

# The openness of Japanese and German young people to ethnic foods: The case of Vietnamese cuisine

## 日本とドイツの若者のエスニック料理 に対する好奇心: ベトナム料理を例に

08 March, 2023

**Vien T.T. Dinh**

PhD Candidate, Kyoto University

# Self-introduction

1

Vien Thi-Thuc DINH  
ヴィエン・ティン

- 2011-15 BA, Economics/National Economics University  
Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2019-21 MA, Global Environmental Studies  
Kyoto University, Japan
- 2021- PhD Candidate, Kyoto University  
Natural Resource Economics

## Keywords:

#food\_multiculturalism #ethnicfood  
#transnational\_immigration #Vietnamese\_diaspora  
#culinary\_class #urban\_garden #community\_health



1. Introduction: Food openness and Vietnamese foodscapes
2. Research objective and questions
3. Methodology and Analytical approach
4. Key findings
5. Discussions and Conclusion
6. Acknowledgement and References

# 1.Introduction: Ethnic food in multiculturalism

- **Ethnic food (heritage food)** is perceived as the cuisine that is associated with a particular cultural or ethnic group.
- In multicultural society, ethnic food can function as a marker of social inclusion when the mainstream gastronomy are enhanced by including different cuisines in either original or hybridity form but also a means of radical and class discrimination (Barbas, 2003; Frost & Laing, 2016).

## ACCULTURATION



## ASSIMILATION



America: Melting pot and Salad bowl

# 1.Introduction: Openness to ethnic food

Openness to ethnic food or the customer perception of and willingness to accept and eat unfamiliar food can be **driven by both external and internal factors**, and mainly measured at individual levels.

- **Country of origin:** Based on the Food Neophobia Scale (Pliner & Hobden, 1992), East Asian people (Chinese and Korean) are more neophobic to non-traditional food than Western customers (Choe & Cho, 2011; Zhao et al., 2020).
- **Culinary familiarities** in terms of ingredients, flavors and gastronomic principles between the sending and receiving destinations can encourage public acceptance of novel food.
- **Personality** (Neophilics/Neutrals/Neophobics): Adventurous and open-minded individuals are more willingness to explore and accept novel flavors and experience (Skrbis & Woodward, 2007; Szakály et al., 2021).

# 1. Why chose Vietnamese food in Germany/Japan?

5

## Germany - “immigrant” country

A mixed influx of **Vietnamese boat people in the late 1970s and former guest workers in the 1980s**, and later achieved the “Vietnamese miracle” among successors.

Vietnamese/Asian fusion restaurants emerged since 1990 as a financial/residence guarantee for the settlement and contributed to cosmopolitan images (Bösch & Su, 2020; Stock & Schmitz, 2019).

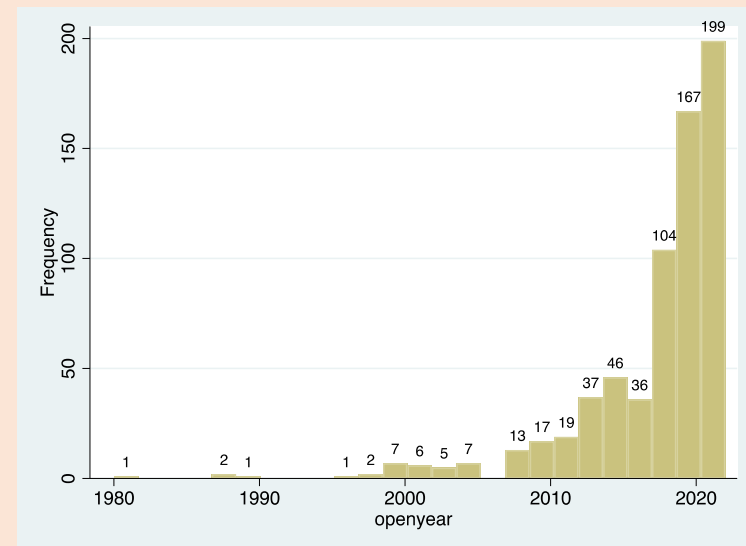


Asian food courts in Berlin

## Japan - ethnically homogenous country

### Food cultural and geographical proximity

Vietnamese gained more attention since 2010, the majority are **temporary migrants** (trainees and international students) (Liu-Farrer, 2020). The “Vietnam boom” (abroad tourism) started from 2015, and converted into a domestic interest in Vietnamese food after COVID-19.



