

Berlin's Japanese foodscapes during the COVID-19 crisis: Restaurateurs' experiences and practices during the spring 2020 shutdown

Cornelia Reiher

ABSTRACT: *The spring 2020 restaurant shutdown after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Berlin hit Japanese restaurateurs at the height of the popularity of Japanese cuisine in Germany. This paper explores how Japanese restaurateurs in Berlin experienced this shutdown from March to May 2020. Based on fieldwork in Berlin, it asks whether and how they continued selling food during the shutdown, compares their experiences and points out similarities and differences that are based on the type of eateries, the restaurateurs' personal migration histories and the degree of their local embeddedness in Berlin. I pay particular attention to strategies of selling and marketing food during the restaurant shutdown via takeout and delivery services and discuss the material culture of protecting customers and staff from COVID-19 during and after the lockdown against the backdrop of Japanese restaurateurs' perceptions of health risks. The paper focusses on ethnic Japanese restaurateurs because most of their restaurants are small, independent establishments, and the majority was closed during the shutdown. Although all research participants belong to the same ethnic community, their experiences during and after the shutdown were quite diverse. I argue that their experiences and strategies were influenced by economic factors related to the type of restaurant they run rather than by their ethnicity.*

KEYWORDS: *Japanese food, Berlin, COVID-19, restaurateurs, Japanese restaurants*

HOW TO CITE: *Reiher, C. (2022): Berlin's Japanese foodscapes during the COVID-19 crisis: Restaurateurs' experiences and practices during the spring 2020 shutdown. In: Berliner Blätter 86, 105–122.*

Introduction

On May 15, 2020, I visited a Japanese restaurant in Berlin's Charlottenburg district. It was the first day of business after a two-month shutdown had been imposed on all restaurants in the city to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. That evening, the restaurant was only half-full but, as the Japanese owner told me, this was due to the new seating arrangements. To keep the required distance of 1.5 m between guests, only every other table could be used, and guests had to wait outside the restaurant to be seated. Nevertheless, the atmosphere was cheerful. Some guests were regular customers who expressed pleasure about being able to eat there again after the restaurant had been closed for so long. Half of the guests were Japanese families enjoying the specialties and, as one Japanese wife told

me, they were happy to be able to eat out again instead of cooking for the whole family every day.

But as the owner's wife, who also works in the restaurant, pointed out, things had changed since the onset of the pandemic. Changes not only included the physical distancing measures, but also mask wearing for employees, sanitizing tables and menus after each use and, of course, uncertainty about future restaurant shutdowns and the economic risks they would entail for the small family business. But despite all these uncertainties, the owners were rather optimistic about the future – as long as there were no further shutdowns.

This rather hopeful account from May 15 seems like a nostalgic memory as I write this paper in October 2020, with the numbers of COVID-19 infections at unprecedented highs in Germany and particularly in Berlin. It looks like the second shutdown for restaurants will come soon, and restaurateurs are again worried about how their businesses and Japanese gastronomy in Berlin in general will be affected. The COVID-19 crisis hit Japanese restaurants in Berlin at the height of the popularity of Japanese cuisine in Germany's capital and amidst a global Japanese food boom. In 2019, more than 1.5 million Japanese restaurants existed outside of Japan, of which more than 12,000 were in Europe (MAFF 2019). Numbers of Japanese restaurants abroad were growing in most parts of the world and in Germany, particularly in Berlin, as well. While there were only 30 Japanese restaurants in Berlin in 1996 (Becker 1996, 81), there were over 230 in September 2020 (TripAdvisor 2020). This is by far the largest number of Japanese restaurants in any German city. Although Japanese cuisine has enjoyed great popularity in Germany's capital for the past two decades, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the accompanying measures that were taken to prevent its further spread severely affected Japanese restaurateurs and food entrepreneurs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed practices of eating out around the world. While measures against its spread hit the hotel and restaurant industries hard everywhere (see for example Farrer 2020; Wadhwa 2020), Berlin is the German city with the highest rate of COVID-19-related unemployment. The majority of those facing unemployment are immigrants (Gegg et al. 2020). This situation has had serious implications on immigrant restaurateurs' and restaurant employees' livelihoods, health and personal lives. According to a recent survey by Germany's Hotel and Restaurant Business Association (DEHOGA), enterprises suffered sales losses of more than 50% between March and August 2020. Many restaurateurs fear for their businesses. The situation is particularly difficult for the more than 2.4 million employees in hotels and restaurants in Germany (DEHOGA 2020). 93.4% of all employees were forced into reduced working hours (*Kurzarbeit*) when restaurants and hotels had to close during the COVID-19 lockdown. As of October 2020, government support schemes for supplementing wages during reduced working hours (*Kurzarbeitergeld*) have been extended to December 2020, but with rising COVID-19 infections, the future of this support and the development of employment in the industry remain uncertain.

In this paper, I analyze how Japanese restaurateurs in Berlin experienced the shutdown from March 22 to May 15, 2020, and the reopening, and I identify patterns and structures within and across their accounts. I ask whether and how they continued selling food during the shutdown. My focus here is on Japanese restaurateurs, although most food entrepreneurs and food workers in Berlin's Japanese foodscapes are non-Japanese and most often Vietnamese. I made this choice because most restaurants owned by Japanese people are small, independent businesses, and most were closed during the shutdown, which was not the case for Vietnamese-owned Japanese restaurants. Thus, my research was inspired by the puzzle of why ethnic Japanese restaurateurs tended to fully close their restaurants more often than Vietnamese food entrepreneurs instead of switching to takeout or delivery op-

tions. Although all research participants are Japanese and could be thought of as belonging to the same national community, their experiences during and after the shutdown were quite diverse. Therefore, I argue that their experiences and strategies were influenced by economic factors related to the type of restaurant they run rather than by their ethnicity.

This paper is based on field notes from participant observation I conducted in and outside of restaurants from April to September 2020 by myself and together with students from the Freie Universität Berlin's Japanese Studies MA program.¹ Research on Japanese foodscapes in Berlin is part of a methods course that I have been teaching since 2015 (Reiher 2018). We conducted more than 30 qualitative interviews with Japanese restaurateurs and food entrepreneurs who have been creating and selling Japanese food in Berlin during the past five years. Ten interviews focusing on experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic were conducted in May and June 2020 with Japanese restaurateurs, some of whom we had interviewed before. Three interviews were conducted together with students online, and I conducted the other seven in the restaurants of my respective interview partners.² All interviews were conducted in Japanese; seven were formal, in-depth interviews that were recorded and transcribed, while three were longer, informal conversations that took place during restaurant visits. In order to contextualize these rather limited data in the larger dynamics of Berlin's Japanese foodscapes, I also analyzed all available websites and social media accounts of Japanese restaurants in Berlin, as well as local government and media coverage of COVID-19 developments and regulations in the capital.

