

Patrimonialisation of Foods and Agriculture in Japan

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1. Introduction

The Japanese food and agriculture industry is thus far not internationally competitive. Japan has imported many kinds of agricultural products. Recently, however, the government has endeavored to enhance the export of foods. Images of the quality and “authenticity” of Japanese foods and agricultural products are very favorable to foreigners.

Japanese traditional food culture (*washoku*) was listed on the UNESCO Representative List in 2013, and the government established *Savor Japan* in 2016 to develop the tourism of rural areas, enhance the income of producers, and revitalize the local economy.

Modern capitalism has entered into the intangible (patrimonial) accumulation regime, which Orléan designates as the cognitive turn in the economy where what matters is not the fundamentals (utility, technological efficiency, resources) but rather the images and representation (2008)—that is, immaterial values such as authenticity, affectation, curiosity (Cochoy, 2011) and so forth. Food and agriculture in Japan have also entered into this regime. We analyze these situations by using the French School of Pragmatique Sociology and valuation studies.

2. Background of Research

(1) The low competitiveness of Japanese agriculture

Japanese agriculture is not competitive. Its food self-sufficiency ratio fell to a calorie supply basis of 39% and production value basis of 64% in 2014 from 60% and 85%, respectively, in 1970. The Japanese government is implementing various measures to increase the food self-sufficiency ratio to 45% by 2025. But due to the aging of society, the declining population and changing dietary patterns, the volume of rice consumption per capita, for example, has decreased by half in the past 50 years (from 118.3 kg in 1962 to 55.2 kg in 2014). Accordingly, the government has encouraged rice consumption by promoting a school lunch program for children.

The low competitiveness of Japanese agriculture has resulted mainly from the farming structure. As the table shows, commercial farm households have decreased tremendously, while non-commercial farm households have increased. Japanese farmers possess their farmlands primarily as family assets in the expectation of future urbanization, and especially for their attachment to their family heritage. They want to transmit their farmlands to one of their sons, and have sentiment of humiliation to sell it in the rural community.

Number of Farm Households (1,000 households)

	1990	2000	2010
Non-commercial farms	864	783	897
Commercial farms	2,971	2,337	1,631
Total farms	3,835	3,120	2,528

Source:MAFF

As mentioned above, one reason for the relatively low competitiveness of Japanese agriculture is

its aging population; 74% of the population engaged in farming is over 60 years old (2010). And its average surface of farmlands is of 2.3 ha (except Hokkaido), and the percentage of farmlands of total national territory is of 12.2%. Hokkaido (the north region of Japan) is the largest farmlands, and its average farming surface is of 35 ha.

Due to the production structure of Japanese agriculture, the government and professional groups strive to diversify agriculture linked with tourism. Currently, there are approximately 34,000 farms processing agricultural products, 9,000 tourist farms, 6,000 farms providing farming experiences, 2,000 farm inns and 1,000 farm restaurants. The Japanese government has established the objective to promote 500 agriculture-tourism (farm inn) regions by 2020 to appeal to foreign tourists.

(2) Authenticity: Potential non-price competitiveness of Japanese agriculture

Generally speaking, modern capitalism can be defined as an intangible (patrimonial) accumulation regime—that is, cognitive capitalism. This type of regime has its origin of accumulation in intangible value (e.g., quality of goods, authenticity) and emotional service work (e.g., care).

The food and agriculture sectors in Japan are no exception to this regime. Japanese traditional food culture (*washoku*) was listed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO) in 2013, and the Japanese government institutionalized a Geographical Indication Protection System in 2015 after a conflict between the Ministry of Economy and Industries (whose approach is similar to that of US commerce strategy as for GI) and the Ministry of Agriculture (whose approach is similar to that of the EU). Twenty-eight GI products are registered, including Kobe beef, in Japan and the registered collective commercial brands count 300 for foods and agricultural products. For example, there is French Association for defending the *Wagyu* race, but French farmers cannot use the name of Kobe Beef (*La France Agricole*, no.3690, 7, avril, 2017, pp.58-59), it is registered in Japanese GI system and reserved to the producers group.