Vietnamese restaurants in Tabelog website

## 2. Objective and questions

### Objective

to explore how the **young generation in Japan and Germany perceive**, accept and include Vietnamese ethnic food in their daily eating and **influential factors** in different contexts.

### Research questions

- RQ1. What is the contemporary acceptance of Japanese and German young people of Vietnamese food?
- RQ2. Which key factors influence the youth's openness to Vietnamese food?
- RQ3. How do (Japanese) young people modify and reproduce Vietnamese food in their kitchens?

# 3. Methodology and data collection

## Public surveys of youth perception

- **In Japan (2021-2022):** Kyoto University and Kansai-based university lectures and events related to Vietnamese culture or international culture exchange (Hyogo, Osaka and Kyoto).
- **In Germany (July-September 2022):** based at Göttingen University (Lower Saxony).
- **Recruitment criteria:** aged 18-40 residents of the host countries at the survey time.



## Artifact-focused group discussions

- **Time and location:** June and October 2022, in Kyoto, Japan
- **Content:** Fresh spring roll exhibition

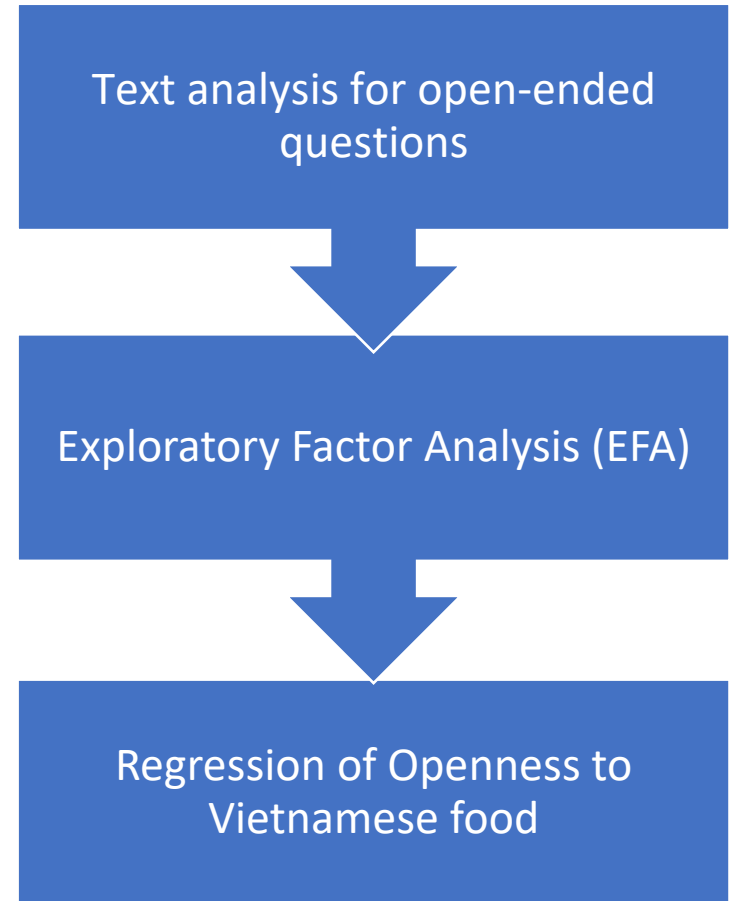




## Questionnaire structure

- Open-ended questions on food names and the impression of Vietnamese culinary specialities;
- 5-level Likert scale of exposure and willingness to try new ethnic foreign and Vietnamese foods/cultures;
- Multiple-choice questions on information sources and difficulties of cooking ethnic food.
- Socio-demographic features include age, gender, occupation, nationality and abroad experience.

