Scuola Italiana di Studi sull'Asia Orientale
ISEAS

École Française d'Extrême-Orient
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Institute for Research in Humanities
KYOTO UNIVERSITY

2023 KYOTO LECTURES

Tuesday, December 12th, 18:00h

Felice Farina SPEAKER

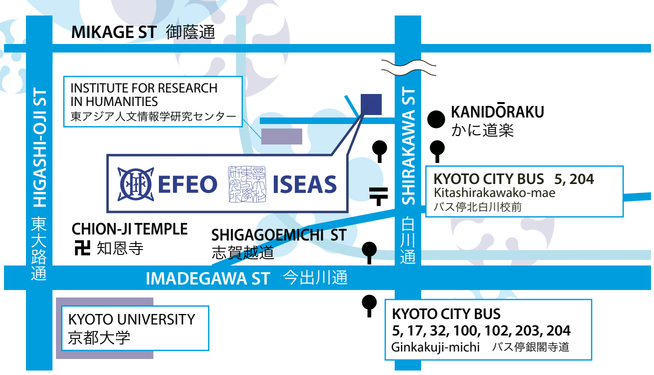
Japan and the Journey of Soy

From *Food from Somewhere* to *Washoku*

In recent years, there has been a growing appreciation worldwide for soy-based products that are often associated with Japan's culinary tradition, such as tofu, *shōyu* (soy sauce), miso, or edamame. However, the path that soy has taken to become a pillar of Japan's culinary identity is a fascinating story that encompasses not only nutrition or agriculture but also politics, diplomacy, and economy. Soybean cultivation began in ancient China, and for centuries, soy production, trade, and consumption remained concentrated in East Asia ("food from somewhere"). However, by the late nineteenth century, it gradually transformed into a global commodity ("food from nowhere"). This lecture explores Japan's crucial role in this transformation. In the 1930s–1940s, Japanese colonialism fueled soy production in Manchuria, then the world's leading producer. After World War II, Japan became a major market for American soy, enhancing U.S. dominance. The 1973 soybean embargo led Japan to diversify sources, notably investing in Brazil, which became the world's leading exporter. Our narrative culminates in Japan's recent efforts to restore soy's cultural significance in its cuisine (*washoku*) through gastronationalism and gastrodiplomacy.

Felice Farina is Research Fellow at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" where he teaches a course titled "Politics and Institutions in Contemporary Japan." His research primarily focuses on Japan's food security, gastro-diplomacy, *washoku*, and the history of soy. He is the author of *La via della soia. Una storia politica, economica e diplomatica del Giappone contemporaneo* (Cierre Edizioni, Verona, 2023).

This hybrid lecture will be held on site (email required in advance) and via Zoom (meeting ID: 868 7531 9515).



École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO)
Italian School of East Asian Studies (ISEAS)
29 Bettō-chō, Kitashirakawa, Sakyō-ku, Kyoto, 606-8276 Japan
EFEO | Tel. 075-701-0882 E-mail efeo.kyoto@gmail.com
ISEAS | Tel. 075-703-3015 E-mail info.iseas@iseas-kyoto.org