

LAYERS OF TASTE: LOCALIZING GLOBAL FOODWAYS IN MIZORAM

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Abstract: This article examines how global culinary influences are localized and integrated into everyday food practices in Mizoram, a state in Mizoram. Using qualitative evidence from restaurateurs, cafe owners, food-truck entrepreneurs and household participants, the study explores the processes through which Korean, Burmese, American and Chinese cuisines are adapted to fit Mizo tastes and domestic routines. Findings reveal that while Korean barbeque, Burmese *Sanpiau*, American-style sandwiches and Chinese *momo* and *chow* were initially foreign, they gradually became familiar and desirable through repeated exposure, selective menu design and socialization. Entrepreneurs played a crucial role by balancing authenticity with affordability, sourcing imported ingredients while tailoring flavors to resonate with local preferences for umami, soy-based seasonings and rice-centered meals. Social media and mobility outside the state further accelerated demand, while food trucks and cafes reshaped urban dining habits and introduced a modest nightlife economy. At the household level, outside cuisines entered through cravings, processed lunchbox foods and health-driven dietary adjustments, even as commensality and gendered divisions of food-related labour remained intact. The study argues that cuisine operates as a mediator of cultural globalization, simultaneously broadening palates, creating new spaces and times for eating and reinforcing local identity. By focusing on how external cuisines become “our own” the article highlights the dynamics of glocalization and contributes to broader discussions on food, culture and social change.

Keywords: Cuisine; Globalization; Localization; Taste; Commensality.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is often described as the root of a society. It is through culture and tradition that a community is known and recognized. Yet culture is not static. It is constantly in motion shaped by external and internal forces that create new patterns of continuity and change. More than any other domain, food and cuisine make this dynamism visible. There is a direct connection between culture and social change, and cuisine serves as one of the most tangible intermediaries through which transformation is experienced, contested and normalized. While people may frame change as “focusing on culture,” in practice, it is most immediately visible in the food placed on the plate such as the ingredients selected, the techniques employed, the times and places of eating, and the relationships and meanings that meals carry. These everyday practices reflect broader social currents and become markers of cultural adaptation.

The focus of this study is to understand how outside cuisines enter and reshape inside culture in Mizoram. Cuisine, operationally, is understood as “the style and ways of preparing food, including the ingredients, both at home and at a restaurant.” It also extends to “the connections and

relationships shared during the consumption of cuisine in the kitchen or elsewhere,” encompassing eating behaviors, commensality, and the symbolic significance of food. In this sense, cuisine is not only about what is eaten but how it is prepared, shared and valued within a community. What appears as “taste” is therefore not a matter of individual choice alone but is the product of socialization, habit and collective experiences of eating and talking about food.

The article situates Mizoram within the framework of *glocalization* i.e. a process through which global influences are selectively adopted, adapted and rearticulated within local cultural contexts. Mizoram’s culinary landscape illustrates this interplay vividly. The introduction of Korean, Burmese, American and Chinese cuisines into the region has not simply replaced local traditions but has become localized in ways that reflect Mizo sensibilities. Korean barbeque and beef soup, Burmese *Sanpiau*, American sandwiches and fries, and Chinese *momo* and *chow* have all been absorbed into the Mizo palate through processes of adjustment and accommodation. Ingredients are tailored to local availability, menus are reshaped to fit local expectations, and tastes are gradually cultivated through repeated exposure.

The cases presented in this study mainly restaurants, cafes, food trucks, and households in Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram demonstrate how new cuisines are domesticated. Korean restaurants adapt their menus to balance authenticity with affordability and local taste preferences. Burmese dishes such as Sanpiau have become so popular that they are now available in nearly every tea stall, marking a shift from foreign delicacy to everyday staple. American cafes cater to youthful trends but must integrate rice-based meals to remain viable, showing how global flavors cannot be sustained without localization. Chinese cuisine, deeply rooted in commensal practices, resonates with Mizo traditions of sharing meals and remains indispensable to the survival of eateries. Street-food innovations like food trucks illustrate how mobility and media introduce new modes of eating, reshaping urban spaces and nightlife.

These developments illustrate that the globalization of cuisine does not lead to homogenization but to new hybrids glocal palates that both expand and reaffirm identity. The study builds on serious study in food studies, cultural sociology, and globalization theory to explore how cuisines travel, how tastes are acquired, and how domestic foodways are recalibrated. It emphasizes the lived experiences of entrepreneurs and households as situated expertise, capturing how external cuisines become familiar, even beloved, through processes of localization. At the same time, the persistence of rice as the staple, shared dishes as a social norm, and gendered divisions of food labor show that adaptation occurs alongside continuity.

This article therefore argues that cuisine is not only a mirror of cultural change but also a motor driving new practices, preferences and meanings in Mizoram. By tracing the localization of Korean, Burmese, American, and Chinese cuisines, it seeks to demonstrate how global foodways are absorbed into everyday life and transformed into something distinctly Mizo, creating a layered culinary identity that is both local and global.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical ties powerfully shape “country kitchens.” Across the African continent, culinary cultures were reconfigured during and after European colonial rule; in many places, imported

gastronomic practices were localized, producing distinctive national cuisines over time (Oktay & Sadikoglu, 2018). Such processes illustrate how cuisines travel, hybridize and embed within everyday life through markets, migration and media.