Leveraging the favorable image of the authenticity of Japanese foods and agricultural products, the Japanese government initiated a tourism strategy inside and outside Japan in the expectation that these tourists would become lovers of these products. As mentioned above, the Japanese government has recognized many types of intangible heritage and initiated a system to promote gastronomic tourism. The quality of Japanese agricultural products has been famous for other countries. Also, the Ministry of Agriculture established *Savor Japan (Sites Remarquables du Goût à la Japonaise)* in 2016, and certified 5 areas. These measures aim to invite foreigners to visit Japan and stay in rural areas around the theme of gastronomic tourism.

This year, the Japanese government established a program to make agriculture competitive. This program includes a strategy for the branding and exportation of Japanese agricultural products by establishing Japanese version of SOPEXA. MAFF has formulated the Export Promotion Strategy of agricultural products and foods to achieve an export value of ¥1 trillion by 2020. The Japanese Minister of Agriculture declared a plan to make Japanese agriculture export-driven. The image of Japanese food and agriculture is very favorable for affluent populations in emerging countries. The export value of Japanese agricultural products and foods rose from ¥555B in 2013 to ¥7,451B in

2015. Because of the cultural image of Japanese foods, for example, *mactcha* (green tea powder) has expanded its exports from ¥5B in 2012 to ¥10.1B in 2015.

3. Theoretical framework and Research Method

(1) Literature surveys and theoretical framework

The theme of “patrimonialisation” of agriculture is well known in France. Nieddu (2007) pointed out the hybridisation of market and identity, arguing that the price of agricultural products in the EU was a subsidized price—that is, a deliberately revised price. Since the beginning of the CAP, European agriculture has been recognized and institutionalized as producing agricultural products while, at the same time, maintaining the population and rural regions around their specific identity.

The concept of patrimonialisation is difficult to translate into English. UNESCO established the Convention for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2003. We conceptualize patrimonialisation as the process of becoming the objects of an intangible heritage. Conceptualized as such, patrimonialisation concerns the concept of the authenticity of goods and services. Many anthropologists, such as Appadurai (1986), argue the theme of authenticity. According to them, the authenticity of objects is always the temporal compromise of negotiations among various actors.

Regarding the French Theory of Conventions, *Repas Gastronomiques des Français* and Japanese traditional food culture (*washoku*) listed on the Representative List of the UNESCO can be considered in general as the city of the public (*cit  civique*). There can be several modes of compromise among cities (*civique*, market, opinion, etc.). We will compare the status quo of politics and the economy of two food cultures after being listed. The overview of Economie des Conventions diffused around the Anglo-American literatures will be useful (Cheyns, Ponte, 2017).

Public policy in general has applied benchmarking as an indicators of its performance ex ante and ex post. In our case studies for *Savor Japan*, Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are introduced as such. Every region of *Savor Japan* defines the objectives of the visiting numbers (man-days) of targeted foreign tourists. As Desrosi res (2006, pp.27-28) noted, the new way of managing companies and public administrations relies on performance indicators and benchmarking, which are supposed to coordinate and orient activities by aligning them on quantifiable criteria. The objects are explicit and quantified so that the government can verify the realization of objects and performance of the services.

For our studies about Japanese foods, we have already discussed Japanese confectionary (*wagashi*) in terms of the Theory of Conventions, the French school of pragmatic sociology, and valuation studies, arguing that dissonance (Stark, 2009; 2011) between various valuations gave rise to innovation in the traditional foods industry (Morisaki, Suda, 2016; Suda, Ebizuka, 2007).

Intangible (patrimonial) objects are constructed with *dispositifs* (*un ensemble r solutement h t rog ne*, comprising discourses, materials, scientific expressions and institutions, etc.; Foucault, 1994, p. 299). Almost all the theories mentioned are more or less concerned with *dispositifs* (Callon, 2013). Thus, we will be satisfied with the mixed application of the French school of pragmatic sociology and valuation studies to argue the intangible heritage surrounding the foods and

agriculture in Japan and its economic valorization.

