

## HUMS 2090: Consuming Japan: The Politics of Food

Instructor: Dr. Lauren McKee\*  
M-F, 10:45-12:15



### Course Description and Learning Outcomes:

Food and politics are never very far apart. Romans gave their serfs "bread and circuses" to keep them from rebelling; Marie Antoinette is remembered for supposedly declaring, "Let them eat cake"; even Herbert Hoover promised Americans a "chicken in every pot" should they elect him in the 1920s.

In Japan, food also has much to say about society and politics; economics and trade; male and female roles; national identities; regional disputes; and global forces. This class aims to explore the politics of Japanese food both as a domestic product and global commodity by relating consumption to economic flows, cultural practice, foreign policy, and globalization. By the end of the class, students should be able to analyze food not just as a means of nutrition but as a political, cultural and economic product to be consumed.

### Recommended Texts:

There is no one text for the course. Instead, I will provide you with various readings from the following books, placed on Moodle:

*Food and Culture: A Reader, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*

*The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*

*Rice As Self: Japanese Identities Through Time*

*Other articles as assigned*

### Assignments:

#### Attendance and class participation in discussion (20%)

Class attendance is mandatory. This is an intensive program, and we have only 24 class days. You are allowed no unexcused absences. For an absence to be considered "excused," it must be medically necessary and approved by the academic and/or administrative director of the program. Unexcused absences will affect your final course grade.

#### Weekly short papers (3 @ 4-5 pages, 40%)

At the end of weeks 2/3/4, you will turn in a short, 4-5 page responsive researched paper. We will talk about the topics of these papers in greater detail at the beginning of our class.

### Visual food diary with captions (20%)

At the beginning of each week you will turn in a Visual Food Diary composed of images of selected meals you have had throughout the week accompanied by captions that describe the meal and its context and offers some analysis that links your food with issues we have been discussing in class. You could situate your weekly journal around a theme (Japanese street or comfort food) or around a particular dish (ramen in all of its interpretations) or perhaps one week you want to search out Japan-ized versions of what we would consider American food. You can be really creative with this assignment. Your journal for each week will need an introduction (1-2 pages) that explains your theme and how what you learned eating on your own this week relates to our class in addition to individual captions for your images.

### Class presentation (20%)

At the end of the class, you will make a 10 minute presentation to the class that is a summation of your food diary and your short papers.

### Grading:

On UNO's 10 pt grading scale:

90-100: A      80-89: B      70-79: C      60-69: D      >60: F

"Incompletes" for the course are strongly discouraged and will only be considered under dire circumstances. Come prepared to have fun during your time in Japan, but also remember this is a regular summer course that will require you to study and work.

### Statement on Student Conduct:

Please be on time for class, prepared for the day's work. I don't mind if you choose to use laptops/tablets, as long as you use them appropriately. If you are using technology inappropriately during class, I will ask you to put it away. Our class will be a respectful, positive environment where everyone should feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Any behavior that disrupts that environment will not be tolerated. Overall, be respectful and considerate of your instructor and your fellow students.

### Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to <http://www.ods.uno.edu>.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at <http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu>.

Schedule:

**Week 1: May 26-30**

I. We Are What We Eat

*Understanding Food as a Political Product and Choice*

Readings:

Margaret Mead, "The Changing Significance of Food," *American Scientist*, 1970.

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, "Food as Metaphor of Self: An Exercise in Historical Anthropology" (*Rice as Self*)

II. From Plants to Protein: Meat, Modernization, and Wealth

*The Changing Japanese Diet*

Readings:

Ohnuki-Tierney, "Rice and Rice Agriculture Today" (*Rice as Self*)

Introduction from Katarzyna J. Cwiertka's *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity*

Hans Martin Kramer, "Not Befitting Our Divine Country: Eating Meat in Japanese Discourses of Self and Other from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present" *Food and Foodways*, 2008

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**Week 2: June 1-5**

\* First chapter of Visual Food Diary Due, emailed by 3pm

III. Fish and Tea: Nationalism and Identity in Japanese Food

*Food as Cultural Ceremony in Japan*

Reading: Paul Noguchi, "Savor Slowly: Ekiben—The Fast Food of High Speed Japan" *Ethnology*, 1994

Anna Meigs, "Food as Cultural Construction" *Food and Foodways*, 1988.

#### IV. The Perils of Losing Control: Drinking and a New Generation in Japan

Readings:

*Modernization and generational differences in views on alcohol*

David Milne, "Alcohol Consumption in Japan: Different Culture, Different Rules" *Canadian Medical Association Journal*

Atsuko Kanai, "Karoshi (Work to Death) in Japan" *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2009

#### V. Measuring Metabo: Waistlines and Penalties

*The Japanese Focus on Health*

Norimitsu Onishi, "Japan, Seeking Trim Waists, Measures Millions" *New York Times*, 2008

TJM Holden, "Overcooked and Underdone: Masculinities in Japanese Food Programming" *Food and Foodways*, 2005

#### VI. Women's Roles in Japanese Society

Anne Allison, "Japanese Mothers and Obentōs: The Lunchbox as Ideological State Apparatus" *Anthropological Quarterly*, 1991

Susan Pharr, "Status Conflict: The Rebellion of the Tea Pourers" *Conflict in Japan*, 1984

\* first short paper due, Friday by noon

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### Week 3: June 8-12

\* Second chapter of visual food diary due

#### VII. Sushi Standards and the American Way

*Eating in Japan as a Non-Japanese*

Mary Redfern, "Getting to Grips with Knives, Forks and Spoons: Guides to Western Style Dining for Japanese Audiences, c 1800-1875" *Food and Foodways*, 2014

Joy Hendry, "Wrapping Culture: Politeness, Presentation and Power in Japan"

#### VIII. How Sushi Went Global

*Japanese Food as Market Commodity*

Theodore Bestor, "How Sushi Went Global" *Foreign Policy*, 2000

Rossella Ceccarini, "Foodworkers as Individual Agents of Culinary Globalization: Pizza and Pizzaoli in Japan" *Food and Culture*

#### IX. For the Love of Fruit

*Food Imports, Regulations, Policy, and the World Trade Organization*

Masayoshi Hanma, "WTO Negotiations and Other Agricultural Trade Issues in Japan" *The World Economy*, 2006

X. Radioactive

*Negotiating Food Contamination and its Economic Outcomes*

*Reading: TBA*

*\* Essay 2 due*

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**Week 4: June 15-19**

\*Third chapter of visual food diary due

XI. Shaka Shaka Chicken: Multi-National Corporations in Japan

*Local Market Adaptation, Labor Regulation, and Abenomics*

Ohnuki-Tierney, "McDonald's in Japan: Changing Manners and Etiquette" *Golden Arches East*

Yunxiang Yan "Of Hamburger and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing" *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*

Eric Pfanner and Zhiyi Yang, "In Sake, Japan Sees Potential Stimulus" *New York Times*, 2014

XII. A Cookie Can be a Battle Cry: Food, Politics and Sino-Japanese relations

*Food's Role in Nationalism and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island Dispute*

<https://storify.com/LinkAsiaNews/a-cookie-can-be-a-battle-cry-food-politics-and-sin>

*\*Essay 3 due*

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**Week 5: June 22-26**

\*Fourth Chapter of Visual Food Diary Due

Project Presentation and Summation