Language: English/German and Japanese



## 3.2. Fresh spring roll exhibition (生春巻き会)

### Event participants (Japanese)

- Event 1 (June 2022): Graduate students and graduates of Kyoto-Uni
- Event 2 (October 2022): Undergraduate students

### Agenda

- **Virtual game:** selecting ingredients' roll and dipping sauce to make ideal fresh rolls;
- **Practical rolling:** Vietnamese-style fresh rolls and dipping sauces and **Group discussion**;
- **Homemade version:** purchase their preferred ingredients and make the rolls at home, either individual or team work (1000¥/participant) and send back **the reflection**.



Example of virtual game poster

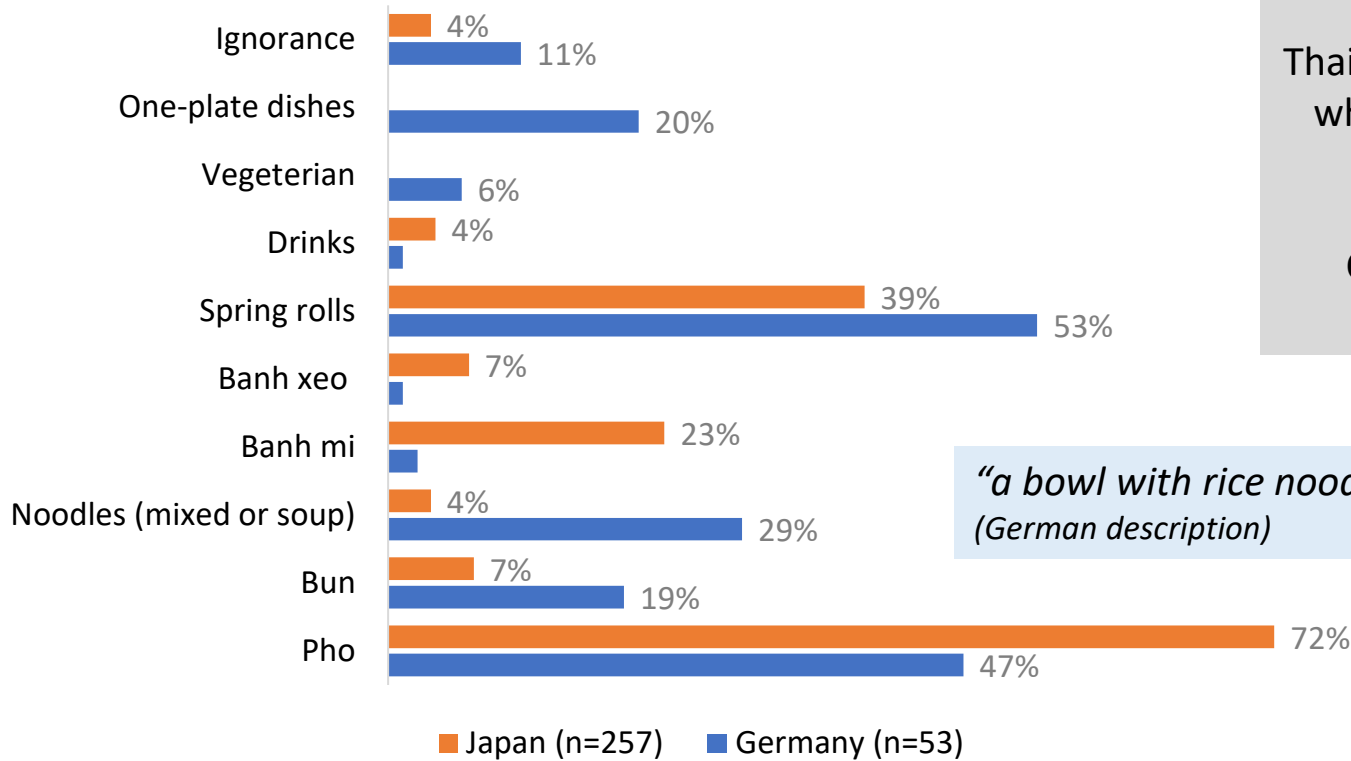
Notes: The discussion was held in Japanese with an interpreter. Transcripts are translated into English before being coded and thematically analyzed.

