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Diffusion of Japanese Culture in Bangladesh via Japanese Restaurants

Abdullah-Al-Mamun

Abstract

A little research has been undertaken on the diffusion of Japanese culture in Bangladesh. This article contributes to the literature of Japanese Studies and Sociology by investigating the diffusion of Japanese culture via Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh. Findings of this qualitative research provide strong evidence to suggest that the number of Japanese restaurants is increasing and Japanese food is becoming increasingly popular in Bangladesh. The popularity of Japanese food can be attributed to various factors, including the use of less ingredients, freshness, taste and people's common belief that Japanese food is healthy. However, restaurants are facing a few problems in running the business, for example, locally unavailability of ingredients, high price of ingredients, and limited awareness about Japanese food. The study reveals that Japanese restaurants are diffusing Japanese cultural elements such as food, culinary art, language, greetings and customs, dinnerware, customs of dining, interior decoration and art, photography and paintings.

1. Introduction

Transnational cultural elements regardless of material or nonmaterial has become more mobile in recent years than in the past, due to social media platforms, YouTube, internet, mass media, and increased tourism. Traditionally, embassies, multi-national companies, and international organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, and various UN organisations and UN peace keepers, however, also act as media to transmit transnational culture. Cultural elements are continuously crossing national borders irrespective of fashion, cuisines, food, accessories, music, customs, words and arts influencing traditional culture and customs of countries across the globe (Schaefer, 2011; Little et al., 2014). For example, the North American snow a days love *Sushi* and *Sashimi* and today people in Asian enjoy *Burritos* and *Taco*. Nonetheless, food is one of the fast diffusing cultural elements because of frequent movements of the people and the growing awareness and interest created owing to internet and the social media. This attraction of people to transnational food has led to the establishment of the country-specific restaurant such as Italian, Mexican, Thai, Chinese or Japanese. These restaurants not only sell food but also diffuse cultural elements of the countries of their origin.

With no exception, the number of country-specific restaurants is increasing in Bangladesh. Due to economic development and change in lifestyle, the people in Bangladesh, especially city dwellers in metropolis like Dhaka and Chittagong, are now a days visiting restaurants often than the past for daily meals (Islam & Ullah, 2010). Along with the traditional restaurants, an ethnic restaurant that sells food of different countries or ethnic groups (Cwiertka, 2005) is becoming a popular destination of food lovers. Indian, Thai and Chinese restaurants setup by entrepreneurs

mostly in the 1990s have become very popular among the masses. The popularity of Chinese restaurant has reached such a level that one will find Chinese restaurants even in beside a narrow road of a Municipality, Ward or in small towns. Moreover, even a village woman has learnt the culinary style of Chinese food too and prepares it as an occasional or festival meal for her family. However, Indian restaurants have not grown as much as the Chinese restaurants. Thai foods are now included in the menu of Chinese restaurant, with a few Thai restaurants selling exclusive Thai dishes.

In comparison, nonetheless, Japanese restaurants had a late start in Bangladesh than Chinese or Indian restaurants. In fact, available information shows that Japanese restaurants commenced the journey in the 2000s, and currently the number has gone to around thirty. However, in the last five years, the number of Japanese restaurants is growing and Japanese food is becoming more popular. In this context, it is important to note that Japan is the single largest development partner of Bangladesh and in recent years a number of Japanese companies are investing in Bangladesh. In 2010, the number of Japanese companies in Bangladesh was 83, whereas currently the number has gone well over 300 (The Daily Star, 2020). As a result, the Japanese community is one of the fast-growing communities in Bangladesh now which, in turn, has helped the growth of Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh. This has enabled the diffusion of elements of Japanese culture such as Japanese food, food presentation, cooking, customs, art and design, language, traditions and hospitality. This research, therefore, evaluates the impact of the growth of Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh from the theoretical perspective of cultural diffusion.

2. Literature Review

Diffusion of Culture

Sociological theorists define the process of cultural spreading from group to group, society to society, or country to country as cultural diffusion (Schaefer, 2011). A group of scholars in contrast, however, defines cultural diffusion as the change of culture because of the influence of foreign culture (Ashraf & Galor, 2007). This group of scholars excludes diffusion of culture among internal groups of society. Another school of thought identifies diffusion of culture as a creative process of cultural distribution and believes that internet and technology are enabling the diffusion of culture faster. This school, in fact, considers business organisations as a strong agency of cultural diffusion (Rae, 2005). However, the debate is whether cultural diffusion enriches a culture or poses a threat to the traditional culture. It is argued in favour of cultural diffusion that it expands the horizon of culture and enriches culture of a particular group or society. However, newly appeared culture via diffusion can be predominant over traditional culture.

Existing literature has identified a number of means of cultural diffusion such as missionary works, military interventions, mass media, social media, internet, tourism and restaurants (Schaefer, 2011). You Tube in recent times has emerged as a powerful medium of cultural diffusion

(Xu et al., 2015) because YouTube videos are easily replicable and imitable by viewers that helps a certain cultural aspect spread quickly (Shifman, 2012). It is argued that in terms of cultural diffusion, material culture diffuses relatively quicker than nonmaterial culture, for example, food or country-specific restaurants (Schaefer, 2011). "McDonaldization" is one of the unique examples of the expansion of international food chains that grew very fast after the 1990s. Sociologists symbolically use the word "McDonaldization" in explaining the diffusion of culture or combination of cultural elements (Ritzer, 2015). However, McDonald's reviewed their marketing strategy by adding a local taste in food items and customized their menu across the world; for example, Japanese clients can enjoy Mega Tamago Burger and Indians can eat Maharaja Mac (Schaefer, 2011). That localisation or fusion has contributed to the fast growth and popularity of McDonald's.