After introducing Berlin's Japanese foodscapes and the Japanese immigrants who make and sell Japanese food in Berlin, based on ongoing fieldwork that began in 2015, I will provide an overview of the development of COVID-19 regulations in Berlin with a focus on the restaurant industry. I will then present empirical findings from fieldwork on Berlin's Japanese foodscapes during the COVID-19 crisis. First, I will compare Japanese restaurateurs' experiences and point out similarities and differences that are often based on the different types of eateries, restaurateurs' personal migration histories and the degree of their local embeddedness in Berlin. Secondly, I will explore strategies of selling and marketing food during the restaurant shutdown via takeout and delivery services and inquire why some restaurateurs refrained from using these strategies. Thirdly, I will pay particular attention to the material aspects of protecting customers and staff from COVID-19 during and after the lockdown and discuss this material culture against the backdrop of Japanese restaurateurs' perceptions of health risks posed by COVID-19.

Berlin's Japanese foodscapes

In 2018, roughly 4000 Japanese immigrants and second-generation Japanese-Germans lived in Berlin (Gaimushō 2019).³ Japanese immigrants to Berlin are very different from the Japanese expats and their families in Düsseldorf, where Japanese companies settled in the 1950s (Kottmann 2020; Tagsold 2011). Not only is the group of Japanese immigrants in Berlin only half the size of the Japanese community in Düsseldorf, but they are also more diverse in terms of professions, age, gender and duration of residence in Berlin. They include many artists, students, musicians and Japanese spouses of German and other nationals living in Berlin. Gerster and Morokhova (2020, 158) found that, like many other lifestyle immigrants who left Japan to live abroad (Ono 2015), many chose a life in Berlin because they were not happy in Japan's society.

The same is true for the more than thirty Japanese food workers and entrepreneurs whom we interviewed in Berlin during the past five years. Most were dissatisfied with life in Japan, in terms of both their private lives and their careers. One Japanese confectioner, for example, was unhappy with her male-dominated workplace and left for Europe; another female food entrepreneur despised her hometown and the people's conservative attitude, while many male restaurateurs we interviewed in Berlin left Japan because of the stressful and exhausting work environment. These findings among Japanese immigrants in Berlin correspond with scholarship on outbound migration of Japanese nationals, who, according to this research (Kelsky 2001; Ono 2015; Sugimoto 1993) often go abroad because of work-life imbalance or a shortage of full-time employment, or because they do not fit into the Japanese education system or local society. Sugimoto (1993, 77) calls them »socio-cultural refugees« who try to escape Japanese society to live in places »where they are freer from obligations and pressures than they were in Japan.«⁴ Japanese immigrants in Berlin in general and particularly younger ones like the open social environment, urban anonymity, freedom from judgement for who they are and the many opportunities to experience alternative lifestyles that the city offers.

Unlike in Japanese expat communities, as for example in Düsseldorf (Tagsold 2011; Kottmann 2020), it is not surprising that Japanese nationals who leave Japan because they are unhappy in their home country do not seek to connect with other Japanese people in their newly adopted country. This is also the case in Berlin, where most of our interviewees emphasize that they do not belong to any kind of Japanese community. While some argue that such a community does not exist due to the diversity of the Japanese immigrants (see for example the interview with Daisuke,⁵ July 10, 2017), others stress that this fragmentation leads to several smaller communities based on profession, like groups for artists, musicians or those of a certain age (interview with Michihiko, May 27, 2020). Members of these small communities regularly gather at specific events like the Ankokai for the gay community (Gerster/Morokhova 2020), but they do not seem to have much in common with other groups and hardly ever meet, according to our research participants (interview Michihiko, 2020). Other individuals strictly refuse to connect with other Japanese people (interview with Mihoko, May 25, 2020). Particularly in Berlin's Japanese foodscape, professional networks of restaurateurs and food workers are rather loose and depend on whether a restaurant is part of a chain of restaurants or an independent eatery.

Only a few Japanese immigrants came to Berlin with the goal of opening a restaurant or working in one, but many ended up working in Japanese eateries for some time in order to make a living, and some founded their own. While the vast majority of employees and customers in Japanese restaurants in Düsseldorf are themselves Japanese (Kottmann 2020), most Japanese restaurants in Berlin are owned by people of non-Japanese descent, especially Vietnamese immigrants and German citizens of Vietnamese descent.⁶ There are, however, a few Japanese restaurants in Berlin with only Japanese ownership and staff. And unlike in Düsseldorf, where most Japanese restaurants are located close to Düsseldorf's main station in a neighborhood called Little Tokyo, Japanese restaurants in Berlin are spread all over the city. Although there is no »Asiatown« or Little Tokyo in Berlin (Yu Dembski 2007; Schmiz 2017), there exists a small cluster of 15 Japanese restaurants around Kantstraße in Charlottenburg. This area is famous today not only for its Asian shops and restaurants, but also as the place where the first two Japanese restaurants in Germany opened before World War II (Möhring 2018, 36).

Japanese food has been very popular in Berlin for the last two decades despite growing competition from other Asian cuisines, particularly from Korean and Vietnamese food

(Byun/Reiher 2015). Gourmet journals feature special issues on Japanese cuisine, and new culinary events related to Japan now pop up consistently.⁷ Although the first Japanese restaurants in Berlin mainly served *teppanyaki* and the first Japanese food boom in Berlin in the late 1990s revolved around sushi, Berlin's foodscapes today are characterized by an ever-increasing variety of dishes such as *okonomiyaki*, *gyōza*, noodle soups and *takoyaki*⁸ that were unknown to German consumers until recently. Additionally, Japanese desserts, sweets and beverages have gained popularity. This ongoing diversification in Berlin's Japanese foodscapes is taking place in other places outside of Japan as well and is part of the larger trend toward the globalization of Japanese food and cuisines (Cwiertka 2005; Cwiertka/Walraven 2013, Farrer et al. 2019).

There is no typical, local style of Japanese restaurant in Berlin; they are all different and unique with regard to ownership, offerings, customers and history. In the 1970s, there were only few Japanese restaurants in Berlin, of which only a small number still exist today. In the mid-1990s, sushi captured the foodscapes of German cities (Keßler 2012), with *kaiten-zushi*⁹ being particularly popular. Sachiko Sushi in Berlin, founded in 1995, claims to be the oldest *kaiten-zushi* bar in Germany (Mladenova 2013, 286). Sushi bars were not only run by Japanese people but also by other Asians, especially those with Chinese or Vietnamese backgrounds (Möhring 2018, 45). During the last decade, Japanese noodle soup restaurants that specialize in *rāmen* and *udon* opened in German cities. Japanese food is usually more expensive than other ethnic cuisines and has a reputation of being of high quality. This situation has changed with the emergence of the new noodle chains, however, and Japanese cuisine is now whatever customers imagine it to be, rather than being based on ethnicity and authenticity (Trenk 2015, 141, 142). Changing demands among Berlin's hip and health-conscious consumers for vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free and organic food in particular have inspired (and sometimes forced) Japanese food entrepreneurs and other actors selling and making Japanese cuisine in Berlin to adjust dishes and ingredients of »traditional« cuisine and to invent new fusion dishes (Reiher 2016 – 2020).