# 4.Results: Youth perception survey

## Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

	Germany (n=83)	Japan (n=257)	Combined (n=340)
Age (Mean ± Std.)	24.51 ±4.38	22.49 ±5.43	22.98 ±5.26
Gender			
Male	32.5%	42.4%	39.5%
Female	<b>69.9%</b>	<b>57.6%</b>	85.5%
Occupation			
Formal/Salary employment	12.0%	16.7%	15.4%
Student	<b>88.0%</b>	<b>82.1%</b>	<b>82.6%</b>
Retired and housewife			0.6%
Self-employed worker			0.3%
Nationality		n=203	n=286
Japanese	1.2%	96.6%	68.9%
German	83.1%		24.1%
Other	<b>18.1%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	7.7%
Rate of abroad living	<b>40%</b>	<b>3%</b>	12%
Abroad travel		n=115	n=201
Never	21.7%	<b>30.4%</b>	26.4%
1 time	13.3%	<b>21.7%</b>	17.9%
2-3 times	18.1%	20.0%	18.9%
More than 3 times	<b>47.0%</b>	27.8%	36.8%

# 4. RQ1: Name of Vietnamese dishes



For Japanese:  
Thai/SEA (ミーゴレン, トムヤムクン),  
wheat-based rolls (トルティーヤ)

For German:  
Japanese (sushi, ramen, udon),  
Chinese (Bao burger, roasted duck),  
Thai

*“a bowl with rice noodles, vegetables, and meat”*  
(German description)



Pho (フォー)



Fresh spring rolls (生春巻き)



