Global Noodles: Silk Routes, Subway Connections & the Umami Quest
An Experimental Research Lab
NYU Spring 2016 (IDSEM-UG 1867 & UA 380)

Professor: Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen
TA: Julia Mendoza
Research resources: Sarah Demott
Mapping & Word Press site: Noah Fuller
Course support: Hannah Baek

19 West Fourth Street #102
T-Th 3:30-4:45;
Section 3, Th, 4:55-6:10, SCA 20 Cooper Square, 4th fl.
Section 2, T, 12:30-1:45, SCA 20 Cooper Square, 4th fl.

Lagman, miàn, pasta!
Basic grain & water, dough, recipes old and new.
Hand pulled, sliced, extruded...
with ingredients, sauces, broths simple and elaborate.
Rolled flat & stuffed
boiled and steamed dumplings, tortellinis...
Fresh, dried, baked as flatbreads and naans...
...over thousands of years and tens of thousands of li...
...the variations are as complex as the time/places of the various silk roads, Indian Ocean routes, and subway neighborhoods. Market-to-market translocal, and port-to-port trans-littorals the quest for umami taste profiles are passionate and compulsive, driving whole sectors of the global cultural economy of desire—at least as this trending moment. So what better time to explore?!?

Is this just an excuse to eat lots of noodles and dumplings (my favorite!)? Yes, it is! This basic research lab is immersive education in the most delicious, fully embodied sensate, and legal way possible. As we collectively traverse these many market to market transport and communication routes, we’ll learn about the secret ingredient to noodle making, the oldest noodle (Italian? or Chinese?), epic scale cultural exchanges, and what Genghis Khan did for modernity. We will examine the historical and ongoing impacts of the silk routes latitudinal and longitudinal movements throughout Central Asia on the vernacular cultures of global cities, such as the migrant friendly neighborhoods New York City. Mainly we’ll raise lots of questions and experiment with taste combinations to locate our respective “selves” and complicate our sense of “otherness.”

And yes this course is also historical and sopped in critical cultural practice theory, you can tell your parents, as a way to learn about cross-cultural communication challenges, intermingled spaces, and embodied knowledges and practices. Part of what is unarticulated yet implied by global cities is the compression of longue durees of times/spaces in one distinctive time/space. Besides slurping for mouth feel, understanding family broth recipes, and storytelling practices, we’ll be documenting, making, analyzing, and appreciating the worlds of noodle-dumpling practices and conveying our collaborative findings using the latest in mapping apps.

Prerequisites – A readiness to change working assumptions and ways of doing research, a willingness to explore beyond your comfort zone, still loving Tampopo (1985) after three+ viewings, having comfy but stylish walking shoes, getting the three required books (the fourth is an ebrary book downloadable from Bobcat), and purchasing Metro Cards for getting around.

Basic flow
Weekly flow: We’ll begin each Tuesday with quick noodle related announcements of events, stories, tidbits. Each T and Th “lecture” there will be mini-lectures & key questions raised. Recitations will pursue reading discussions, mappings, your postings, and collaboratories.
A dialogue-driven & chronotopic approach

I believe a liberating, dialogic pedagogy needs to engage active learners in identifying from where we each come from in the world, to imagine where we are going, and to explore how we consciously and unconsciously position ourselves in society and globally. These basic issues of identification are at once personal and political, social and cross-cultural, domestic and transnational. Communicating across our differences, honest analysis, rethinking, and the process of re-searching buried archives and fragments are some of the tools we’ll be using to deconstruct and reconstruct, decode and recode a more critical knowledge. This will require both an ethics of care and of critical generosity. We have to live with the maxim: do no harm!

We also have to actively decolonized our approach towards knowledge making which first and foremost includes checking how we do research, how we work with people, how we gather insights, and who we’re benefiting in our work.

Our re-search and re-membering will be collaborative, dialogue-driven, personal and political, reflexive and ongoing. I won’t provide “answers” for you to regurgitate. We’ll all be formulating provisional questions and provisional answers with the goal of improving our approximations of understanding what this phenomenon has and is about. The honest feedback we provide each other is key to make this active learning process work.