The notion of glocalization i.e. the simultaneous globalization and localization of cultural forms has been widely applied to food studies. Robertson (1995) first coined the concept to capture how global flows are indigenized, producing hybrid practices rather than wholesale adoption. In culinary terms, foreign cuisines rarely displace local ones but instead are adapted through local tastes, ingredient availability and cultural values (Wilk, 2006). Watson and Caldwell (2005), in their edited volume *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*, demonstrate how global fast foods such as McDonald’s are reinterpreted in different national contexts, becoming “glocal” icons.

The globalization of Korean cuisine (hansik) has been strongly linked with the Korean Wave (hallyu). Kim (2015) highlights how Korean food has been promoted as part of Korea’s soft power strategy, using media and cultural exports to create demand abroad. Joo and Yoon (2021) further argue that Korean restaurants outside Korea act as cultural ambassadors, negotiating authenticity while adjusting flavors to meet local expectations.

Cuisines often flow across political borders through kinship, migration and trade. In Northeast India, The global spread of American foodways, from fast food to cafe culture has been extensively studied. Ritzer (1993) introduced the concept of “McDonaldization,” describing how American models of efficiency, standardization and consumer appeal influence food systems globally. Yet scholars also highlight localization, Martinez (2014). argues that American fast food adapts differently across cultures, often blending with local ingredients and meal patterns. In South and Southeast Asia, Traphagan (2017) notes that burgers and sandwiches are rarely eaten as full meals but rather as snacks, reflecting local understandings of satiety, a pattern mirrored in Mizoram where sandwiches are “never seen as a staple food.”

Chinese food culture is one of the most globally pervasive. Anderson (2014) describes Chinese cuisines as highly adaptable, with dishes like

noodles and dumplings easily localized worldwide. In Asia, Sun (2012) shows how Chinese street foods are reinterpreted in diaspora contexts while retaining core principles of commensality and shared eating. Warde (1997) emphasizes that Chinese dining habits like dishes shared in the middle of the table, waiting for all to be seated are powerful cultural practices that persist even when dishes change. Such traditions strongly echo Mizo norms of shared meals and family participation, making Chinese cuisines particularly resonant in Mizoram.

Street food, once associated with informality, is now central to global food culture. Kraig and Sen (2013) illustrate how mobile food formats, from hawker stalls to food trucks, adapt menus to balance novelty with affordability. In India, Ray (2016) argues that street food not only feeds the masses but also reflects aspirations, modernity and youth culture. The rise of food trucks in Aizawl exemplifies this trend, creating new nightlife spaces and allowing young people to experience global flavors in localized forms such as hot dogs modified to please the taste buds of Mizos.

Taste itself is a socially cultivated phenomenon. Bourdieu (1984) conceptualizes taste as structured by habitus and social position, while Sutton (2001) emphasizes the embodied role of memory in food preference. Fischler (2011) insists that commensality which is the act of eating together is a cornerstone of cultural identity. Murcott (2019) adds that gendered divisions of food-related labour persist within shifting culinary landscapes, underscoring continuity within change. These frameworks help explain why, even as sandwiches, momos, or barbeques enter daily life in Mizoram, rice-centred meals, shared dishes and gendered domestic roles endure.

The readings demonstrate that global cuisines are rarely transplanted whole. Instead, they undergo processes of glocalization, in which menus, flavors, and eating practices are rearticulated to align with local tastes, cultural norms and social structures. Studies of Korean soft power, Burmese cross-border dishes, American fast food, and Chinese commensality all suggest that external foodways gain acceptance when they resonate with local practices and are adapted by entrepreneurs and households. This study builds upon these insights by showing how Korean, Burmese, American and Chinese cuisines have

been localized in Mizoram, creating glocal palates that reflect both global circulation and enduring Mizo food culture.

RESEARCH GAP

Although existing scholarship has extensively examined the globalization and localization of cuisines such as the global spread of Korean food through the Korean Wave, the cross-border circulation of Burmese dishes, the worldwide influence of American fast food and the adaptability of Chinese culinary traditions, most studies have focused on metropolitan centers or diaspora communities, overlooking smaller regions like Mizoram where multiple external cuisines converge. There is also limited research on how these diverse food influences simultaneously reshape both public dining spaces and domestic household practices, particularly in contexts where rice-centred meals, commensality and gendered divisions of food labor remain strong. The absence of ethnographic work that foregrounds the lived experiences of entrepreneurs and households in Mizoram, and the lack of studies that examine how Korean, Burmese, American and Chinese cuisines are localized together within a single cultural setting, created the gap that led to the need for the study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the localization of Korean, Burmese, American and Chinese cuisines in Mizoram.
2. To understand how these cuisines influence Mizo food practices across public and domestic spaces.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design as the primary concern was to capture lived experiences, everyday practices and the nuanced ways in which outside cuisines are localized within Mizoram. Qualitative approaches are particularly suited to research questions that seek to understand meanings, processes and cultural practices in context rather than measure them numerically. Following Creswell (2014), the study emphasizes naturalistic inquiry, privileging participant voices and interpretations of their own food practices.

The fieldwork was conducted in Aizawl, Mizoram, a city that has witnessed the recent rise of restaurants, cafes, and food trucks serving global cuisines alongside traditional Mizo food. Participants were drawn from multiple contexts to reflect the layered nature of culinary change. These included restaurateurs and café owners who introduced Korean, American, and Chinese dishes to local consumers, a food-truck entrepreneur who pioneered mobile street food culture in the city, and household participants who described how their domestic food practices, lunchbox preparations, and family meals had been shaped by exposure to outside cuisines. This range of participants allowed the study to explore both the commercial and domestic dimensions of culinary globalization.

