In 2006, the Italian Chamber of Commerce commissioned the first (and so far only) survey concerning the perception of Italy in Japan compared to France, Germany, UK, Spain and USA (Viste 2006). The study, conducted via the internet, was based on the opinion of 5,000 Japanese informants. Among the survey respondents, 715 had visited Italy. According to the survey, Italy is the place where every Japanese would love to live (23%), closely followed by the USA (22%) and at distance by France and UK (17%), Spain (14%) and Germany (13%). Italians are strongly perceived as amusing, creative, irresponsible, sexy, generous, and gentle people. The French are fashionable and the Americans dynamic. Those who have been to Italy tend to have a more positive view. For instance, Italians are considered friendly by 57% of the Japanese who have visited the country and by 42% of those who have not. The quality of Italian products rises to high levels—to 76% among those who have been to Italy and 63% from the general sample. Pasta, food, leather goods, clothes, design and brands are the products mostly associated with Italy. Italy has the primacy in pasta and leather, but when it comes to general food and design, France, which maintains wine and cosmetic dominance, closely follows it. Germany predominates with cars, the USA with music, movies, and coffee, and the UK with alcohol and tea. According to the survey, Spain does not gain primacy as it is not strongly associated with any product, but there exists a tendency to relate the country to food and artisanal

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1 The Italian Chamber of Commerce commissioned the survey from Net Ratings, who sent 105,000 e-mails to a casually selected sample based on gender, age and geographical area. Among the 7,875 replies received, 5,000 were considered valid.

2 Respondents were asked to match each country with the following products and industries: aeronautical and aerospace, agricultural machinery, alcohol, artisanal products, bank and insurance, brands, cars, chemicals, clothes, coffee, computers, design, electronics and semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, food, jewelry, leather goods, motorcycles, movies, music, novels, pasta, perfume and cosmetics, precision instruments, tea, textile machinery, weapons, and wine. Pizza was not among the available choices.
goods. We must not forget that the survey is already five years old and it does not take into account the recent interest for the food sector in Spanish products, such as the *Iberico* ham.

Percentages varied according to age. For instance, alcohol is matched to Germany by those in their twenties but associated with the UK by older respondents, although by only a slight difference in percentage. Design is mainly associated with France in the age range 40–49 and 50–65, and with Italy in the age range 20–29 and 30–39. Brands are coupled with Italy among the young sample and compete with France among the respondents who are over forty. Only the match of pasta and Italy does not change according to age, getting around 90% agreements in all age groups.

Thus, the statistic confirms that Italy is labelled as the country of good food. However, numbers do not explain why Italian cuisine is so appreciated among Japanese. During my fieldwork I have attended Italian fairs and food shows around Tokyo. At Food Ex 2009, I have been able to witness how Italian cuisine holds an eminent position in the Japanese culinary world. Not only was the Italian stand the largest among those presented in the Western food pavilion, but the Japanese food pavilion also included Italian cuisine. In fact, surrounded by Hokkaido and other Japanese products, the Nisshin Seifun Group staged an Italian restaurant. Supplied with a microphone, a Japanese chef of Italian cuisine gave advice on making delicious pasta and *bruschetta* (Italian garlic bread).

Given the indisputable presence and appreciation of Italian food in Japan, the major goal of this chapter is to investigate the role of the chefs and pizza chefs in proposing Italian cuisine to Japanese consumers. Though my interest is mostly in pizza, I will also look at Italian cuisine in general. Specifically, I am interested in questions such as: how do Italian cuisine chefs perceive Japanese consumers? How do food workers influence the customer taste? How is their work influenced by the customers’ tastes? What are the reasons, according to chefs, for the great popularity of Italian cuisine among Japanese?

Before addressing these questions, I will delineate a general picture of the Italian restaurant customer: who are the typical Italian restaurant customers? How do they choose a restaurant? Moreover, during my fieldwork I witnessed a predominance of female customers that I could not overlook. I will briefly address several issues related to gender and restaurant choice. In doing so, I will look at popular Japanese magazines and restaurant review websites to give an idea of how they