Think 53: Food Talks
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Eating High and Low: Sushi and Ramen

Thursday, May 4, 2017
DATE AND TIME
Fri, May 19, 2017
3:00 PM – 4:30 PM PDT

LOCATION
Meyer Green
Escondido Mall

REGISTER HERE: www.inclusivitea.eventbrite.com
Rāmen and Sushi
Rāmen and Sushi

In the U.S.
They may be --
• Trendy or possibly “high class” food
• Still “exotic”
Ramen and Sushi

In Japan

• Originally street food
• Consumers crossed class boundaries
• Fostered connoisseurship
  – Aestheticization, craftsmanship, ritualization
• Gendered (traditionally)
  – Cooks
  – Consumers
Rāmen
An anthropological study
Class and connoisseurship
History of Rāmen in Japan

• The exact origin is unclear, but it was brought to Japan probably between 17\textsuperscript{th} C – 20\textsuperscript{th} C.
• Ramen shops opened in early 20\textsuperscript{th} C.
• After the WWII, low-cost wheat flour imported from the U.S made possible mass production of ramen
• In 1958, instant ramen was invented (by Momofuku Ando)
History of Rāmen in Japan

• Inexpensive, for sale at street stalls for male consumers (blue-collar workers and students)
• 1970s – aimed at middle-class women and children in supermarkets
• 1980s – rāmen became popular as “B-grade gourmet” food.
• 1996 – three former white collar workers open three fashionable rāmen shops.
Rāmen Connoisseurs


• “The expanding usage of the Internet in the 1990s and 2000s led to an explosion of blogs and online communities dedicated to ramen the establishment of fellowship among aficionados.” (p. 271)
Rāmen and cup noodles blog rankings
Prices of Rāmen
(as of 2017)

• Instant rāmen (¥110 ≈ $1.03)
• Franchised shop rāmen (¥450 ≈ $4.22)
• Traditional, older shops (¥750 ≈ $7.03)
• New-wave shops (¥850 ≈ $8.00)
Rāmen Connoisseurs


• “Practices of ramen consumption challenge the normative association of elite status with connoisseurship.” (p. 255)
Rāmen Connoisseurs


• “Contrary to Bourdieu’s (1984) argument for taste as an indication of class, rāmen represents a more diffuse subject of taste and connoisseurship through its appeal across class divides.” (p. 270)

• “Connoisseurship” – a taste for and an expert knowledge of a subject
Instant rāmen
THE MOMOFUKU ANDO
INSTANT RAMEN MUSEUM
Menu of an older rāmen shop
Traditional rāmen shops
A Guide to the Regional Ramen of Japan

The characteristics of Japan’s twenty established regional styles.

BY NATE SHOCKEY  JANUARY 15, 2015

Photographs courtesy of Nate Shockey, Mark Roberts, and the Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum
Trendy chain restaurant in Japan
Trendy chain restaurant in Japan
The same chain restaurant in New York
The same chain in New York

ABOUT IPPUDO

Ramen is a Microcosmos in a Bowl

Ramen is a cosmos created in a bowl. The basic broth is derived from the essence of pork, chicken, beef, or seafood, and seasoned with soy sauce, salt, miso, and other important ingredients. It’s totally up to each individual chef to decide which ingredients and how much to use. Flour, eggs, kansui (an alkaline water) and other ingredients are used to make noodles. The chefs do not simply mix these ingredients together. Their own particular originality is infused into the thickness, length, form, and texture of noodles. Toppings such as yakibuta (roast pork) and ni-tamago (soy sauce flavored boiled egg) are also selectively used according to the tastes, preference and individuality of the chef. Soup, noodles, and topping? the trinity brings forth the cosmos. Ramen is quite a creative dish with infinite potential for expansion and diversity.
Ramen is Japan's Soul Food

