

# About Air Meal and Revival of the Black Market

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**Abstract** Everyone is anxious that the way we eat and drink will change drastically due to the pandemic. While the immediate challenge is how to overcome the harsh reality of the rush of restaurant closures, the chance of survival may be found unexpectedly in the black market. Large-capital *sushi* chains, *izakaya* chains, family restaurants, and First Foods are also shrinking. Privately owned restaurants have been forced to withdraw before the epidemic spread, but large capital has also been hit hard. Which is faster, to regenerate or restart? Private restaurants with weak capital will soon collapse, but the selling point is the lightness of the footwork that can be rebuilt immediately. It seems that minimalism is likely to become the standard in the post-Corona era.

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Abundant experience and culture will greatly help to expand the wings of fantasy and delusion. I usually exchange opinions with friends, acquaintances, peers, people from different industries, scholars of different genres, disciples, students at taverns and bars, and I can massage my brain and fly my fantasies farther, hiring the others' brains. However, due to COVID-19, my favourite bar is closed and there is no place to gather, so I spend my days feeling like a *ronin* in forced house arrest or a cicada waiting for the time of emergence. Those who will be charged with something will have a preparatory period to become accustomed to imprisonment in preparation for the day they will be imprisoned in jail or a detention centre. It reminded me of an experience I had heard from the President of a publishing company.

This person was once charged with drug addiction and possession and was imprisoned in a detention centre for about a year. I knew him as a luxury person who left behind a lot of heroic stories, so I thought the ascetic life in the jail would have been painful. But he said, “I was completely devoted to fantasy, so it was not painful as I thought”.

The food inside the jail was simple, and from a gourmet’s point of view, it was like being fed an emergency ration every day. But he said: “I could stand it because I added a few fantasy side-dishes every time. If you want to eat raw oysters today, imagine the visuals of the exquisite raw oysters you once ate, squeeze the lemon, slide that smooth body directly from the shell into your mouth, chew, and beat your mouth. It seems that the operation works if so-called ‘air raw oysters’ are used. If you look at it closely, you may be wondering what the ritual is, but the ritual must be done solemnly. As long as the image of raw oysters in your memory is restored to the maximum and it is realistic, you only need to improve your concentration and use your imagination to the fullest”.

When he was asked “if you have raw oysters, you also need white wine”, he said, “of course, I also prepare white wine. The fine white wine we have drunk is stored in the wine cellar of our memory”. After all, it is said that the ritual is to uncork it, pour it into a glass, check the scent, roll it on the tongue, and enjoy the taste. That way, it takes a lot of memory and experience to add a number of menus that have previously spoiled your tongue to the rations. Even if you add caviar, *foie gras*, *matsutake* mushrooms, porcini mushrooms, soft-shelled turtles, branded Japanese beef, etc., you cannot reproduce them unless you have eaten them. Taking advantage of his experience of gastronomy, he was able to upgrade the coarse food in the jail as much as he wanted. I was worried that it is very hard to keep imagination and concentration if he was eating air gastronomy every time. He answered,

There was a limit to the menu that could be reproduced, but as for curry and *ramen*, I eat it about twice a week. So, I can repeat it and reproduce it. Eventually, I started to feel heavy in my stomach just by fantasy, so at that time I would eat the regular jail meal. It’s good to have a rough meal once in a while. Above all, the good thing about fantasy gastronomy is that it doesn’t make you fat, your blood pressure doesn’t rise, and it’s healthy to the body.

It would be so. It’s like eating a delicious fog. However, the enjoyment of eating and drinking is halved if there is no other person who can have a live conversation. The reason why a single person’s meal gets simple is because he is the only one who is happy to make it, he is the only one who criticises it, and it becomes foolish to make it properly. Unexpectedly, such a person overcomes the bachelor’s handi-

cap by uploading today's menu on the net and getting comments. He takes pictures, so he tries to make the food photogenic by devising arrangements and spending extra time. If you have a partner, cooking can be a communication tool. If you keep facing the same face all the time, your love will deepen, but your hatred will also increase. Cooking can make relationships worse and repair them, bring both respect and contempt for others.

If the style of eating alone becomes cool, it means that you have joined the ranks of a dandy. If you don't become self-deprecating, don't look miserable, don't buy the sympathy of others, and become interested in others, you can see it as a professional.

In Europe, post-war reconstruction began with the reconstruction of the church. In the case of Japan, it started with the construction of a black market. Akira Kurosawa's movie *Rashomon* is a story of the Heian period, but the image of the post-war burnt town and the people living there is superimposed on the background and figures. A large amount of money was invested to make a set of decayed Rashomon gate, but it seems that he really wanted to reproduce the black market near the gate.

The black market is the prototype of a restaurant. In the midst of severe food shortages, the food rations were not enough, and everyone needed a black market. When someone saw a person walking with a large *furoshiki* wrap on his back, there were followers behind him. He'll start selling something soon. All the ways to survive led to the black market. The black market in Shinjuku was illuminated by a dazzling lamp that could be seen from the next station, and the slogan was "Light is from Shinjuku". You could get almost anything if you paid for it. However, for those who do not have to prepare for starvation, it is sake that makes them forget the fear. However, when they drank the liquor mixed with methyl alcohol and formalin, hell became closer. There were people who couldn't help drinking the *sake* even if their eyes were blurred and their legs became stiff.

At that time, those who were released from prison were given 95 yen and five rice balls. As soon as he stepped into the black market, he wanted to eat sweets, so he ate a cup of sweet soup for 20 yen, drank a beer for 30 yen, ate 40 yen in *oden*, and smoked a regenerated cigarette with the remaining 5 yen, and thus became empty. Maybe another ex-prisoner would buy a stove for 5 yen, a large pot for 20 yen, bought 10 soup bowls for 10 yen, boiled porridge in the large pot, and started selling.

There was a specialty of the black market cafeteria called 'stew', which was a stew made using as ingredients the nutritious leftover food from the foreigner-only cafeteria used by the US military. Hiding behind the cafeteria, as soon as the kitchen waste was taken out, they collected it in a bucket. They carefully removed the cigarette butts, matchsticks, and paper from the leftover food. Lefto-

vers included miscellaneous items such as leftover steak pieces and ham, tooth-shaped cheese, chicken skin and lard, fish heads, potato skins, and apple cores. When the chef threw them into a large pot and simmers them slowly, the traces of garbage disappeared cleanly and were reproduced in an appetising stew. Whenever sold for 5 yen per cup, it was said that the people who made the stew managed to attract many customers and they were thanked for ‘warming’ and ‘nourishing’ them. Perhaps an adult male could get the calories needed per day with a single meal. In an era where food shortages continued, emphasis was placed on calorie intake. This principle is still alive among the poor, even today, when health-conscious and high-calorie diets are shunned. By the way, the cheapest calorie intake is macaroni cheese in the United States and the mega size of instant fried noodles in Japan.

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The management body will also change. It is not a chain development, and it is not limited to individual management, but there may be a form of management by a cooperative method or opening a store in a flea market. Municipal, ward, and village canteens and taverns may also appear. Eating and drinking cannot be stopped as long as they are alive, so restaurants should pursue sustainability more than ever. In addition, eating and drinking is a culture, and the restaurants that provide the place are also cultural properties and public goods. It is not impossible to turn the pandemic into a fortune if you think that you have been given the opportunity to try to keep the restaurant alive for a purpose other than the pursuit of profit.