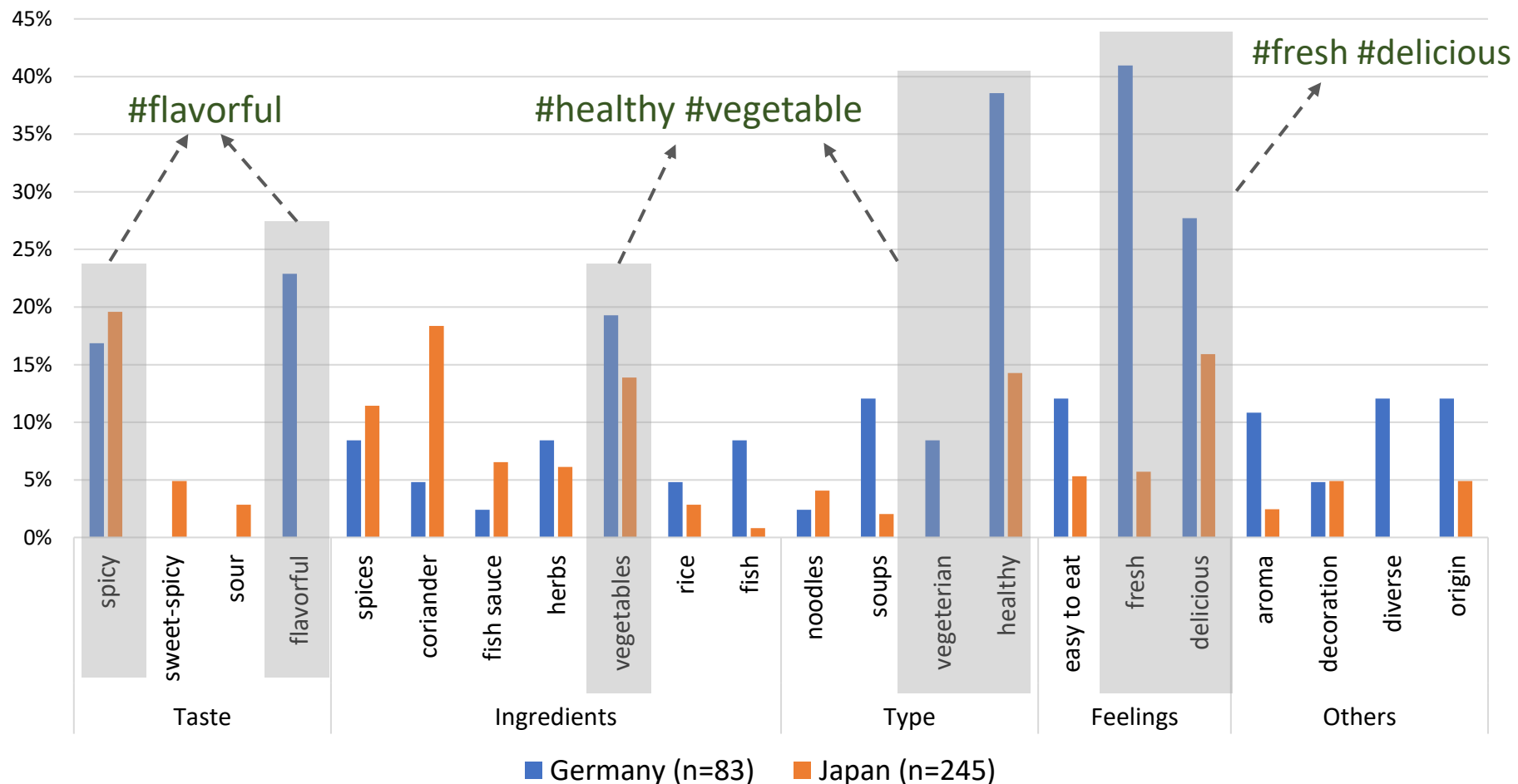
Banh mi (ベトナムサンドイッチ)



One-plate rice dish

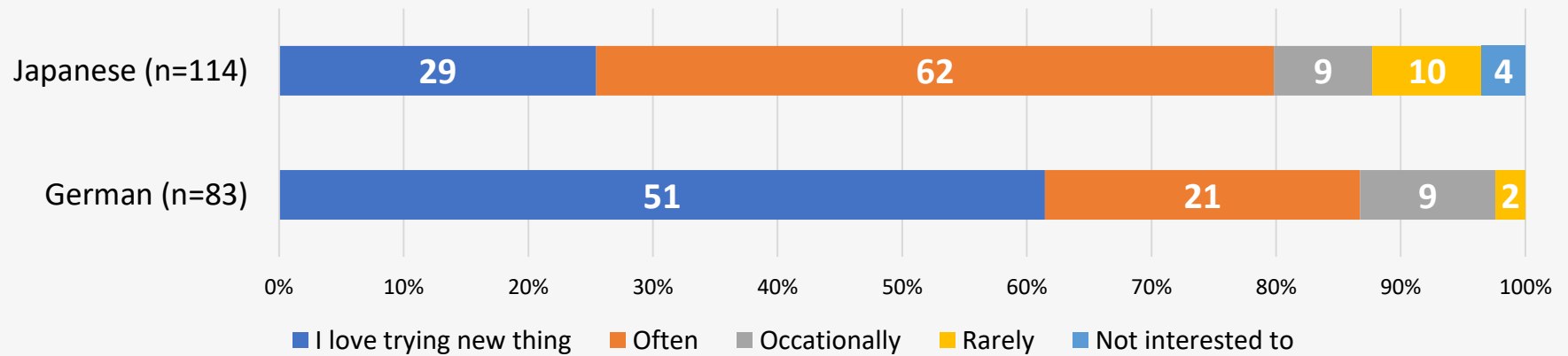
# 4. RQ1: Impression on Vietnamese food

Japanese young customers can describe more details of **specific flavors** (eg. sweet-spicy and sour) and **exotic ingredients** (eg. coriander and fish sauce), meanwhile German perception are more generalized in **flavorful**, diverse and freshly delicious. However, German youth appreciates the food more about **healthy and vegetarian/vegetable-rich** aspects.