Available literature also points to State patronisation of cultural diffusion of a particular culture or elements of culture to develop an international image or as part of cultural imperialism (Otmazgin, 2008). For example, a research concludes that the South Korean government has a dedicated policy to promote Korean popular culture (K-pop) internationally (Jin, 2006). Japan, on the other hand, has a designated organisation, Japan Foundation, to promote Japanese culture worldwide. However, diffusion of a specific culture or cultural element does not necessarily depend on the economic or political strength of the country of origin of that culture; rather, diffusion depends on the popularity or wider acceptance, for example, Korean popular culture- K-pop (Xu et al., 2015).

Diffusion of culture is also an integral part of globalisation, although globalisation in much of the scholarly discussion has been seen from the viewpoint of economic, trade, and seamless movement of people and services (Mayer & Timberlake, 2014; Little et al., 2014). Nonetheless, studies reveal that factors such as geographic proximity, language and historic relationship contribute to the diffusion of culture (Moon et al., 2010), for instance, the diffusion of Japanese popular culture in nearby Asian countries (Cho, 2011). Several studies suggest the likelihood of cultural imperialism in the wake of cultural diffusion, pointing to how the Western culture enjoys superiority over the third world culture. Western culture, in the name of global culture, is sponsored by capitalism, consumerism and consumer culture, along with the growth of transnational media such as CNN, BBC, or NBC (Doda, 2005) and the West-based social media.

Currently, the pace of diffusion of culture is accelerating owing to tremendous technological advancements; as a matter of fact, cross country distribution of cultural elements has increased than ever before (Schaefer, 2011). On the one hand, internet, smartphones with immense capacity, a number of social media platforms, for example, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Viber, WhatsApp and mass media, for instance, YouTube, online streaming of television channels and online newspapers are not only bringing people closer but also providing people with the opportunity to be acquainted with transnational food, fashion, arts, music, literature, news, laws, and so on. On the other hand, technological advancement

in communication has increased tourism and interaction of people from different cultures, thereby contributing to cultural diffusion. For instance, Bangladeshis traveling abroad return home with an appreciation of Japanese tempura or British fish and chips while the Japanese people have an appetite for Italian pizza or Indian biryani.

Japanese Restaurants and Diffusion of Culture

Japanese restaurants are one of the fast-growing restaurant categories in the world and a major growth has been witnessed across Asia. In the years 2017 and 2019, Japanese restaurants grew around 30% and in terms of number, these restaurants have grown from 118,000 in 2017 to 156,000 in 2019. In the same years, the growth rate in North America was 20%, in Latin America 30%, and in the Oceania region 40% (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Survey, cited in Matsuo, 2020)

Sushi is the first Japanese food to become popular around the world. In the 1970s, the health-conscious people in the US and Europe identified *Sushi* as a healthy food. This trend was also visible among the Japan's neighbours in Asia (JETRO, 2013). However, Japanese food was first introduced in Europe in the 1960s in the form of groceries, especially in the UK, France and the Netherlands. Japanese food, in time, has become popular across Europe and now Japanese restaurants are omnipresent (Cwiertka, 2005). Eventually, traditional Japanese meal with soup, rice, a main dish, two side dishes and a dessert gained popularity due to the perception of a balanced diet full with nutrients such as carbohydrates, protein, minerals and vitamin (JETRO, 2013). Interestingly, Japanese restaurants appeared in Russia in the late 1990s relatively later than other European countries. However, the number of Japanese restaurants increased very quickly in the mid-2000s and the number of restaurants in Moscow alone was 300. In 2009, Moscow and St. Petersburg had 1000 and 300 restaurants, respectively (Panibratov, 2012).

There is a perception among people across the world that the nutritional imbalance caused due to a very busy and crazy lifestyle can be addressed by the intake of the healthy Japanese food; they attribute the secret of the long-living Japanese to such healthy Japanese food (Tokyo Sushi Academy, 2020). The enlistment of traditional Japanese food (*Washoku*) as UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage has helped in a big way by conveying a message to the food lover to trust and enjoy Japanese food as a good brand (Nippon.com, 2016). There is a common perception among food lovers that the ingredients of Japanese food are nutritional, with high quality and as being healthy. These factors have not only helped increase the number of Japanese food lovers but also contributed to the growing number of Japanese restaurants across the world. These, in turn, encouraged the food industry investors worldwide to invest in Japanese restaurants; obviously, this has led to the number of Japanese restaurants increasing every year (Nippon.com, 2018). Another encouraging factor for Japanese restaurant owners is the popularity of Japanese food among the middle class; as a result, Japanese food is now the third most popular food in the world after Italian and Chinese (Kramer, 2020).