Chrono-topos: chronos or time and topos or place.

Time, contrary to Greenwich Mean Time mechanics, is a cultural historical construct that can be infinitely meaningful and manipulated. GMT is a global standard because it stems from British colonialism and global economic-cultural imperialism. Today more than ever, the sun rises and sets according to the mechanical and now atomic time of the British Empire’s past glory. In a land which First Nations/native peoples first named, we have to ask here on the island of Manahatah, what names do we use? In what language? All stories and explorations are grounded in the moment of the here and now with an emphasis of some other time and other place “back,” “now,” or to come. What is the “Present?” “Past?” “Future?” We’ll be exploring power relationships in these three temporal frames but always being mindful of their relations to the originating time of reference—the momentous “now” of the formulator. What is our “now?”

What about topos? Home, a place of social practices and beliefs, is part of the cultural cartography of here/there, insider/outsider, us/them, citizen/alien, etc. A chronotope, therefore, is the culturally bound meaning we tie to a specific case study between the here/now we take for granted and some other time/place. Chronotopes can be with a past moment read from the present back, or a projection into “the future” as in much science fiction.

Notetaking & communication

Notetaking, in your primary language, is the most important work for you to learn, master, and obsessively partake in this semester. Please keep all your notes and fieldnotes in one volume. Ideally a bound, hardcover 100 page notebook. If you have notes from somewhere else or a scribble on a piece of paper, just tape it into the notebook. When you read, write your notes into this. When you sketch you first cognitive maps, do so in this notebook. This will be the primary, low-tech research notebook.

We need to learn how to communicate more precisely and clearly. And as the world become more multi-mediated and digitized and globalized, we need to do so in a decolonized, multi-lingual, cross-cultural way.
Syntax is key and in this cross-cultural space relational and relative. The “proper” ways we learn self-presentation is through the way we learn to speak, move, and express ourselves socially within historic-cultural contexts. Creativity necessarily is expressive in relation to such “proper” patterning. Given these differences, how do we figure out how to communicate across these differences?

**Mappings & Artifact Project**

We’ll be doing regular exercises to promote discussions, collaborations, and your notetaking. We’ll also have three major assignments, one for each of the three parts of the course.

I. Mapping your subject umami position
II. Writing decolonized reviews
III. Your artifact project & our collaborative mapping

**Expectations**

I don’t believe in grades but am required to give them. I believe in effort, engagement, cultivating insights, collaboration, and sustained work. I also believe in regular self-evaluation and giving feedback. And getting feedback from “others” is also essential. So, attendance is absolutely important. So is working in groups. And honest engagement with each other, and the Collaboratory staff are imperative. We are all en-culturated within various powerful culturally normative systems and our senses are habituated to find comfort and meaning within them. Yet, meaning cannot just be found in the “head” but must integrate “heart” and “soul,” smell, taste, touching with the Western “higher” senses of sight and sound, right and left, upper and lower, and in how we live our lives and practice our theories. This, to me, is what critical cross-cultural researchers are made of.

Your grade will be based on your critical, honest self-assessment and if we agree. A realistic self-awareness of your strengths and areas for improvement is key in this process. **I’ll be asking you to write self-evaluations for the mid-term grade and at the end of the term.** Attendance and participation, in class and online, are key. The effort you put in and how gained insights shift and deepen your understanding will be what you’ll be asked to measure yourself against.

Primary books:

- John McQuaid, *Tasty: The Art and Science of What We Eat*, Kobo
- Jack Goody, *Eurasian Miracle*, Bobcat ebrary
- Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Kobo

As a way to save some money, I thought online books to be the lesser expense, unless you can score a used copy right away. You’ll need to download the McQuaid and Smith books right away. Kobo books enable you to download a book online via your favorite indie bookstore which I encourage you to support. My NYC favorite if Greenlight in Fort Greene. Set up an account thru Kobo or the store.