Japanese ramen has a roughly 400-year history. At the beginning of the 20th century, expatriate Japanese from mainland China sold ramen at food stalls in Yokohama's Chinatown. This is how ramen spread to the rest of Japan. In those days, Chinese lamian (pulled noodles) was adapted to suit Japanese preferences and called Chuka Soba (Chinese noodles). A simple bowl of Chuka Soba, egg noodles in a broth made from chicken stock seasoned with soy sauce, became popular for its taste, reasonable price, and fast service. In the 1950s, Chuka Soba gradually proliferated to become the common people's taste readily enjoyed by one and all. In the meantime, ramen made its emergence through the cooking techniques used for Chuka Soba. Then it was only a matter of time until the ramen varieties flourished locally and regionally using available traditional ingredients. In the 1980s, many chefs and cooks became enchanted by the freedom and depth that ramen offered, and ramen shops started popping up one after another. These chefs stimulated, motivated and encouraged one another, to advance the rise in the Japanese ramen market. Now, one bowl of ramen has that special something that transcends all culinary ethnicities and nationalities such as Japanese, Chinese, French, Italian, and Indian. Although there are thousands of different flavors and varieties, they are all known by the collective name "ramen." Thus this Japanese soul food, ramen, was born out of each chef's individual and free, unconstrained idea and concept.
Menu of Tsuta
“Traditional” ramen shop in Tokyo

Purchase a meal ticket from a vending machine.
We have made this noodle dish by combining the stock extracted from numerous ingredients with soy sauce gravy, black truffle oil and black truffle sauce.
Tsuta – Michelin One Star
Rāmen shops targeting women

ZUND-BAR (本厚木/ラーメン)
http://tabelog.com
★★★★☆☆☆9.64 ■丹沢山系おいしい天然水を使用したスープ。あっさりした
中にも奥深さを感じられない奥深さ ■予算(夜): ¥1,000～¥1,999

出典：http://ikemen.blog.so-net.ne.jp
Connoisseurship of Ramen Tampopo (1985)

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9m6FoSw4jE
Think about these questions after you read Fukutomi on Ramen Connoisseurs

- Does Johnston and Baumann’s omnivorous paradigm of gourmet food apply to ramen in U.S?

- How about ramen in Japan as described by Fukutomi?
Omnivorous Frames
Johnston and Baumann (2007)

Authenticity
- Geographic specificity
- Simplicity: Homemade, small sale and the simple life
- Personal connection: Food with a face (famous chefs)
- Historicism: Food grounded in tradition

Exoticism
- Unusualness and foreignness
- Exciting food: Food that breaks norms
• Ramen in Japan
  – Authentic (craftsmanship, tradition); no longer exotic
  – Ordinary food for all
  – Inexpensive
  – B-grade “gourmet” (not served at an upscale restaurant)
  – Can be aesthetically well presented but still affordable
  – Connoisseurs are not necessarily the elite
  – … … …

• How about in other societies and cultures?
• Anything similar in the U.S?
Sushi
Short Story—class and taste
History of Sushi– Edo/Tokyo style

• In the early 1800s, Hanaya Yohei began to serve sashimi on sushi rice (rice with vinegar) at his stall in Edo (present-day Tokyo). This was the beginning of *nigiri-zushi*.
• Sushi-stalls continued to exist until the 1950s.
• (Indoor) sushi restaurants have existed since the Meiji era (1868 – 1912) but they offered mainly delivery services.
• It is only in the Taishō (1912- 1926) period that people started to have sushi at restaurants.
• The first conveyor belt sushi restaurant appeared in the 1950s, but such establishments became ubiquitous only in the late 1970s.

**Edo** 1603- 1868 • **Meiji** 1868-1912 • **Taisho** 1912-1926 • **Showa** 1926-1986
Sushi Stall (Edo period)
Sushi Stall (early 20th century)
Sushi restaurant (present)
Traditional menu
A Modern Menu
Conveyor belt sushi
The pricing at a conveyor belt sushi restaurant

The bill depends on the number and type of plates you took off the conveyor belt.
Sukiyabashi Jiro

http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/jiro-dreams-of-sushi/
THE SHOPBOY’S GOD
小僧の神様

a story of class, taste and sushi
The Shopboy’s God
Background

• The author: Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883-1971)
• The story was published in 1920, i.e. Taisho era (1912-1926) right after the WWI (1914-1918)
• “Taisho modernism” – a new type of aesthetics resulting from the combination of new Western and traditional Japanese elements
The Shopboy’s God

Background

• WWI led to an economic boom ➔
  – Emergence of the educated middle-class with disposable income to buy books, go to movies and eat out.
  – Street food sold at stalls began to be served at restaurants

• It was fashionable amongst “snobs” to eat “dangerous, lower-class food.”

Who are in the story?