A study conducted in 2009 interviewed 421 Americans to rank six Asian cuisines- Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese - and concluded that Japanese cuisine is the most popular among American food lovers. This study suggested that Japanese food is popular among the American people because it is tasty, edible, high quality, fresh, digestible, looks pleasing, clean, aromatic, healthy and attractive; additionally, the respondents found the Japanese food nutritionally balanced, colourful, with a strong vegetable component, besides being neat and clean (Jang et al., 2009). This data is indeed encouraging for those involved in restaurant business and has helped the growth of Japanese restaurants (Inamine, 2016). It may be noted that the business of Japanese restaurant is no more an isolated phenomenon. In real terms, due to the changes in the dining taste of people and their fascination for ethnic restaurants, it has become profitable as well (Cwierka, 2005). Japanese restaurants have mushroomed rapidly in the ASEAN countries in the last few decades; for example, Thailand had 2126 restaurants in 2015. The increase in the number of Japanese restaurants is also linked with people's lifestyle and value change, with Japanese food increasingly becoming everyday food instead of that restricted to festivals or formal occasions (Miyamoto, 2017). Japanese food is popular in Malaysia and Japanese food and beverage companies are growing there (Radzi et al., 2016). Studies have also found East Asian countries such as China, Hong Kong and Korea as a popular destination of Japanese food and food industry (Lu & Tokunaga, 2008). However, in comparison to America, Europe and ASEAN, the popularity of Japanese food and the number of Japanese restaurants are limited in India where largely higher class people are the clients, and that too mostly in big cities- Delhi and Mumbai (IANS, 2013; FnBnews, 2020).

A venture such as a restaurant facilitates transfer of knowledge and skills and diffuses cultural elements. For example, in terms of expansion of Japanese restaurants in Europe, most of the new entrepreneurs hired chefs and other staffs from the existing restaurants (Cwierka, 2005). In most of the cases in Russia, only Japanese cooks were appointed for the first few years to train local cooks and, afterwards, these local cooks replaced the Japanese cooks (Panibratov, 2012). Thus, culinary skills or cuisine culture got transfer from one individual to another. Japanese restaurants in Europe, America and ASEAN helped spread out of Japanese food in the society and Japanese food in a number of countries become part of daily life, for example, America or the UK. The spread of Japanese restaurants also diffused Japanese customs, hospitality, culinary art and food presentation in Europe, America and ASEAN (Cwierka, 2005). However, studies also reveal that restaurants focus only on business, for example, Japanese restaurants in Thailand (Miyamoto, 2017).

Recent Trend of Food Consumption in Bangladesh

Due to a number of factors, for example, economic development, increased awareness about food items created by the social media, television and print media stories and growth of education, the food habits of Bangladesh's city dwellers in Bangladesh is changing (Islam & Ullah, 2010). Increasingly, these city residents tend to enjoy food from outside so

as to avoid cooking at home, and families prefer to go to the restaurant as a leisure trip. In selecting the restaurant, people are exploring different food options apart from traditional food and the already popular fast food, and Chinese and Thai food. Among others, Turkish, Mexican, Italian, Korean and Japanese restaurants are becoming favourite options for them. While families choose to visit these restaurants during the weekends, office goers, students and groups of friends drop into such restaurants in the weekdays. The demand for restaurant food in the capital city Dhaka depends on festivals, important occasions and special orders (Rabbi et al., 2013). The Dhaka consumers consider quality, variation, location, price, taste of food, cost, accessibility, cleanliness, overall ambience, privacy, brand name, parking and security, and extra facilities such as kids' paying zone in visiting them (Tabassum & Rahman, 2012; Islam & Ullah, 2010; Rana, 2013; Ashraf et al., 2014; Islam et al., 2018; Tinne, 2012). Interestingly, one study reveals that gender also influences the selection of a restaurant (Mahmud, 2018). Moreover, the restaurant selection also depends on the age group of the clients (Farhana & Islam, 2011). However, customers have dissatisfaction over price, quality and staff service (Rahman et al., 2012).

This literature review precisely inspects means of cultural diffusion, especially diffusion of culture via restaurants. It also reviews literature related to the perception of people about Japanese food, its popularity and the growth of Japanese restaurants worldwide. Further, it investigates the changing pattern of food habits of Bangladeshi nationals and their recent preferences in terms of international food, including the factors that Dhaka city food lovers consider in visiting a restaurant. However, a number of gaps can be identified in the existing literature. The reviewed literature does not provide conclusive evidence about the role of restaurants in diffusing cultural elements whereas the fact is that a number of elements of material culture diffuse through such restaurants. Moreover, existing literature neither provides much information about the growth of Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh nor especially the diffusion of culture through the Japanese restaurants. Therefore, this research attempts to fill these gaps by examining the role of the Japanese restaurants in diffusing Japanese culture in Bangladesh. To underpin the objectives, this study answers the following research questions:

- a) What is the current growth trend of Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh and how do owners manage the operation of the restaurants?
- b) Are Japanese restaurants diffusing Japanese culture in Bangladesh and what specific cultural elements are being diffused?

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative mode of inquiry, combining an abductive approach and case study strategy. The thematic data analysis technique of Braun and Clarke (2006) is applied to analyse data using NVivo to code transcribe data for generating themes.

