Course Overview

What is food “for”? How does food function in society? This interdisciplinary course introduces historical, cultural, and socio-economic aspects of food and foodways in China, Japan, and Korea, from the earliest societies down to the present. Thinking about food provides us with critical and scholarly tools to understand historical change, structures of consumption and collective life, and allows us to delve into topics such as the role of ritual, religion and cosmology, the evolution of trade, the transfer of ideas/technology, plus many more.

Toronto, with its many vibrant Asian communities, allows us to experience food cultures in a global context. Often, questions about food and its history begin with encounters that involve our senses. For this reason, this course will suggest various “field activities” (observations of food ingredients and situations) to supplement our lectures and reading.

There are no prerequisites. Some knowledge of premodern and modern histories of East Asia (such as from EAS103/105) can be helpful for the course.

Week 1: Introduction: Why study food?

Week 2: Early Staple Foods
Required Reading:
• “The Origins of Agriculture,” in E.N. Anderson, Food and Environment in Early and Medieval China, 30—47.
• "Investigation of Ancient Noodles, Cakes, and Millet at the Subeixi Site, Xinjiang, China." Journal of Archaeological Science 38, no. 2 (2011): 470-79. (Focus on the sections “Introduction,” “Site description,” “Discussion” and “Conclusion.”)
• “From Millet Cuisine to Han Imperial Cuisine,” in Rachel Laudan, Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History, 87—94. (Available as E-book from UofT library)

Week 3: Kitchens Around Asia
Required Reading:

Week 4: Recipes and Cookbooks
Required Reading:
• (Primary source) "Ni Zan, Cloud Forest Hall Collection of Rules for Drinking and Eating." In Hawaii Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture, 444-55.

Reading Response #1 due

Week 5: Banquets and Ritual
Required Reading:
• Joanna Waley-Cohen,"The Quest for Perfect Balance: Taste and Gastronomy in Imperial China." In Food: The History of Taste, 99-134.
• “Of Knives and Men: Cutting Ceremonies and Cuisine,” in Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Japan, 38-51.
• “Foods of the Royal Palace,” in Korean Cuisine: An Illustrated History, 128-141.

~~~ reading week ~~~
Week 6: Drinks and Other Potent Stuff
Required Reading:


Field Report #1 due

Week 7: Pharmaceutical Foods
Required Reading:


Reading Response #2 due

Week 8: Flavoring Food
Required Reading:

• (Primary source) “Discovery of Crystalized Sugar,” in *Hawaii Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*, 399-404

Reading Response #2 due

Week 9: Food and Identities
Required Reading:


Field Report #2 due

Week 10: Fast Foods of Asia, Fast Foods in Asia
Required Reading:


Week 11: Global Foods
Required Reading:

• Bestor, Theodore C. *Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World*, 1-49.

Week 12: Food and Labor, Food and Migration
Required Reading:


Field Report #3 due