

Object and Person: Steamed Bread Used as Sacrifices, Gifts, and Works of Art

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Abstract

In the vast area of the Yellow River Basin in northern China, where agriculture is dominated by wheat planting and the primary diet and life is dominated by wheaten food or wheat flour (which are called pastry or noodles in western society), the lifestyle completely different from that of the Yangtze River Basin in the southern part of China. There are many kinds of wheaten foods in the north, including steamed bread (饅頭), noodles (面条), steamed stuffed buns (包子), and dumplings (餃子). This paper mainly discusses the history and folk culture of steamed bread. Steamed bread is not only the most common “food” in the north but also a very common “sacrifice,” which is used to worship gods and ancestors. At the same time, it is also a “gift” when people give gifts at New Year’s festivals or hold life transition ceremonies (birth, adulthood, marriage, and funeral). More importantly, on the extension line of the villagers’ life logic of “food-sacrifice-gift,” and the grass-roots’ “works of art” have emerged, that is, the steamed flower buns (花饅) or crispy noodles (面花). The steamed flower buns or crispy noodles is a fleeting art in the villagers’ life. They have rich symbolic meaning, which well reflects villagers’ outlook on life, happiness, and aesthetic consciousness.

Keywords: Steamed bread (饅頭), Steamed flower buns (花饅), steamed bread used as gift (禮饅),
Sacrifice (祭品)

要旨

北中国の黄河流域では、広範囲の小麦作農業を背景にして、人々の食生活は粉食がメインであり、南中国の長江流域とは異なる生計や生活様式が形成されている。北中国の食生活は麺類の種類が非常に豊富ではあるが、饅頭、きし麵、包子や餃子などが最も普及している。黄河流域における饅頭は人々によく食べられる「食品」であるのみならず、神仏や祖先を祭る様々な儀式によく登場する「祭品」でもある。それと同時に、年中行事や人生の通過儀礼（出生、成年、結婚、葬送）が行われる時、饅頭はプレゼントあるいは贈答品として重要視されている。さらに、「食品」―「祭品」―「贈答品」といった郷土社会の生活文化の延長線上において、饅頭は「芸術品」としての「花饅頭」といった素朴なアートにもなる。「花饅頭」は「花饅」や「麵花」とも呼ばれ、地域ごとに異なる民俗的称呼が数多く存在している。「花饅頭」は人々が普段から食べるため、日常生活における刹那的なアートとも言えるが、その造形・模様及び付加された象徴的な意味合いは非常に豊かで、農民たちの人生観、幸福観や美意識などがよく反映されている。

キーワード：饅頭 花饅頭 饅饅 祭品

Dangjia village is located about 9 kilometers northeast of Hancheng City, Shaanxi Province. It is 3.5 kilometers away from the Yellow River in the east and 1.5 kilometers away from national highway 108 in the west. The geographical environment around Dangjia village happens to be the intersection of the Loess Plateau and the 400 kilometers of Qinchuan river and plain, which is a typical loess landform. It is located on a valley platform, near the tableland and river named Bishui a tributary flowing into the Yellow River through the south of the village. Both sides of the river and the plateau in the north and south of the village are densely covered with fruit trees, pepper forests, vegetable fields, and farmland. This village has two main surnames of Dang and Jia, who have intermarriages with each other for generations, with few foreign surnames. It is a typical village formed by marriage linkage. In 2006, there were 392 households with 1373 people, with about 2220 Chinese mu (about 365.71 acreages) of farmland/-cultivated land, on average 7 mu of land per household. In addition to farming (such as wheat, corn, and pepper, etc.), the main source of income of most villagers is to rely on their family members who are young or middle-aged and do the odd jobs in small towns or large cities¹⁾.