Both primary and secondary data are the sources of this study. Fourteen interviews of restaurant owners, chefs, managers, supervisors and waiters

were conducted in two phases—November 2019 and September 2020. Interviewees are identified with serial number as shown in the Appendix, with the serial number being used to cite an interviewee in the discussion. Due to application of the theory matching technique of abductive approach and case study strategy of this research, a few interviewees were interviewed a second or third time while the data analysis was in progress (Dubois & Gadda, 2002). A semi-structured questionnaire written in the local language, Bengali, was used for the purpose of the interview, while all interviews were noted and transcribed in English for coding. A variety of documents has been examined to generate secondary data for this research which, perhaps, was not yet appraised by the previous studies. This research pays close attention to research ethics. Respondents were briefed about the purpose of the research and their consent was taken to cite names, if necessary. However, anonymity is given to a couple of respondents anticipating harm or negative consequences. Braun and Clarke's six steps of data analysis are followed to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) viz. familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for the themes, reviewing for themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. All fourteen interviews and documents were read and re-read to fully familiarise with the initial ideas. Subsequently, NVivo data analysis software was used to code transcribe data. After a robust examination, codes were primarily categorised as child-nodes and child-nodes as parents-nodes. In outlining primary themes from parents-node, attention was given to pattern and nature, homogeneity and commonness of data and alignment, and ability of data to contribute to research questions. Primary themes were reviewed using the memo, note and mind-map option of NVivo and, by so doing, the whole data set was analysed in a continuous back and forth process. Finally, three themes were identified and named after critical examinations that responded to the research questions. To improve clarity and better understanding of the readers, several interviews are directly quoted in the analytical sections of this study.

4. Limitations of the Study and Scope of Future Research

This study has examined the expansion of Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh from the theoretical perspective of cultural diffusion. However, the study excludes comprehensive discussion of Japanese food and buyers' choice. Primary data of this research was collected only from the owners or those who work in the restaurants to understand the reasons behind their decision to open a Japanese restaurant, selection of food items, overall management of the restaurant and the challenges of operation. Therefore, the views of the customers of the restaurants are not reflected in this study.

It is suggested that the findings and discussion of this study provide opportunities for future research that can *inter alia* investigate the popularity of Japanese food by interviewing customers of Japanese restaurants. It will also be interesting to examine the quick expansion or high popularity of Chinese food in Bangladesh and the lessons that the Japanese restaurant owners can gain from them.

5. Discussion

Recent Growth of Japanese Restaurants in Bangladesh

Initially, Japanese food was available in Bangladesh only in five-star restaurants or in some standard Bangladeshi or Indian restaurants. This situation changed after the launch of the Samdado Japanese Cuisine in 2001. Interestingly, only two restaurants were kicked-off between 2001 and 2010: the Nagasaki Japanese Restaurant in 2005 and the Izumi Japanese Kitchen in 2010. However, in the last ten years, more than twenty Japanese restaurants have been launched both in the form of physical and online restaurants among which the Kiyoshi, Sushi Samurai, Tokyo Express, Ginza, ICHI and the Izumi Japanese Kitchen are well known to Japanese food lovers. Except the Azuki Express and Ichiban in Chittagong, all the other restaurants are operating in Dhaka. This growing trend has also been observed in relation to the other ethnic restaurants as well, due to factors such as economic development, awareness about food from the social media, visiting restaurants as part of recreation, change of food habits and lifestyle (Islam & Ullah, 2010). From the available information in the internet and from the Japan External Trade Organization, 32 Japanese restaurants, including online restaurants, can be listed. However, the Facebook and web page content of these restaurants and information provided by the interviewees reveal that out of the 32 listed restaurants, only 21 restaurants serve Japanese food exclusively while the remaining 11 serve other foods along with Japanese food. Sushi Tei Bangladesh, Izumi Japanese Kitchen, ICHI Japanese Restaurant, Kyoshi, Umai, Sushi Samurai, Nagasaki Japanese Restaurant, Ginza Japanese Restaurant, Sumo Sushi Restaurant, Samdado Japanese Cuisine, Tokyo Kitchen, Tekiya Japanese Cuisine, Tokyo Express, Midori Japanese Restaurant, Nobu Signature, Izakaya, Azuki Express, Nobu 7, Yoko Japanese Restaurant, Sushi King and Zushi serve only Japanese food. Restaurants that serve Japanese food along with other cuisines are Man Mo, Crème de la Crème Coffee, Fools' Diner, Grandiose Restaurant, Master chef Cuisine, Khulshi Hill, Bunka, TBC- Dhanmondi, Ichiban, Amarin Japanese Restaurant and I Love My Home.

In terms of the ownership of the fourteen sampled restaurants, only two restaurants are owned by Japanese nationals-Nagasaki Japanese Restaurant and ICHI Japanese Restaurant. Two restaurants, Tokyo Kitchen and Ginza, are a joint venture of Japanese and Bangladeshi owners. Three restaurants are owned by Japan lovers who, in fact, stayed in or visited Japan: Sumo Sushi Restaurant, Tokyo Express and Azuki Express. Bangladeshi entrepreneurs have ventured into setting up seven restaurants- Sushi Tei Bangladesh, Izumi Japanese Kitchen, Kyoshi, Umai, Sushi Samurai, Midori Japanese Restaurant and Sushi King.

