



JANUS FILMS PRESENTS

# TAMPOPO

A FILM BY JUZO ITAMI

**"Manages to short-circuit  
most of our senses at once."**  
—*Los Angeles Times*

**"Outwardly preposterous.  
And everything works."**  
—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

JUZO ITAMI'S RAPTUROUS "RAMEN WESTERN" returns to U.S. screens for the first time in decades, in a new 4K restoration. The tale of an enigmatic band of ramen ronin who guide the widow of a noodle shop owner on her quest for the perfect recipe, *Tampopo* serves up a savory broth of culinary adventure seasoned with offbeat comedy sketches and the erotic exploits of a gastronome gangster. Sweet, sexy, surreal, and mouthwatering, *Tampopo* remains one of the most delectable examples of food on film.

Japan • 1985 • 115 minutes • Color • 1.85:1 • In Japanese with English subtitles •  
Screening format: DCP

This new 4K digital restoration was undertaken by the Criterion Collection from the original 35 mm camera negative. The color grading was approved by longtime Itami collaborator Yonezo Maeda. The audio was sourced from a 35 mm magnetic audio track.



Booking Inquiries: Janus Films  
booking@janusfilms.com • 212-756-8761

Press Contact: Courtney Ott  
courtney@cineticmedia.com • 646-230-6847

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF TAMPOPO

**T***ampopo* is not about noodles. It's about life. Food is life, and *Tampopo* is about living to the fullest, finding the absurdity and humor in the quest to master life. It respects tradition but is not afraid to lovingly satirize or push boundaries with a cast of characters that settle for nothing less than complete gastronomic perfection.

At the film's heart, the vehicle for all its philosophy is the food. The ethereal, platonic ideal we are all striving toward—the prime mover and MacGuffin—is noodles! Perfect noodles. What could be a better metaphor in such a screwy, tangled, delicious movie?

Gastronomic religion: that is the prescient part of this film. Vincent Canby's 1987 review in the *New York Times* reads: "It's about people who take noodles seriously, who read self-help books that, among other things, instruct the eater to regard the pork 'affectionately' while 'slurping' the noodles that have been 'activated' by the soup."

Isn't that just what's been happening all over major cities in the past ten years? In the Cup Noodles world into which this movie was first released, it was like a missive from a distant, foreign religion, but now

it seems like prophesy. The film was already taking a very twenty-first-century attitude toward food, not only in its obsession with ingredients and technique but in its assertion that food is meaningful. Food ties in to our culture, class system, social customs, aesthetics, and health, and it puts us in closer proximity to death and life than any other experience we have on a daily basis.

*Tampopo* is an unforgettable, mystical experience: it's a rich essay on film and food, politics and culture, sex and death, order and transgression, meaning and absurdity. It's about everything.

**"There is no more 'foodie' a film,  
though it predates the term,  
anticipating a kind of insane fetishism  
that no longer seems that unlikely."**

—Anthony Bourdain



## IT'S ABOUT EVERYTHING

### Sex

Director Juzo Itami satirizes the clichés of Japan's multiplicity of sexual fetishes in *Tampopo*'s subplot and framing sequences that feature a white-suit-clad yakuza (Koji Yakusho) and his sexy moll. The scene of them sharing a hotel room and using various foods as sexual enhancements—honey, whipped cream, even a live shrimp—might have some basis in reality, but Itami brilliantly mocks foreign and even domestic images of Japanese perversity in a later sequence when the couple erotically pass an egg yolk between their mouths.

### Life & Death

Witness the surprisingly comic sequence featuring an elderly rich man choking on a piece of mochi from his red bean soup, a food that was forbidden by his young wife. Itami's razor-sharp dark satire also finds a target in the young mother who can die only after cooking one final meal for her salaryman husband and her children—stereotypical fulfillment for a traditional Japanese housewife.

### Social Order

One of Itami's primary drives as a filmmaker was to subvert the traditional social order, and the members of the lowest social strata were always his heroes. In *Tampopo*, the self-contained sequence of a businessmen's lunch perfectly encapsulates this theme: the bullied and disrespected flunky turns out to be the most outgoing and experienced of the lot when it comes to ordering food at a fancy French restaurant. The scenes of homeless men who turn out to be gourmets also show where Itami's true sympathies lie. Even the subject of *Tampopo*, ramen, is for most Japanese the very lowest of working-class food; as one character says, "People who eat ramen are all amateurs."

### Manners

Etiquette and proscribed behavior were a frequent target of Itami's satire, and the spaghetti-eating class, where the supposed expert is shown up by a foreigner sitting nearby, perfectly encapsulates his message. Both the teacher and her students succumb to the supposedly low-class ramen-eating style of slurping one's noodles as they eat the Western dish.

