thought, yes, we're having a party! With lots of food! But I found out it is actually hard work [laughs]. I did not know this! I only found out later... the deception. Those bastards! [laughs] (Tibor, informal conversation with author, March 29, 2018).

The Japanese manager, having listened in on the conversation, laughs and confirms that this is true (Haruto, informal conversation with author, March 29, 2018). Examples of two gyoza parties follow to show how terroir can be linked to the senses and memory.

Wednesday 29/03/2018 - Gyoza party at staff's house

I look at my phone and see that I received a message from one of the younger guys working at the ramen shop: "I am making dumplings gyoza!" (Jiro, Instagram Direct message to author, March 29, 2018), delivered at 20:02. It is already an hour later, so I message him back, asking where he is. I then quickly make my way over to the Southern district of Amsterdam, nearby the Vondelpark, where five of the staff members live. Arriving at the house at 21:30, I'm afraid I am too late and have already missed out on the fun. Luckily, this is not the case. The amount of pairs of shoes placed on the landing top of the stairs give away that it must be busy. Taking my shoes off and walking into the living room, I am greeted by everyone. Jiro is new to folding gyoza, too, just like me. He has practiced under the supervision of Kazuki, the ramen chef, a few times before. Kazuki is folding the gyoza and it is mesmerizing to watch. He has big hands and fat fingers, yet the way he is folding the gyoza does not indicate any clumsiness. His touch is delicate and each gyoza is folded within seconds. I cannot take my eyes off of his hands. He is barely looking at what he is doing, almost as if he is on automatic pilot. He has done this many times before, there's no doubt about it. A gyoza paper is placed in my hands, I ask if he can explain me how to do it. Then I come to find out that there is not really a way to explain how to do it; it is a matter of watching and repeating.

Understanding that I would not learn this skill through verbal explanation, I am confused and

Tokyo, for example.

slightly annoyed. How was I going to learn? Just watching would simply not be the way to go, right? As Sutton describes: "Cooking seems to be increasingly socially disembedded if not disembodied (…). Cooking is best learned through embodied experience, or even apprenticeship" (2006, 97). I was approaching this gyoza-folding with my mind, not with my body. The Japanese staff who were handling the gyoza nimble-fingered, had learned this from their mothers or even grandmothers, by watching and repeating, slowly getting better – a sort of apprenticeship.

Words can not transfer a particular skill like this ta person new to the craft. This type of knowledge is implicit, automatic, unexplainable, subtle, and nuanced. It can be seen as a sort of learning beyond the book that cannot be described or explained; it can only be learned by doing it, repetitively. It *can* be taught and interpreted, but a lot of it stays implicit, like a sixth sense that comes with long practice (Scott 1998, 328). This explained my clumsiness – I had had *no* practice yet. These experienced practitioners of the gyoza-folding craft have developed "a large repertoire of moves, visual judgments, a sense of touch, or a discriminating gestalt for assessing the work as well as a range of accurate intuitions born of experience that defy being communicated apart from practice" (Scott 1998, 329)[26]. Choo has similar findings in his research on satay babi, as he describes how training, experience and skill are required, and to learn, one needs to watch and practice (2004). This is skilled embodied practice.

Gyoza Party Number Two

Wednesday 04/04/2018 - Gyoza tasting party at the boss' house

It's 14:30 and I'm the first one to arrive for gyoza party number two. It is warm outside, but I can see dark clouds in the sky - a promise of rain. Two chefs and the manager arrive around an hour later, bringing ingredients from the ramen shop. The manager almost immediately leaves again to get some mackerel from a special fish seller in the area. Matthijs, the Dutch chef, starts cutting cabbage for the gyoza. When this is finished, Jiro gets the task of manually kneading the raw minced (pork) meat with Chinese sake. A Japanese cook tells me this has to be done for at least twenty minutes, until it is pink and fluffy – a laborious task. In the meantime, I am handed a cup of tea that blows my mind. I am told it is green tea with puffed rice, or genmai cha*. A while later, I see*

26 The skilled practice (*mētis)* James Scott describes (2004) differs slightly from the example I have elaborated upon here. A bit of nuance might be instructive. This type of knowledge differs only in the sense that the locality is not as important in the context of my research, in the case of folding gyoza. It does not really matter where the skilled practitioners are, something that Scott does describe as relevant. As long as there are gyoza papers and a filling, they can do their job. The rest of Scott's descriptions of this type of skilled embodied practice do align with what I have observed and experienced and therefore I have included this information in this section.