We will add the theoretical framework of valuation studies. As Aspers and Beckert (2011) have noted, different forms of values (moral, esthetic, market, ecological, and so forth) coexist in the economy. The interface of the economic values and the moral values is ambiguous. Aspers and Beckert also argue that the ethical value contributes to the value of products economically, as well as that the evaluation on the market is closely linked with the evaluation outside the market. Thus, the market for whale watching is constructed by being linked with the value of nature symbolically. The value of Japanese foods and agriculture consists in its ability to valorize the dissonance resulting from the interaction between different principles of evaluation (Stark, 2011). The economic market needs to be appreciated as a field of heterogeneous phenomena in which multiple values are at play (Helgesson, Kjelberg, 2013). Japanese foods and gourmet tourism in rural areas are closely related to values and valuation other than economic ones. We will investigate the variety of *agencements* in which market and economic, social, and cultural activities are *tangled*, configured and performed.

(2) Data collection and interviews

As our research focus, we have chosen the Japanese traditional food culture (*washoku*) and two *Savor Japan*, that is, in Tsuruoka (Yamagata) and Tokachi (Hokkaido) Cities to discuss the process of patrimonialisation of foods and agriculture. We have investigated the website of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) and of the two cities. We also have conducted intensive interviews with the staff members of the projects of these cities.

The number of foreign tourists to Japan is increasing tremendously, rising from 8.4 million in 2012 to 24.0 million in 2016, with consumption values rising from 1.1 trillion yen to 3.7 trillion yen (JNTO). Of the latter figure, tourists from China account for the highest percentage (39.4%), followed by those from Taiwan (14.0%), Korea (9.5%), Hong Kong (7.9%), USA (5.7%), Thailand (3.1%), Australia (2.9%), Singapore (1.6%), UK (1.4%), Malaysia (1.4%), and France (1.3%). The Japanese government endeavors to detach foreign tourists from the “golden route” (Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka) and instead to orient them around rural regions.

1) Case 1: Japanese traditional food culture (*washoku*)

Washoku was listed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO) in 2013. According to the MAFF, *washoku* is a special practice based on an essential spirit of the Japanese, <respect for nature>. It contributes to healthy life and strengthens familial and community ties (MAFF, 2016). MAFF explains the elements of *washoku* as follows.

a) Various fresh ingredients and using their natural tastes: Ingredients used in *washoku* are diverse, fresh and available in four distinct seasons. *Washoku* requires minimum cooking and processing.

b) Well-balanced and healthy diets: *Washoku* contributes to a healthy life, long life expectancy and prevention of obesity among Japanese since it requires well-balanced and low-fat diets. Japanese people have highest life expectancy (83 years old), and lowest obesity rate (3.9%).

c) Emphasis of the beauty of nature in the presentation: The beauty of Nature and changing of season is emphasized in the presentation of *washoku*. Plates are decorated with leaves, flowers and

bamboo, and natural motifs are represented in decoratively cut foodstuff. Decorating tables and rooms with objects matched to the season are also closely associated with *washoku*.

d) Connecting to annual events: *Washoku* has developed using traditional knowledge and customs closely associated with nature and a connection to annual events. It strengthens the bonds of family and community members when they share mealtime together, appreciating nature-gifted ingredients.

MAFF also publishes pamphlet to promote the local foods for foreign tourists (*Japan's Tasty Secrets: Local food that satisfies the world's most demanding eaters*) on its web site.

2) Case 2: Tsuruoka, listed in UNESCO Creative Cities Network, certified as Savor Japan

Following after the French experiences of *Sites Remarquables du Goût*, Japanese government has established *Savor Japan* Certification. *Savor Japan: Explore Regional Flavors* is described as follows (MAFF).