In a nutshell, although there are comparatively few Japanese immigrants in Berlin, the city features the most Japanese restaurants in Germany, which offer an ever-diversifying range of dishes and culinary creations. Japanese food experienced several booms, including the sushi boom of the late 1990s, a more general Japanese food boom that began around 2015 and – with the ongoing differentiation of Japanese cuisine – several booms that started just recently and sometimes simultaneously. They include a *matcha* (green tea powder) boom, a *rāmen* (noodle soup) boom and, most recently, an *izakaya* (Japanese snack bar) boom (Farrer/Wang 2020). While many restaurants are owned by non-Japanese people, in the following sections I will focus on how Japanese food entrepreneurs and food workers in Berlin's Japanese foodscape experienced the COVID-19 crisis and the lockdown from March to May 2020.

Timeline of the COVID-19 crisis and regulations for restaurants in Berlin

From March 22 to May 15, all restaurants in Berlin remained closed for indoor dining. With COVID-19 cases rising in Berlin in early March 2020, Berlin's federal state government instated several measures in quick succession.¹⁰ First, it decided to prohibit events with more than 1,000 participants, to close public offices and libraries and later to cancel events, including the Hanami (cherry blossom) festivals in Berlin's parks and botanical gardens. From March 16, all schools closed down. Many shops, bars, theaters and other public ven-

ues closed in mid-March as well. From March 16, restaurant opening hours were restricted from 6am to 6pm. Bars and pubs had to close completely. Beginning March 22, when more than 500 COVID-19 cases were reported, restaurants had to stop indoor dining and could only remain open for takeout and delivery to protect staff and customers alike. Whenever possible, people worked from home beginning in mid-March. Only businesses like supermarkets, banks and pharmacies that supplied consumers with everyday necessities remained open. During this time of contact restrictions and lockdown of public life, people began stockpiling staples like toilet paper, pasta and flour, resulting in empty shelves in food stores. At the end of March, it was difficult to buy certain food items, and people lining up in front of bakeries and grocery stores became a normal sight.

From March 25, entrepreneurs and restaurateurs could apply for emergency financial support (*Soforthilfe*) from Berlin's local government. Until April 9, Berlin's government had paid EUR 1.6 billion to entrepreneurs through this scheme. Self-employed persons and small restaurants received EUR 5,000 each from Berlin's local government. In addition, Germany's federal government paid out EUR 9,000 to enterprises with up to five employees and EUR 15,000 to enterprises with up to ten employees. During the summer, several loans with low interest rates and support schemes to pay rent for restaurants were initiated by the federal government and individual state governments. In addition to support for restaurant owners, food and other entrepreneurs could apply for support for their employees hit by reduced working hours. Because many restaurants had to lay off part-time and other employees, Germany's short-time work allowance scheme (*Kurzarbeitergeld*) prevented people from getting fired. During the first three months, employees received 60%¹¹ of their net income, 70% during the fourth to seventh months and 80% from the seventh month of reduced work hours. This strategy helped many employees in restaurants whose salary and working conditions were precarious even under »normal« circumstances. Precariousness is also an issue for food workers in Germany's Japanese food sector, where (particularly female) employees have to take on several jobs to make a living (Kottmann 2020, 181).

In late April, shops of a certain size were allowed to re-open in Berlin, and from April 29, customers were and (still are) obliged to wear face masks in shops and stores. From May 15, restaurants finally reopened. Although some restaurants opened right away, others continued offering only takeout services in order to protect their staff and customers' health. Many restaurateurs used the shutdown to renovate their eateries. From May 15, customers were crowding on restaurant terraces and enjoying the »new« freedom to dine at tables on the sidewalks outside of the restaurants and cafés. Many restaurateurs warmly welcomed customers back with personal conversations, posters and, in some cases, presents. Restaurateurs, however, were obliged to ensure a minimum distance of 1.5m between seats, and staff had to wear facemasks when serving customers. In addition, restaurants had to provide sanitizer spray, regularly clean tables and menus, and many restaurants removed condiments and other equipment from tables that had formerly been available to diners.

After the reopening of restaurants in May, it was mandatory to document guests' contact information and, Berlin's government set a fine in September 2020 for restaurateurs who failed to collect patrons' contact information. Although some customers complained that restaurant visits were not fun anymore, the number of happy people sitting in front of cafés and restaurants all summer left me with a different impression.

I am writing this paper in October 2020 when, after a summer of low infection rates and enjoying a life that was almost back to normal, the rates of COVID-19 infection are not only on the rise again, but actually have exceeded those from April. Measures to prevent the spread of the virus have been tightened accordingly. Restaurants now must close by 11 pm

at the latest and Berlin, like many other German cities, has become a »risk area,« meaning that residents are not allowed to travel freely due to the particularly high rate of local infections. While this paper can only focus on the experiences of the past seven months, the tragedies and uncertainties related to the pandemic continue and will be the object of future investigations.

Experiences: Japanese restaurateurs during the COVID-19 crisis

Although restaurants in Berlin were closed for indoor dining between March 22 and May 15, 2020, not all restaurants were completely closed. When I walked through Berlin's Charlottenburg district on May 8, for example, most Japanese establishments and particularly the sushi restaurants were open for takeout. It was a sunny afternoon, and people walked around in small groups and lined up in front of restaurants, guided by marks taped on the floor to ensure the minimum distance of 1.5m, to pick up food they had ordered via phone or online. Of the 15 Japanese restaurants in the neighborhood I visited that day, only four were really closed, all owned by Japanese restaurateurs. On the other hand, many sushi restaurants – all owned by Vietnamese restaurateurs – were open for takeout and/or delivery services for limited hours, mainly because takeout had already been part of their business model before the COVID-19 lockdown. Some shuttered Japanese restaurants had left notes on their windows telling customers in German, English and Japanese that they had closed their restaurants for an undefined period and expressing hope that their customers would stay healthy. Restaurateurs often shared these messages online via their websites or social media accounts, too. However, there were also restaurants that were closed without any message, on- or offline.

This account of the situation during the shutdown shows that restaurateurs making and selling Japanese food in Berlin had different ways of handling the time when indoor dining in restaurants was prohibited. While some completely closed their restaurants, others remained open for a few hours a day to cater to customers who came for takeout food or to prepare food for delivery. Accordingly, depending on their individual situation, Japanese restaurateurs experienced the shutdown differently. But what all the restaurateurs we interviewed have in common is that their narration of the COVID-19 crisis was organized according to the time before, during and after the restaurant shutdown. The following account of their experiences is organized accordingly.