### Family & Belonging

Most Japanese filmmakers don't dare to upend traditional beliefs about family, but Itami subverts even this pillar of Japanese social mores via the surrogate family formed by Goro, *Tampopo*, and her son, not to mention the gaggle of other men who lend their expertise to making her ramen restaurant a success. The dying mother who is able to make her family one final meal is simultaneously a satirical look at traditional family roles.

### Movies

Itami's *Tampopo* is as much in love with movies as it is with food, and film references and satire are woven throughout its various narratives. Goro and Gun's initial entry into *Tampopo*'s noodle shop on a rainy night is shot and scored like a classic American western, and her training sessions with Goro echo Hong Kong kung fu movies. And when the film ends, Goro virtually rides off into the sunset, while the white-suited man meets his end in a hail of gunfire that references not only American and European gangster movies and films noirs but also 1960s Japanese crime movies.

# BIOGRAPHIES



## Juzo Itami

[*Writer, producer, director*] The son of famed silent-era satirical writer-director Mansaku Itami, Juzo Itami was born in 1933 in Kyoto as Yoshihiro Ikeuchi, though his family usually called him Takehito. After failing the entrance exams for Osaka University in 1954, he moved to Tokyo and found a job in the editorial department at the fledgling studio Shintoho. While there, he also began a side career as a commercial designer, a field he came to master, and he was particularly respected for his skill in typography. He entered Daiei studios in 1960 as an actor and began performing as Ichizo Itami, taking the surname from his father's well-known stage name. At Daiei, he appeared in several productions, including Yasuzo Masumura's 1960 *A False Student* and Kon Ichikawa's 1961 *Ten Dark Women*. Itami left Daiei in 1961 and went on to appear in a pair of international productions that were shooting sequences in Asia: *55 Days at Peking* (1963) and *Lord Jim* (1965). In 1966, Itami met the woman who would become his wife, actor Nobuko Miyamoto, on the set of Nagisa Oshima's 1967 film *Sing a Song of Sex*.

Itami began working on television documentaries in 1970, which deepened his interest in filmmaking, and he also appeared on-screen as a reporter in several programs. After Miyamoto's father's death,

### FUN FACT

Juzo Itami briefly worked as a cooking assistant for Akira Kurosawa's regular script supervisor, Teruyo Nogami.

Itami found himself inspired by the surreal events surrounding the traditional Japanese funeral ceremony, and he wrote a script in one week that he used as the basis for his directorial debut, 1984's *The Funeral*, which stars Miyamoto and Tsutomu Yamazaki. It was respected and popular and won over thirty awards in Japan, including multiple Japanese Academy Awards, but made little impression internationally. That was not the case with Itami's second film, *Tampopo*, which was released overseas to great success and acclaim, and at home gave rise to the so-called Itami brand of comedy. This style pokes satiric fun at typical human weaknesses regarding food and sex, and

it is a feature of Itami's gently humorous tweaking of traditional Japanese institutions in later films such as *A Taxing Woman* and *The Last Dance*.

After making *Minbo, or The Gentle Art of Japanese Extortion* in 1992, which starred Miyamoto as a crusader against yakuza extortion of ordinary citizens, Itami was attacked outside his home by five men, who were reportedly from the Goto-gumi crime organization and had been instructed to punish the filmmaker for offending their boss with his portrayal of yakuza. Itami was beaten up and slashed repeatedly on the face and arms, and he spent three months recovering from his injuries. He kept his spirits high, however, and used his hospital experience as inspiration for the 1993 film *The Last Dance*, about the bureaucracy and inefficiency of the Japanese health-care system. But another incident occurred during a showing of this satire: a member of a right-wing group took a knife to the screen, and after being subjected to further public harassment and threats, the director even began traveling with a bodyguard. This experience led to another creative spark: 1997's *Woman in Witness Protection*. But on December 20 of that year, Itami's body was discovered on the pavement outside the apartment that housed his production offices, shocking the Japanese film community. An investigation concluded that he had died as a result of a fall from the rooftop, and a brief confessional note was found on a word processor inside the office. The note, along with some reporting in a tabloid newspaper, indicated that Itami had committed suicide because of an extramarital affair. Friends and family were skeptical of this explanation, however, considering it completely out of character for Itami.

