

URUSEI YATSURA DISC 4, EPISODES 13 – 16

Ep. 13, Story 25: “Hawaiian Swimsuit Thief”

Cold winter nights: The “heaters” Ataru refers to are “kotatsu.” A Kotatsu is essentially a short square table with a heater underneath it, over which one puts a blanket, and then another tabletop. In older houses, there is often a square pit in the center of the room (normally covered by a tatami mat) where the heater can be placed. In winter, people sit around kotatsu with their legs underneath it to keep warm. Another thick blanket is often put on the floor underneath the kotatsu to keep warmth inside the room as well.

Here's mud in your eye: In the final scene, when everyone is fighting the octopus in the dark cave, it squirts ink in both Ataru and Sakura's faces. Sakura's response is to pick it up bodily and shout, “On top of everything else, you throw mud in my face?” The original expression, “Kono ue, mada watashi no kao ni doroo o nuroo to iu no desu ka?” has both a literal and a figurative meaning, leading to a pun (no surprise). The idiomatic meaning of this particular line is that “your actions have caused me to lose face,” which the octopus (which everyone thinks is Cherry) has done.

Ep. 13, Story 26: “Full Course From Hell”

The drink Sakura orders at the beginning of this story, which reads “lemon soda” in the subtitles, is actually called “Lemon Squash” in the original. “Lemon Squash” is essentially carbonated lemonade, and, to the best of this writer's knowledge, does not exist under that name outside of Japan.

One important note about the foods that were served: they are a deliberate mix of everyday fast-food and fancy dishes -- the all-you-can-eat restaurant is sort of a combination of a 4-star restaurant and a burger stand.

The 300-gram steak mentioned in the restaurant scene is huge for a steak in Japan. The average size for a steak in a Japanese steakhouse (for example, the Victoria Station in Shibuya, where many AnimEigo meetings have taken place) is around 150 grams, because beef is very expensive in Japan (2-3 times more than chicken or pork, and even more for grades of beef high enough in quality to be used as steak).

Cherry saying, “I haven't had steak in years!” and Sakura retorting, “Be honest. It's the first time in your life,” are continuations of the above reference to how expensive beef, and especially beef steak, is in Japan. We think they are exaggerating.

The “fermented beans” that came on rice is actually called “natto.” If you don't know what natto is, consider yourself extremely lucky. Foreigners either swear by natto, or swear at it -- usually the latter. AnimEigo CEO Robert Woodhead refuses to kiss his wife after she eats Natto. She has retaliated by ensuring that his children love the stuff.

The “onion” in “liver and onion” is actually a vegetable called “nira.” It's green, with a long stalk,

often served in Chinese restaurants.

The “extra-large box lunch” is “Tokudai Hinomaru Bentoo”. “Hinomaru Bentoo” is so-called because the main dish (which is usually the only dish) is a circle of umeboshi (pickled plums) surrounded by rice, which makes up the shape of the Japanese flag, Hinomaru. It was usually eaten when people couldn't afford anything else.

“Bonito sashimi” is actually a dish called “katsuo no tataki,” a specialty of Shikoku (the third of the four Japanese home islands). Katsuo, or bonito, meat is skinned, then grilled very lightly (a few seconds or so) so that only the surface gets cooked at all. Then it is dipped in cold water, sliced, and served with a cold soup of lemon, green onions, and soy sauce.

“Rice with miso soup” is actually “miso-shiru bukkakegohan.” Typically, rice and miso soup are served separately, but some people seem to like having them mixed together, though it is usually considered vulgar to do so.

“Rice-fish casserole” is actually called “nekomamma,” which literally translates as “cat food,” though not the kind one finds in pet shops. It's a mix of scraps and leftovers, usually not served as a dish in restaurants, often consisting of bonito flakes, rice, other small fish, etc.

“Noodles with rice cakes” are actually known as “chikara udon,” or “power noodles,” because rice is believed to give strength.

When this episode was originally made, whale meat was more easily available commercially than it is now, hence the “whale steak” reference.

“Steamed sweetbuns,” or “ampan,” are a bun filled with sweet bean-jam paste. An animation character popular with small children is called Anpanman because he looks like one.

Mentioning that Ataru, Sakura, and Cherry are at “table number four” is also a joke, because four is a bad-luck number in Japanese.

The shot of Sakura with the fork in her teeth is reminiscent of Spanish flamenco dancers with roses in their teeth.

Ep. 14, Story 27: “Mendou Brings Trouble!”

The opening of this story is a tribute to a popular, long-running historical-fiction series, or “jidaigeki,” called “Mito Koomon.” Mito Koomon was an actual Edo-period historical figure, whose real name was Mito no Mitsukuni, and he was a member of one of the three main Tokugawa families. The basic plot of each story is the same: Mitokoomon travels the land, his true identity concealed, rooting out evil. The jokes in this scene are that Grandfather Mendou resembles Mito Koomon in both dress and appearance, and the shot of Shutaro showing the cup with the family crest on it, the latter referring to Mito Koomon showing his crest when he reveals his true identity, namely that he is a member of one of the families of Tokugawa. Also, the decoration of the room is in the style of rooms that the shogun would have, in the best traditional style.