The Japanese restaurant owners we interviewed recalled that even before the actual restaurant lockdown began on March 22, business was slow. Restaurants offering business lunch for workers in neighboring companies told us that people had already stopped coming in early March because they were working at home and did not go out for lunch anymore, while others feared getting infected with COVID-19 while eating out. Daisuke, who runs a small Japanese restaurant specializing in Japanese home-style food, had to close his restaurant at 6 pm (usually it is open until 10 pm) under the new regulations that began on March 16. Daily turnover during that week dropped to one-fifth of the usual, which was not even enough to pay the staff's salary, he said. Another restaurant owner who runs a restaurant that serves deep-fried skewered meat and vegetables closed down his restaurant even before March 22, because their opening hours had started at 6 pm and, under the new rules, restaurants were obliged to close by that time (interview with Michihiko, May 27, 2020).

None of our research participants received any official notice from Berlin's local authorities about the date of the lockdown, but instead learned about it from the news and on

the internet. During the lockdown, independent restaurateurs stayed at home, read books, went for walks and spent time with their families. Many actually recalled this time as quiet and relaxing, enjoying the time-off from their usually busy schedules. But not all restaurateurs could afford or wanted to close, and they started or further developed existing takeout services. But regardless of whether food entrepreneurs closed their businesses, all were worried about financial issues and suffered from uncertainty surrounding the duration of the lockdown. Paying rent was a particular problem for all the entrepreneurs who ran their own eateries. Due to the economic uncertainties, all interviewees had to apply for the short-term work allowance for their employees and for government support for the restaurants.

Overall, our research participants evaluated government support positively. To apply for these funds, many Japanese food entrepreneurs in Berlin had to get help from German-speaking friends, but the application process nonetheless went rather smoothly. One difficulty that all interviewees complained about was that although applications for the short-term work allowance went comparatively smoothly, restaurant owners had to pay their employees first and then wait for reimbursement from the Federal Employment Agency (*Agentur für Arbeit*). When we interviewed Japanese restaurateurs in June, however, they still had not received the reimbursements from March, April and May, which put some of them into a very difficult financial situation and added to stress caused by the low turnover after restaurants reopened in mid-May.

While experience with government support varied depending on the scheme, the immediate support (*Soforthilfe*) for entrepreneurs was evaluated more positively than the short-time work allowance, not in terms of usefulness but in terms of availability and procedure. However, *Soforthilfe* was considered more helpful by self-employed food entrepreneurs who did not run restaurants but were in catering businesses, for example, because they did not have to pay a monthly rent. Naoko, who runs a catering business, said for example that she was happy to receive EUR 5,000 of *Soforthilfe* to support herself for several months. Catering orders were at zero even in June because the companies she had catered for neither ordered lunch for their employees, who were only slowly called back to work in the office, nor were there any events taking place where people were allowed to share food. Restaurateurs who had a restaurant with fixed costs said that the government support only helped to pay the rent, insurance and ancillary costs:

It's simply not enough. At the moment, I don't have any income at all. I live off my savings. I guess that people with no savings have to close their restaurants. [...] If my savings are exhausted, I have to apply for a loan. (interview with Daisuke, May 23, 2020)¹²

As Daisuke emphasized in our interview, even with the government support schemes that all interviewees considered useful, food entrepreneurs' ability to cope with the COVID-19 crisis economically depended to a large extent on their economic capital.

When restaurants reopened in mid-May, most restaurants that had been closed during the shutdown opened again. But some that had continued business with takeout and/or delivery services did not reopen for indoor dining right away, mainly to protect staff and customers (interview with Ryōhei, June 4, 2020). And despite the fact that customers appeared happy to come back, business was sluggish and customers were slow to return (partly) due to new regulations to maintain physical distance between customers. Despite the slow business over the summer, all interviewees were glad to be back to work for everyday structure and meaning. They told us the same was true for their employees as well. But in some cases,

even with the short-term work allowance, restaurateurs had had to lay off employees, resulting in longer work hours for fewer staff and greater physical stress on the restaurateurs (interview with Mihoko, May 25, 2020).

No matter how different the restaurants were in terms of size, number of employees, location or type of food sold, all restaurateurs we interviewed experienced economic uncertainties and worries about the future shortly before, during and after lockdown. Even in May and June, our research participants stated that what they feared most was another shutdown of restaurants that would, in most cases, mean the end of their business. While most said that they could now cope with the loss during the lockdown and slow turnover over the summer, their savings would not be enough to survive such a situation again. However, some businesses that were already struggling faced more difficulties after the first shutdown in spring 2020 (interview with Mihoko, May 25, 2020).

In summary, Berlin's Japanese restaurateurs' experiences shortly before, during and after the restaurant shutdown from March 22 to May 15, 2020, differed depending on their decision to close their restaurants or to stay open for takeout and/or delivery. Despite the fact that some restaurateurs who completely closed their restaurants experienced two months of well-deserved vacation, none of our interviewees found this time truly relaxing. All were busy applying for government support for their businesses, and employees and were worried about their economic future. Neither government support nor the support of regular customers after the shutdown could make up for the financial losses or rid restaurateurs of their fears of a second restaurant shutdown. However, the crisis also enabled innovation and creativity, at least among some.

Practices: Selling Japanese food during the crisis

In early May, I often saw a long queue in front of a Japanese restaurant in Berlin's Charlottenburg district. This rather expensive restaurant sold exclusive Japanese lunch boxes (*o-bentō*) to its customers. Customers could pre-order via phone or email and pick up their order during a specific time slot. Selling *o-bentō* was also a common practice by restaurants in Japan during that time (Farrer 2020; Wadwha 2020). In Berlin, people were regularly lining up in front of that popular Japanese restaurant in Charlottenburg to pick up their pre-ordered lunch boxes, which at EUR 59 were probably the most expensive *o-bentō* in town. Most other Japanese restaurants in Berlin who offered *bentō* boxes kept them simple, with rice, *kara'age*, *tamagoyaki* and pickles like those typically available in Japanese *konbini* or supermarkets. But the EUR 59 *o-bentō* was much more elaborate. With miso soup as a starter, chocolate mousse for a desert, steak, salad and *sashimi*,¹³ it resembled a multi-course dinner more than a lunch box. Nevertheless, it always sold out quickly.

Like in many other urban areas around the world that experienced shutdowns (see e.g., Farrer 2020), restaurateurs in Berlin began to change their business practices to takeout and/or delivery services. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, many of Berlin's restaurateurs became creative and developed new takeout or delivery services or online offers. The latter, for example, included websites where professional chefs shared recipes with customers for a small fee and provided ideas for lighting and music to go with the food. Some takeout offers included multi-course menus, while some bars even delivered cocktails to their clients via email order (Schönstädt 2020). Although some restaurants initiated these services after the lockdown began, many Asian food restaurants and particularly sushi restaurants had long-established takeout and delivery services.