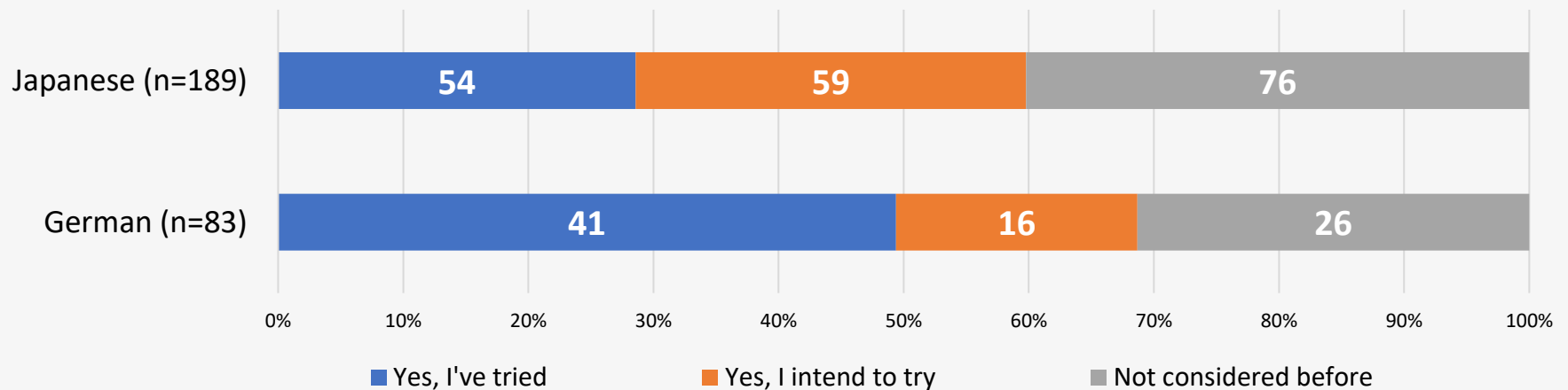


# 4. RQ1: Willingness and experience of ethnic food 13

## Willingness to try new ethnic food



## Experience of cooking Vietnamese food



# 4.RQ2: Exploratory Factor Analysis

## Socio-demographic factor

Age Occupation  
Gender Nationality/Country

## Exposure to Vietnamese

Friend/family recommendation (0.55)  
Foreign experience (0.32)  
Vietnamese people contact (0.84)

## Exposure to foreign culture

Foreign experience (0.61) Foreigner contact (0.53)  
Abroad travel frequency (0.61) Living abroad (0.47)  
Willingness to try ethnic food (0.42)

## Openness to Vietnamese food

Food familiarity (0.65)  
Dishes' number (0.55)  
Food impression (0.37)  
Cooking experience (0.71)

The arrow represents the direction of impacts.

### Analytical framework (Factor loading)

Notes: Maximum likelihood, Retained factor=1. Factors with a loading score smaller than 0.3 are excluded.

# 4.RQ2: Determinants of food openness

OLS regressions of Openness to Vietnamese food  
on Vietnamese and foreign exposure

	Openness to Vietnamese food	
	(1)	(2)
Exposure to Vietnamese people	0.429*** (0.056)	0.305*** (0.071)
Exposure to foreign culture		0.346*** (0.074)
Age	0.023* (0.012)	-0.004 (0.019)
Female	0.282*** (0.103)	0.269** (0.103)
Occupation	0.088 (0.164)	0.002 (0.210)
Country	0.996*** (0.310)	0.047 (0.109)
Nationality dummies	YES	YES
R squared	0.45	0.59
N	187	150

Exposure to the specific people affects significantly youth's openness to ethnic food in both cases.