Episodes of Mito Koomon always have the following in common: The bad guys are rich, noble oppressors of the people, and, after the big “by the way, have you seen my family crest?” scene, the bad guys attack Mito Koomon and his assistants, whereupon the body-count becomes astronomical. The bad guys are always offed in reverse order of their importance, and the top bad guy usually gets it while trying to run away. Surprisingly, none of the bad guys ever get the bright idea of attacking the good guys en-masse; they go to their graves one at a time.

Grandfather saying “Did you remember your handkerchief? And your tissues?” is the sort of thing a typical Japanese mother would say to her children-- if they were in kindergarten, that is.

At the time this story was made (Winter 1982), ¥5 trillion was worth about US\$19.2 billion.

“Field Day” is actually called “Undookai” (Sports Meet, or Sports Day). It's a collection of various activities, ranging from track events to tug-o-war to “fill up the basket” (tamaire), about which see story 29, “The Great Spring War.”

The pose Lum strikes when she zaps Mendou to protect Ataru is a pitching technique invented by Hoshi Hyuuma, star of the popular manga/anime series “Kyojin no Hoshi” (Star of the Giants), called “Dai-League Ball Nigoo” (Big League Pitch No. 2). The technique involves raising one's leg up in the air, thus kicking up lots of sand. When the ball is thrown through the sand, the sand creates a smoke screen effect which makes it disappear just before the batter is about to hit it.

To atone for his defeat, Shutaro prepares to commit seppuku, in truly traditional fashion.

Ep. 14, Story 28: “Constellation-Go-Round”

The computer Lum uses at the beginning of this story is a pachinko machine, a very popular form of gambling in Japan. The idea is to shoot balls up into the machine, and have them bounce off the pins and into scoring slots (which pay off with more balls). There are two basic types; “airplane” and “fever.” In an air-plane machine, getting balls in certain slots briefly open up “wings” that allow balls to go into a central area ; if a ball manages to go into the “V-zone” in the central area, the machine goes “uchi-dome,” and the wings open repeat-edly, making it easy to win several thousand balls. In a fever machine, getting balls into certain slots start a slot machine-like device working, and if the numbers line up, the machine goes “uchi-dome.” Gambling is illegal in Japan, so pachinko parlors cannot give out money; players are supposed to trade in their balls for prizes like food and sundries. How-ever, invariably, each parlor has some weird little prize like lighter flints or tiny bottles of toilet water that, purely by coincidence, can be sold at a tiny shop just around the corner for cash.

Ep. 15, Story 29: “The Great Spring War”

Setsubun, or, “The Day Before Spring,” comes on February 3rd, according to the old Japanese calendar. On that day, people throw roasted soybeans to ward off Oni, in a ceremony called “Mamemaki” (see Ep. 1, Story 1, for additional information).

The list of foods Ataru asks his mother to make in celebration of what he thinks is Cherry leaving

them is an assortment of Japanese holiday foods in the original:

“Sekihan,” literally, “red rice,” made from “mochigome,” a type of rice used to make “mochi” (rice cakes) and azuki beans (which give it its red color). They’re steamed, and given on special occasions such as births, passing the university entrance exams, graduations, weddings, etc.

“Botamochi,” made of mochigome and sweet bean paste, about the size of an egg. Unlike ampan, the bean paste is on the outside, and the rice on the inside. Given on the Equinoxes, primarily the Autumnal Equinox (Sept. 21).

“Chitose-ame,” A special candy given on Nov. 15, the “Shichi-Go-San” (Seven-Five-Three) Day, which celebrates children reaching those ages. It’s a long stick-shaped candy, in white and pink colors.

The joke about this sequence is that none of these foods have anything to do with one another. Ataru just wants to use anything and everything he can think of to celebrate Cherry's leaving.

Sukiyaki is considered a special meal in middle-class Japanese households, because it contains beef. In addition to beef, it consists of “yakidofu,” lightly grilled tofu, “shirataki,” noodles made of konyaku, a kind of no-cal potato, that looks like jello, “negi,” green onions, “shimeji,” champignon mushrooms, and “shungiku” and “hakusai,” a pair of vegetables that have no apparent English equivalent. It’s flavored with soy sauce, sugar and sake (or sometimes cooking wine instead of sake), cooked in a deep iron pan, and eaten right out of same. More ingredients are added as it’s eaten as well, and one helps oneself out of the pan and into one’s bowl. Sometimes people put a raw egg into their bowls, dip their sukiyaki into said egg, and eat it that way as well.

Shichifukujin (The Seven Gods of Luck) are Buddhist Guardian Spirits, gods of warfare and the household, often placed in the kitchen. They are generally regarded as representing good fortune in the same way Oni represent misfortune.