Japanese food entrepreneurs also engaged in other forms of innovation. Analysis of the websites of more than 100 Japanese restaurants in Berlin and our walks around town showed that only a few restaurants were completely closed. During the lockdown, smaller restaurants owned by Japanese restaurateurs were often closed, but others kept up business by providing takeout or delivery services. One Japanese restaurant group that runs several restaurants in Berlin and is owned by a Japanese entrepreneur started takeout services at one of its branches shortly after lockdown began. It offered sushi as well as dishes like *donburi*, soups and *nimono*.¹⁴ It created a vibrant takeout and delivery business that is still running successfully to date. Another Japanese restaurant in the Prenzlauer Berg district changed its menu from mainly sweets to *o-bentō* in order to offer a takeout service to people in the neighborhood. Daily offers were announced via Instagram, and business went surprisingly well. Many restaurants that had offered takeout and delivery before continued to do so during lockdown. Restaurants that had already established structures for delivery and takeout tended to be in a better position to cope with the lockdown. While some restaurants received orders directly at their establishments, others took orders via food delivery companies like Lieferando. However, one Japanese restaurateur told me that he wanted to become a Lieferando member during lockdown but could not register because of the large demand and had to join a waiting list (interview with Ryōhei, June 4, 2020).

Many restaurants, regardless of whether they offered takeout or delivery services, created vouchers for customers to use after lockdown. Some were created individually by the respective restaurants and others via the community website Helfen.Berlin, for example. Vouchers ranged from EUR 10 to EUR 100 and could be purchased in restaurants or online. This strategy worked very well for some restaurants, and their owners stressed how impressed they were with the community solidarity. But the level of solidarity seemed to differ depending on the neighborhood in which the restaurants were located. Although regulars did come back after the shutdown and bought vouchers to support the Japanese restaurants of all the owners whom we interviewed, the culture of community support seemed to be



Figure 1: Information about takeout in front of a Japanese restaurant in early May, 2020

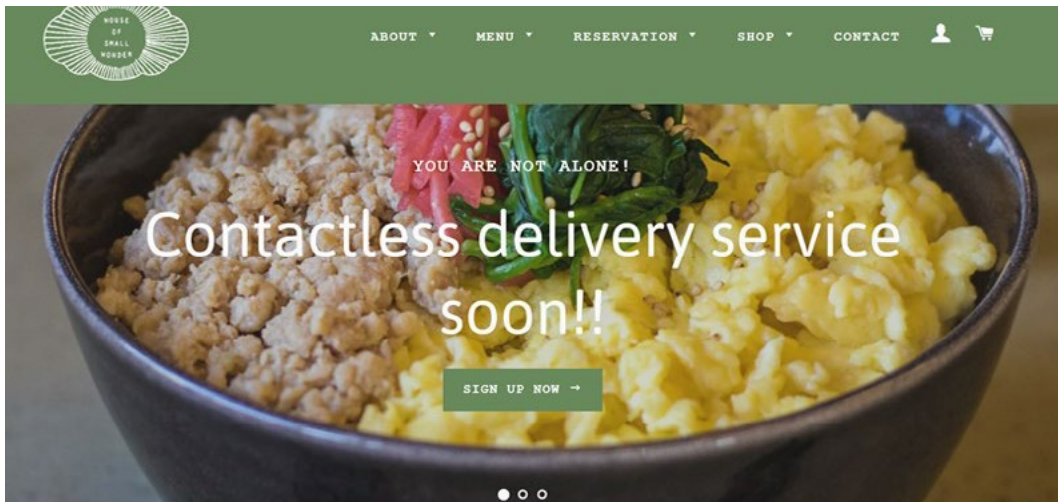


Figure 2: Website of a Japanese restaurant on March 25, 2020

more relevant in Berlin's hip districts in the north and east of the city where more young people live (interview with Ryōhei, June 4, 2020). In his account of how independent restaurateurs in a specific neighborhood in Tokyo coped with the COVID-19 crisis, James Farrer (2020, 2) shows how the pandemic opened new opportunities for restaurateurs to establish good relations with their neighborhood through offering takeout services, for example. Like these independent restaurateurs in Tokyo, some of Berlin's Japanese restaurateurs developed new products by changing their menu to foods more suitable for takeout, inventing new sales strategies by beginning inhouse delivery services or designing new modes of outreach to the community and customers by selling vouchers.

Social media appeared to be particularly helpful during the restaurant shutdown for announcing (new) takeout and delivery services. Those restaurateurs who successfully ran takeout and delivery services used their website and/or social media. Messages were often written in German, English and sometimes Japanese (if the restaurant was owned by a Japanese speaker) and informed customers of takeout or delivery options and offers or announced that such offers were in preparation and offered alternatives such as vouchers. These messages often included very personal notes and encouraged customers to hang in there, to take care and to stay healthy. One restaurant even posted poems.

While these accounts sound rather positive, many Japanese food entrepreneurs did not create new takeout services if none had been in place before lockdown. They provided two main explanations for this decision. The first was cultural, arguing that Japanese food is not suited for delivery. We heard this explanation quite often and were surprised because many other Japanese restaurateurs engaged in takeout services, not only for sushi but for many other Japanese dishes as well. Asked why he refrained from offering to-go or delivery services, one Japanese restaurateur told me that all the food they serve is hand-made, not ready-made. He suspected that those restaurateurs selling Japanese food for takeout used ready-made sauces and other ingredients. In addition, he doubted that the taste would be satisfying if customers took the food home and heated it up again. But more importantly, he added—and it felt like this second argument was more important to him—switching to takeout would have not made sense economically. Because he had sent all his staff into *Kurzarbeit* (short-time work) and they made everything by hand, he would have had to prepare everything himself, which he calculated would have taken him about ten hours a day.

He doubted that the turnover would actually have justified his effort (interview with Daisuke, May 23, 2020). Similarly, another Japanese restaurateur added that switching to takeout would have required preparing a different marketing strategy and buying containers for takeout. He did not think the effort would have been worth it (interview with Michihiko, May 27, 2020). Besides the economic argument, which might be more important in this situation, both restaurateurs expressed very strong opinions about the quality of their food. Thus, whether Japanese food entrepreneurs decided to engage in takeout services during the COVID-19 restaurant shutdown was affected by the type of food that they sold, as well as their attitudes towards Japanese food and its quality.

