CHAPTER TWO

THE CULTURAL OBJECT: PIZZA

Take a pizza crust, half of it garnished with beef stew, truffle cheese sauce and mushrooms, the other half topped with tomato sauce, broccoli and crab. Finally, cover up the garnishments with a veil of melted cheese, slices of Camembert and drops of cream cheese. This is what you will taste when ordering the Domino’s Cheese Ristorante Half and Half Pizza. The Cheese Ristorante will then deliver this to your door for 3,000 Japanese yen. If you are looking for a less elegant deal, you might order the Pizza with Ears made by Pizza Hut. The “ears” contouring the crust are made of dough rolls, stuffed with three types of cheese or puri puri (ぷりぷり, tender) sausages. Broccoli, mayonnaise, beef and mushrooms cover the heart of this creative and amusing pizza. If you tend to be more of a traditionalist, you might prefer ordering a pizza out of the Italiana Series proposed by Pizza La: Fresh Basil and Smoked Fresh Ham Italiana; “Cooked & Coarse Grinded Pork Italiana,” or Seafood Italiana among others. If you are even more of a traditionalist, you can also go for Napoli Italian Delivery. While the advertising leaflet features a photo of the French Eiffel Tower, the menu introduces the Napoli Style Margherita, Pizza Marinara and even a Quattro Formaggi with salmon and cheese. No day passes without finding the mailbox of my tiny Tokyo apartment filled with pizza delivery discount coupons and commercial fliers. The pictures and menus clearly show that pizza has traveled the world but major transformations have occurred during its expedition. An Italian would hardly consider a “Cooked & Coarse Grinded Pork Italiana” as a product of Italy. An American would scarcely recognize the mimi (みみ, ear) pizza as a Pizza Hut product. For sure, neither Italians nor Americans would consider a crust topped with seaweed, raw eggs and fermented soybeans, sometimes featured in popular Japanese magazines as a proper pizza. The undisputed popularity and spread of pizza around the globe seems to have caused a creolization and a loss of its original characteristics.

In this chapter I will analyze the domesticated forms of Japanese pizza drawing on the four processes of ethnic food diffusion delineated by Alan Warde: preservation, naturalization, improvisation
and authentication. It might be useful to briefly recall the meaning of each stage. Preservation is “to reject everything lacking the stamp of tradition. […] However it is not only by rejections, but also through positive revalorization that local tradition is preserved”. Naturalization is “the adaptation of recipes to render unfamiliar tastes familiar. […] Taste and flavor principles are compromised. Differences are minimized”. Improvisation “involves restyling something local by adding foreign elements to it”. Authentication is to seek “authentic replication of dishes from a foreign cuisine” (Warde 2000, 312–313).

Prior to this, I will delineate the history of pizza, keeping in mind the following questions: what really is pizza and from where do its origins truly derive? Who carried pizza globally? Who is and has been producing and consuming pizza? How has pizza been domesticated in different historical times and geographical places? The historical excursion will show that over time and place pizza has had different travel companions. For instance, in the past century pizza accompanied Italian migrants, and now travels with professional pizza chefs. Pizza that used to be consumed by the migrant poor at home or during lunch breaks at work is now the food of everyone and consumed in a proper pizzeria. What comes into view is the fact that it is not only the food but also food workers, eateries and consumers aware of food culture that are now part of the global process. In other words, all the four elements of Griswold’s cultural diamond are going global. What is travelling is a whole food package. I borrow the term food package from Girardelli (2004):

…the initiation of a meal in Western societies is almost invariably signaled with the breaking of a “package.” A package not only functions as a protection for the food, but it also acts as a symbolic vehicle in the process of attributing symbolic values to the food contained in the package. This symbolic value generally is a consistent element of a flow of messages that is generated from traditional mass media and proceeds downstream to the supermarket shelves and into the homes of the consumers. As for restaurants, I suggest that the consumption of the meal takes place “inside” the package. In this case, the “package” is the carefully constructed symbolic environment, often named as the “atmosphere” or the “dining experience,” offered to the diners, and these are important considerations in the restaurants’ appeal to customers. […] Therefore, using Baudrillard’s idea of commodity-sign, I propose that in contemporary consumer societies, the food and its package should be regarded as one unique and inseparable entity that is consumed in both a concrete and a symbolic manner. I define such an entity as “food package” (Girardelli 2004, 311).