- **Senkichi** – Shopboy at the scale shop
- **A(wano)** – Member of the House of Peers
- Two clerks at the scale shop
- **B(anda)** – A’s fellow member
- A’s wife
- Proprietor of sushi stall
- Proprietor of sushi shop
• **Senkichi** overhears about new sushi shop and stall from his seniors (clerks) at the shop he works, and wants to eat sushi sometime.

• **Senkichi** comes to the sushi stall, hoping to have one piece of sushi, only to realize he cannot afford it.

• **Awano**, trying to be brave and eat sushi at the stall he heard from his friend Banda, encounter Senkichi.

• **Awano** is touched by the scene, and when he later encounters the boy, he decides to treat him to sushi.

• **Awano** takes Senkichi exactly to the sushi restaurant that the clerks talked about earlier. Senkichi eats sushi to his heart’s content.

• **Awano** feels guilty about his behavior.

• **Senkichi** thinks that Awano was God, who knew his wish.
The Taste of Sushi

The taste of sushi described in the narrative:

Clerks
“The reason I mention it is, you can’t eat the stuff around here.”
“That’s for sure.”

Senkichi
“How he longed to become a clerk soon! Then, making that kind of knowledgeable remark, he could step right into such a shop any time he liked.”

(p.1)
The Taste of Sushi

Clerks:
By the way, Yohei’s son has opened a shop near the Matsuya. Did you know that, Ko-san?” (…)
“Oh? Is the sushi good there?”
“So they say.” (…)

Senkichi, listening, thought:
So there are shops as famous as that. Then, he thought: But when they say “good,” just how do they mean “good”? ...he swallowed the saliva that had gathered in his mouth.
Price of sushi and who can eat sushi

• The proprietor of the sushi stall says:

“Nowadays, even sushi has gone up. It’s not something for shopboys.” (p. 3)

The prosperity brought by WWI triggered inflation and increased economic inequality.
Authenticity of sushi *eating*

• Banda, Awano’s friend who told A about the sushi stall, commented:

“the pleasure of sushi could not be understood unless you ate it with your fingers straight from the hands that shaped it.” (p.2)

→ The “authentic” sushi could only be experienced as street food.
Who are connoisseurs of sushi?

• Banda? Awano? Or neither?
A: “I noticed that everybody held it this way, the fish-side down. Is that the way to do it? (...) Why do they hold it fish-side down?”
B: “So when the fish is bad you’ll know it right away by the hot taste on your tongue.”
A: “You sound like a pretty fishy connoisseur.”
(p.3)
Substance or Form?

• “Instantly gobbling them down like a skinny, starved dog that has come upon unexpected food, Senkichi had three adult-sized pieces of sushi.” [ym: three adult-servings of sushi]

• “Without worrying about how he looked, Senkichi was able to gorge himself to his heart’s content.” (p. 5)

• “But he could not remember ever having filled himself with such delicious food.” (p. 7)
Substance or Form?

• **Awano** is concerned with form of eating sushi
• **Senkichi** eats quickly a large quantity of sushi

**Bourdieu** (1984):

“Working-class meal is characterized by plenty (...) and above all by freedom.” (p. 194)

“In opposition to the free-and-easy working-class meal, the bourgeoisie is concerned to eat with all due form.” (p. 196)
Gender and Sushi (then)

• Awano’s wife is curious about sushi from the restaurant or the stall
• Women did not go out to eat.
Sushi and Class

• Both Senkichi, the shopboy, and Awano, the member of the House of Peers, want to transcend their respective class boundaries
  • Senkichi aspires to eat higher
  • Awano wants to eat lower

• Awano’s exploration of street food, and Senkichi’s expensive meal were only momentary escapes from their every-day life-styles. These two experiences only served to reinforce their belonging to their respective class.
Sushi Today

• Times have changed.
• Sushi stalls can no longer be found in Japan, having disappeared around 1950.
• Starting in the 1970s, the new invention of the conveyor belt sushi made sushi affordable.
• Japanese now can either enjoy sushi as a delicacy in relatively expensive restaurants where a sushi master prepares high-quality sushi, or in an affordable conveyor belt sushi (kaiten sushi), where a plate with two pieces of sushi sells for about one dollar.
Eating High and Low Around You?

• Bunny Chow
  “Hunger Games in South Africa” by ZP Dala.

• Hamburgers
• BBQ
• Food trucks
• Ramen
Ivan Orkin

Ramen

• Chef’s table