“In this year 2016 round, 5 areas; Tokachi-Hokkaido, Tsuruoka-Yamagata, and so forth were given the Savor Japan certification through the approval committee that was organized by the Ministry. The Savor Japan initiative opens the door to local resources in every corner of the country, such as the uniqueness of local foods, the agriculture, forestry industries in the area that produce those foods, as well as the charms of the local scenery, and house hospitality. The growing interest in Japanese cuisine and culture by people from all over the world has fueled a dramatic increase in tourism to Japan, inspired by the desire to experience truly authentic Japanese food at the source. The *Savor Japan* certification is designed to draw attention to the local brand that come from the numerous farming, mountain and fishing villages throughout Japan where food is a way of life, and lead to an increase in interpersonal exchanges through a deeper discovery of Japanese cuisine and the enjoyment of unforgettable experiences in authentic Japanese food culture” (*Savor Japan*, 2016).

As for Tsuruoka *Savor Japan*, it is described as follows.

“With more than 50 varieties of indigenous products including *dadacha-mame* and *Atsumi* turnip, superior varieties of <living cultural treasure> are the inheritances of this region. *Dadacha-mame*, a special type of *edamame* (raw soy bean) from Tsuruoka, has a unique sweetness and umami flavor that is said to be the most delicious in Japan. In addition, there are many simple yet deep flavors, including *Atsumi* turnip and other indigenous products that has long been farmed using slash-and-burn farming. The amazing *Mount Haguro Sugi-Namiki* features a 350-year old cedar-lined stone-step path to the shrine and a five-storied pagoda that is a National Treasure. It is so beautiful that it was awarded three stars in the *Michelin Green Guide Japan*. There are also Japanese spiritual and cultural experiences to be enjoyed, such as *shugendo* (Buddhist mountain asceticism), vegetarian cuisine and the *Zen* meditation practices by the monks in the *Three Mountains Dewa*.” (*Savor Japan*).

Tsuruoka City has also been listed in UNESCO Creative Cities Network (food culture). In Japan only Tsuruoka is listed in this category. Tsuruoka City Council for Food Culture Creative City is comprised of many actors, including regional municipal, agricultural and forestry, fisheries cooperatives, Yamagata National University, Keio University, Commerce and Industry Chamber, and the tourism office. The food culture of Tsuruoka, which includes many local varieties of vegetables and local recipes, is not comprised of market goods and services. To become

merchandise, these cultural objects must be made visible as such. The professors of Yamagata National University have identified many local varieties that have been transmitted through generations in several families. The research team of Keio University also has projects for metabolic analysis of the agricultural products analyzing taste components of local varieties. The team aims to develop an evaluation system for the functional elements of local products. In this way, local varieties are attributed many characteristics such as biodiversity or organoleptic quality. So, traditional agricultural products of family heritage are mixed with innovative technologies and consumer taste. To sell these varieties as market but also authentic goods, scientists and many other stakeholders (e.g., agricultural cooperatives) have to negotiate regarding the (re)definition of non-human objects and human actors.

3) Case 3: Tokachi Region (Hokkaido) certified as *Savor Japan*

Tokachi Region (Hokkaido, the north region of Japan) is one of the largest agricultural production region, especially dairy products, wheat, potato, sugar-beet and many kinds of beans (soybeans, *azuki*, etc.). Tokachi region has been considered as the production region of these agricultural products. Last year, this region was attacked by the typhoon, and then, the production of potato decreased tremendously. So the main foods companies must have stopped the production of potato chips. Tokachi region endeavors to get out of the image of only the production place, and to promote the rural and gourmet tourism by using the image of dairy and crop farming and through the farm experiences.

With this aim to increase the foreign tourists, Tokachi City is also certified as *Savor Japan*. Tokachi *Savor Japan* is described as follows.