The vast area in the middle reaches of the Yellow River where Dangjia Village is located is one of the main wheat-producing areas in China, the people in this area mainly eat wheaten food. For a long time, the local diet was dominated by wheaten food, and

1) The Chinese version of this article was originally published in the International Center for folk culture studies, the Institute for the study of Japanese folk culture, Kanagawa University: (international symposium report No.2 MEXT approved Joint use / Research Center International Center for folk culture studies, the 2nd International Symposium, “Things Talk: human culture from the perspective of Mingu and Material Culture”), pp. 169–173, July 20, 2011.

women have mainly created a unique culture with a rich connotation and diverse forms of “steamed flower buns” (花饅Huamo) and “steamed bread used as a gift” (禮饅Limo). In this paper, “steamed bread” (饅頭Mantou) refers to the food steamed after fermentation of wheat flour, which is called “Mo(饅)” or “Momo(饅饅)” in Shaanxi dialect. “Steamed flower buns” refers to steamed bread made into various shapes or dyed with various colors, whereas “steamed bread used as a gift” is steamed bread or flower steamed bread that is used as gifts among villagers. The so-called “steamed food” is the general name of all the steamed buns mentioned above.

The discovering of “steamed flower buns” and “steamed bread used as gifts” in Dangjia Village

From February 16 to 24, 2007, during the Spring Festival, I conducted a field investigation in Dangjia village. On New Year’s Eve, I saw with my own eyes steamed bread/buns made for the Spring festival, including the steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as gifts. Every family in Dangjia Village keeps the tradition of steaming steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as gifts on the eve of the Spring Festival. Generally speaking, every family starts to steam the steamed bread/ buns after December 23rd of the lunar year. Most of them steam all kinds of steamed flower buns according to the number of relatives who need to visit back and forth, as well as the seniority, age, and population of the family who needs to give gifts, and then they prepare all the steamed bread in one time. Steamed bread has a deep local cultural connotation in the local area. They have many names and types, which are applied to various but very important life scenes by the villagers. The villagers, especially the peasant women, have various “explanations” about steaming steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as gifts.

On New Year’s Eve, every village holds a “God Receiving” ceremony. The so-called “God Receiving” ceremony is to set up a small offering table in the center of the courtyard, offering various sacrifices, and then burning incense and setting off firecrackers. The whole family members successively worship in generation orders. Among those sacrifices, there is a kind of steamed bread called “Xianye Mo” (獻爺饅 a steamed bread used as a sacrifice with a shape similar to the human head), which is unique and very eye-catching.

On the morning of New Year’s Day, three generations of men in the family hold “Sacrifice to God” and “Sacrifice to Ancestor” ceremonies, and once again used the offering of “Xianye Mo” as a sacrifice.

On the second day of the first month of the lunar year, the villagers welcome their daughters and sisters who already married back to their mother’s house to offer New

Year's greetings. Among the various gifts they brought home, there will be all kinds of steamed flower buns or steamed bread.

On the third day of the first month of the lunar year, nephews and nieces offer New Year's greetings to their uncles with many steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as gifts. That afternoon, we visited the "folk custom museum" in the quadrangle of the village cadre, Dang Wentao's house. There are several large cabinets of steamed flower bread displayed in the museum. There are dozens of kinds of steamed bread, with a wide variety of patterns and exquisite modeling and workmanship. Perhaps it is because of the need for an "exhibition." Compared with the relatively simple steamed buns in the homes of ordinary farmers, the steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as gifts displayed here really look more fancy, bright, and exquisite. It is said that every daughter-in-law or mother-in-law of some people in Dangjia Village can make steamed flower buns, especially the skillful ones. When they make steamed buns before the Chinese New Year, many people ask them for help, which is very popular.

On the fourth day, we went to villager Li Minjie's house to attend his wedding in the morning. The Spring Festival is a time when many young people hold weddings. Relatives, friends, and neighbors come to bless the young couple. The main gifts they brought were steamed bread or steamed buns. In a cave in the bridegroom's house. Several villagers and elders who came to "help" or "watch" (greeting guests) confirmed and counted the gifts, that is, the steamed flower buns or steamed bread brought by the greeting guests one by one, and registered them one by one, to serve as the basis for returning gifts in the future (refer to Photo 1). It's almost natural to think of Marcel Moss's famous research on gifts and gift-giving. At the scene, we interviewed the greeting guests about the gift steamed bread and flower steamed bread they brought and learned a lot of rural knowledge about steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as gifts. For instance, we learned on this occasion how many gifts of steamed bread should be given to the important relatives (such as aunts in the paternal line, uncles and aunts on the maternal side, etc.), and how many might be given to the ordinary neighbors.