Impact of exposure to foreign culture is higher than contact with the specific people.

Personal characteristic is more powerful than the hosting country when nationality is controlled.

Females have better acceptance toward unfamiliar food.

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*p < 0.05, \*p < 0.1.



# 4.RQ3: Youth's modification of fresh spring rolls

## Top ingredients of virtual spring rolls, by components

	1st event (28 rolls)	2nd event (27 rolls)	Combined (55 rolls)
<b>Vegetables</b>	Lettuce (8)		Lettuce (19)
	Mizuna (6)	Lettuce (11)	Carrot (9)
	Coriander (5)	Advocado (4)	Coriander (8)
	Carrot (5)	Cucumber (3)	Onion (7)
	Tomato (4)	Coriander (3)	Mizuna (6)
	Onion (4)		Cucumber (6)
<b>Meat</b>		Smoked salmon (6)	Smoked salmon (13)
		Beef (6)	Boiled shrimp (9)
	Smoked salmon (7)	Salmon caviar (5)	Boiled pork (7)
	Boiled shrimp (6)	Cheese (3)	Beef (6)
	Boiled pork (4)	Boiled pork (3)	Salmon caviar (5)
		Boiled shrimp (3)	Cheese (5)
	Sashimi (3)	Bacon (4)	
<b>Noodles</b>	Rice noodles (4)		Glass noodles (6)
	Glass noodles (3)	Glass noodles (3)	Rice noodles (5)
<b>Dipping sauce</b>	Sweet chili sauce (15)	Sweet chili sauce (10)	Sweet chili sauce (25)
	Peanut sauce (15)	Peanut sauce (10)	Peanut sauce (25)
	Oyster sauce (15)	Oyster sauce (10)	Oyster sauce (25)

### Idea of fresh rolls:

- Salad vegetable (1-2 kinds)
- Thinly sliced meat/fish (1-2 pieces)
- Noodles (optional)

Missing: tropical aromatic herbs (except coriander)

Replacement: diverse seafood and processed ingredients with strong flavors

### Among 2 events

- Group 1: vegetable, balanced
- Group 2: more meat, fish and animal-derived products

# 4.RQ3: Imagination and reflection

## Pre-event imagination:

unpleasant flavor and strong smells of fish sauce and coriander.

## Reflection:



F, 19

*The fish sauce and coriander are not hard to eat as I thought before. Many people told that. But it is even stimulating.*



*Such a great combination of tastes: The light taste of the fresh roll matches well with the flavorful dipping sauce made of aromatic fish sauce and refreshing lemon juice.*



M, 21

## Japanese sushi rolls vs. Vietnamese fresh rolls

- Wrapping skin: seaweed vs. rice paper
  - Rolling shape: triangle vs. round
  - Appearance: totally wrapped vs. visible
  - Ingredient combination
  - Dipping sauce
- **Similarities:** light taste, freshly made and eaten at the dining table and eating with others.



F, 27

*It was my first time to get together and eat with other people in the shared house through this fresh spring roll party. I also want to remake it with my family members when I come back to my parent's house.*



Japanese hand-rolled sushi



Vietnamese fresh spring rolls

# 4.RQ3: Reflection on making fresh spring rolls



(1) Missing ingredients



(4) Sashimi and (5) Dessert rolls



(2) Ingredients' shape and placing direction



(3) Portion the ingredients

# 5. Discussions: Food openness determinants

- **Contextual factor:** In multicultural societies, young people are more willing to accept non-traditional food than those coming from a more conventional culture.
- **Culinary familiarity** might not guarantee a higher level of acceptance of ethnic food. Despite more similarities to Vietnamese food's country of origin and culinary culture, Japanese young people are more skeptical in trying and experiencing the less-familiar Asian ethnic cuisine.
- **Personality**, specifically exposure to foreign culture and people, are more important than the reception country in shaping openness to ethnic food. Germany-based respondents are more open to novel food when controlling nationality and contact with the ethnic people. However, the country became insignificant when including personal exposure to foreign cultures.

