Study of Souvenirs in the Modern Period: Focusing on Tokaido

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In modern Japan, we can see various souvenir outlets. However, this sight is not always common worldwide. In particular, foods such as Manju and Dango, which are considered local specialties, are unlike any other in the world. This article aims to study such modern Japanese souvenirs from the viewpoint of their relationship with the development of railways; based on their development since the early modern period.

In early modern Japan, souvenirs were developed as proof of visits to shrines and temples. Most were non-edible, lightweight and non-bulky items. Specialties such as Manju and Dango sold well before the gates of shrines and temples, and along the Kaido (highway). However, they were basically consumed on the spot and not considered souvenirs.

When railways were inaugurated and the travel time was shortened in the Meiji Period, these specialties since the early modern period became a souvenir that could be brought back.

In such cases, obtaining the right to sell in the station yards was important for increasing their popularity, and their products became suitable souvenirs, thanks to improvements in preservation and containers. The expositions and competitive exhibitions held in various places played a major role in encouraging such creative efforts and increasing the popularity.

Thus, the most characteristic feature of modern Japanese souvenirs is their original development through modern inventions such as railways and expositions, while built upon a foundation of genealogy from the pre-modern period.

Key words: specialty, souvenir, railway, the Exposition, worship