

# Pizza in Japan

By Rossella Ceccarini



Pizza Hut anime commercial showing friends sharing pizza. ©Pizza Hut Japan. Source: <http://tiny.cc/nfh57>.

As a lover of *onsen* (hot springs), I often frequented them during my five-year sojourn in Japan. Once, I went to Lake Kawaguchi to enjoy the onsen and the view of Mount Fuji. Arriving in time for lunch, I asked the hotel receptionist for food suggestions. It must have been because I am Italian, or perhaps because the hotel could just sense I was researching Japanese pizza, that rather than recommending a noodle shop, she suggested the pizza at the Mt. Fuji Smoke House, which was located in a nearby mall. Moved by curiosity, I walked to the shopping center, and the small, first-floor restaurant resembled a bakery but sported a “Pizzeria” sign and a green, white, and red curtain. I picked up one of the fliers outside the shop that read:

*Our proud premium pizza is a real Napoli style pizza of rich and stretched dough baked on the Mt Fuji’s lava stone. Topped with home-made Italian style cheese (Mozzarella and Provolone) and smoked ham and bacon. [sic]*

Thus, I tried a slice of Pizza Margherita (named after an Italian queen) with mozzarella and tomato and a slice of ham and mushroom pizza for 300 yen (about US \$3.69) each. Although the size was smaller than standard Italian pizza, the dough had the same marshmallow-like consistency of Napoli-style pizza. I thought the only city to have a Napoli-style pizza with a volcano in the background could be Naples, but the Mt. Fuji Smoke House proved me wrong.

Upon returning to my Tokyo apartment after the holiday, I checked the mailbox. Unsurprisingly, Domino’s Pizza, Pizza Hut, and several random delivery pizza

commercial fliers were waiting for me, and along with the typical pepperoni pizzas, they featured a wide range of seasonal and special pizzas, including winter camembert cheese and a sausage-framed pizza. Pizza is ubiquitous in Japan, and it can be found in supermarkets, family restaurants, and school cafeterias.

The essay that follows begins with the history of pizza, how it spread to Japan, and examples of current pizza palate pleasers there. The rise of pizza’s popularity around the world gives students an excellent chance to learn that globalization is not a new phenomenon and may help them understand some of the ways that diffusion of a particular cuisine can impact different cultures.

## The History of Pizza

In ancient times, pizza used to be simple flat bread, probably originating in the region which is today contemporary Israel and in the areas of the Middle East where Levantine Arabic is spoken (e.g., Cyprus, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria). Two well-known scholars of antiquity, Mario Alinei and Ephraim Nissan, contend that both the dish and the term “pizza” spread throughout Mediterranean Europe in two different stages. Syrians first introduced a plain focaccia bread and later a seasoned version, followed by a Byzantine phase that featured a seasoned or stuffed flat bread.<sup>1</sup>

However, it was much later—around the 1600s in Naples—that pizza became a popular local food. The Neapolitan version was a fried or baked bread stuffed with humble ingredients such as garlic, lard, and cheese and was eaten

**Pizza made its first appearance in Japan following World War II, with Nicola's and Antonio's among the first restaurants to serve pizza in the 1950s.**

Nick (Nicola) Zappetti in 1982, the year he became a Japanese citizen. Source: *Tokyo Underworld: The Fast Times and Hard Life of an American Gangster in Japan* by Robert Whiting. (New York: Pantheon, 1999; Vintage Departures)



making a handcrafted pizza, only a few ingredients garnish it, and no two pizzas of this genre will taste the same. Flavor and crust texture depend on the pizzaiolo's expertise, the quality of the ingredients, and the oven.

Standardized pizza originated in the US and is made in steel ovens, utilizing mass production techniques, then sold by pizza chain restaurants. Standardized pizzas come in all sizes with a variety of toppings, but they often tend to be large and heavily garnished. The standardized pizza has a homogeneous taste so that the Domino's pepperoni pizza ordered in Chicago should taste like the one ordered in London, Paris, or Tokyo. The standardized pizza and the handcrafted pizza are found in Japan in both American and Italian styles, as well as in a variety of domesticated forms.