Daikokuten: Mahaakaala in Sanskrit. In Tantric (esoteric) Buddhism, an avatar of the Hindu god Shiva, of which Daijizaiten is another name in Japanese. Symbolized by the zukin (skullcap) on his head, the large bag on his left shoulder, and the uchide-no-kozuchi (mallet of luck) in his right hand, which, when shook, rains gold and other precious objects. Also has a bag of rice underfoot.

Ebisu: Originally Hirokoonomikoto, Guardian Spirit of Nishinomiya Shrine in Hyoogo Prefecture. God of the oceans, fishing, and business. Often wears a hat called “kazaorieboshi.” Carries a fishing pole with a snapper on it.

Bishamonten: Vaisravana in Sanskrit. One of the Shitennoo (Four Devas); also one of the Juuniten (Twelve Guardians). Guardian of the North Ward. Known as Tamonten when referring to the Shitennoo.

Benten: Originally Bensaiten. Sarasvatii in Sanskrit. Goddess of music, oratory, luck, wisdom, longevity, and victory. Also called Myoonten and Byonten. Together with Kichi-jooten (Vishnu, or Srii-mahaaderii in Sanskrit), she was the most respected goddess in India. However, the two

were mixed up in Japan, and came to be regarded as a giver of fortune, thus becoming one of the seven Gods of Luck.

Fukurokuju: In China, an avatar of Nankyokusei (the Southern Cross). Known for a short body, a long head, an abundant beard, and the prayer wheel he carries. Often followed by a flock of cranes.

Juroojin: An actual person believed to have lived during the Ganyu Period. An old man with a long head, prayer wheels, a fan, and followed by deer. Said to bestow long life.

Hotei: A Zen Buddhist in China during the T'ang Period (AD. 618-907). He lived on a mountain called Shimeisan. Has a huge body, exposes his belly, and slings a bag over his shoulder. Wanders in search of charity. Regarded as an avatar of Miroku (Maitreya). Known also for constantly happy expression.

War Games: "Tamaire" (Fill Up the Basket) is a very common event at "undookai" (Field Days). Two teams try to fill baskets with balls of a certain color, each team trying to put in more than the other.

Ep. 15, Story 30: "The Benten Gang's Return Match"

When Shinobu says, "We're firing a shot for tomorrow!" it's yet another cultural-linguistic in-joke. The original, "Asu e mukatte ute!" (Face Tomorrow and Shoot!) is the Japanese title of "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid."

When Cherry says, "I forecast a new high of misfortune," it was an attempt to deal with still another culture-specific reference. The original phrase, "Akamaru jooshoochuu," means "red circle rising," and is used to refer to hot songs on the Japanese music charts, which are marked with a red circle.

When Ataru says, "Purr!" to Benten, it's almost literally what he said in the original. "Boronya!" is the onomatopoeic sound of a cat nuzzling up to someone.

Name Games: The names of the daughters of the Gods of Luck are themselves derivations of the names of the Gods themselves, though at least one of those derivations comes from a somewhat unexpected direction: "Kuro" is the Japanese reading of the kanji which is read "koku" in "Daikokuten." On the Japan Railways Tokyo Yamanote Line, Ebisu and Meguro Stations are right next to one another. The "Sha" in "Shala" is the same kanji "sha" in her father's name, "Bishamonten." "Roku" is derived from "Fukurokuju" the same way. "Kotobuki" is the Japanese reading of the kanji which is read "Ju" in "Juroojin." And "Tei" is taken directly from "Hotei."

Ep. 16, Story 31: "Oh! Lone Teacher!"

The new teacher, Kuribayashi Sanjuuroo, is a takeoff on the character of Sanjuuroo created by Mifune Toshiroo in two classic films by Kurosawa Akira: "Yojimbo" and "Sanjuro." Note particularly his entrance at the beginning of the episode.

The persistent references to someone or something being a "cancer" (gan) are because it was a

very popular phrase at the time the episodes were produced (c. 1982).

Kuribayashi saying, “I can see her... No, I can't...” is a literal translation of the original: “Aeru... Aenai...” The reason we translated this line this way, and not as, “She loves me, she loves me not...” is because the original phrasing is not normal in Japanese either. Usually, in Japanese, one would say, “Suki, kirai...” which almost literally means, “She loves me, she loves me not...” (see Ep. 9, Story 17 for another example). But Kuribayashi uses a form that is variant even in the original, so we did the same thing here to connote that deliberate difference.

Ep. 16, Story 32: “Terrifying Visiting Day”

When parents visit their children's school in Japan, there are typically three different events. One is “open class,” where parents come and actually watch a (supposedly) typical class period, so that they can see how their children are doing. Another is a PTA meeting and discussion, covering various topics, including student entrance examinations and electing PTA officers. Also, for high-school juniors and seniors, there are meetings between parents, teachers, and students, about university prospects. The fancy dress that all the mothers are wearing is unusual because they only dress up to show off in front of all the other mothers; it becomes a competition, and no one wants to be left out. It's hardly a fancy-dress occasion, but they do it anyway. The kids don't help matters by keeping an eye out to see whether their mothers are looking nice.