

“Ways of Eating: Explorations in Food History and Culture:”

A Book Talk and an Invitation to Food Studies via Japan

Merry White, Boston University

Abstract:

What was, and is, this thing we call food studies, and how did our book, “Ways of Eating: Explorations in Food History and Culture,” come to address it? In this talk, I will review some of our main points regarding global food history and culture, and discuss how they might illuminate ways of thinking about Japanese foodways. Over the past ten years working on this book, my co-author Ben Wurgaft and I worked to provide not only the basics of food studies, but also to offer applications and experiences that we think useful in contemplating where our food comes from, where historically it’s been, and how change and diversity are intrinsic to the foods we eat.

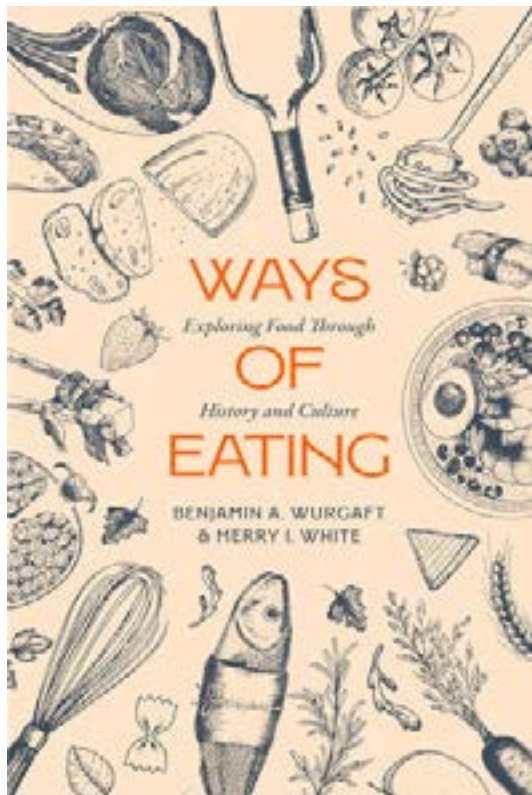
Japanese food within and beyond Japan has always been on the move, influenced from outside and changed from within. Tempura and pan from Portugal, sushi from Southeast Asia, ramen and sukiyaki from the Asian mainland as well – and those are only the older borrowings. Changes have occurred in practices as well as in principles, and now, those practices and principles called “Japanese” have traveled to be part of a globalizing Japanese food wave, influencing chefs and customers everywhere and acquainting the world with words like “kaiseki” and “omakase.” The trends in coffee in Japan have similarly created something called “Japanese style coffee” also with a world market. In my more recent, incomplete work, I’ve seen a formerly foreign beverage, whisky, a yoshu, now becoming almost a washu and traveling the world with enhanced prestige. This talk will situate some of these examples within a larger discussion of food studies.



Bio:

Merry White is Professor of Anthropology at Boston University. She received her B.A., M.A., and PhD degrees from Harvard University, in anthropology and sociology. Her first visit to Japan was in 1963: her research has included Japanese education (*The Japanese Educational Challenge*), internationalization (*Japanese Overseas*), material culture and adolescence (*The Material Child*), family and social policy (*Perfectly Japanese*), food workers and food studies, including a study of coffee (*Coffee Life in Japan*). With her son, Benjamin Wurgaft, she has written a book on food anthropology and history, *Ways of Eating*, published in 2023 with the University of California Press. She is now engaged in a study of the Japanese whisky industry.

This talk is organized by James Farrer (Professor of Sociology, Sophia University, Lead investigator of the ICC Collaborative Research Unit “Sophia Food Studies”).



April 25,
18:30-20:00
Room 301, 3F,
Building 10,
Sophia University

No registration necessary
In Person Only