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Hawai'i regional cuisine: the food movement that changed the way Hawai'i eats

by Samuel Hideo Yamashita, University of Hawai'i Press, 2019, 208 pp., ISBN 978-0-8248-7972-3

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BOOK REVIEW

Hawai'i regional cuisine: the food movement that changed the way Hawai'i eats, by Samuel Hideo Yamashita, Hawai'i, University of Hawai'i Press, 2019, 208 pp., ISBN 978-0-8248-7972-3

Hawai'ian cuisine is wildly rich in flavor. The process of migration since the colonial era that brought Japanese, Filipino, and Chinese immigrants as agricultural workers ultimately nurtured the uniqueness of local cuisine in Hawai'i. In addition to this massive migration, these immigrants and their family members shaped the cultural trajectories of Hawai'ian cuisine.

A narrative worth highlighting in *Hawai'i Regional Cuisine* – written by Japanese and fusion food expert and historian, Samuel Hideo Yamashita – is that there have been long-standing racial hierarchies in the Hawai'ian cuisine landscape, which shaped local customers' preferences until the 1990 s. As Chapter 1 thoroughly examines, the arrival of Caucasian chefs to the islands from European continents since the 1980 s has westernized the majority of food choices. Despite a small portion of ingredients coming from local sources, the servings and presentation are reminiscent of French inherited food. Aside from that, French legacies at that time were robustly omnipresent and took precedence over local menus. Wheat bread as a critical companion in the main course was an old-found characteristic. Against this backdrop, and since that time, Hawai'i Regional Cuisine, as a culinary movement involving young chefs, permeated the island by introducing and amplifying local flavors in vernacular dishes, since 1991. Ever since then and up until today, their struggles and actions have garnered attention, earning coverage in the national press, radio, and television broadcasting, ensuring that the public in general and well-known Hawai'ian foodists have become acquainted and familiarized with their accolades.

With this national media coverage in mind, Chapter 2: Development critically appraises the multiple strategies and tactics these chefs employ to reach out to the public and international communities. Amazingly, in this chapter, an extensive review of the growth of more than 54 local restaurants over the past 20 years marks a new moment in the successful promotion of Hawai'ian cuisine. As well as holding numerous causes and appearing in cooking and food reviews on TV broadcasts, the internationally recognized celebrity chefs have published more than 27 books. This output is valuable documentation for aspiring Hawaiian chefs and the general population who desire to professionally embark in the world of cuisine. Fostering networks with international and local media can boost the general public's exposure to cuisines, local ingredients, locations, and social profiles of the respective chefs. In terms of sources, Hawai'i Regional Cuisine has indigenized the flavors and tastes of the menu.

More details on this can be perused in Chapter 3: Cuisine. One of the most essential aspects of this chapter is "locavorism" – or the strengthening of returning to local ingredients. The American colonials are solidly entrenched in Hawai'i. People from European continents also brought culinary influences to the islands. Given these challenges, Hawai'i Regional Cuisine has decoupled the post-colonial engagement by heralding locavore movements, involving local growers, native plants, fishermen, and farmers. Three local Hawai'ian chefs, Choy, Yamaguchi, and Wong, are the key actors. They have removed racialized barriers to the progression of Hawai'ian cuisine through their world-leading awards, international and national recognition, and achievements in the last 20 years. At this point Hawai'i Regional Cuisine has also debunked the dominance of French cuisine and provided luxurious freedom to the local cuisines. With the emergence of junior chefs as actors of change, the missions of


Hawai'i Regional Cuisine are increasingly reimagined. These junior chefs also have de-racialized and nullified the racial disparity in the menu itself.

Chapters 4 and 5 adumbrate the prowess of prominent junior chefs. Chapter 5: Legacy unfolds how strong the challenges and breakthroughs of junior chefs are, as it has taken years to undo the European continental preoccupations in the Hawai'ian menus. Locavorism-based manifestations in eccentric fine dining have radically revolutionized the food landscape in Hawai'i. This success marks the agency of those young chefs who undertook continuous innovation.

This book is a highly recommended reference for food sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and culinary experts who want to deepen their knowledge about the transformation of multicultural cuisine in Hawai'i. There are books on the environmental side of Hawai'ian cuisine, such as Rachel Laudan's *The Food of Paradise: Exploring Hawaii's Culinary Heritage* (1996), but Yamashita's book more clearly focuses on the agency of chefs and their crucial roles in promoting a new cuisine through diverse national and international media.

Reference

Laudan, R. 1996. *The Food of Paradise: Exploring Hawaii's Culinary Heritage*. Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.

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