Title “Food Imagery and Parody in 16th Century Japan: About the Shuhanron Emaki (The Illustrated Scroll of the Sake and Rice Debate)”

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Abstract

Displaying four paintings depicting banquets and kitchen scenes, Shuhanron emaki illustrates a debate about different types of food, behind which may hide a religious dispute. Quite famous among specialists of Japanese food history and culture for its documentary value, this scroll most probably dates to the first half of the 16th century; but its anonymous text has not yet been much discussed and it raises hermeneutical issues.

Beyond the obvious food-centered theme, the discursive strategy of the work as a whole seems far more complex and deals with many other dimensions of medieval Japanese culture. Several attempts of interpretation have been recently proposed for this work, and emphasize different aspects of this scroll and its historical background, the discrepancy between the obviously parodic nature of the text and the depiction in the paintings of an idealized, wealthy and placated Muromachi society, denying the religious conflicts and the terrible economic climate of that time. Thus the Shuhanron emaki would offer a metaphoric transposition of the religious and social context of early 16th century Japan.

This talk will introduce the research program launched in France on this scroll since autumn 2009, its interdisciplinary approach, and its results.

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