Food and Management of Japanese Restaurants

Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh offer mainly two types of food-authentic and fusion. Most of the restaurants offer different types of *Sushi* (mostly Salmon, Tuna, especially in Maki and Machi type & *Sashimi* (especially Salad), *Tempura*, *Teriyaki* (Chicken, Beef, Salmon, mainly), *Udon*, *Gyoza*, Rice Bowl, *Chicken Nanban*, *Yakitori Chicken*, *Odenmori*, *Ramen*, all

types of *Bento Box*, *Chicken Katsuki*, Seafood platter and so on (Interviewee 1-14, 2019 & 2020) being no different from other ethnic restaurants across the world (Schaefer, 2011; Panibratov, 2012). Bangladeshi Japanese restaurants offer Japanese fusion foods, for example, in the Sushi types Ebi meat Sake, Pink Sakura, Red Dragon, The Crabby Affair, Lava Roll, Spider Roll, Tuna Caviar Sushi Roll and Salmon Sushi Roll. These restaurants also serve Japanese fusion food such as Jalapeno Chicken, Happa Chicken, Yakitori Chicken, Steamed Beef Gyoza, Beef Udon, Shrimp Shu Mai and Shrimp Tempura (Interviewee 7, 2020; Interviewee 9, 2020; Interviewee 5, 2020).

Primarily, the clients of Japanese restaurants are Bangladeshi nationals who have stayed in Japan for a number of years, mostly for education or employment, and those who have visited Japan for business, training and tourism (Interviewee 8, 2020). However, due to the social media and YouTube, food lovers, in general, are overfed with food information on food items and specific ethnic cuisine (Islam & Ullah, 2010; Xu et al., 2015; Shifman, 2012). Because of online food reviews, especially in YouTube Channels and Facebook of the restaurants themselves, as well as those of independent food reviewers, food lovers are increasingly becoming familiar with various ethnic foods that tempt them to test a new food (Nakayama & Wan, 2018). Interviewees indicated that they were receiving a number of customers, especially young clients, who never visited Japan and did not have much idea about the country, but enjoy Japanese food. (Interviewee 8, 2020; Tabassum & Rahman, 2012). As mentioned earlier, the Japanese food is predominantly appreciated as healthy food (Jang et al., 2009; Tokyo Sushi Academy, 2020). Therefore, a group of people who are health conscious visit a Japanese restaurant to enjoy such healthy food (Interviewee 3, 2020). Interviewees were asked about the ratio of the nationality of their clients; they said it varied from restaurant to restaurant. For example, 60% to 70% customers of Sumo Sushi, Sushi King, Tokyo Kitchen, Tokyo Express and Ginza were Bangladeshis and the rest were Japanese and other nationals (Interviewee 1, 2019; Interviewee 13, 2020; Interviewee 10, 2020; Interviewee 11, 2020; Interviewee 5, 2020). 60% to 70% customers of Nagasaki, Izumi and Midori were Japanese and other nationals and 30% to 40% were Bangladeshis (Interviewee 2, 2019; Interviewee 4, 2019; Interviewee 12, 2020). However, 50% customers of Azuki Express and ICHI Japanese Restaurant were Japanese and other nationals and the other 50% Bangladeshis (Interviewee 14, 2020; Interviewee 3, 2020). Nonetheless, Bangladeshi clients of Japanese restaurants often prefer Japanese fusion food to traditional raw food because Bangladeshis cannot eat raw food. In relation to Japanese fusion food, Interviewee 5 (2020) opined:

"Previously we observed that our clients had difficulties to eat those Japanese foods which had raw ingredients. We did our homework, talked to the clients about their desire and invented a number of Japanese fusion food such as Jalapeno Chicken, Happa Chicken and Yakitori Chicken [.....] now we serve Japanese fusion food and customers love it."

Further more, religious factors contribute in the choice of Japanese fusion food, considering that around 90% Bangladeshis are Muslims who

are the main customers. These customers look for 'halal' ingredients but a common ingredient of Japanese cooking is Sake (a kind of Japanese wine); if Sake is used, then Muslims cannot eat that food. To overcome this, most of the restaurants do not use Sake (Interviewee 1, 2020).

As the ingredients of Japanese food are unique and since some of them are not available in Bangladesh, Japanese restaurants collect ingredients from a number of sources from different countries; for example, *rice vinegar*, *mirin*, *sushi rice*, *miso pasta*, *wakame and nori* (a kind of seaweed), *bonito flakes*, *kombu*, *shichimi togarashi* and *wasabi*. Some restaurants, for example, the Midori Japanese Restaurant and Tokyo Kitchen import ingredients directly from Japan (Interviewee 12, 2020; Interviewee 10, 2020). Conversely, Ginza and Kiyoshi import them from Thailand and Sushi Tei and Umai from Singapore (Interviewee 5, 2020; Interviewee 7, 2020; Interviewee 6, 2020; Interviewee 8, 2020). These restaurants also contact local vendors, for instance, Korean Mart Limited to import ingredients (Interviewee 11, 2020; Interviewee 13, 2020; Interviewee 9, 2020). However, a number of respondents affirmed that due to the dependence on import, there is a consequent increase in cost. As one interviewee stated:

"As a good number of ingredients of Japanese food are imported from overseas, therefore, the cost of the ingredients increases which ultimately contributes to the higher price of the food, and higher price negatively impacts sales volume and the number of customers (Interviewee 1, 2020)."