**Pizza in Japan**

Pizza made its first appearance in Japan following World War II, with Nicola's and Antonio's among the first restaurants to serve pizza in the 1950s. Both were located in the Tokyo area of Roppongi and were named after their owners. Nicola Zappetti was an Italian-American marine who converted himself into a restaurateur. Antonio Cancemi was an Italian-trained chef from Sicily who arrived in Japan on board an Italian military vessel. In these



Advertisement for Nicola's Pizza House. Source: <http://tiny.cc/q23zq>.

early days, pizza was a luxury food, available only to foreigners, especially Americans and wealthy Japanese.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1970s, pizza chains entered the pizza market, taking advantage, we can assume, of the revision of the March 1969 foreign capital law that enabled foreign-capitalized restaurants to compete against Japanese restaurants or for joint ventures to occur between Japanese and American corporations. Since 1945, the Japanese government for the most part did not permit any of these activities, and by and large the restaurant industry welcomed the changes.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to legal reform, pizza became widespread and affordable for Japanese consumers, at least in urban areas. In 1973, Shakey's Pizza and Pizza Hut opened, and Domino's Pizza followed in 1985. The first Japanese delivery chain, Pizza La, opened in the Mejiro area of Tokyo in 1986.

However, in rural areas during the 1970s and 80s, pizza was not popular fare, as can be inferred from the story told by Yuko, one of my informants who grew up in the countryside:

*When I was in elementary school [late 1970s], during the Japanese class, I read a tale known as "The Song of Pizza Pie" [Pizza pie no uta].<sup>8</sup> It is the story of an old man who became a pizza chef, although I think because of the name "pizza pie," it was not Italian pizza. As the story goes, Mr. Matsuji and his wife were an old couple living in a tiny wooden house surrounded by skyscrapers. In my mind I pictured they were living in Shinjuku, though I had never been to Shinjuku at that time. I was just a kid living in the countryside of Shizuoka prefecture. The old couple was very rich, because they had sold their land to a skyscraper construction company. Having a lot of money, they did not need to work. However, day by day, the old man became more unhappy and depressed. He had lost the soil to cultivate vegetables and flowers. He had no more reason to wake up in the morning. Thus, preoccupied with her husband's condition, the old lady decided to take him to a newly opened Western-style restaurant.*

by the poor.<sup>2</sup> Since the eighteenth century, travelers wandering through Naples' streets have been impressed by pizza and macaroni available for purchase. What occurred in Naples is a good example of what scholars have categorized as "glocalization," or the process where locals domesticate foreign foodstuffs to meet their needs and culture, e.g., when the American tomato, introduced in Italy as an ornamental plant, found its way to the top of pizza sometime between 1790 and 1810.<sup>3</sup> Naples birthed the modern pizza and began its round-the-world journey that created many glocalizations.

Italian immigrants carried pizza to the US in the late nineteenth century, where it found a safe second home, becoming at first a local dish in urban areas, including New York and Chicago style pizzas, and later developing into a fast food phenomenon. The popularity of American culture, along with technology, helped pizza spread throughout the globe with its numerous local adaptations.<sup>4</sup>

Despite a labyrinth of global recipes, perhaps historian Carol Helstosky has identified the most important two divisions possible in the world of pizza: that between the handcrafted and standardized.<sup>5</sup> In the handcrafted Neapolitan pizza style, expert *pizzaiolos* (pizza chefs) make it using artisanal methods and bake it directly on the stone of a wood-burning oven, but modern gas and electric ovens are sometimes accepted. Although there are precise rules for

However, Mr. Matsuji was a traditionalist and a stubborn old Japanese man. He told his wife he would eat only Japanese food because boiled rice and miso soup were the best food. Pressed by his wife's insistence, though, he had a bite of pizza and fell in love with it. He liked it so much that every day he went back to the restaurant to have pizza, and finally he asked the restaurateur to teach him how to cook pizza. He was willing to pay anything, but his request was not accepted.

Mr. Matsuji did not give up his new dream, and every night he would creep into the restaurant to make pizza. His ability grew night after night. However, the restaurateur noted that pizza ingredients such as flour and tomato sauce were diminishing. Being suspicious, one night he stayed after the restaurant closing hours and found the old man singing and making pizza in the kitchen. At first, he was upset, but after trying the pizza made by the old man, he asked Mr. Matsuji to work for him. However, the old man refused, gave some money to the restaurateur for having used the kitchen and the ingredients, and left. Next, he turned his small house into a pizza restaurant, and from outside people could hear him happily singing and making pizza.