In summary, many Japanese restaurateurs engaged in takeout and/or delivery services during the restaurant shutdown. Some used existing structures, whereas others initiated them after March 22. Some even changed their menus in order to make them more suitable for takeout. However, there was a number of Japanese food entrepreneurs who did not chose to offer takeout services for economic reasons and because they feared a reduction in the quality of their food. In addition, individual restaurateurs and community initiatives created vouchers to be used after lockdown to support struggling restaurants. The internet and particularly social media proved to be important avenues of communication for all these strategies, however, placing older entrepreneurs at a disadvantage. Community support for restaurants differed according to the restaurant's neighborhood and seemed better in neighborhoods with younger and more internet-savvy residents.

Material culture: Protecting staff and customers

My first visit after reopening for indoor dining in mid-May to a Japanese restaurant that I had used to frequent often was very different from previous experiences. Even though I had made a reservation, I had to wait outside the restaurant until I was asked to enter. There



Figure 3: Sanitizer provided from an installation that looked like a Japanese shrine in a Japanese restaurant (photograph by Agata Olszewska, May 2020 in Berlin)



Figures 4 and 5: Measures taken in and outside of restaurants to protect customers and staff from COVID-19 (photographs by the author, May 2020 in Berlin)

were large signs displaying the hygiene rules: wear facemasks, maintain distance and sanitize and wash one's hands. When I was allowed to enter, I was asked to sanitize my hands with sanitizer provided from an installation that looked like a Japanese shrine. I had to wear my facemask until I was seated. Before placing my order, I was asked to enter my contact information into a form that asked for my email address, home address, phone number and relationship to the people accompanying me. When I received my food, I was asked to take it from the tray myself so that the waitress did not have to touch it. Soy sauce and other condiments that were usually provided freely on the table were missing and came with the food in small plastic packages instead. Free, self-serve tea refills were also impossible due to the hygiene restrictions. I could, however, order tea directly from the staff.

The place itself had also changed. In order to follow the social distancing rules, half of the tables had been removed from one side of the restaurant, where four staff members, all of whom wore facemasks, put together food boxes for takeout and delivery orders. In the middle of the restaurant, two large tables were filled with menus and sanitizer, and two staff members were constantly busy sanitizing the menus and cleaning tables once customers had left. Although the food was as delicious as always, I wondered whether dining would look like from now on, and what it implied for restaurateurs and staff. This is an experience probably familiar to many urbanites around the world when they ate out for the first time after the COVID-19 lockdown. But how did new hygiene regulations installed to protect staff and guests from COVID-19 actually change the material culture of restaurants?

From the end of March to early April, when restaurants were still closed for indoor dining, shops began to install partition walls between customers and staff at counters and cash registers. They were manufactured in quite creative ways, particularly in the beginning when many shop and restaurant owners had to improvise. Some partition walls were made from perspex discs, transparent foil that was usually used to wrap gifts or plastic curtains. It was not until April 29, 2020, that wearing facemasks in shops and restaurants became mandatory in Berlin; thus, these often quite improvised constructions were the only way



Figures 6 and 7: Tape mark spots for customers to line up in front of restaurants (photographs by the author, May 2020 in Berlin)

to protect staff and customers from each other in the weeks before. With time, takeout services in restaurants increased and protection measures became more elaborate, including for example preparing counters to minimize contact between staff and takeout customers. Some restaurants distributed takeout food from windows; others even cut holes into their windows to create even smaller contact zones (figure 4). Some restaurants allowed takeout customers into their restaurants in May but created counters with protective measures (figure 5). In addition, restaurants regulated waiting lines and minimum distances for those waiting by putting marks on the sidewalk (figures 6 and 7).

After restaurants reopened for indoor dining, all employees who were in direct contact with customers had to wear masks, whereas customers could remove their masks once seated. While Farrer (2020) mentions that many restaurateurs in Tokyo were worried about their health and the spread of COVID-19, surprisingly, only one of the Japanese restaurant owners whom we interviewed was worried about his own health and the health of his employees and customers. In one restaurant, only one of the 18 employees did not return to work after the shutdown because she was worried about becoming infected and then infecting her husband, who belonged to an at-risk group.

While some restaurants took hygiene rules more seriously and implemented additional measures like the staff not touching serving dishes, as described above, all restaurants had to implement the minimum social distancing measures and modified seating arrangements, and some removed tables from the dining rooms. In some restaurants where staff members spoke Japanese only, the hygiene rules were translated into Japanese by the owner and pinned to the wall. The handling of sanitization also differed across restaurants. Some Japanese restaurants used the Japanese custom of providing hot towels (*oshibori*) to customers to wash their hands before they dined and additionally offered them sanitizer. In other restaurants, as in the one I described above, sanitizer was installed at the entrance to the restaurant, and staff members reminded guests to use it to sanitize their hands as they entered.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed what restaurants look like. These changes varied over time. In the beginning, restaurants installed partition walls on counters or served takeout customers through windows. After the reopening of restaurants for indoor dining, all restaurants adjusted their seating arrangements to ensure a minimum distance of 1.5 m between guests either by removing tables, assigning guests to tables or putting »reserved« signs on some tables. Wearing masks has now become a matter of course in all restaurants, and self-service has stopped. Some Japanese restaurants tried to incorporate the use of hand sanitizer into Japanese culinary culture through *oshibori* or by making dispensers look more Japanese to fit in with the restaurant interior. Over the summer, eating outside was very popular and helped make staff and customers alike feel safer. How this will change against the backdrop of winter and the rapid increase of COVID-19 infections remains to be seen.

Summary

In this paper, I analyzed how Japanese restaurateurs in Berlin experienced the shutdown of their restaurants due to the COVID-19 pandemic and their reopening in the spring and early summer of 2020. With a focus on Japanese restaurateurs, I showed that their experiences differed, and that experiences and strategies were influenced by economic factors related to the type of restaurant they ran rather than by their ethnicity. There is no typical Japanese restaurant in Berlin. All are unique with regard to ownership, offerings, customers and history. How Japanese restaurateurs in Berlin have coped with the COVID-19 pandemic depends on their type, size, available resources and staff, the food they usually serve and their ability to redesign the menu to accommodate takeout or delivery.

Accordingly, restaurateurs' experiences shortly before, during and after the restaurant shutdown differed depending on their decision to close or to stay open for takeout and/or delivery. All our interviewees applied for government support for their businesses and employees and worried about their economic futures. However, neither government support nor the reassuring support of regular customers after the shutdown could make up for the financial losses or relieve restaurateurs of their fears of a second shutdown. The situation was harshest for self-employed catering entrepreneurs for whom events and business lunches had been cancelled, although they found government support helpful and sufficient to get by for a few months. On the other hand, government support was not sufficient in the long term for restaurants with running costs like rents and personnel.