“Tokachi, the largest farming area (approx.3,600km²) in Hokkaido, is an enormous plain surrounded by 200-meter-high mountains,,,where you can enjoy the magnificent sense of openness unique to Hokkaido. One of key attraction is the agricultural and livestock products raised on the soft, nutrient-rich volcanic ash soil with the longest daylight hours in the country. People come to enjoy the rich cheese made from high-fat raw milk in Tokachi, where the majority of natural cheese in Japan is produced. The winter scene is particularly special as the winter ground is covered in snow in a freezing -25.c atomosphere which create a magical world of diamond dust and glaze ice. Tokachi Garden Spa, one of the few plant-origin moor springs in the world, is a hot spring that you can enjoy in swimwear. In recent years, a popular activity is to visit the fields with a guide to learn about and farming on a <Field Guide Tour> where you can taste fresh vegetables harvested there and then. You can also enjoy a cheese and ham making experiences.” (Savor Japan, 2016).

4. Discussion and conclusion

The Japanese government has developed an export strategy for its authentic agricultural products, and it is seeking to develop gourmet tourism in rural areas by using an authentic image of Japanese foods and agriculture. As Helgesson noted, the consumption of an economic exchange involves efforts to qualify the objects that are exchanged. The actors in our case studies have constructed a particular mode of exchange around *washoku* and *Savor Japan* projects.

Regarding *Washoku*, it is useful to compare it with *Repas gastronomiques des Français*, with both being listed on the Representative List of the UNESCO. As Csergo (2016) has pointed out, the French government seems to promote the elitist image of the gastronomy of *Grands Chefs* by borrowing the UNESCO inscription, and this approach seems to belong to the logics of deluxe industries and the biggest financial groups. Csergo criticizes this approach, claiming that it is not accessible for the ordinary French people. We see in this case that values and valuations are tangled with economy, and *agencements* (e.g., UNESCO inscription) are subject to controversy. On the other hand, the Japanese approach seems to be more modest and more popularized. The Japanese government endeavors to promote the attractiveness of rural regions and local foods by using *washoku* and to develop the popular and accessible gourmet tourism. The Japanese government has established a policy to capture foreign tourists and orient them to rural areas, by subsidizing the renovation of farmhouses to host these tourists. As mentioned above, the Japanese government has established the objective to promote 500 agriculture-tourism (farm inn) regions by 2020 to appeal to foreign tourists. The projects certified as farm-inn regions will require coordination among farmers' groups and local tourism companies, restaurants, local government, and so forth. We think that market *agencement* differs between Japan and France with regard to the UNESCO inscription.

As for Savor Japan, we will show that markets are not only the *agencement* (Callon, 2013) that produces economic exchange, but also the *agencement* that produces and mediates between various values (nature, authenticity, esthetics, tradition and so forth). Cochoy (2012) also refers to the notion of “embedding” (not embeddedness) as the market activities making the hybrid linkages between human and non-human entities.

As many other previous studies have shown, the inscription or certification in similar systems (e.g., Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, GIAHS, FAO) of food and agriculture has not necessarily added value to the price of agricultural products in these certified areas, nor increased the amount of tourism (Kohsaka, Uchiyama, 2016). The temporary results of our case study in Tsuruoka City have shown the same conclusion. The UNESCO Network is not so known in Japan. However, many activities have been undertaken to promote the region and enhance the visibility of the Inscription of UNESCO. Having been inscribed in the UNESCO Network (food culture section), Tsuruoka City has broken the routine of economic activities, and actors have faced with various kinds of difficulties and complexities and had to accommodate their activities. For example, the agricultural cooperatives producing *dadacha-mame* (soybeans, local variety) and *Atsumi* turnips (local varieties, produced with traditional and local knowledge) managed to market their products as a “living heritage”. The qualification of goods differs according to the actors. These different activities of the *objectivation* of goods lead to *inquiry* (Dewey) in the interaction of various valuations. We will investigate the usefulness of distinguishing products and goods to analyze the role played by the intermediary (Callon, 2013). The intermediary—that is, market *agencement*—changes the product into goods. We will demonstrate how the intermediary (e.g., UNESCO inscription, *Savor Japan*) intervenes in this process. The market of objects of intangible heritages is “not given a priori, but is constructed by means of third parties who can be more or less stable and

institutionalized, and who can structure various modes of activity or introduce mediation between general conventions of quality and more local conventions. „, this approach investigates the entire available body of instruments and mechanisms, and in particular cognitive artifacts such as classifications and nomenclatures, and assessment tests used by intermediaries in their daily work, which play a role that is both cognitive and normative in directing their activity” (Bessy, Chauvin, 2013, p.95). We can investigate UNESCO inscription and Savor Japan as such intermediaries.