Data were collected through in-depth, open-ended conversations and informal interviews, as well as participant observations of dining spaces and household routines. Participants were encouraged to share their narratives in their own words and particular attention was paid to verbatim quotations in order to preserve authenticity and voice. These narratives provide rich insights into how taste is acquired, how menus are adapted to local palates, and how outside cuisines are gradually incorporated into everyday life.

In treating entrepreneurs and households as situated experts, the study recognizes that culinary globalization is not an abstract process but a lived experience negotiated daily through decisions about what to cook, what to serve, and what to eat. By foregrounding these perspectives, the methodology ensures that the findings reflect both the structural forces of globalization and the intimate practices of local adaptation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In Mizoram, a state historically rooted in rice-centred meals, local vegetables and shared family commensality, the arrival of outside cuisines over the past two decades has introduced new tastes, new ways of dining and new meanings of food. This section presents the results of the study and situates them within the broader debates on cultural change and glocalization, emphasizing how the global and the local are not opposites but interwoven forces that shape one another.

CULTURE, CHANGE AND THE PLATE

Food is one of the most immediate indicators of cultural change because it is embedded in daily life and consumed both materially and symbolically. The food on our plate rarely belongs to a single culture; rather, it is the outcome of historical interactions, geographical proximity, trade, migration, and market access. In this sense, cuisine becomes a living record of cultural encounters. As Serdar Oktay and Saide Sadikoglu (2018) observe, “Every country has adopted a different food culture from a neighboring society, and every society has taken the food culture from those who migrated from far away countries.” Their comparative analysis reminds us that culinary exchange is a universal phenomenon. “The African countries still use the culinary culture they received from the European civilisations they lived in the past years. Historical relations play a very important role when evaluating the country kitchens.”

These insights resonate strongly in Mizoram, a state historically located in the northeastern part of India, bordering Myanmar to its east and south and Bangladesh to its west. Mizo foodways have been continually shaped by cross-border interactions with Myanmar, the cultural influx from India, and global cultural flows such as the Korean Wave. Thus, Mizoram exemplifies the way in which food reflects both continuity and transformation, becoming a site where local traditions meet global influences.

At the heart of Mizo cuisine lies rice, not just as a staple food but as a cultural anchor. Around rice revolve supplementary dishes such as leafy greens, meats, or fermented ingredients that together constitute a meal. This dietary grammar has remained remarkably resilient even as external cuisines enter. Korean barbeque, Burmese Sanpiau, American sandwiches, or Chinese momos are not consumed in isolation but are woven into a palate already attuned to umami flavors, soy-based seasonings, and shared dishes. In this sense, the global does not overwrite the local but instead interacts with pre-existing tastes and practices, creating what this study calls glocal palates.

The concept of glocal palates captures this dual process. On the one hand, globalization introduces new cuisines, ingredients, and ways of eating; on the other hand, localization ensures that these

elements are filtered through cultural preferences, economic conditions, and domestic routines. In Mizoram, outside cuisines are accepted and enjoyed, but only insofar as they align with the cultural logics of taste and commensality. For example, rice remains indispensable in meals, and dishes continue to be evaluated in terms of their compatibility with collective eating practices. Even when sandwiches or noodles are introduced, they are often repositioned as snacks or supplementary foods rather than full replacements for traditional meals.

Situating Mizoram within the wider literature on culinary globalization allows us to see how deeply historical these processes are. Just as colonial histories left legacies, Mizo palates have been shaped by histories of migration, missionary encounters, and modern mobility. Youth who travel outside the state bring back new cravings, while social media accelerates exposure to foreign cuisines. Yet all of these influences are localized in everyday practice: modified, reinterpreted, and embedded within the rhythms of family meals and urban dining.

Thus, “culture, change, and the plate” is not an abstract slogan but a concrete observation in Mizoram’s contemporary foodscape. The plate becomes a microcosm of cultural negotiation, where global dishes appear alongside traditional rice and vegetables, and where new tastes are accepted only when they resonate with the cultural core of eating together. In this way, Mizoram’s food culture demonstrates the dynamics of glocal palates: a culinary hybridity that is simultaneously global in its influences and local in its grounding.

KOREAN CUISINE: FROM FOREIGN TASTE TO FAMILIAR CUISINE

The introduction of Korean cuisine into Aizawl in 2016, with the establishment of restaurant called Flavor of Korea, marked a turning point in the city’s dining culture. Before this, Korean food was foreign to most people of the city and its flavors, textures, and service patterns did not initially align with local expectations. Yet, as the restaurateur reflected, taste is not innate but constructed. As stated by him, “taste is built through constant and regular tasting of any particular food.” This observation resonates with Bourdieu’s (1984) argument that taste is socially cultivated through habitus, repetition and context. Through repeated exposure, Mizos “familiarized the taste,”

transforming Korean cuisine from a foreign novelty into a familiar option within the city’s expanding foodscape.