On the sixth day, we had the opportunity to attend another family's wedding for their son. The bride and the bridegroom are "outsiders" who left the rural community after they passed the college entrance examination. The congratulatory gifts given by relatives, friends, and neighbors seem to be different from the normal ones. At least, there is not so much steamed bread used as gifts, but anyway, the "jujube cake" (a kind of steamed flower buns, which is very large) given by her mothers and the pair of tigers shaped steamed flower buns in the bridal chamber of the new couple still follow the old tradition. On the same day, another villager celebrated the birthday of their grandmother, her children and grandchildren sent the steamed flower buns called "longevity

peach” (壽桃, peach-shaped steamed bread for a birthday) and the steamed flower buns called “longevity plate” (壽盤) to show filial piety.

On the seventh day, we went to Xizhuang town, not far away from Dangjia Village, to visit a small shop which is specialized in the making of steamed flower buns. The owner of the store is a capable woman, who introduced her varieties of steamed buns and kindly allowed us to take many photos. The shape, appellation, and types of steamed flower buns in this shop are generally the same as those in Dangjia village, but the workmanship should be more exquisite, probably due to the changes brought about by commercialization or professionalization. Her billboard says “making all kinds of ‘portal steamed buns’” (承做各類門戶饅). The so-called “portal steamed buns” (門戶饅) refers to the steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as a gift. Shaanxi people call relative-visiting during the Spring Festival and the occasions of funerals and weddings as “drop across” (行門戶). And they have to bring steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as a gift with them when drop by or visit one’s house.

In the summer of 2007, when I went to Dangjia Village to field investigate again, it was during the “Double Seventh Day/ Festival” (七夕). The festival atmosphere in Dangjia Village is very strong. In addition to setting off firecrackers and making delicious food for children, there is also a sacrifice table in the center of the house in the evening, and the girls burn incense and worship the moon. Besides watermelon, pear and grape, and other fruits, there is also steamed flower bread offered on the sacrifice table. The steamed flower buns on the double seventh festival are mainly made into the shape of fruits, such as peaches, pears, pomegranates, and grapes. Several women of the same age met to make steamed flower buns together. While chatting, they made various shapes with their hands skillfully, and their cooperation was very tacit. One of them is the owner of the house. She said that they haven’t been so happy for a long time. Now everyone is so busy that they can rarely get together, especially the opportunities to make steamed bread/ buns together seems to be less and less. Except for all kinds of fruit-shaped steamed buns, the “shell” (basket) shaped (殼兒造型, 筐篋造型) steamed buns and “inkstone” shaped (硯台造型) steamed buns had also completed. This kind of steamed bread is made especially for boys and girls respectively. The moral is that girls should be skillful and should be good at needlework, while boys should have talent and make progress in study (refer to Photo 2).

Sacrifices, foods, gifts, and works of art

In Dangjia Village, steamed bread, steamed flower buns, or steamed bread used as gifts are not only used as sacrifices and food, but also as gifts and works of art. There

are many subtle connections between their attributes and functions. Except for those ordinary steamed buns with simple shapes that cannot be regarded as works of art, other kinds of steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as gifts can often be replaced with each other in some scenes. For example, after the sacrifice is used, they can be used to eat at home, and can also be used as gifts to relatives and friends. The steamed flower buns can be appreciated by the villagers as a work of art and can naturally be used as gifts. Even if it is a very ordinary steamed bread or steamed buns, if it is used for New Year's greetings, it will naturally be "upgraded" to a gift.

In Dangjia Village, the steamed bread offered to sacrifice the gods during the New Year's festival is called "Xianye Mo"²⁾. It is very large bread and is usually made of about 0.5 kilograms of white flour. Its shape is like a human head with facial features. This kind of steamed bread as a sacrifice is said to be related to the fact that Liu Yongzuo (劉永祚), a hero who resisted the Qing army in the late Ming Dynasty in Hancheng (韓城), was finally beheaded. Although they are mainly used as a sacrifice for worshipping Gods and ancestors, they are also used when the younger generation pays New Year's greetings to the elders and often pays tribute to the steamed bread dedicated to God (refer to Photo 3). In addition, it is also used as a gift or directly for guests. Eating the steamed bread after sacrificing them to the gods usually has the meaning of "eating together" with the Gods. In the past, in Dangjia Village, some families would offer "Xianye Mo" steamed bread to gods, and "Jujube steamed bread" (棗饅) steamed bread to the kitchen god during the New Year. The "Jujube steamed bread" is a kind of steamed bun inlaid with red dates.