Most of the Japanese restaurants follow the Japanese style of food presentation- out of the sampled 14 restaurants, 12 restaurants present food following the Japanese style. Respondents were asked whether they follow the formal Japanese style of food presentation- *moritsuke*. In general, three elements are considered very important for the aesthetic presentation of the traditional Japanese meal: (a) selection of foods to serve, (b) the dinnerware, and (c) an exacting placement of dinnerware (Dzujna, 2019). Respondents responded that they try to follow all the three elements in presenting the food (Interviewee 1, 2019; Interviewee 2, 2019; Interviewee 3, 2020; Interviewee 4, 2019; Interviewee 5, 2020). However, a few restaurants do not always follow the Japanese style of food presenting (Interviewee 10, 2020; Interviewee 13, 2020). In terms of the use of dinnerware, most of the restaurants use Japanese dinnerware (Interviewee 3, 2020; Interviewee 6, 2020; Interviewee 7, 2020) but some restaurants use locally available modern dinnerware (Interviewee 11, 2020; Interviewee 1, 2019).

Most of the Japanese restaurants receive the highest number of customers on Thursday, Friday and Saturday; Friday and Saturday are weekends in Bangladesh (Interviewee 5, 2020; Interviewee 9, 2020). However, a few have reported a good number of customers on all weekdays (Interviewee 6, 2020 & Interviewee 10, 2020).

The receptionist and waiters at the Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh greet their clients with Japanese greetings such as *irasshaimase* ("Welcome to the store" or "come on in!"), *konnichi wa* (Hello/ Good Afternoon), and *konbanwa* (Good Evening). Waiters sometimes use basic Japanese to communicate with their Japanese guests, for example, *okyakusan*, *douzo*

suwatte kudasai (Guest, please take your seat/please sit down). The staff also bid goodbye in Japanese, for instance, *sayonara* (Goodbye), *oyasumi nasai* (Good night), *doumo mata kite kudasai* (Please come again), *arigatou gozaimasu* (Thank you) and so on (Interviewee 1, 2019; Interviewee 12, 2020; Interviewee 2, 2020). Therefore, although very basic, these restaurants' Bangladeshi staffs are learning the basics of Japanese language, especially greetings and courtesies.

The traditional Japanese interior decoration is well reflected in the interior design of the restaurants. Apart from Japan-like furniture and fixtures, restaurants are decorated with Japanese books, products, calligraphy, photos of Japanese girls in traditional dress-*kimono*, *Bantorakun*, *Sumo and momiji*, artificial plants, different types of Japanese paintings, etc. A number of restaurants, like the traditional Japanese restaurants, do not allow clients to wear shoes inside the restaurants (Interviewee 2, 2019 & Interviewee 3, 2019). They also provide *Horigatsu*, the traditional seating arrangement with a Japanese table low to the ground. (Interviewee 3, 2019; Interviewee 7, 2019).

Cooking of Japanese food contemplates as culinary art, and, therefore, an expert chef is crucial to prepare the perfect Japanese food and present it. A number of Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh have Japanese chefs, for example, Nagasaki, ICHI, Izumi and Umai Japanese Restaurant (Interviewee 2, 2019; Interviewee 3, 2020; Interviewee 4, 2019; Interviewee 8, 2020). Some restaurants, nevertheless, have hired chefs from Japan to train local chefs, for instance, ICHI (Interviewee 3, 2020; Interviewee 8, 2020). A few restaurants sent their chefs to other countries such as Singapore to get training from Japanese chefs (Interviewee 6, 2020). However, some restaurants, in the beginning, hired Japanese chefs to train the local Bangladeshi to cook Japanese food; these Japanese chefs were previously working in Bangladeshi Japanese restaurants, for instance, Tokyo Express and Umai (Interviewee 11, 2020; Interviewee 8, 2020). This model was commonly seen in Europe at the beginning of the boom of Japanese restaurants (Cwiertka, 2005). Some restaurants hired non-Japanese chefs from nearby countries such as Thailand who have a greater expertise in Japanese culinary art to train Bangladeshi chefs (Interviewee 7, 2020). Remarkably, a few restaurants even arrange specialised training for their chefs when they plan to introduce a new item. In particular, the ICHI Japanese Restaurant trains their Bangladeshi chef, inviting a Japanese chef from Japan (Interviewee 3, 2020). Nevertheless, all the respondents indicated that the number of Bangladeshi chefs who were efficient in cooking Japanese food was increasing; naturally, these restaurants preferred to employ a local chef so as to reduce the overhead costs. They added that although they were reducing the number of Japanese chefs and appointing Bangladesh chefs, they did not receive any complaints about the authentic taste of the food either from their Japanese customers or from the Bangladeshi clients. The interviewees reckoned that a good number of Bangladeshi chefs had earned the desired level of expertise and soon they were able to train other Bangladeshi chefs on Japanese cooking. An interviewee expressed his understanding in the following lines:

“It is becoming difficult to hire chefs from Japan to train local chefs and as a number of Bangladeshi chefs are very competent to make Japanese food, owners of the restaurants are more inclining to hire local chefs to provide training. It is noteworthy that when these chefs cook Japanese food for Japanese, for example, JICA’s Japanese staffs, they appreciate the food and do not complain about the quality of the food (Interviewee 1, 2020).”