The process of localization was not accidental but deliberate. Menu design balanced authenticity with resonance. While the restaurateur collaborated with a Delhi-based restaurant (Guung the Palace) to curate the offerings, only select items were chosen that would “match the taste of the Mizos.” The result was a set of best-selling dishes such as “barbeque, sea food, squids, beef soup” that satisfied both the desire for novelty and the comfort of familiarity. The restaurateur explicitly noted the culinary parallels between the two cultures: “the way Mizo prepare pork is very similar with that of the Korean.” Likewise, the presence of soybean paste in Korean food appealed to local palates accustomed to umami flavors: “The Korean cuisine has the presence of soybean paste in most of the food items which the Mizos are also fond of.” Even more striking were culinary analogies: dishes such as “Chicken bone soup” were immediately associated with the Mizo dish “Arsa Buhchiar.” Such connections illustrate the mechanisms of glocalization; foreign dishes gain acceptance by echoing, rather than erasing, local food traditions.

Localization extended beyond taste to operational practices. In Korea, restaurants typically follow a fixed rhythm of opening for lunch, closing in the afternoon, and reopening for dinner. In Aizawl, however, this model proved unworkable because, as the restaurateur observed, “Mizos do not follow any strict timing in consumption of food ... they just eat when they feel hungry.” To remain viable, Flavor of Korea opened “from morning till night.” Here, we see how external cuisines adapt not only to local palates but also to local rhythms of life. Food cultures are temporal as well as sensory, and global cuisines must negotiate both dimensions to be localized successfully.

The restaurateur’s insights into consumer behavior also highlight cultural differences in taste perception. Non-Mizos were described as being able to identify individual ingredients in a dish, while “Mizos are not picky in terms of food choice. They eat it if they find it tasty.” This suggests a holistic approach to taste evaluation, where overall satisfaction outweighs ingredient-level discernment. Such a perspective helps explain why Mizos were willing to embrace Korean flavors once they became familiar, even without fully distinguishing their components.

Eating-out patterns shifted in tandem with these new culinary opportunities. According to the owner, “eater-out are maximum at night time and during day time, students usually come for food.” The clientele further diversified: “Mostly married men visited the place most frequently after work, while family would often come for dinner.” This shift demonstrates how the introduction of outside cuisines fosters new temporalities and social practices of dining-out. What was once unusual, eating out at night as a family or after work became normalized through the Korean restaurant experience.

Social media played an important role in embedding Korean cuisine into the local imagination. The restaurateur created Instagram account as well as facebook account two weeks before he opened the restaurant. Early visitors knew about the place through social media and the posting of the first day situation on Instagram created such buzz that it led to a boom on the following day. In this way, digital media functioned as a catalyst of glocalization, connecting global culinary trends with local consumption through images, narratives, and social visibility.

Taken together, the Korean case illustrates the processes by which global cuisines become localized, aligning with the first objective of this study: to analyze the localization of Korean, Burmese, American, and Chinese cuisines in Mizoram. Korean food in Aizawl is no longer simply “Korean” but a hybrid form: dishes are selected to resonate with local palates, service models are adjusted to local rhythms, and social media amplifies awareness in ways specific to Mizo urban youth culture. At the same time, this process addresses the second objective: to understand how these cuisines influence Mizo food practices across public and domestic spaces. By reshaping dining patterns, encouraging late-night eating, and diversifying social uses of food, Korean cuisine illustrates how external influences become woven into everyday life, producing what this article calls glocal palates.

BURMESE CUISINE: SANPIAU BECOMES “OUR OWN FOOD”

If Korean cuisine represents a relatively recent arrival mediated through global cultural flows, Burmese cuisine reflects older and more proximate cross-border exchanges. Mizoram’s shared

boundary with Myanmar has long enabled flows of people, goods, and foodways, and these influences are especially visible in the enduring popularity of Burmese dishes within Aizawl.

A family-run establishment, John Restaurant in Chhinga Veng was originally opened by a family who had once lived in Burma. Initially, the restaurant’s purpose was to serve migrants who had relocated to Mizoram but still craved familiar flavors. Over time, however, this has turned out that not just the Burmese but even the Mizos like the Burmese food. Another long-standing restaurant, Chhuangchhuang, has been serving Burmese dishes for almost two decades. Strikingly, the menu has not been changed since then, a testament to the stability of demand and the way Burmese cuisine has become embedded in Aizawl’s food culture.

Among the dishes, Sanpiau has achieved iconic status. The narratives collected emphasize its widespread diffusion: “It has become so popular that almost in every tea-stall found in Mizoram, Sanpiau will be available. It has now become our own food.” This statement is significant. It captures the process of glocalization at its fullest. What was once a foreign or borderland dish has been so thoroughly localized that it is now claimed as part of Mizo identity.

From the perspective of the study’s objectives, Burmese cuisine illustrates how external foodways become part of the everyday cuisine not by trendiness or media hype, but through long-term availability, affordability, and compatibility with local taste preferences. Unlike Korean food, which required careful adaptation and social media promotion, Burmese dishes entered Mizoram’s palate through continuity and proximity. Their flavors were never too distant from Mizo expectations, making adoption smoother.

The case of Sanpiau also speaks to the resilience of rice as a cultural anchor. As a rice-based snack, it resonates with Mizo food norms while offering novelty in texture and preparation. This combination of continuity (rice as staple) and change (Burmese seasoning and preparation styles) exemplifies the “glocal palate.” Rather than replacing local foods, Sanpiau expands the cuisine of what counts as “Mizo food.”