At the time, my schoolmates and I had never had pizza, because we lived in the countryside. After reading the story, we all became curious about this dish that had changed the life of the old man. For instance, my cousin asked her father, who worked in the bigger city of Shizuoka, to buy pizza for her. Another friend of mine, whose parents were running a food business, asked them to order pizza in bulk. Consequently, everyone in her class had a frozen pizza. We all have good memories of the pizza pie tale. [Paraphrase, May 2010]

The above account is a good testimony to pizza still being an exotic dish in the 1970s outside of the big cities and not very commonplace with children. Moreover, the term “pizza pie” indicates that the idea of pizza was mostly linked to the US, since this was formerly a popular expression for the cuisine in that country.

Italian-style handcrafted pizza became popular in Japan during the 1990s, following an Italian *itameshi* (cuisine) boom, and wood oven baked artisanal pizza gained favor as proper Italian-style ristorante pizzerias opened. Moreover, the two-way flow of Italian chefs going to Japan to ply their trade and of Japanese chefs moving to Italy to learn how to make Neapolitan-style pizza created enough expertise in Japan to expand the handcrafted segment of the pizza industry. As a result, not only a new dish but also a new occupation entered Japan. Today, the word *pizza shokunin* (pizza craftsman), is used to indicate a pizza artisan, and the *katakana* ピッツァイオーロ (pizzaiolo) has entered the Japanese *katakana* dictionary.<sup>9</sup>

Neapolitan pizza is also promoted by the Japanese branch of the Italian Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana (AVPN). AVPN was founded in Italy in 1984 to promote and safeguard the traditional

pizza of Naples as a response to the rise of fast-food pizza chains and mass-produced pizzas often marketed as “Pizza from Naples.” Pizzerias making their pizza in accordance with the Napoli system can become members of the association and display the trademark of Verace Pizza Napoletana (VPN). In Japan, the first pizzeria to display the



Japanese curry chicken/beef pizza from the *Oishi!* Japanese Pizza website. Your choice of tasty chicken chunks or juicy cubed beef assorted with specially-made curry, diced potatoes, and carrots. Source: <http://tiny.cc/uvd5j>.

Good examples of Japanese pizza may be discovered by looking at delivery pizza fliers advertising *puri puri* (tender) and *mimi* pizza (framed by pastry or sausage “ears”) or by wandering around the supermarket shelves.



Pizza La Christmas flier. (Photo: Rossella Ceccarini)

trademark VPN in Tokyo was Ristorante Pizzeria Marechiaro in 1996, followed by La Piccola Tavola in 1998. Today, the association has thirty-five members throughout Japan and in 2006 established an independent Tokyo branch.<sup>10</sup>

### Varieties of Japanese Pizza

A large Domino's pepperoni pizza is a symbol of a typical American variety, but when kernels of corn and wasabi accompany the pepperoni, the pizza has been glocalized for Japan. The artisanal Pizza Margherita, baked in the wood-burning oven and eaten straight away, is an original Italian pizza but becomes glocalized when topped with slices of local *daikon* (large white radish). However, substantial cases exist in which pizza is not merely tailored to local tastes and is not a simple variation of the original dish. When not only the topping, but the dough, shape, and the way of cooking are different from the original pizza, whether industrial or artisanal, a uniquely *Japanese* pizza is present.

Good examples of Japanese pizza may be discovered by looking at delivery pizza fliers advertising *puri puri* (tender) and *mimi* pizza (framed by pastry or sausage “ears”) or by wandering around the supermarket shelves. The fry-pan pizza is a good example of a Japanese pizza available at supermarkets. It usually has an oval shape, requires either none or very little—ten minutes on average—leavening process, the dough is a few millimeters thick, toppings are Japanese, and the pizza is easy to cook. Given that Western-style gas-electric ovens are usually missing from the standard Japanese kitchen, the supermarket pizza is small so that it can be easily cooked or warmed up using a fry pan, microwave, toaster, grill, and even cookware used to make traditional dishes such as *yakisoba* (stir-fried noodles). The fry-pan pizza can be purchased

## Japanese-Style Mochi Pizza for Two



Kikkoman, the soy sauce company, illustrates how to make a Japanese-style mochi pizza (*mochi no wafu* pizza) for two people:

Mochi cakes, 4 pieces  
 Kikkoman special soy sauce, 1 teaspoon  
 Spring onion, 1 teaspoon  
 Dried young sardines, 1 ½ teaspoons  
 Sakura shrimp, 1 ½ teaspoons  
 Stringy cheese, ½ cup  
 Dried bonito flakes, 1 teaspoon  
 Salad oil, a small quantity

1. Cut the spring onion into small pieces.
2. Brush the foil with a little oil and place the mochi on top. Warm up in the oven toaster until the mochi become soft.
3. Remove the mochi from the toaster. Cover one side with soy sauce. Top with dried sardines, sakura shrimp, and cheese.
4. Put back in the toaster until the cheese melts. Display on a tray and dust with bonito flakes.