that the men are in a deep conversation, in Japanese. I see a lot of hand gestures and slightly frowned eyebrows and I hear pauses in between their sentences, as if they are trying to make sense of something but are not quite getting there. The manager looks at me. I put my hands in the air, frown my eyebrows, shrug my shoulders and widen my eyes, signifying that I do not understand what is going on. "We are trying to remember the real taste of gyoza in Japan. Dutch pigs taste different than Japanese pigs. We need other spices to get the same flavor, but we don't understand how" (Haruto, informal conversation with author, April 4, 2018). *I had heard this before. Several of the men had been saying that the pork meat tastes so differently here. Apparently they have not cracked the code yet. They are racking their brains for a sensorial memory, to think back to when they had good gyoza - most of them started talking about their mothers -, how their food tasted, and what would be needed to add in the here and now in terms of spices. They are in search of real Japanese tastes by going back to their lost childhood. They are moving from tasting and to sitting with their eyes closed, to sharing some of their memories out loud. The men reminisce about the tastes from their childhood, bringing these tastes back into their mouths. At some point, they get to a consensus. They start adding the spices. We end up pan-frying some dumplings, and boiling others in a soup broth. I have never before seen so many dumplings being made and eaten in the span of a few hours. We dip the fried gyoza in soy sauce and rice vinegar. I burn my mouth at least five times, because I am too impatient. A few hours later, I hop on my bike with a round, dumpling-filled belly, almost feeling like a dumpling myself.*

The way that the Japanese staff is committed to serving Japanese tastes in a taste away from their homeland shows just how important sensory memory is in this process. The staff is consciously using senses and memory in developing and improving the dishes for the ramen restaurant in Amsterdam. The Japanese men use their sensory memories in order to regain or recreate a taste of place, a taste of Japan, to be precise. By doing so, they regain touch with home, and they give the customers the experience to taste this Japaneseness.

Embodied Sensory Translation

The way the Japanese staff uses memory and the senses to find the 'real Japanese' tastes for the restaurant in Amsterdam has given me reason to link the notion of terroir with the senses and memory. To fully cover what is happening among this small group of Japanese migrants in and around a ramen shop in Amsterdam, I have constructed my own term. Let me elaborate.

When taking the notion of terroir, we see that the Japanese staff likes Japanese tastes. This

taste is associated with a specific local place as well as practices associated with that place. In this case, the specific local place is often home in Japan, and often with mother or grandmother. The practices associated with that place in all examples revolve around eating or preparing specific Japanese food, or both. However, this is where the notion of terroir stops. David Sutton has not described what happens with the concept of terroir if we are are disconnected from our taste of place. The Japanese staff is not in the terroir physically. The research participants have time and again shown me how important sensorial memory is when working with a taste of place. Here, I build onto the notion of terroir. How can they recreate or preserve a taste of Japan? I argue that the research participants connect taste to place, imaginatively, by using their memory and their senses.

The group of Japanese migrants consciously bring this taste of place into the restaurant context, where they sell ramen to a mostly Dutch audience. The staff is thus engaging in a translation process. And here is where I coin the term "embodied sensory translation". The research participants use embodied knowledge and sensorial memory to give ramen an authentic Japanese taste. Using sensorial memory, connecting to a taste of place, the staff embodies the translation. In translating Japanese dishes to a Dutch clientele in Amsterdam, the staff uses its embodied knowledge of a taste of home. The people engaging in an embodied sensory translation process *do* need to have had experienced the terroir beforehand. All of the Japanese staff in this research is brought up in Japan. Most customers had never been to Japan. As the appreciation of certain foods and tastes depends on the context in which one finds him- or herself, the senses of the customers are being educated in the Amsterdam ramen shop by the embodied knowledge of the Japanese staff.

Conclusion

Source: Pinterest.

Conclusion

This research has described the everyday lives of a small group of Japanese migrants in and around a ramen restaurant in Amsterdam. This group of Japanese migrants is selling an authentic Japanese dish in a Dutch context; this group is translating a Japanese dish to a Dutch audience. This research has investigated the ways in which the Japanese migrants translate a traditional Japanese dish to an Amsterdam customer base in the restaurant context of the ramen shop.

In the introduction, I have provided the reader with background information on ramen and its political, historical, and cultural background. In the theoretical framework I have discussed translation literature, placing myself along the authors that see translation as a process or rather as "living translation", hereby breaking the dichotomy between source and target text. The research conducted by anthropologists David Sutton and Carolyn Korsmeyer on the senses and on diasporic memory has also been discussed. Case studies on Ottoman restaurants and satay babi have been instrumental for better understanding the construction of Japaneseness and for theoretically framing the embodied sensory experience of the staff during the menu development tasting parties. Sarah Pink her work on sensory ethnography has helped demonstrate the importance of the senses in cooking, preparing and selling of ramen in Amsterdam, and I have shortly elaborated on the methods that I have used and the approach that I have taken, namely participant observation and informal conversations, and a gustemological approach. With this research I have added a few more blocks to the bridge-building process that links food anthropology to the anthropology of the senses.

In the first chapter, I have gone deeper into the friction inevitable in any translation process. Producing and selling a Japanese dish in a Dutch context leads to minor collisions and awkward misunderstandings. I have found how differing cultural ideas on hospitality, service, eating culture and etiquette led to misunderstandings between the Dutch and the Japanese in and around the ramen shop. The only anthropological research on Japanese people in the Netherlands, conducted and written up by Harriët Kroon, was helpful in writing this chapter. What became clear? Many Dutch consumers are missing knowledge about the dish, about its cultural and historical background, and about how to eat it. This confusion and misunderstanding could unintentionally be feeding the allure of ramen's authenticity and exoticism for the customers. One of the results of my research is that friction is not only negative, but also constructive in selling ramen. Overall, having dived into this friction with the framework of translation brings me to the conclusion that translation is a messy endeavor.