Burmese cuisine in Mizoram demonstrates another dimension of glocalization. It shows how culinary globalization is not always mediated by distant cultural flows or digital platforms but can also emerge organically through geographic closeness and sustained availability. It showed how borderland cuisines become normalized into daily routines, shaping snacks, street foods, and household expectations.

In short, Burmese food in Mizoram illustrates that the glocal palate is not only about adopting the “new” but also about rearticulating the “familiar.” What begins as a migrant community’s cuisine can, over time, be claimed collectively from “their food” to “our own food.”

AMERICAN-STYLE CAFE CULTURE: DEMAND-DRIVEN MENUS AND SLOW TASTE FORMATION

If Burmese food in Mizoram represents culinary continuity through proximity, and Korean food represents adaptation through novelty and media promotion, American-style cafes illustrate yet another pathway of glocalization, negotiation between customer demand, cultural perceptions of satiety, and global cafe aesthetics. The case of Warehouse Cafe reveals how external cuisines are neither imported wholesale nor rejected outright, but tested, adapted and gradually woven into the local palate.

The menu was intentionally “mostly American-based,” featuring “cafe food” such as sandwiches, pancakes, burgers, fries, and “bits & bites.” Importantly, the introduction of items followed a process of internal testing. Before adding or introducing any food items in their menu, they first try out the food for at least two weeks nearly every day like the experts do. Only after refining dishes through feedback loops were they introduced publicly. This deliberate, trial-based approach underscores that glocalization is not passive imitation but an experimental process in which foreign cuisines are actively recalibrated for local markets.

Yet despite initial successes, sandwiches and fries emerged as bestsellers. Mizo diners resisted viewing such foods as meals in themselves. As one respondent noted, “We considered sandwiches as some sort of bread; we never see it as a staple

food.” This statement reflects a deeper cultural logic. In Mizoram, satiety is strongly linked to rice, and no cuisine can displace it as the centrepiece of a meal. Thus, while American cafe foods became popular, they were reclassified as snacks, side dishes or occasional treats rather than replacements for traditional meals.

Customer expectations reinforced this pattern. Although the cafe initially avoided serving rice or chow in an effort to remain authentically “Western” repeated requests from customers compelled a pivot. As the co-owner explained, “Since our primary concern is based on the customers, we need to take into account the kind of food eaten by our customers because our cafe would not survive if our customers do not have food to eat.” The addition of a “rice bowl” to the menu and the consideration of adding pasta illustrates how customer demand mediates global ambition, producing a localized compromise. Here we see glocalization in action, global cafe culture must bend to the cultural weight of rice in Mizoram.

Taste formation in this case also reflects social embeddedness. The co-owner emphasized that “taste is a collective thing ... it develops over a period of time in which location and household played a crucial role.” A biographical anecdote makes this concrete that her husband has been brought up in Delhi. Because of which, the food he liked the most is Naan (Indian bread) even though he is a Mizo. This account shows how mobility and long-term exposure shape individual tastes, which then ripple into collective preferences. It echoes Sutton’s (2001) insight that taste is cultivated through memory and embodied practice rather than innate preference.

American cafes also imported new operational formats alongside food. The self-service “paging system” where the pager beeps when food is ready represents a technological and experiential borrowing from global cafe models. Yet even this innovation had to fit local circumstances because the cafe was located outside the city center, people usually go with a proper plan beforehand and some travelled specifically to eat items like “tuna.” Thus, global formats were adapted to Mizo patterns of planning and mobility.

The American cafe case shows how external cuisines are localized. Sandwiches and burgers are accepted, but reframed as snacks; rice bowls are

added to secure customer loyalty; operational systems are adapted to local geographies. It reveals how global food practices reshape Mizo dining: cafes become planned destinations, taste acquisition occurs through repetition, and eating-out is tied to aspirations of participating in cosmopolitan lifestyles.

In terms of glocal palates, American-style cafes highlight the cultural resilience of local food anchors. Even as Western aesthetics, menu formats, and technologies circulate into Aizawl, the centrality of rice to the definition of a “meal” remains non-negotiable. What results is not American food transplanted into Mizoram, but a hybrid cafe culture in which burgers, fries, and pancakes sit alongside rice bowls, an accommodation that reflects both global aspirations and local continuities.

CHINESE CUISINE: THE EVERYDAY DEFAULT AND COMMENSAL ALIGNMENT

If Korean cuisine in Aizawl illustrates novelty mediated by media, and American cafes reflect aspiration tempered by rice-centered satiety, Chinese cuisine demonstrates how some global foodways become so thoroughly localized that they appear as everyday defaults. Geography, migration histories and cultural proximities have made Chinese food deeply embedded across Asia, and Mizoram is no exception. The Mizo relationship with Chinese cuisine is less about discovery and more about familiarity such as momos, chow, and soups are so ubiquitous in Aizawl that cafes survive only when they include Chinese cuisine.

This pattern reveals the limits of culinary experimentation. As one cafe owner recounted, “I have introduced a number of food items to create scope for developing a variety of cuisine that I thought was foreign to the Mizos, such as spaghetti, Parmesan cheese and continental food. However, the demand for such food was so low that we have to stick to the normal menu, which has Momo, chow, rice, beef soup, etc.” The quote underscores a key element of glocalization, while global cuisines circulate widely, only those that resonate with local tastes, textures, and expectations achieve sustainability. In Mizoram, Chinese cuisine has filled this role as a dependable and adaptable option.