Japanese restaurants are gradually becoming an employment industry, with around 1000 staff working in these restaurants. These employees, by and large, are increasingly becoming familiar with Japanese cultural elements as well. The restaurant staffs taste Japanese food every now and then and they find it tasty; they too believe that Japanese food is very healthy and that the ingredients used in preparing the Japanese food are great sources of vitamin, protein and energy that help lead a long, healthy life (Interviewee 3, 2019). A number of staff said that they tasted Japanese food not merely in their own restaurants, but they also went for a full meal in the restaurant they work or visited other Japanese restaurants to enjoy it (Interviewee 14, 2020).

The sale of Japanese food is not restricted to the restaurants alone; these restaurants often receive orders to supply food on social occasions, official meetings and family parties (Interviewee 7, 2020). They also supply Japanese food to offices for lunch and to families for lunch and dinner. Restaurants arrange special buffet lunch and dinner at the weekends with the Japanese foods are becoming increasingly popular among the Bangladeshi food lovers (Interviewee 12, 2020). The buffet lunch and dinner showcase myriad of Japanese food items following the art of traditional Japanese food presenting and display Japanese dinnerware to give the real Japanese flavour. However, a few respondents pointed out that due to financial hardships, owners of the restaurants were unable to undertake promotional activities to create more awareness about Japanese food and to attract more customers (Interviewee 1, 2020). Currently, these restaurants are very much dependent on Facebook and YouTube promotions; occasionally, some YouTubers prepare videos as part of their food review programme on Japanese restaurants which they telecast in their YouTube channels. However, Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh, as of today, do not participate in food festivals organised by different organisations nor do they organise any food festival on their own (Interviewee 3, 2020; Interviewee 5, 2020; Interviewee 6, 2020).

Section 4 responds to the first research question which is to examine the current growth trend of the Japanese restaurants in Bangladesh and to investigate the management of these restaurants. This section concludes that the number of Japanese restaurants is increasing in Bangladesh and although the entrepreneurs are encountering some challenges, overall, they are satisfied with the growth of their business and the profits.

6. Diffusion of Japanese Culture

The discussion in section 5 reveals that Japanese restaurants are diffusing various elements of the Japanese culture, for example, cuisine, food, decoration and food presentation, dinnerware, culinary arts, customs,

greetings, language and decorative arts, photography and paintings. Moreover, with the continuous increase in the number of Japanese restaurants, these elements of Japanese culture are diffusing more and more in the Bangladeshi society, especially amongst the city dwellers. These findings respond to the second research question which is to investigate whether Japanese restaurants are diffusing Japanese culture in Bangladesh and also to identify those elements of Japanese culture that are so diffusing. Furthermore, the findings of this study support the result of a previous study which concludes that although a restaurant is a commercial venture that seeks to maximise profit by attracting an increasing number of customers, it effectively works as a means of cultural diffusion (Cwierka, 2005).

The Bangladeshi nationals' physical orientation to Japanese culture is limited to some cultural events organised by the Embassy of Japan in the form of Ikebana and tea ceremony demonstration, drama and film show, music and drama performance by singers and artists from Japan and cultural festivals. Besides, some local organisations such as the Bangladesh Ikebana Association, Bangladesh Bonsai Association, Kokorozashi & Kazuko Bhuiyan Japanese Cultural Center, the Department of Japanese Language & Culture, and the Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka occasionally organise cultural events and shows. Additionally, a few five-star hotels rarely organise Japanese Food Festival. These events, shows or festivals are the limited sources for Bangladeshis to familiarise themselves with the Japanese culture. These transient agents perhaps play some role to diffuse cultural elements but permanent establishments such as restaurants are more influential agents to diffuse culture. One strong evidence of this is the learning of, and expertise developed by the Bangladeshi chefs insofar as the Japanese cooking style is concerned. Thus, the study finds that most of the restaurants employed Bangladeshi chefs who are experts in Japanese cooking and these chefs either have got training from Japanese chefs or from Bangladeshi chefs who are experts in cooking Japanese food.

Another example of diffusion of culture by Japanese restaurants is the growing popularity of the Japanese food. Previously, people had the option to taste Japanese food either at Japanese food festivals organised by five-star hotels or at special events arranged by organisations related to Japan. However, people now have the facility to enjoy Japanese food for their lunch or dinner in restaurants. This has paved the way for the increasing diffusion of a Japanese food culture in Bangladesh. Furthermore, due to the social media, Facebook, YouTube, etc., people are now exposed to transnational foods; as the number of Japanese restaurants is increasing, they get the opportunity to taste and savour Japanese food. This factor also contributes to the diffusion of Japanese food. Since the existing Japanese restaurants have introduced take-away and home delivery services, therefore, it is convenient for the people to order and enjoy Japanese food in their office or from the comforts of their homes. Moreover, buffet system of food in lunches and dinners are also an added attraction for food lovers. Consequently, these factors are helping the diffusion of Japanese food in the country.