(See <http://tiny.cc/vesro>, author's translation from the original Japanese.)

frozen and ready to go, but can also be made at home using a powder mix available in various brands. Recipes for handmade fry-pan pizzas can easily be found in magazines, culinary books, and blogs. For instance, the website for the Ajinomoto Corporation, one of the biggest Japanese seasoning makers, features a recipe to make a fry-pan pizza in about twenty minutes. Ajinomoto's fry-pan pizza can be made using domestic products such as salt from the Seto Inland Sea (*Seto Naikai*) and a special low-calorie mayonnaise developed by Ajinomoto itself. Mayonnaise is usually used to decorate the top of pizza with a variety of patterns (e.g., checkered, lace-like).

Though usually addressed simply as pizza, the fry-pan pizza is typical fare in such Japanese eateries as pubs and coffee shops, as well as at family restaurants such as Denny's and Royal Host. Fry-pan pizzas are typically served over a wooden board or while still frying on a very hot saucepan. They are usually eaten as a snack or side dish and can be very small. Often Japanese eateries serve pizzas with a diameter of less than fifteen centimeters (nearly six inches).

Another variety of pizza that can be cooked using the fry pan or toaster oven includes the *mochi* pizza, probably the most Japanese of all. The crust is not made of standard dough but of mochi, i.e., cakes of pounded glutinous rice. Mochi is traditionally used to make typical Japanese sweets but now is also used as the major ingredient for this special pizza crust. A Google search of 餅ピザ (*mochi* pizza) yielded about 2,820,000 results.<sup>11</sup> Mochi can also be used as a local topping, and the expression *mochi-mochi* indicates a standard crust having both a soft and springy texture in the mouth, so the Google result might include these latter meanings. Mochi pizza recipes are easily found on the Internet. Ketchup is often used instead of tomato sauce. Kagome Corporation, which specializes in sauces, offers a special recipe on its website to make a mochi pizza topped with ketchup, sausages, and peppers. Mochi pizza recipes are also shared in personal blogs throughout the net. Versions of "real Japanese" mochi pizza have also been developed. Kikkoman, the well-known soy sauce company, provides a recipe for Japanese-style mochi pizza (*mochi no wafu*) for two people. Mochi pizza is a uniquely Japanese creation.

The Japanese have also devised original ways of eating pizza. For instance, a special magazine titled *Pizza no Hon* (*The Book of Pizza*) presents cooking and eating methods, as in the "Garden Pizza Style" advocated by Junji Kosuzume, an outdoor activities trainer and author of a book on camping cuisine.<sup>12</sup> In his article, Kosuzume illustrates how to have a special outdoor pizza party at home. Guests are sitting in the garden around a camping table set with dishes of chopped vegetables, fruit, salads, meat, and other fresh ingredients, and they choose the toppings for a personal and special pizza. When the guests have chosen their toppings, Mr. Kosuzume bakes the pizzas using an outdoor oven. The author shows how to make an outdoor "Yokohama Pizza," characterized by a square-shaped crust, cream sauce, mushrooms, and lots of clams.

### Conclusion

Japanese pizza preparation, the wide varieties of pizza available, and its consumption in many venues ranging from the home to the pub to the coffee house are all different manifestations of the globalization of cuisine. Sociologist Alan Warde identified processes such as naturalization, improvisation, and authentication that often occur when ethnic foods travel to a different culture.<sup>13</sup> Naturalization is the adjustment of foreign food and recipes in a way that unknown tastes are made familiar. Seaweed and raw fish on top of the crust are a clear example of naturalization, where the introduction of a local topping makes unknown tastes more natural for Japanese. Improvisation is restyling something local by adding foreign elements. Adding tomato and mozzarella to the rice in order to have a *pizza raisu* (rice pizza), adding the flavor of pizza and red tomatoes to instant ramen—Seafood Pizza Noodles by Nisshin Foods, 2008—or adding a slice of pizza in the bentō box are a part of the improvisation process, as is renaming a local dish with a foreign name. This occurred with the Japanese dish *okonomiyaki*, a stir-fried omelet of sorts made from cabbage, eggs, fish, or meat, among other ingredients; but now, some people in Japan describe it as "Japanese grilled pizza." When the boundaries of improvisation and naturalization tend to merge, we witness the invention of a new dish, as in the case of mochi pizza.