The appeal of Chinese food is not just in its flavors but in its social meanings. In Chinese culture, meals are understood as acts of relationship-building. As noted by Oktay and Sadikoglu (2018), “treating others with meals” is a way to make friends or enhance established ties. This resonates strongly with Mizo practices. The reasons for people hanging out at a restaurant or a cafe include having some quality time with friends and family. Both cultures value food as a medium of social bonding rather than merely as nourishment which helps explain why Chinese dining traditions have been easily integrated into Mizo contexts.

The alignment extends into the domestic sphere. In Chinese households, dishes are placed in the middle of the table for people to share, families wait until the whole family is seated and women are also responsible for the housework of cleaning the table and washing dishes. Mizo participants described nearly identical routines, “Me and my mother cook, my younger sister washes the dishes, and our youngest dries the plates or whatever chore it is that we have assigned ourselves. We share the load, and we spend time together, and there’s a certain joy in it. However, we do not particularly come together at the time of cooking.” (Female participant, 23 years old). These parallels show that glocalization operates not only through flavors and menus but also through congruence in social practices surrounding meals.

Food also carries symbolic weight as a marker of achievement. In Chinese culture, delicious foods are sometimes offered as rewards, while deprivation functions as punishment. Similar patterns appear in Aizawl as most cafes and restaurants would experience a boom when exam results are being declared. Students would come and have food to reward themselves for getting good results. This demonstrates how globalized food practices intersect with local rituals of accomplishment, embedding food in the moral economy of effort and reward.

Chinese cuisine in Mizoram illustrates both how cuisines are localized and how they reshape social practices. On the one hand, dishes like momos and chow have become so normalized that they are indispensable for commercial survival. On the other hand, the incorporation of Chinese commensality into Mizo domestic and social practices reinforces collective dining, shared responsibility, and symbolic uses of food.

Framed within the title *Glocal Palates*, the Chinese case shows that localization is not always about novelty or adaptation but sometimes about reinforcement where external cuisines thrive precisely because they align with existing cultural anchors. Chinese cuisine resonates with Mizos because it complements the collective ethos of eating together, the gendered structure of domestic work and the symbolic role of food as a social reward. In this way, Chinese food has become not just another “foreign cuisine” but an everyday default, embedded in both the commercial and domestic rhythms of Mizoram.

STREET FOOD AND FOOD TRUCKS: CULINARY MOBILITY AND NIGHTLIFE

Street food has long been associated with affordability, convenience, and cultural vibrancy in cities across the world, and in recent decades it has become a marker of globalization as food trucks and mobile stalls spread across both developed and developing economies (Kraig & Sen, 2013). In Aizawl, this global phenomenon has taken root in the form of “Just Chill,” a food truck launched which demonstrates how mobility, entrepreneurship, and localization intersect in Mizoram’s emerging culinary landscape.

The founder’s personal biography is central to this story. Having lived for years in Bangalore and New Delhi, where “dining out” was a regular habit, he translated those experiences into a business idea for Aizawl to start up the business here in the city bringing the food truck concept into a context where it had not previously existed. This reflects how migration and urban exposure function as conduits of culinary globalization, not only shaping taste preferences but also inspiring new business models. The glocal palate here is not only about flavors but about formats, the very way food is made available in public spaces.

Localization was central to the truck’s success. The owner explained, “We tune it to please the taste buds of Mizos; even with our hot dogs, we try to make it in a way that we typically like them. For instance, we Mizos do not like Subway hotdogs, so we try to change it up the best way we can.” This statement illustrates how global items like hot dogs are not simply transplanted but are reformulated to align with local preferences. Even “Western” food like a hot dog is only viable when adapted to local notions of taste and satisfaction.

The truck’s menu is eclectic, ‘chicken burgers, hot dogs, Chicken Rice Bowl, Chicken Wrap Roll, potato tornadoes, chicken pakora, kebab sticks, and momo.’ This blend of global fast foods (burgers, hot dogs), localized fusions (rice bowls, pakoras) and regional staples (momo) shows how food trucks become laboratories of culinary hybridity. Their flexibility allows them to test and combine influences, reinforcing the idea of the glocal palate as layered rather than linear.

Demographics also matter. The primary clientele of “Just Chill” are youth aged 18–25, with peak hours between 9:30 and 10:30 p.m. This pattern reveals two cultural shifts: first, the normalization of late-night eating in a city where evening dining was once less common; second, the role of youth culture in driving the adoption of globalized food trends. In this sense, the food truck is more than a site of eating; it is a social space where modernity, leisure, and culinary experimentation converge.

Operationally, localization extended beyond menus to labor. The truck employed a chef named Sangma, who is a non-Mizo yet he has been living in Mizoram for over 30 years. Though the items served are not traditional Mizo dishes, the preparation process does not differ much from the Mizo culture. This demonstrates that glocalization also happens in practice, the techniques of chopping, frying, seasoning, and serving carry local imprints, even when the names and formats of dishes are global.

The early reception was positive, “I feel like people have reacted positively and I feel they value it, for the time being at least. Or maybe it’s only because we’ve just started recently.” (Owner of Just Chill). This ambivalence hints at the experimental nature of food trucks in Aizawl. They are welcomed as novelties but must continually adapt to sustain long-term acceptance. Their survival depends on their ability to balance excitement with familiarity.