It may be seen that the Bangladeshis who are visiting Japanese restaurants are not only enjoying Japanese food but also experiencing Japanese art of food presentation and decoration, dinnerware, cutlery, interior design, paintings, plants, handicrafts and so on. This experience, memories and lessons as part of socialisation and in the form of imitation also helps diffuse Japanese culture. Likewise, those visiting these restaurants are becoming familiar with Japanese greetings and language in the form of short sentences such as *irasshaimase* (Welcome), *konnichiwa* (Hello), and *kombawa* (Good Evening), *sayonara* (Goodbye), *oyasumi nasai* (Good night), *doumo, mada kite kudasai* (Please come again), *arigatou gozaimasu* (Thank you), and *okyakusan douzo suwatte kudasai* (Guest, please take your seat). Such diffusion of cultural elements via Japanese restaurants is not only limited to greetings and language but also typical Japanese customs such as bowing, *horigatsu* (the traditional Japanese table laid low to the ground) and the non-use of shoes inside the restaurants. Presently, as previously discussed, the Bangladeshis' understanding of Japanese cultural elements is very limited, that mostly comes from internet and various events organised by the Japan Embassy and other Japan-related organisations. Therefore, Japanese restaurants are becoming an important source to familiarise Japanese culture and playing a crucial role to diffuse that culture in Bangladesh. Additionally, Japanese restaurants as a primary agent are influencing employees of their restaurants to become acquainted with Japanese culture and customs, and such acquaintances are contributing to the diffusion of culture.

7. Conclusion

Bangladesh and Japan enjoy warm and friendly relations; the two countries will be celebrating the 50th years of establishing their relationship in the year 2022. In recent years, more and more Japanese companies are investing in Bangladesh, with the Government of Bangladesh showing keen interest to welcome them into the country. The traditional donor-recipient relationship is gradually transforming into a mutually beneficial partnership, with the investment of Japanese companies being the linchpin to the strengthening of such partnership. Simultaneously, the Japanese community in Bangladesh is growing from the hundreds to the thousands. This study reveals that at this point of time the number of Japanese restaurants is increasing in Bangladesh. As the role of a restaurant as an agent of diffusion of culture is multifaceted, a number of Japanese cultural elements are diffusing in the Bangladeshi society. Some policy implications can be drawn from these findings. The long-standing debate is in relation to the question whether diffusion of cultural elements is positive or negative. However, a burgeoning body of literature has argued that in the age of globalisation and internet, it is indeed difficult to prevent cultural diffusion. Therefore, this school of thought takes a middle ground in arguing that if a society is reluctant to allow transnational culture it may lose many benefits resulting out of globalisation. It is evident that the diffusion of Japanese culture through Japanese restaurants is advantageous for Bangladesh because the size of Japanese community is increasing, especially due to the increase in the

number of Japanese companies operating in the country. Along with other facilities, the growing community needs access to Japanese food that can be ensured by the Japanese restaurants. Because of the diffusion of Japanese culture, the Bangladeshi people are becoming more and more familiar with Japanese culture that will also help them to deal with the Japanese people more effectively. That being so, it will be in the fitness of things if the Government of Bangladesh enhanced the facilities for Japanese restaurants so that the number of these restaurants can grow to meet the requirements of the Japanese community. The growing number of restaurants will also cater to the needs of the rising number of Bangladeshi lovers of Japanese food which will, in turn, enhance their understanding about Japanese culture, thus contribute to further cementing the effective partnership between Bangladesh and Japan.

Appendix

List of Interviewees

No.	Name	Occupation	Date of Interview	Sex
1.	Mr.Nuru Alam	Former Main Chef, Sumo Sushi Restaurant	24th November, 2019; 21 st & 23 rd September, 2020; 14 th October, 2020	Male
2.	Mr. Rahim	Staff, Nagasaki Japanese Restaurant	25 th November, 2019	Male
3.	Md. Dulal Hossain	Staff, ICHI Japanese Restaurant	25 th November, 2019; 20 th , 21 st & 23 rd September, 2020	Male
4.	Anonymous	Manager	25 th November, 2019	Male
5.	Mr.Sajib Ahmed	Staff, Ginza Restaurant	20 th & 21 st September, 2020	Male
6.	Mr. Faisal	Staff, Sushi Tei Bangladesh	20 th & 21 st September, 2020	Male
7.	Mr.Rashed Alam	Staff, Kiyoshi	20 th & 21 st September, 2020	Male
8.	Mr.Nazmul Hossain	Supervisor, Umami	20 th & 21 st September, 2020	Male
9.	Md. Salahuddin	Supervisor, Sushi Samurai	20 th & 21 st September, 2020	Male
10.	Anonymous	Staff	21 st September, 2020	Male
11.	Mr.Masum	Staff, Tokyo Express	21 st September, 2020	Male
12.	Mr. Akbar Hossain	Senior Waiter, Midori Japanese Restaurant	21 st September, 2020	Male
13.	Mr.Shuvroto Sarkar	Owner, Sushi King	21 st September, 2020	Male
14.	Mr.Rony	Supervisor, Azuki Express	21 st & 23 rd September, 2020	Male

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