However, the crisis also enabled innovation and creativity, at least in some cases. Innovation took diverse forms, like engaging in takeout and/or delivery services during the restaurant shutdown, changing menus to make them more suitable for takeout (e.g., preparing Japanese lunch boxes) or selling vouchers. For all these strategies, the internet and particularly social media proved to be important avenues of communication with customers, putting not only older entrepreneurs but also restaurants in neighborhoods with less internet-oriented residents at a disadvantage. Accordingly, community support for restaurants differed across neighborhoods and seemed to be higher in neighborhoods where younger and more internet-oriented people reside.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also changed restaurants' materialities, particularly what restaurants look like. These changes include installations to protect staff and takeout customers from each other, adjustment of seating arrangements to ensure the minimum distance of 1.5 m between guests, wearing masks and suspending self-service. Some Japanese

restaurants tried to incorporate the use of sanitizer into Japanese culinary culture and into their interior design. But dining out has changed in all Japanese restaurants we visited in Berlin. While low numbers of COVID-19 infections and eating outside helped to prevent anxiety about infection among staff and customers over the summer, the situation is changing now against the backdrop of a rapid increase of COVID-19 infections and an approaching winter. The greatest fear of all Japanese restaurateurs we interviewed in May and June 2020 was a second shutdown. We sincerely hope that none will come into effect. To our knowledge, to date, no Japanese restaurant in Berlin has had to close permanently due to the COVID-19 crisis. Whether this would still be true after a second shutdown, we do not know. But the closing of any Japanese restaurant in Berlin endangers not only the city's culinary plurality, but also the livelihood of the restaurant's owners, managers and employees.

Future research will have to observe how well government support schemes and community support can prevent restaurants in Berlin from experiencing long-term financial setbacks. It remains to be seen whether Farrer's (2020, 1) observation that both government support and community support have been key to sustaining independent restaurants in Tokyo during the COVID-19 pandemic can be applied to the situation in Berlin and over a longer period. But Japanese restaurateurs in Berlin certainly will draw on experiences from the first shutdown and build on their takeout and delivery structures, community networks and communication channels established in April and May 2020. Both Farrer (2020) and Wadhwa (2020) have shown how coping with COVID-19 has also opened new opportunities for restaurateurs in Tokyo, including opportunities based on cooperation. This is certainly true for some Japanese food entrepreneurs in Berlin as well, and it offers hope for the time in the future when the COVID-19 pandemic will have finally ended.

Endnotes

- 1 I would like to thank all students who participated in the method course I taught in summer 2020. I am particularly grateful to Maritchu Durand and Furkan Kemik for their help with finding interview partners and for building an archive of Japanese restaurants' websites over the summer, as well as for their comments on this paper.
- 2 Students created videos to display the results of their own research projects. These can be viewed (in German) on our course blog »Forschungswerkstatt Japanische Küche in Berlin« (Research workshop on Japanese foodscapes in Berlin) via this link: <https://userblogs.fu-berlin.de/forschungswerkstatt-japan/> (Reiher 2016 – 2020).
- 3 In comparison, in the same year, 8,451 Japanese persons lived in Düsseldorf and 4,866 in Munich (Gaimushō 2019).
- 4 There is, however, another group of Japanese immigrants in Berlin who left Japan after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster and decided to live abroad for health and safety reasons.
- 5 All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.
- 6 This is due to the particular immigration history of former Vietnamese contract workers who were sent to the former GDR in the 1980s, of whom 25,000 stayed after the German reunification in 1990. Because they did not have a residence permit, they could not enter the labor market and opened their own businesses, including restaurants to survive. In the 1990s, Vietnamese food entrepreneurs sold »Asian« food like the (in)famous »Chinapfanne,« opened or took over Thai, Chinese, Korean and sushi restaurants and disguised their ethnic identity because they believed that Vietnamese food would be rejected by mainstream German consumers (Bui 2003: 179). Around 2000, there were approximately 600 Asian restaurants in Berlin, the majority of which were small-scale eateries run by Vietnamese immigrants (Bui 2003: 185, 86). Only recently have Vietnamese food entrepreneurs successfully entered the high-class restaurant market, opened high-end Japanese (fusion) restaurants and set new culinary trends. Vietnamese owners are now hiring Japanese chefs (Farrer and Wang 2020: 9, 10), while Vietnamese staff is also employed in restaurants run by Japanese managers.
- 7 See for example Garçon 2017, Tagesspiegel Genuss 2017, Lust auf Genuss 2019.

- 8 *Teppanyaki* is a dish that uses an iron griddle to cook food. *Okonomiyaki* is a Japanese savory pancake containing various ingredients. *Gyōza* are dumplings filled with ground meat and vegetables. *Takoyaki* is a ball-shaped snack made of dough filled with octopus.
- 9 *Kaiten-zushi* or conveyor belt sushi is served on plates on rotating conveyor belts. In some restaurants in Germany, sushi plates rotate on little boats travelling on water in small canals.
- 10 The summary of anti-COVID-19 measures is based on the Berlin Senate Chancellery (2020), Betschka and Kiesel (2020) and information from more than 100 articles about COVID-19 regulations and Berlin's gastronomy from Berlin's daily newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* that we retrieved from the database <https://www.wiso-net.de/> between March 2 and September 10, 2020.
- 11 The raise of this short-time work allowance after the fourth month depends on certain conditions. For example, the percentage of an employee's salary paid out via *Kurzarbeitergeld* rises to 67%, 77% or 87%, respectively, if they have at least one child.
- 12 Translated from Japanese to English by the author.
- 13 *Kara'age* is deep fried chicken. *Tamagoyaki* is a Japanese omelette. *Sashimi* is fresh raw fish or meat sliced into thin pieces. *Konbini* is the Japanese term for convenience stores or small retail businesses that sell everyday items and ready-made food.
- 14 *Donburi* is a Japanese dish served in a large bowl of rice with fish, meat or vegetables. *Nimono* is a dish with vegetable, fish, seafood and/or tofu simmered in soup stock flavored with sake, soy sauce, and a small amount of sweetening.
- 15 [houseofsmallwonder.de](https://www.houseofsmallwonder.de/), accessed March 25, 2020.
- 16 [houseofsmallwonder.de](https://www.houseofsmallwonder.de/), accessed March 25, 2020.

