



FILM: **TAMPOPO**

FDG RATING: 3.9 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Juzo Itami: *director*  
Tsutomu Yamazaki: *actor, Goro*  
Nobuko Miyamoto: *actress, Tampopo*

DATE: November 17, 2024

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **TAMPOPO**

The 1985 film, Tampopo, retained much of its quirky appeal as we watched it in 2024. A “ramen western”, the film is a parody of western, and spaghetti western movies with the entire focus on how to get the most pleasure from food; the aromatic ingredients, loving preparation, appealing presentation, appreciative consumption, and even the eroticism of some foods.

Tampopo, the eponymous noodle cook of a Japanese roadside ramen café, serves a bowl to the swaggering cowboy, long distance trucker, Goro, and his side kick, Gun. The taste is disappointing so the two men agree to teach Tampopo how to cook the perfect bowl of noodles, and the film's wild ride begins. Visiting other popular ramen cafes, the trio identifies the secret to the success of each cafe, even stealing some secret recipes while at the same time, observing the pure pleasure of food.

A bit disjointed, sprinkled with humor, we move from scene to scene including an old noodle master who explains the correct ritual for eating a bowl of ramen noodle soup: how every ingredient must be perfectly cut and cooked, how to address it, how to approach it, how to smell it, how to eat it, how to thank it, how to remember it. He apologizes to the pork in his bowl before taking a bite. In another scene, a group of young Japanese women are taking a class on proper eating etiquette and the instructor tells them to savor the delicate pasta with special care making sure they don't make any slurping noise, but they see an American man gluttonously slurping his pasta so one-by-one the ladies start slurping their noodles with vacuum-like intensity feeling quite liberated.

The fondling of food goes against what an upstanding Japanese citizen should do but we see an old woman indulging herself by squeezing the bulbous fruit and other foods at a grocery store. And then there is the eroticism of a gangster and his girlfriend in bed with little more than an egg yolk and a live prawn to separate them. In stark contrast, at the end, is the scene of pure innocence and basic pleasure of a baby suckling mother's milk.

Timing is crucial in making ramen so Tampopo goes through a Rocky type kitchen training to be able to quickly move heavy pots full of liquid and do all the necessary steps in the shortest amount of time. Finally, the taste test. Tampopo serves a delicious ramen to her customers, saving her little café. Goro and Gun drive off into the sunset in his huge milk truck.

We loved the abundant beautiful visuals throughout the film: from a fluffy egg omelette on a bed of fried rice to a succulent oyster fresh from the sea in the palm of an innocent young girl.

Most of us agreed that the film was an entertaining, fun film about our relationship to food.

But there is also the nod to the importance of film. In the opening scene the doors of a cinema blow open. In walks a flashy mobster and his glamorous girlfriend, both in all-white outfits. Their entourage follows them to the front row – and unpack a lavish champagne picnic. When a man sitting a few seats back, loudly stuffs his face with crunchy crisps, the mobster warns him, "I'll kill you if you make that noise once the movie starts."

We served Tampopo a delicious score of 3.9 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!  
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