In the case of Tokachi’s *Savor Japan*, the region has just begun its rural tourism. Several initiatives have been implemented in past years, but the activities remained centered at the individual farms. Hokkaido is one of the most-visited areas for tourists in Japan. Foreign tourists visiting Hokkaido increased by 88%, from 2.5 million man-days (2012) to 4.7 million man-days (2014). For the Tokachi region, the increase in the number of tourists was from 116,370 to 125,229 man-days, representing only a 7.6% increase. Chinese tourists visiting Hokkaido buy mainly dairy products and chocolate. According to Zhou (2013), the purposes of tourism to Hokkaido for Chinese people are the natural landscape (52.4%), spa visits (49.1%), and shopping (32.9), while they are less interested in the historical and cultural architecture (20.4%) and traditional culture (21.0%). Chinese people said that “there are no fake products; I’m interested in buying the foods and cosmetics, because these products are safe” (O.I) but also said that “Japanese culture is not much to Chinese people” (U). Hokkaido is put into black boxes (Latour) of the image of snow, white, nature and so forth. Tokachi’s *Savor Japan* seeks to deviate from the established image of Hokkaido by adopting the green image of farming and livestock fields.

Tokachi’s *Savor Japan* has established the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) and aims to enhance the number of foreign tourists to 250,000 man-days by 2020. Considering the trends of tourists having visited Tokachi thus far, it has set up the objectives for tourists to Taiwan (100,000 man-days), Hong Kong (46,000), Singapore (30,000), China (26,000), Korea (7,000), UK and Australia and others (41,000). It is interesting to compare the KPI of Tokachi’s *Savor Japan* with Tsuruoka’s *Savor Japan*. Tsuruoka’s *Savor Japan* has aimed for 6,000 man-days by 2020 of tourists from France, Italy, Germany, the U.S., and Australia, because these people are thought to recognize the spiritual culture of Tsuruoka.

We should point out the transformation of the identities of actors in Tokachi by the changing configurations where they are engaged. Farmers hiring seasonal agricultural workers provide them with the snacks at 10 pm and 15 pm. These snacks are generally *azuki* bean-jam buns and *azuki* bean jam-doughnuts. These are made from *azuki* beans produced in Tokachi, but wheat has been imported from foreign countries. The *M* bakery, which sells the snacks, collaborates with the Agricultural Research Centre in Tokachi to develop the variety of wheat (*yumehikara*) use for making the bread. The bread used for regional customers has obtained a reputation for having been made of 100% Tokachi raw materials. The *M* bakery has opened a new store in Tokyo, where the bread and buns sell well by virtue of Tokachi’s image. Thus, the traditional snacking culture of agricultural workers, the *M* bakery, the Agricultural Research Center, the new panifiable variety of wheat and the image of Tokachi have interacted to transform actors’ (human and non-human)

identities. The qualification of goods has proceeded through stages engaging many actors.

Finally, in the Tokachi region there is agricultural diversity. The *K-G social farm* started its livestock farming and made various cheeses by hiring handicapped persons 30 years ago, and has innovated its production method for cheese making. There is also the *Tokachi ladies' farm school*, a public organization offering a one-year course only for women. Many younger people coming from outside have set up their own bakeries hoping to make French-type breads, but they will have to make *azuki* bean-jam buns as well to meet the local demand. These varieties of valuing farming and food are also resources for local innovation.

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