References

- Becker, Bert (1996): Japan an der Spree. Deutsch-japanische Beziehungen im Spiegel Berlins und Brandenburgs. Berlin.
- Berlin-Senate chancellery (2020): Corona virus information. <https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/>, accessed October 25, 2020.
- Betschka, Julius/Robert Kiesel (2020): Die Chronik der Ungewissheit. Wie Berlin in den Shutdown steuerte – und nun wieder raus will. In: *Der Tagesspiegel*. April 22, 2020. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/reportage/die-chronik-der-ungewissheit-wie-berlin-in-den-shutdown-steuerte-und-nun-wieder-raus-will/25760264.html>, accessed September 14, 2020.
- Bui, Pipo (2003): Envisioning Vietnamese Migrants in Germany: Ethnic stigma, immigrant origin narratives and partial masking. Münster.
- Byun, You-Kyung/Cornelia Reiher (2015): Kulinarische Globalisierung. Koreanische Restaurants in Berlin zwischen Authentizität und Hybridisierung. In: Cornelia Reiher/ Sarah Ruth Sippel (eds.): *Umkämpftes Essen. Produktion, Handel und Konsum von Lebensmitteln in globalen Kontexten*. Göttingen, 271 – 291.
- Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. (2005): From Ethnic to Hip. Circuits of Japanese cuisine in Europe. In: *Food & Foodways* 13, 241 – 272.
- Cwiertka, Katarzyna J./Boudewijn Walraven (eds.) (2013): *Asian Food. The global and the local*. London.
- DEHOGA (2020): DEHOGA zieht Corona-Zwischenbilanz. Gastgewerbe weiterhin in großer Not. <https://www.dehoga-bundesverband.de/presse-news/aktuelles/dehoga-zieht-corona-zwischenbilanz-gastgewerbe-weiterhin-in-grosser-not/>, accessed September 10, 2020.
- Farrer, James et al. (2019): Culinary Mobilities. The Multiple Globalizations of Japanese Cuisine. In: Cecilia Leong-Salobir (ed.): *Routledge Handbook of Food in Asia*. Abington, 39 – 57.
- Farrer, James (2020): How are Tokyo's Independent Restauranteurs Surviving the Pandemic? In: *The Asia-Pacific Journal. Japan Focus* Volume 18, 13. <https://apjif.org/2020/18/Farrer.html>, accessed October 2, 2020.
- Farrer, James/Chuanfei Wang (2020): Who owns a cuisine? The grassroots politics of Japanese food in Europe. In: *Asian Anthropology*, DOI: 10.1080/1683478X.2020.1774960, 1 – 18
- Gaimushō (2019): Kaigai zairyū hōjin kazu chōsa tōkei [Statistics about the number of Japanese nationals living abroad]. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/page22_000043.html, accessed September 23, 2020.
- Garçon (2017): *Japan in Berlin*. Berlin.
- Gegg, Michael/Manuel Kostrzynski/Hendrik Lehmann/Helena Wittlich (2020): Coronakrise am Arbeitsmarkt. Berlin bundesweit am Härtesten von Corona-Arbeitslosigkeit betroffen. In: *Der Tagesspiegel*, June 8, 2020. <https://interaktiv.tagesspiegel.de/lab/wie-die-coronakrise-den-arbeitsmarkt-getroffen-hat/>, accessed September 20, 2020.

- Gerster, Julia/Natalia Morokhova (2020): Picturing translocal matters in a mobile world. Photography as a method of ethnographic research at a Japanese gathering in Berlin. In: *Contemporary Japan* 32/2, 150 – 173.
- MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries) (2019): Kaigai ni okeru nihonshoku resutoran no kazu. <https://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/shokusan/service/attach/pdf/191213-1.pdf>, accessed September 2, 2020.
- Kelsky, Karen (2001): *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western dreams*. Durham and London.
- Keßler, Sandra (2012): Japanisch, exotisch, kosmopolitisch, modern. Sushi als Global Food in Deutschland. In: Sandra Keßler et al. (eds.): *Interkulturalität und Alltag*. Münster, 147 – 160.
- Kottmann, Nora (2020): Japanese Women on the Move. Working in and (Not) Belonging to Düsseldorf's Japanese (Food) Community. In: Matta, Raúl, Chantal Crenn, Charles-Edouard de Suremain (eds.): *Food Identities at Home and on the Move: Explorations at the Intersection of Food, Belonging and Dwelling*. London, 293 – 318.
- Lust auf Genuss (2019): *Japanisch kochen*. München.
- Mladenova, Dorothea (2013): Sushi global: Zwischen J-branding und kulinarischem Nationalismus. In: *Japan 2013: Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 275 – 297.
- Möhrling, Maren (2018): Von Schwalbennestern und neuen Fingerfertigkeiten. Globalisierung und esskulturelle Transfers am Beispiel asiatischer Küchen in Deutschland. In: *Jahrbuch für Kulinaristik* 2, 31 – 51.
- Ono, Mayumi (2015): Descending from Japan: Lifestyle mobility of Japanese male youth to Thailand. In: *Asian Anthropology* 14/3, 249 – 264.
- Reiher, Cornelia (2018): Japanese Foodscapes in Berlin. Teaching research methods through food. In: *ASIEN – The German Journal on Contemporary Asia* 149, 111 – 124.
- Reiher, Cornelia (2016 – 2020): Forschungswerkstatt „Japanische Küche in Berlin“. <https://userblogs.fu-berlin.de/forschungswerkstatt-japan/>, accessed October 25, 2020.
- Schmiz, Antonie (2017): Staging a ‚Chinatown‘ in Berlin. The role of city branding in the urban governance of ethnic diversity. In: *European Urban and Regional Studies* 24/3, 290 – 303.
- Schönstädt, Annika (2020): Eine Branche erfindet sich neu. In: *Berliner Morgenpost*, March 29, 2020. <https://www.morgenpost.de/gastronomie/essen/restaurants/article228792303/Corona-Krise-Eine-Branche-erfindet-sich-neu.html>
- Sugimoto, Yoshio (1993): *Nihonjin o yameru hōhō* [how to quit being Japanese]. Tokyo.
- Tagesspiegel Genuss (2017): Oishii in Berlin. Berlin (Summer 2017).
- Tagsold, C. (2011): Establishing the ideal foreigner representations of Japanese community in Dusseldorf, Germany. In: *Encounters* 3/1, 143 – 168.
- Trenk, Marin (2015): *Döner Hawaii. Unser globalisiertes Essen*. Stuttgart.
- Wadhwa, Megha (2020): In the Age of COVID-19. Indian restaurants and the Indian cooks in Japan. In: *The Asia Pacific Journal. Japan Focus* Volume 18/18, <https://apjff.org/2020/18/Wadhwa.html>, accessed October 2, 2020.
- Yu-Dembksi, Dagmar (2007): *Chinesen in Berlin*. Berlin.

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Information about takeout in front of a Japanese restaurant in early May, 2020
- Figure 2: Website of a Japanese restaurant on March 25, 2020¹⁵
- Figure 3: Sanitizer provided from an installation that looked like a Japanese shrine in a Japanese restaurant (photograph by Agata Olszewska, May 2020 in Berlin)
- Figure 4/5: Measures taken in and outside of restaurants to protect customers and staff from COVID-19 (photographs by the author, May 2020 in Berlin)
- Figures 6/7: Tape mark spots for customers to line up in front of restaurants (photographs by the author, May 2020 in Berlin)