



Culinary soft power

a new concept for cultural politics

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Culinary soft power can be defined as the attractiveness and appeal of food culture that adheres to a nation, region or locality. Culinary soft power is a concept tied to the relatively recent historical development of a globalized field of cuisine, largely based in restaurants, but also transmitted through cookbooks, cooking shows, and other media. The development of globalized field of restaurant cuisines means that middle-class consumers all of the world can now locate their own cuisines on a globalized map of national, regional and local cuisines.

Culinary soft power has *two basic dimensions*. One is the *status* of a cuisine. The other is the *popularity*. Both are in principle relatively easy to measure. For a measure of status of a cuisine globally, we can survey the rankings of restaurants by nationality or ethnicity in sources such as Newspaper reviews, restaurant guides and online guides. For a measure of popularity of cuisines, we can simply count the numbers of restaurants of various cuisines in major cities. Both dimensions tell us something about the culinary soft power of nations, regions or localities. For example, French restaurants have retained high status longer than any other cuisine, while American fast food restaurants may dominate in terms of their numbers and geographic reach.



I would list the following *factors in the development of culinary soft power* – or a higher status within the global culinary field – to a nation, region or locality: (1) location in or connection to trend-setting global cities that support innovation (2) an overseas diaspora that transmits cuisine abroad (3) reputation for healthiness and food safety (4) strength of food publics, including both online and mainstream media (5) touristic interest in the region (6) prestige of culinary profession and institutions for training chefs in the techniques of the cuisine both domestically and abroad (7) culinary nation branding, or the development of signature dishes (8) length of a tradition of restaurant cuisine (9) initiatives of national and local governments to promote the cuisine