

Japanese Language and Literature

Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese

jll.pitt.edu | Vol. 57 | Number 2 | October 2023 | DOI: 10.5195/jll.2023.335

ISSN 1536-7827 (print) 2326-4586 (online)

REVIEWS

Diving into Japanese Culture and Society through Food

By **Yuko Prefume, Akiko Murata, and Hiroshi Tajima**. Tokyo: Kurosio shuppan, 2023. 110 pp. ¥2,000.

Reviewed by
Hironori Nishi

Diving into Japanese Culture and Society through Food (DJCSF) is an excellent content-based textbook for learners of Japanese at the intermediate to advanced-level, containing rich information about the food culture of Japan as well as contemporary issues surrounding food. As for the reason for choosing food as the topic, the authors state that “[i]t is an excellent topic for enjoyable language learning because it is something we all relate to as humans” (3). Food is indeed one of the central elements of human life, and by learning more about how food is produced, prepared, served, and consumed in Japan, learners can expand their knowledge on Japanese culture and society, while learning grammar and vocabulary in Japanese. Although the title of this textbook, *Diving into Japanese Culture and Society through Food*, may give the impression that the cultural information included in this book is mostly about food culture, this textbook covers a wide range of topics such as geography, history, gender issues, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Japan by using food culture as a medium through which students can learn about these topics.



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Therefore, while it is certainly possible for instructors to use this textbook as a general intermediate to advanced-level textbook for Japanese language courses, it is also feasible to use this textbook for a course specifically focused on the food culture of Japan.

DJCSF consists of ten chapters in total. Each of these chapters is divided into section 1 and 2. Section 1 is designed for learners who are at the N3 level based on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), and section 2 is tailored for learners at the N2 level or higher. As the authors mention in the “how to use this book” section at the beginning of the book, instructors can choose which sections to focus on depending on their students’ proficiency levels. A typical section begins with a one-page long reading text on a specific topic, followed by a page that includes some comprehension check questions and information about several important grammar points and expressions included in the text. All of the reading texts in *DJCSF* are short essays. Each section also includes two or three activities relevant to the topic of the text. The activities typically consist of collecting and summarizing additional information about the topic for the section. While the components are structured similarly in section 1 and 2, section 2 contains more advanced grammar and vocabulary for higher levels of learners. Also, the texts and activities in section 1 tend to focus on topics directly related to food, whereas those in section 2 are centered more heavily on broader sociocultural and socioeconomic issues pertaining to food. The print copy of *DJCSF* does not include a vocabulary list or English translations; however, abundant online resources specifically created for this textbook are made available by the textbook’s publisher. Readers can follow the QR code or the URL provided in the paper copy to access the web portal, where they can download word lists with English equivalents, English translations of the reading texts, English translations of the questions in the activities, worksheets for the activities in the textbook, audio files for the reading texts, and grammar and vocabulary exercises. The online portal also includes guidelines for teachers and example lesson plans for classroom teaching. All the downloadable materials on the portal are easily accessible and free of charge. The inclusion of English translations allows learners to comprehend the textbook without getting stuck on unknown words or grammar. Additionally, the worksheets, totaling fifty-one pages, are for the activities in the main textbook. This allows teachers to assign the activities as homework and have students work on them using the worksheets.

The ten chapters in *DJCSF* are titled as follows: 1. Let’s eat *Washoku*,

2. Food and Community Revitalization, 3. Food and History, 4. Food and Globalization, 5. Food and Media Arts, 6. Food, Family, and Gender, 7. Food, Education, and Social Disparity, 8. Food and Health, 9. Food and Labor, and 10. Food and Solutions to Social Issues. The content of the two reading texts in each chapter go beyond simply describing food items in this book. For example, in chapter 6, one of the readings focuses on the changing gender roles and how food preparation at home is impacted by these changes in Japan. The activities in the chapter prompt students to analyze how gender roles are depicted in TV commercials and how household chores are linked to gender roles. In chapter 9, one of the readings is about the food service industry and the *omotenashi* culture in Japan, which has been somewhat controversial among Japanese people in the last few years due to the demanding work environment for customer service workers. Many of the activities following each reading also involve using the internet to gather information about the given topic. For instance, one of the activities in chapter 7 involves collecting information about school lunches in Japan. Several relevant keywords for internet searches such as *shōgakkō* (elementary school), *kyūshoku* (school lunch), *kondate* (menu), and *shokuiku* (food education) are provided in the instructions. The use of the internet seems to make the activities more practical and realistic, because gathering information through the internet is already an essential part of everyday life in modern Japanese society, and learning how to use the internet in Japanese is also an important component of learning the Japanese language.

While *DJCSF* is intended to be used as a textbook for Japanese language learning, it can be presented to learners as an informative book to read because of the rich array of information it contains. *DJCSF* is genuinely interesting to read, and it summarizes a wide range of topics associated with food consumption in Japan in a clear and concise manner, in addition to being a practical textbook. This makes the book fun and informative to read for all levels of readers of Japanese, including readers with superior to native-level proficiency levels who have already completed formal education and wish to maintain or enhance their Japanese skills. Also, even if the reader is a native speaker of Japanese from Japan, a lot of new information and thought-provoking ideas can be learned through reading this book.

In summary, *DJCSF* is an excellent learning resource with rich and up-to-date information. In the preface, the authors state “[i]t is our desire that readers will be captivated by the topic of food and see how it intersects

with society in various ways” (3). The content of this textbook clearly shows that the authors have succeeded in achieving that goal.

How Dark Is My Flower: Yosano Akiko and the Invention of Romantic Love

By **Leith Morton**. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2023. x, 403 pp. \$44.95.

Reviewed by
Marianne Tarcov

This book argues that Yosano Akiko’s (1878–1942) poetry and that of her circle, the *Myōjō* (Morning star) coterie, contributed to the rise of the modern concept of romantic love in Japan during the early twentieth century. In the introduction, Leith Morton delineates a theoretical foundation for his argument based on Peter Verdonk, Jonathan Culler, and other studies of poetry and poetics, suggesting a complex, multifaceted dynamic between poetry on the one hand and society on the other. Morton makes the case that poetry is not a mere symptom or evidence of historical trends in Japan; rather, it is an active participant. As such, Akiko (Morton follows Japanese conventions and refers to the poet by her given name) does not merely reflect the twentieth-century rise of romantic love in her writing; she actively contributes to it.

In the first chapter, Morton then traces the contested discussions of romantic love in a general-interest periodical called *The Sun* between the years 1895–1905. Ranging from philosophical meditations to fiction and poetry, the material in *The Sun* represents a diverse series of views on romantic love, and there is little in the way of consensus. This lack of consensus points to the uneven, dynamic process by which Western-inspired notions of romantic love were translated and interpreted in Japan.

Chapter two traces the development of romantic love in a women’s magazine, *Jogaku zasshi* (Woman’s magazine), and it also broadens the discussion to include significant works of Meiji-period fiction by such authors as Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), Higuchi Ichiyō (1872–1896), and Mori Ōgai (1862–1922). Morton shows how romantic love was