

EALC 380: Cultural Topics in East Asian Literature

Japanese Food Media

4 Units/Summer 2022/MWF 11:00-1:50/Location CPA 110

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Yōkan happens to be my very favorite tea sweet. Not that I particularly want to eat it, but that velvety dense texture, with its semi-translucent glow, makes it a work of art by any standards. I especially enjoy the sight of that which has a slightly blue-green sheen, like a mixture of gemstones and alabaster—and this bluish *yōkan* on the plate glistens as if it had just this moment been born from within the celadon, so that my hand almost twitches with the urge to reach out and stroke it. No Western sweet gives this degree of pleasure. [...]
[A]s for those tiered pagodas of white sugar and milk, they're simply execrable.
--Natsume SŌSEKI, 1908

It has been said of Japanese food that it is a cuisine to be looked at rather than eaten. I would go further and say that it is to be meditated upon, a kind of silent music.... When *yōkan* is served in a lacquer dish within whose dark recesses its color is scarcely distinguishable, then it is most certainly an object for meditation.
--TANIZAKI Jun'ichirō, 1933-34

I'm sure one of the frustrations of being a Western enthusiast of Japanese food and culture is you're confronted every day with the absolute certainty that you will die ignorant. --Anthony BOURDAIN

Course Description This course examines Japanese food in modern and contemporary literary classics (short stories and novels); writings by academics, public scholars, journalists, food writing and activists (for instance, social media, food blogs, food memoirs, cookbooks, restaurant reviews); and other forms of media such as TV shows, short and feature-length films, and photojournalism and photography (food porn). The investigation of the topic of food textually, as a reflection of cultural, social, religious, economic, and political values, will extend into the visual arena, specifically the presentation of Japanese food through *moritsuke* (the art of presenting food, e.g. table settings, ceramics) and interior design (e.g. restaurant design, tea house architecture). Among the aesthetic ideas to be covered are: *wabi sabi* (subdued, austere beauty/rustic patina), *mottainai* (pity to waste), and minimalism.

Objectives To study the culinary culture of Japan and how the aesthetics of food relate to broader cultural aesthetics; explore how food forges individual and collective identity; analyze the relationship between food practices and the processes of globalization, with special attention to our locale of southern California/Los Angeles; consider how writing on food can inform and transform our own writing.

The class will include a tea practice session and a visit to a Japanese restaurant.

Assignments: Brief class and reading response journals assignments posted to Blackboard; team presentations; a final “presentation” in which students will cook a Japanese dish to share with the class; and a final paper or creative project (no quizzes or exams).

*All readings will be in English. Knowledge of an East Asian language or a background in East Asian culture is NOT required. The examples of food media addressed in the class will be Japanese, but students are highly encouraged to explore similar instances of Chinese and Korean food media for their final paper or creative project.