## Key rules of fresh spring rolls

- Wrapping materials: rice paper - stretchable, sticky
- Contrast texture/flavor of ingredients and sauces
- Rolling in a round and thinly long shape
- Aesthetic as inside ingredients are visible
- Healthy/vegetable or balanced combination
- Socialization



**Japanese youth’s modification:** by complying with and breaking the rules and even going beyond the principles to create their own versions.

- **Compliance:** contrast of light/strong flavor, soft/crunchy and aesthetic (care about the visual of rolls)
- **Breaking:** substitute with more available and affordable materials (coriander -> perilla, lettuce -> cabbage, boiled shrimp -> seasoned fish/meat, fish sauce -> generic commercial sauce).

# 5. Conclusion

- **Vietnamese food** is perceived by young generations as **healthy, vegetable-rich and flavorful** cuisine that can flexibly customize to different palates.
- Regarding **food perception, German young people** tend to describe Vietnamese ethnic food with more general expressions of food group and impressions due to their culinary dissimilarities but are more willing to accept non-traditional food than their Japanese counterparts. However, **personality or exposure to foreign culture** strongly influences their openness to ethnic food.
- Through the **imaginary of Vietnamese food**, the Japanese young generation can reproduce fresh spring rolls by both **complying with and breaking the food rules** due to the limitation of ingredients and even elevate their cooking with creative versions.



# Acknowledgement

- Kyoto University:
  - **KURA** (Kyoto University Research Administration) Center
  - Graduate School of Agriculture: **Profs. Akitsu, Feuer** and Genron Lab. members
- Göttingen University: **Prof. Neu**
- **All participants and supporters** have participated in the study.
- Funded by:
  - DAAD-Kyoto University Partnership Programme towards SDGs
  - Yamaoka Memorial Foundation





- Barbas, S. (2003). "I'll take chop suey": Restaurants as agents of culinary and cultural change. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 36(4), 669–686.
- Bösch, F., & Su, P. H. (2020). Competing contexts of reception in refugee and immigrant incorporation: Vietnamese in West and East Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.
- Choe, J. Y., & Cho, M. S. (2011). Food neophobia and willingness to try non-traditional foods for Koreans. *Food Quality and Preference*, 22(7), 671–677.
- Frost, W., & Laing, J. (2016). Cuisine, migration, colonialism and diasporic identities. In D. J. Timothy (Ed.), *Heritage Cuisines: Traditions, Identities and Tourism* 37–52. Routledge Studies of Gastronomy, Food and Drink.
- Liu-Farrer, G. (2020). *Immigrant Japan: mobility and belonging in an ethno-nationalist society*.
- Skrbis, Z., & Woodward, I. (2007). The ambivalence of ordinary cosmopolitanism: Investigating the limits of cosmopolitan openness. *Sociological Review*, 55(4), 730–747.
- Stock, M., & Schmitz, A. (2019). Catering authenticities. Ethnic food entrepreneurs as agents in Berlin's gentrification. *City, Culture and Society*, 18(July).
- Szakály, Z., Kovács, B., Soós, M., Kiss, M., & Balsa-Budai, N. (2021). Adaptation and validation of the food neophobia scale: The case of Hungary. *Foods*, 10(8).
- Zhao, J. bo, Gao, Z. bing, Li, Y. xian, Wang, Y. le, Zhang, X. yuan, & Zou, L. quan. (2020). The food neophobia scale (FNS): Exploration and confirmation of factor structure in a healthy Chinese sample. *Food Quality and Preference*, 79(1023).

**Thank you for your kind attention!**

**ご清聴ありがとうございます。**

**Danke für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit!**

Contact information

Vien T.T. DINH  
dinhthithucvien@gmail.com