**Metro cards:**

You should plan on at least two round trips to different parts of NYC per week for the length of the semester. This will be to explore neighborhoods, visit markets, and discover noodle and dumpling dishes where immigrants have settled in the region.

**Collaboratory staff**

**Hannah Baek**, course support, is a Gallatin undergraduate and Korean American foodie who has previously taken *Yellow Peril!, Chinatown and the American Imagination*, and assisted in the former in Spring 2015. She studies modernisms, with particular disciplinary interest in linguistics, medium interest in film, and regional interest in North Korea. She has much experience in conducting artifact research, utilizing critical theory, and filmmaking and will be sitting in on all of our lectures. If you miss class and need notes, have any questions about the research process, need resources, need a one-on-one to get your mind stirring about your projects, or need any other course help and advice, contact Hannah!
Noah Fuller, CartoDB mapper & Word Press site designer, is a curator and artist working in Brooklyn and an inaugural member of NYU’s Art, Education & Community Practice master’s program. He has curated “In the Shadow of the Highway: Robert Moses’ Expressway & the Battle for Downtown” & and co-curated “Haunted Files: The Eugenics Record Office.” He is co-founder with Jack Tchen of the Below the Grid Lab.

Sarah DeMott, Bobst research support & scholar of the Mediterranean, received her PhD in International Education at New York University. Her dissertation, Mediterranean Unbound: A History of Mediterranean Migration between Tunisia and Sicily, 1830-2015, is a postcolonial and trilingual history of 20th-century migration across the central Mediterranean corridor. In her work, DeMott explores the local reconfiguration of political and social subjectivities through the lens of Mediterranean migration, demographic cartographies, and the colonial spaces. For this work, she has been awarded funding from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC,) Cambridge University’s Center for Geography and Gender Studies, and the Junior Researcher Award by the American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS). Sarah’s specializes in postcolonial theory, gender and migration studies, cultural history, and qualitative methods. Regional areas of interest include: North Africa, Italy, France, and the Mediterranean.

Julia A. Mendoza, TA leading recitations, is a fourth year doctoral student in the American Studies program. Prior to coming to NYU, Julia obtained her law degree from UC Davis and a master’s degree in Human Rights from Columbia University. Julia thereupon worked at the ACLU of Northern California in the Racial Justice Project as a legal fellow. During her fellowship she worked on two advocacy campaigns that utilized a combination of legal and legislative advocacy, public education, and organizing strategies to address racial disparities within public schools and felon disenfranchisement. She is continuing her advocacy by using research as a tool to address the problems and issues confronting urban public schools and prison education programs. She is currently teaching in the recently launched NYU Prison Education Project and conducting preliminary research for her dissertation. During the summer, she enjoys returning home to the Bay Area to teach at San Quentin State Prison for the Prison University Project and work as a youth organizer at Fathers and Families of San Joaquin Valley--a community organization located in Stockton, California.

Jack Tchen, chief noodle and dumpling taster, is a historian, curator, writer, and dumpster diver. He is founding director of the A/P/A (Asian/Pacific /American) Studies Program and Institute at New York University, NYU and a founding faculty of the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis. He co-founded the Museum of Chinese in America in 1979-80 where he continues to serve as senior historian. Jack has built collections of “silenced” communities and contributing to the practice and theory of critical archival studies. His recent book is Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear (2014) with Dylan Yeats. He served as the senior historian for a New-York Historical Society exhibition on the impact of Chinese Exclusion Laws on the formation of the US. He is currently working on a two hour “The American Experience” PBS documentary with Ric Burns and Lishin Yu on Chinese Exclusion. And he is also working on a series of exhibit, conferences, and performances retelling US history from the lens of scientistic racism and eugenics “sorting” hierarchies. His ongoing reworking of having New York City’s WASP and subaltern’s past come alive, that takes its Lenape/Algonquian origins as foundational, is being developed for our future of wearable, geo-spatial technologies.