

Making Tea, Making Japan:



Cultural Nationalism in Practice

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18:30-20:00, Dec. 13, 2013

Sophia University, Room10-301



Few practices are simultaneously as exotic and representative, esoteric and quotidian, instrumental and sensual, political and cultural as the Japanese tea ceremony. While most Japanese have never participated in a formal tea gathering, and to many its arcane procedures remain rather alien, the practice is all but universally recognized as a defining constituent of Japanese culture, integrating arts, manners, and sensibilities deemed peculiarly characteristic of the nation into a single, striking form.

This talk will explore how it is that the tea ceremony serves as a site and instrument for evoking Japaneseness, even within Japan where such ethnonational associations might otherwise be taken for granted. First, drawing on Barthes, I will enter the flow of tea preparation to examine phenomenologically how an alternation of parallels with and contrasts to common features of everyday life in Japan facilitates an experience of Japaneseness within Japan. Second, I will turn attention towards the actions and interactions of tea practitioners themselves to investigate how they employ three modalities of ethnonational categorization to establish what precisely is “Japanese.”

Kristin Surak is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Japanese Politics at SOAS, University of London who specializes in international migration, culture, ethnicity, and nationalism. Her book *Making Tea, Making Japan: Cultural Nationalism in Practice* was published by Stanford University Press in 2013, and her articles have appeared in the *European Journal of Sociology*, *International Migration Review*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Lettre International*, *Merkur*, and the *New Left Review*. Her current research compares migration regimes and temporary migrant labor programs in East Asia and across the globe.