Authentication is the search for authentic replication of dishes from foreign cuisines. While the naturalization and improvisation processes regarding pizza have been going on since the cuisine first entered Japan, and new versions have been created, the authentication process is more recent. In September 1996, the lifestyle magazine *Brutus* invited three Neapolitan pizza masters to Japan: Raffaele Surace, Gaetano Fazio, and Gaetano Esposito. The pizza masters visited Tokyo pizzerias driving a red Fiat 500, wearing dark suits, hats, and sunglasses, as if in a Francis Ford Coppola movie. The tiny Fiat had sheriff stars drawn on the body that read "Pizza Polizia Napoletana" (Napoli's Pizza Police), and the three masters formed a flying squad looking for authentic pizza around the streets of Tokyo.<sup>14</sup> A little more than ten years later, certification of VPN



Pizza Polizia. Source: *Brutus Magazine*, September 1996, 13.

authenticity exists in various parts of Japan. The popularity of the Napoli-style pizza, as opposed to a general Italian pizza, testifies to the current authentication stage in Japan of the highest genre of pizza. To put it another way, pizza in various forms is institutionalized in Japan. ■

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#### NOTES

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## Coffee Life in Japan

By Merry White

In April 1881, Japan's first coffee house opened in Tokyo. On its site, a monument, surmounted by a white coffee cup, is inscribed to its founder, Tei Ei-Kei, a Japan-born Chinese man. The Kahiichakan was a luxurious space with leather chairs, a pool table, free newspapers, and other amenities. There, men gathered to converse for hours for the cost of one cup of coffee.

However, coffee appeared in Japan much earlier. In the sixteenth century, Portuguese missionaries brought coffee, and in the seventeenth century, Dutch traders shared coffee with the Japanese, who found it bitter. The first Japanese to drink coffee for pleasure were Nagasaki prostitutes who added honey and appreciated coffee's stimulant properties.

By the twentieth century, tea had slipped in popular consumption. Coffee consumption increased for two reasons: the rise of a mercantile class helped create public social spaces flavored with Western trends, and Japan and Brazil's economic relationship boosted coffee's consumption. In 1908, the ship *Kasatomaru* arrived in Brazil, carrying a boatload of Japanese who would work in the coffee orchards and help market beans in Japan. The Brazilian coffee industry targeted Japan and shipped eighteen tons of beans free to stimulate a taste for the beverage. In the same year, Brazilian-style cafés, such as the Café Paulista (named for Sao Paulo) became popular Tokyo sites: coffee, new ideas, and fashions arrived together, and the *jōkyū* (café waitress) set new modes for female public behavior, not always approved by "polite" society.

Artists and intellectuals in the Taisho period (1912–1926) often eschewed the cabaret-style *jōkyū* cafés for the *junkissa*, or "pure café," with no alluring waitresses, music, or alcohol to distract their discussions. In the prewar years, the police often shut down cafés for suspected subversive activity. By war's end, only a few remained, serving ersatz coffee made of roasted grain.

Postwar cafés were clearing houses for jobs, news about neighbors, and places where one could learn about the Occupation's goals for "democracy." Between the 1960s and the end of the 1980s, cafés proliferated. No one could live without one, it was said, for social or personal purposes. At their 1981 peak, there were 155,000 café's in Japan, with 10,000 in Tokyo alone. In 1997, American chain cafés arrived, but Japan's coffee craze antedated the Seattle imports by decades.

Today, diverse independent coffee houses serve new functions. In hard times, a cup of coffee is an affordable luxury. For housewives, it is a welcome "adult" moment. For elderly, the café is a refuge from loneliness and domestic chores. For anyone, it offers respite from the stress caused by the compression of time and space. The café is a "third space," neither home nor work (nor school), and liberates the visitor from their demands. It can be a place where "everyone knows your name" or a place where you are free to be private in public.

The coffee itself draws visitors: in a 1950s café in Kyoto, you find "siphon coffee" attracting older customers for whom this hand-hewn brew was connoisseur coffee in their youth. The hand-pour, one-cup-at-a-time apparatus meticulously pours water in a thin spiral over freshly ground beans in a "nel" (flannel) bag and is the hallmark of some cafés. Despite prejudice against "machine-made" espresso among coffee specialists, some pioneering artisans offer fastidiously made versions of the drink.

Though there has been some decline in the number of cafés since the 1990s, there are still two or three to the urban block and no fall-off in attendance: as one businessman said, "we cannot do without the café."

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