In the second chapter, I have shown how the friction that is part of the translation process

then again led to adaptation. I have described how the Japanese staff changes (aspects of the) dish to make it understandable for the Amsterdam customers. Giving the customers vegan options and the possibility to choose how they want to compose their bowl of ramen shows a flexibility and willingness from the Japanese side to respect and listen to the local context. This shows the wish of the investor and the staff to understand their customer base and to work with this, instead of simply copy-pasting their product into a new context. I also have provided the reader with an explanation for the staff's willingness to adapt, in contrast to popular belief about Japanese rigid and traditional culture, by describing how ramen differs from the traditional washoku cuisine. Ramen is relatively new, plus it is a migrant dish in Japan, as it came from China. In this sense, it is not traditionally Japanese. However, over the years, it has become viewed as unmistakably Japanese. The ramen deliveries by bike are illustrative of how friction in cultural translation leads to adaptation to make it work. The five-year plan of the pork soup brings me to the conclusion that this particular migrant group is very creative and adaptive, as they adapted the dish to the local context while simultaneously preserving and constructing Japanesenesess for the Dutch customers and themselves.

The previous chapters have led up to the third and final chapter on memory and the senses. Even though the staff is adapting the dishes to a certain extent, they are trying to preserve a sense of Japaneseness at the same time. This research finds that memory and the senses play a crucial role in getting this translation to capture its (Japanese) essence as well as possible. This is my most crucial finding. My ethnographic descriptions of the gyoza and tonkotsu tasting parties illustrate the symbiotic relationship between senses and memory. Linking a taste of place, or terroir, to the senses and memory, I provide a term called “embodied sensory translation” to describe how the senses and memory are important in the translation process. The Japanese staff uses its embodied experience and its sensory memory to make the translation complete.

This research has given insights into the live worlds of a relatively invisible and under-documented group of people in the Netherlands. By focusing on a small group of Japanese migrants, I have given more visibility to this group. The anthropological nature of the research makes this information valuable, as it gives a nuanced view of the lives and the culture of a group of people in a specific point in time in a particular place. I see this material being illustrative of a move away from rigidity, and towards a refutal of stereotypes. It shows the changing and processual nature of (food) culture and people. Putting my focus on the body, the senses and memory in a society where the mind is regarded most important helps me conclude that regaining touch is important, not only for the research participants, but also for me, as researcher. Focusing on the way this group of Japanese migrants handle food also gives insights into the broader struggles they are

dealing with. This micro-view is indicative of the way they are navigating their lives, how they are finding their way and place in a new home while not neglecting their roots.

Limitations and Further Research

Since this research is based on three months of fieldwork, it only is a small and incomplete account of a small subgroup of Japanese migrants the Dutch city of Amsterdam. Further research is needed to understand to what extent my results resonate with other (Japanese) migrants producing and selling 'authentic' food in an urban context such as Amsterdam.

Although I have provided the reader with valuable findings, I did find the language barrier an obstacle. I therefore encourage the researcher to at least have a basic understanding of the language that the research participants speak, especially if they are not proficient in English or another globally spoken language. I could have collected more and richer data if I would have been able to follow all of the Japanese conversations that I have been observing in these three months. The data would also be more valuable to me when a translator is not necessary.

Another important limitation was due to the sexual harassment that I experienced during my research. In hindsight, there were many indications and examples of sexism, most of them 'innocent' remarks, but with deep-rooted misogyny at its base and with far-reaching consequences for me. Whether the male-dominated professional kitchen context contributed to this or the fact that I was the exotic white young woman would be interesting to figure out. However, talking to other women in the field of anthropology within my own circle has shown that all of these women have encountered sexism during their fieldwork. This has fueled my interest in getting more information of the meaning of being a female(-identifying) anthropologist in a still mostly male-dominated field. I also would encourage to take an intersectional approach, not only taking gender into account, but other aspects of identity, too. Research on the implications of a mostly white, male-dominated research methods legacy within anthropology could be helpful in understand the lack of preparation that I had concerning the threats and dangers of sexual violence in the field, however implicit or extreme. I would urge anthropologists to conduct research on this topic, collecting stories of women, while also talking to men in the field as to give a holistic view of the structural and global problem of sexual harassment.

The insights that emerge from this thesis can be used for understanding migrant groups in Dutch restaurant industry. It could give better understandings into the ways that migrant groups navigate their lives between a past led in their homeland and building a future in a new homeland in a present moment. Some other striking data has sparked my interest for further research, namely the

fact that so many of the Japanese men, when using their sensory memory, had scenes of their mothers and grandmothers coming to their minds. It would be fascinating to dive further into that topic, to see in which ways culinary knowledge is being passed down through skilled embodied practice or even through embodied sensory translation. I would also encourage to investigate the aspects of their lives outside of the food context to investigate issues of belonging and meanings of home, among others. All in all, this and further research will allow us to gain better understanding of difference in a melting-pot culture where people are increasingly living in their own (filter) bubbles. It will allow us to understand others more easily, to see their humane side, and to be able to see connections more than divisions.

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