Food trucks are especially significant because they reshape the urban rhythms of consumption. They contribute to a modest nightlife economy, normalize late-evening snacking, and provide spaces where young people gather socially. In doing so, they extend the reach of globalization beyond the restaurant and into the street, embedding new culinary practices into the everyday fabric of the city.

Thus, street food and food trucks in Mizoram embody the logic of glocal palates. They exemplify how global models of mobility and youth-oriented food culture are domesticated within local expectations of taste, affordability, and sociality. By blending burgers with rice bowls and kebabs with pakoras, food trucks make visible the hybridity of Mizoram's foodscape at once global in inspiration and local in adaptation.

HOUSEHOLD

TRANSFORMATIONS: MOBILITY, CRAVINGS, PROCESSED FOODS, AND HEALTH

Culinary globalization in Mizoram does not stop at the threshold of restaurants, cafEs, or food trucks. It extends deeply into the household, where food choices are shaped by migration, cravings, convenience, and health considerations. This domain is critical, because it is within homes that taste is cultivated, reproduced, and transmitted across generations. By examining how global cuisines filter into everyday domestic practices, we can see how glocal palates are sustained not only in public dining spaces but also in the intimate routines of family meals.

Mobility plays a central role in reshaping household preferences. A 23-year-old female participant reflected, "I have been living outside the state, and I grew up on Indian dishes like parathas and pav bhaji. So it has been rather recently that I have started to acquire a liking for local Mizo food and our ethnic dishes." This illustrates how living outside Mizoram exposes individuals to new culinary items, which later coexist with local tastes upon their return. Here, taste is mobile, it is carried across geographies, absorbed into memory, and re-integrated into local contexts. Another participant emphasized the constraints of place, "On coming home, we do not have the luxury of having all kinds of cuisines here." In such cases, scarcity generates creativity, "Cravings would occur naturally, and I would make one on my own at home." These accounts show how globalization enters kitchens not just through restaurants but through experimentation, improvisation, and the embodied memories of those who have lived elsewhere.

At the same time, convenience foods have entered households, particularly through children's

lunchboxes. As one respondent noted, "My younger brother's lunchbox usually consists of processed food items like sausages, chicken nuggets, and such." (Female participant, 23 years old). This reflects broader global trends in which packaged, ready-to-eat items infiltrate family diets under the pressures of time, schooling, and modern consumer culture. These changes resonate with Ritzer's (1993) idea of "McDonaldization," where efficiency and convenience reshape cultural practices. Yet in Mizoram, these foods do not displace rice-centered meals; rather, they supplement them, signalling a layered palate where tradition and convenience coexist.

Health concerns also reconfigure domestic menus. One participant observed, "We have salad more often these days, as it has to do with my father's recent decline in health." Here, external culinary practices intersect with medical advice, demonstrating how global discourses on health and nutrition infiltrate family decision-making. Salads, not traditionally central to Mizo meals, become normalized when tied to care and well-being. This illustrates another dimension of glocal palates: foods are not only adopted for taste or trend but also for their perceived role in sustaining health.

Eating-out decisions similarly reflect the tension between aspiration and constraint. As one young woman explained, "The main reason I eat out is basically to have exotic and better food, which is not found at home, and also I eat out when I do not have time to cook myself." This combines the allure of novelty with the realities of modern time scarcity, situating eating-out as both a form of leisure and a coping strategy. In this way, household practices are inseparable from broader urban rhythms, linking the private sphere of cooking to the public sphere of dining.

Global cuisines are localized through the selective integration of dishes, whether via do-it-yourself replication of cravings or incorporation of salads for health. These cuisines reshape domestic practices by altering lunchbox choices, diversifying menus and redefining the boundaries between "snack," "meal," and "healthy food."

Households transformations are perhaps the clearest demonstration that globalization does not replace tradition but infiltrates it in uneven, negotiated ways. Rice continues to anchor daily meals, yet lunchboxes carry nuggets; traditional

stews remain staples, yet salads appear on the table; cravings for parathas coexist with pride in ethnic dishes. The household thus becomes a key site of cultural negotiation, where global and local cuisines meet, merge, and are transmitted to the next generation.

OTHER DRIVERS: BOUNDARIES, MEDIA ECONOMIES, AND MARKET FEEDBACK

While restaurants, cafes, food trucks, and households serve as the main arenas in which global cuisines become localized, a range of external drivers also shape how glocal palates form in Mizoram. These include geographical boundaries, patterns of migration and return, digital economies of discovery, and intergenerational negotiations around taste. Together, they provide the connective tissue that explains why global food influences not only arrive in Aizawl but also gain traction and endure.

The state's border adjacency with Myanmar is perhaps the most straightforward factor. Burmese flavors, exemplified by Sanpiau, entered Mizoram not through trend-driven hype but through proximity and historical ties. These cross-border flows remind us that globalization is not always distant or abstract, it is also immediate, facilitated by neighboring cultures that share ingredients, preparation styles, and tastes. Similarly, diasporic returns and travel bring back other influences. Students and professionals who live outside Mizoram acquire new cravings whether for parathas, pav bhaji, or Korean barbeque and often reintroduce them upon returning home. In this way, mobility extends the palate, linking personal biography with collective change.

