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Menus of Cooperation and Giving: A Case Study of A Farm Family of Nanyo City, Yamagata Prefecture

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This paper elucidates the process of commoditization of ingredients and outsourcing on banquets, analyzing private documents of farm family A of Nanyo City in Yamagata Prefecture. Furthermore, it focuses on how the system of banquets based on cooperation and giving by guests has changed over the past 200 years.

Japan has a long history of documents, not only by the class of rulers but also by those ruled. Even the high class of villagers kept documents for several centuries. Historical documents regarding menus are very valuable for understanding changes in diet. Japanese cuisine was divided into four types, daikyo ryori (大饌料理), shojin ryori (精進料理), honzen ryori (本膳料理), and kaiseki ryori (懐石料理) during medieval ages (Harada 2005). These formations gradually became widespread between “the top and bottom.” Shojin ryori is a
vegetable dish based on Buddhist belief. *Kaiseki Ryori* developed based on the tea ceremony. *Honzen Ryori* was developed as a banquet dish for shoguns of the Muromachi period (1333–1573 CE). It consisted of an odd number of dishes, such as roasted, boiled, and soup dishes, becoming the base of Japanese cuisine today. With such a background, the formats of banquet menus in local villages during the early modern era are surprisingly alike. I focused on the menu contained in gift records; it reveals how to give ingredients, cooperate on cooking, and eat together. This perspective is different from previous research.

Research Data

The heads of family A had served as the village mayors before the modern era, and they possessed 1,260 village-related and 302 private documents concerning family members (Yamaguchi 2012). These private documents include information about gift exchanges and menus of banquets organized for life events, such as funerals, weddings, childbirths, get-well gifts, expressions of sympathy for disaster victims, farewell gifts to travelers and soldiers, housewarming parties, and expelling evil of unlucky years.

This report focuses on the records of several events, such as funerals (1896, 1931, 1952, 1976, 1977, 1984), a wedding (1932), an expulsion of evil from an unlucky year (1822), and a housewarming party (1792). These documents reveal changes in the usage of vegetables, fruits, processed foods, and protein sources over the past 200 years. At the events, the hosts, family A, and the guests gave each other condolence money, handsel, commodities, ingredients, assistance, and return gifts.
Historical Analysis of Funerals

The main characteristic of funeral menus is to avoid using animal proteins, in accordance to the Buddhist belief. Therefore, funeral menus were cooked with vegetables, processed food, and rice. Agar, gelatin noodles, and soybean curd were often used in such meals. At funerals, some intimate guests prepared *aomono* (青物), meaning vegetable, in addition to offering. Community women used these *aomono* as ingredients. The number of guests at funerals ranged from 138 to 404; it was hard to cook for so many guests at funerals. *Sekihan-Mimai* (赤飯見舞) is also a special category of offering. *Sekihan* is rice boiled with red beans and usually used as a menu for celebration. In this area, however, *sekihan* was also used for funerals. Five families each gave 15 kg of *sekihan* to family A, and they redistributed it to the guests. According to Buddhist beliefs, they have several memorial services after formal funerals, every 7 days. Except for the formal funeral, only intimate people participate in the other memorial services. On the 49th and 100th days, they had banquets. At the 100th day, they used animal protein since it represented the end of the mourning period. Family A gave 4 kg of white sugar, 1 pack of green tea, and 1 bottle (200 mL) of rice wine as presents to guests. It seems too much, however, white sugar was very useful for pickles.

After 1970, people have gradually come to rely on funeral parlors. Before that, people cooperated to manage funerals inside the community, called *soushikigumi* (葬式組) or *tonarigumi* (隣組). This was the reason people prepared enormous and multiple meals at funerals. Funeral parlor N is one of the oldest companies in Nanyo city. Director M who entered the company in 1981 thought that it was very important to prepare meals at funerals by funeral parlors, as women of the bereaved family had to tidy their kitchens as soon as family members died. Nowadays, women of the community rarely
prepare meals at funerals. She remembered the special taste of funeral meals cooked by the women of the community.