## JUZO ITAMI FILMOGRAPHY

1984	<i>The Funeral</i>	1992	<i>Minbo, or The Gentle Art of Japanese Extortion</i>
1985	<i>Tampopo</i>		
1987	<i>A Taxing Woman</i>	1993	<i>The Last Dance</i>
1988	<i>A Taxing Woman's Return</i>	1995	<i>Shizukana seikatsu</i>
1990	<i>Tales of a Golden Geisha</i>	1996	<i>Supermarket Woman</i>
		1997	<i>Woman in Witness Protection</i>



## Nobuko Miyamoto

[*Tampopo*] The female lead in all of Juzo Itami's films, as well as his personal and professional muse, Nobuko Miyamoto was born in Hokkaido in 1945 as Nobuko Ikeuchi and raised in the central Japanese city of Nagoya. She studied literature and theater in college and joined Isao Kimura's acting troupe, the Young Actors Studio, soon after graduation. Miyamoto made her film debut in Nagisa Oshima's 1967 film *Sing a Song of Sex*, which also featured Itami. Miyamoto and Itami married in 1969, and although she appeared in several films during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the seventh episode of the Tora-san film series in 1971, she put her acting career on hold in order to raise their children.

She returned to professional life in the 1980s, starring in Itami's 1984 directorial debut, *The Funeral*, and went on to star in all ten of his films, taking on roles ranging from

### FUN FACT

The repeating musical theme played throughout *Tampopo* is "Les préludes" by Franz Liszt, one of the theme songs of the *Lone Ranger* radio series.

beautiful young women to clumsy ugly ducklings to older characters. Her on-screen presence inspired the titles of many of Itami's films—*A Taxing Woman*, *Tales of a Golden Geisha*, *Supermarket Woman*—and she has been nominated for and received many awards within the Japanese acting community.

Recently, in 2013, she lent her voice to the Studio Ghibli animation *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*. In 2014, Miyamoto was the recipient of the Japanese government's Purple Ribbon Medal of Honor, the highest award for achievement in the arts.

## Tsutomu Yamazaki

[*Goro*] Born in 1936 in Chiba prefecture, outside Tokyo, Tsutomu Yamazaki is one of the most respected and experienced actors in Japan, with over five and a half decades of work on the stage, as well as on television and in films, and is a recipient of Japan's Purple Ribbon Medal of Honor. Yamazaki began his film career at Toho, where he appeared in director Kihachi Okamoto's *Bandits of the University (Daigaku no sanzokutachi)* in 1960. He received his big break three years later, when he was cast as the kidnapper in Akira Kurosawa's *High and Low*. Kurosawa also cast Yamazaki as Sahachi in his final samurai film, 1965's *Red Beard*, and that year Yamazaki appeared in Seiichiro Uchikawa's remake of Kurosawa's *Sanshiro Sugata*.

When Itami made his directorial debut with 1984's *The Funeral*, he cast Yamazaki

as the male lead. Yamazaki became a regular member of Itami's acting company, appearing in *Tampopo*, *A Taxing Woman*, and Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Sweet Home* (produced by Itami). The same year that he appeared in *Tampopo*, Yamazaki produced a stage production called *Pissarro*, starring a young actor named Ken Watanabe. Following the pair's appearance in *Tampopo*, Watanabe had come to look to Yamazaki as a mentor. Yamazaki also left a deep impression in Hiroshi Teshigahara's 1989 film *Rikyu*, in which he was cast as the historical figure Hideyoshi, a shogun who orders the execution of his best friend, Sen no Rikyu, the monk who developed the Japanese tea ceremony.

## Ken Watanabe

[*Gun*] Born in 1959 to schoolteacher parents in northern Japan's Niigata Prefecture, Ken Watanabe studied trumpet in school but was unable to enter a conservatory because of family financial difficulties. After he saw a stage production of *Demon Pond* in 1978, he decided to try his hand at acting, and, the following year, he became a student of the theater troupe that had put on the play. Success soon followed: while Watanabe was still a student, he was unexpectedly cast in a lead role in one of famed director Yukio Ninagawa's stage productions. Watanabe became a full troupe member in 1982 and made his television debut soon after.

In 1984, Watanabe appeared in Masahiro Shinoda's postwar comedy *MacArthur's Children*, which also features Juzo Itami, and the following year he was cast as the faithful trucker sidekick Gun in Itami's *Tampopo*. Watanabe's biggest role of that period, however, was as the lead in *One-Eyed Dragon Masamune*.

In the early 2000s, Watanabe again began appearing regularly in feature films, and he had his first international role in 2003's *The Last Samurai*, for which he received Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations. He moved with his family to Los Angeles and began a successful Hollywood career: in 2004, he was named to *People* magazine's "most beautiful" list, and in 2005, he appeared in *Batman Begins* and *Memoirs of a Geisha* and was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. Director Clint Eastwood specifically sought out Watanabe for the role of General Kuribayashi in 2006's *Letters from Iwo Jima*.

### FUN FACT

The homeless-man-cooking-an-omelet sequence in *Tampopo* is a visual send-up of Charlie Chaplin's Tramp character.