Social media functions as a second driver, operating as what might be called a "discovery engine." Restaurateurs described how Instagram and Facebook posts prior to opening day generated excitement, with images of food circulating widely and creating anticipation. This form of digital publicity not only attracts initial customers but also legitimizes eateries as part of global food culture. Posting about one's meal becomes a form of cultural participation, further embedding outside cuisines into urban youth identity. Thus, media economies accelerate the process of glocalization

by bridging the global visibility of food trends with local dining decisions.

Market responsiveness provides another layer of explanation. Vendors constantly adjust spice levels, ingredient combinations, and menu offerings in response to customer feedback. For example, sandwiches are retained but reframed as snacks; rice bowls are added to American-style menus; and hot dogs are reformulated to match Mizo taste preferences. These adjustments illustrate how the palate is co-produced: it is not simply imposed by global cuisines but actively negotiated between supply and demand.

At the household level, intergenerational dynamics also act as a driver. Parents and grandparents encourage children to taste and value traditional Mizo foods, sometimes out of fear that younger generations, exposed to proliferating eateries, may drift away from local cuisines. At the same time, teenagers and young adults curate their own palates across new restaurants, cafes, and food trucks, often preferring global or hybrid foods.

The roll-call of best-selling items across Aizawl are "fries, sandwiches, pancakes, burgers, bits & fries, chow, momo, cheese burger, barbeque, sea food, squids, potato tornado, hot dog, chicken wrap roll, kebab stick" which provides a snapshot of how external influences saturate the palate. Yet beneath this cosmopolitan spread, the domestic grammar of eating remains resilient. Rice continues to anchor meals, soups and side dishes maintain their importance, and commensality, the practice of eating together remains deeply meaningful. The persistence of these practices reveals the layered nature of glocal palates: external cuisines diversify the repertoire, but they do not erase the cultural logics that underpin everyday meals.

In summary, these additional drivers show that the formation of glocal palates in Mizoram is not reducible to the presence of foreign restaurants alone. It is enabled by borders that allow cross-cultural exchange, migration that carries culinary memories back home, social media that amplifies global food imagery, market feedback that tailors dishes to local preferences, and intergenerational efforts to balance tradition with novelty. Together, these forces ensure that the Mizo palate is neither purely local nor simply global, but a living synthesis of the two.

CONCLUSION

Cuisine is not simply about eating. It is a lived conduit of social change, where histories, identities, and aspirations converge on the plate. This study of Aizawl demonstrates how external food influences such as Korean, Burmese, American, Chinese, and the emergent culture of street food are localized into everyday practices, reshaping but not erasing the domestic and social rhythms of Mizo life. The result is a hybrid culinary landscape that embodies the logic of glocal palates.

Across cases, common patterns of adaptation emerge. Korean cuisine, initially foreign became familiar through taste acquisition, menu curation, and operational changes that suited Mizo eating rhythms. Burmese dishes such as Sanpiau transitioned from a migrant specialty to “our own food,” naturalized into everyday tea stalls through proximity and continuity. American cafes experimented with cosmopolitan menus, only to find that survival required adding rice bowls underscoring the cultural centrality of rice. Chinese cuisine, already resonant with commensal practices, embedded itself so deeply that momos and chow are now seen as everyday essentials. Street food and food trucks, meanwhile, illustrate how global formats of culinary mobility intersect with youth culture and nightlife, further diversifying the urban foodscape.

These adaptations highlight the mechanisms through which external cuisines are domesticated. Entrepreneurs adjust menus to balance novelty with familiarity; supply chains are tailored to the local economy; service hours are extended to reflect flexible eating times; and media economies generate anticipation and visibility. Crucially, these are not just commercial strategies, they are cultural negotiations that make global cuisines livable and palatable in Mizoram.

Equally important are the continuities that persist. Rice-centred meals remain the core of Mizo food identity, anchoring satiety and structuring the

definition of a “real meal.” Commensality continues to frame eating as a collective act, reinforced in both restaurants and households. Gendered divisions of culinary labor persist, even as new dishes enter kitchens and processed foods especially in lunchboxes make inroads. Health concerns and global nutrition discourses have introduced salads and new food practices, but these are layered onto, rather than replacing, traditional repertoires.

Participants’ narratives emphasize that taste is not innate but acquired, shaped through repetition, collective socialization, and iterative feedback between vendors and consumers. This perspective challenges simplistic notions of globalization as cultural replacement. Instead, what unfolds in Mizoram is a process of layering and hybridization: external cuisines broaden repertoires, reconfigure times and spaces of eating, and add new symbolic dimensions to food, while core domestic practices endure.

By foregrounding the sensory, operational, cultural, and market mechanisms of adaptation, this study contributes to understanding how culinary globalization proceeds in practice. It shows that cuisine is not only a mirror of social change reflecting migration, mobility, and media but also a motor that generates new habits, spaces, and forms of sociality. Mizoram’s food culture exemplifies this dual role. It reflects the state’s growing connections to global flows and simultaneously helps make those connections tangible, desirable, and shared.

In conclusion, the localization of Korean, Burmese, American and Chinese cuisines in Mizoram demonstrates that the global does not dissolve the local. Rather, it coexists with, adapts to, and is redefined by it. Through this interplay, glocal palates emerge not as passive copies of external trends, but as living, evolving cuisine that both sustain cultural continuity and embrace culinary change.

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Received on 20-07-2024

Accepted on 01-08-2024

Published on 15-08-2024

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