Comparison among Other Events: Weddings, Expelling Evil of Unlucky Years and Housewarming Parties

Family A possessed 41 documents regarding weddings. I chose the 7th headmaster’s wedding held on May 13, 1932. They had four banquets among the bride’s and bridegroom’s relatives. Compared with funeral guests, wedding guests were less than 40. Gifts for weddings mainly consisted of money, food, and clothes. Clothes were represented by towels, Japanese socks, and parts of kimonos. They used various animal proteins, such as domestic carp, fresh fish, squid, fulvia mutica, abalone, adductor muscle, herring roe, codfish, flounder, fresh tuna, and eggs. Nanyo city is located inland and is famous for domestic carp breeding. However, other than freshwater fish, marine fish were distributed from the coastal area. At this wedding party, some guests gave aomono, such as various vegetables, and fu (麭), wheat gluten cake.

In addition to weddings, they used various animal proteins at an expelling of evil of an unlucky year. In Japan, men aged 25, 42, and 61 years as well as women aged 19, 33, and 37 years old, by east Asian age reckoning, are considered to be at their unlucky years. They had an event for expelling evil, called toshinaoshi (年直し). Family A received 45 gifts, such as money, Japanese socks, and rice, at the event in 1822 and had banquets three times. They used various animal proteins, including duck, chicken, dolphin, codfish, dried codfish, crucian carp, shrimp, pike conger, sea bream, flat fish, squid, and tuna. At this event, no one gave aomono. Family A bought many fish, vegetables, processed foods, and rice.

Family A had several housewarming parties for houses (1792, 1897,
1932), storehouses (1820, 1846, 1897), and woodsheds (1859). The oldest party was held on November 3, 1792. It is also the oldest menu in family A's documents. It has the following items: helpers, gifts, shopping, and three menus. They used animal proteins, such as salted salmon, herring roe, sardine, shrimp, and squid. The number of animal proteins is smaller than the previously noted events (wedding and expelling evil of unlucky year). This seems to be caused by the age of 1792.

From these cases, I point out three trends. At first, even though it was held in the early 19th century, they used various animal proteins, 5-10 kinds. On average, they used 2-6 kinds of processed foods. After WWII, the types of ingredients have been increasing, which is equivalent to a rich dietary life. The variety of vegetables has been increasing from 5-9 kinds to 10-17 kinds. They used some local vegetables in Yamagata Prefecture, such as bracken, spiral spring, bamboo shoot, and edible chrysanthemum. In the early 20th century, they began to use some fruits, such as persimmons and chestnuts. After WWII, they used melons, grapes, mandarin oranges, peaches, pears, watermelons, and strawberries. Fruit production is popular in the Yamagata prefecture. Frequent use of fruits also indicates a prodigality.

Conclusion

Basically, all types of banquets had a common form of menu consisting of sara, hira, meshi, shiru, and tsubo (main dish, side dish, rice, soup, and pot) for 200 years, which are similar to other cases throughout Japan. One of the characteristics of family A's menu is the frequent use of seafood. Mori Motoko (1999) analyzed the menu of Gifu prefecture and observed they used dried bonito, sardine, squid, small shrimp, trout, herring, yellowtail fish,
mackerels, sea bream, and salted salmon. Compared with this case, family A used more seafood. The differences depend on the characteristics of events and family status.

At funerals, in particular, there were many invited guests. The banquets needed many people who cooked. For example, the funeral held in 1924 had 37 helpers from 28 families, physically involving themselves behind those menus. Readers need knowledge and imagination to understand the hidden physicality and locality of those menus, which also connect to the present day.

Procurement methods of ingredients are two levels. One is how to obtain ingredients, home-use crops, or commodities. The other is to prepare ingredients, guests, or family A. Home-use crops are frequently used because family A is located in a farming village. The relationship between family A and guests contained eating together, giving ingredients, and cooperating with cooking. However, this relationship changed after the 1980s because of the utilization of funeral parlors. Only eating together left behind.

These menus seem normal content for Japanese, however, it is important to focus on banquet menus that recorded, conserved, and referred for 200 years. They also recorded gift-giving. The head master was told “if you master recording gift records, you are too come of age.” These menus were put into effect through actions by family A members, such as recording, conservation, referring, and cooking based on the records, that is, historical and physical activity. These activities comprise not only family cooking, but also community cooking: they cooked party dishes together using communal ingredients, that is, geographical and physical cooperation. These banquet menus emerged from the confluence of historic activity and geographical cooperation.

In hunter-gathering societies, symbolic animals, such as whales,
bears, elks, and caribous are shared throughout the community. According to the data of family A, vegetables and processed foods are shared with people related to family A. They give priority to existing and specific relationships. This is different from hunter-gathering societies.

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