Nobuko Miyamoto as *Tampopo*



Tsutomu Yamazaki as *Goro*, Ken Watanabe as *Gun*, Yoshi Kato as a master of ramen making, *Kinzo Sakura* as *Shohei*, and *Riktya Yasuoka* as *Pisuken*

## Koji Yakusho

[*The man in the white suit*] One of the best-known and most successful Japanese actors working today, Koji Yakusho was born as Koji Hashimoto near Nagasaki in 1956. He moved to Tokyo following his university studies and was employed as a government office worker, but he was so impressed by a stage production of *The Lower Depths* starring Tatsuya Nakadai that he abruptly decided to enter the world of entertainment. He was accepted into Nakadai's prestigious Mumeijuku school (Nameless school) for actors and, owing to his previous career, given the stage name of Yakusho—meaning “government office”—by Nakadai.

Yakusho's first leading role in a feature film was in 1988's *Another Way*, a Japanese-Swiss production directed by veteran *jidai-geki* and yakuza filmmaker Kosaku Yamashita. Many TV and genre film appearances followed, including a role in Masato Harada's *Kamikaze Taxi* in 1995. His big break came the following year in the 1996 megahit *Shall We Dance?*, directed by Masayuki Suo, and 1997 brought back-to-back successes, with Yoshimitsu Morita's *Lost Paradise* and Shohei Imamura's *The Eel*, which became the first Japanese film in fourteen years to win the Cannes Palme d'Or and cemented Yakusho's reputation as an actor with commercial success and critical respect (he took home a Japanese Academy Award for his performance). In 1997, Yakusho also appeared in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Cure*, which began a long-running collaboration; he went on to appear in another seven of the director's films. In the mid-2000s, Yakusho became a regular leading man in major Japanese film and television productions. He made his international debut in *Memoirs of a Geisha* in 2005, and the following year he appeared in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*.



Ken Watanabe as Gun and Ryutaro Otomo as a master of ramen eating

## Rikiya Yasuoka

[*Pisuken*] A commanding presence, at over six feet tall and weighing 230 pounds, Rikiya Yasuoka was born to an Italian father and a Japanese mother. He made an early film appearance in the 1964 Toho production *Car Thieves*, in which he played a mixed-race kid. But Yasuoka's main interest was music, and he joined a popular Japanese group-sounds band called the Sharp Hawks as lead vocalist; the band made its recording debut in 1966 but broke up three years later. During his music career, Yasuoka also competed as an amateur kickboxer, logging three wins and one loss in four matches.

Yasuoka's martial arts background helped him get a role in the Sonny Chiba-starring *Bodyguard Kiba* films beginning in 1973, and he went on to

appear in many of Toei's “karate boom” films starring Chiba and Etsuko Shihomi. In the early 1980s, he became a regular on TV variety programs, often appearing with “Beat” Takeshi Kitano. Some of his later films include Shintaro Katsu's 1989 reboot *Zatoichi*, the Troma horror-comedy *The Toxic Avenger, Part II*, which was partially shot in Japan, and Ridley Scott's *Black Rain*. Yasuoka spent most of the 1990s, however, in the popular V-Cinema world, appearing in action films and thrillers aimed specifically at the lucrative home video market, including many directed by future wunderkind Takashi Miike. Yasuoka was hospitalized in 2005 with a diagnosis of Guillain-Barré syndrome, and although he made a brief recovery in 2009, he succumbed to liver-disease-related heart failure in April 2012, at the age of sixty-four.

## Kinzo Sakura

[*Shohei*] Born in 1956 in Hiroshima (as Shigeki Sato) but raised in Tokyo, Kinzo Sakura is known primarily as a comedian in Japan, and he spent most of the 1970s as a television performer and member of various comedy teams, most notably as half of a stage and TV act called Ago and Kinzo. As the 1980s began, Sakura began to focus primarily on film acting, making his debut in Hideo Gosha's 1982 period yakuza drama *Onimasa*, starring Tatsuya Nakadai. A bigger break came with the critically respected 1983 yakuza drama *Ryuji*, in which he plays a major role as the best friend of the titular lead character, a gangster trying to leave “the life” to return to his family. Sakura had begun his acting career under his real name, but during the production of *Ryuji*, legendary tough-guy star Yusaku Matsuda,

who was friends with the film's director, Toru Kawashima, insisted that he take on a stage name, and chose Sakura to go along with Kinzo, his comedy name.

During the planning of *Tampopo*, director Juzo Itami specifically sought out Sakura for the role of the chef turned chauffeur Shohei, due to the actor's resemblance to a former ramen master on whom Itami had based his story.

### FUN FACT

When *Pisuken* drives over to challenge Goro to a fight in *Tampopo*, he pulls up in a Chevrolet Camaro. The imported American car is a sign of wealth and status.



Fukumi Kuroda as the man in the white suit's mistress and Koji Yakusho as the man in the white suit



Nobuko Miyamoto as Tampopo and Kinzo Sakura as Shohei