On the 15th day of the first lunar month, it is the lantern festival. It is necessary to steam the special steamed bread as the lamp for the New Year (年燈饅). That night, the villagers will put a lamp and kitten-shaped steamed bread on the granary, a lamp and a small fish-shaped steamed bread on the cover of the water tank, and a lamp and a frog-shaped steamed bread at the mouth of the well and a lamp and a steamed wheat straw pile in the middle of the house. On the one hand, all these animals and things shaped steamed bread can be regarded as sacrifices, implying the wish for good luck, favorable weather, and plenty of food and clothing; on the other hand, they can also be regarded as plastic art of villagers, but they will eventually become delicious food for children.

In Dangjia Village, all villagers use steamed buns as ceremonial food to the festivals and traditions: Steamed "insect bite shaped steamed bun" (咬蟲饅) on February 2nd; steamed "Dustpan shaped steamed bun" on the Duanyang Festival; steamed "moon cake shaped steamed bun" (月餅饅) on the Mid-Autumn Festival. As mentioned earlier, when begging for luck on the double seventh day, besides various melons and fruits, there are

2) The local people call the gods "ye (爺)", this is a respectful address.

also various kinds of fruits shaped steamed flower buns. The most distinctive ones are the “inkstone shaped steamed bun” (硯台饅) and “shell-shaped (or needle and thread basket-shaped) steamed bun” (殼兒饅 or 針線筐籬饅). In the shell-shaped steamed bun, female props such as scissors, awls, and needle and thread-shaped steamed buns will be made. After these are sacrificed to the Gods, they will be given to the girls as gifts (Dang 1999: 79–82), which is in line with the original intention of Qiqiao (乞巧, a custom in which women wish to be skillful in sewing) at this time. The inkstone-shaped steamed bun is specially made for boys. There will also be stationery-shaped steamed bread such as a pen holder and brush on the inkstone. When all these steamed flower buns are finally eaten by the children, it means that those full of prayers have been integrated with the children.

All the steamed buns and steamed buns as gifts mentioned above contain the simple and sincere feelings of the villagers. The villagers of Dangjia Village tend to think that the more exquisite the steamed buns are, and the more varied the patterns are, the more profound their intentions as gifts are. Such as the “jujube cake” (or “jujube steamed bread”) that made by the mother for her daughter’s marriage (refer to Photo 4), the “shell-shaped steamed bun” made by the grandmother for her granddaughter, and the “longevity plate-shaped steamed bun” made by the younger generation for the elders. They are all laborious and painstaking work, which naturally contains or reposes a lot of love and feelings.

In general, the flour used for making steamed buns should be the best white flour. The flour should be hard and need to be kneaded into very hard dough. In this way, it is easier to be made into various shapes, and also not too out of shape when steaming. Making steamed buns often requires the cooperation of many people. Usually, the women in the neighborhood discuss with each other, agree on the sequence of time, and then help each other. They do together in one family today and then another tomorrow. The chopping board is mostly placed on the heated floor when making steamed buns. The women sit together, kneading dough, making shapes, and they work together and talk and laugh, and the atmosphere is always pleasant and lively.

The making process usually includes kneading, kneading, kneading, pinching, cutting, pressing, editing, pasting, coloring, inlaying, steaming, and other procedures (Li 2002: 218–223). The props they use are very simple. They are nothing more than rolling pins, scissors, chopsticks, and comb grates. In addition, they are also good at using colored beans, grains, and jujube to decorate the steamed buns with some different charm. Women who are skillful in making steamed buns are very popular, and they are invited by everyone, even like the stars supporting the moon. In Dangjia Village, the skill of making steamed food is often one of the important aspects of the community’s

evaluation of a woman, and the scene of many women making steamed buns together seems to mean whether they are skillful or not.

Steamed food and exchange

There is a folk saying in Dangjia Village: steamed food exchange (蒸食往来), which generally refers to the custom of villagers' intercommunication with relatives and neighbors through giving the gift of "steamed food". This saying is likely to circulate in a wider space, at least in the Hancheng area (Zhang 2000: 253–254). In Dangjia Village, in the intercommunication with relatives and friends during festivals and traditions, as well as the frequent contacts, assistance, and exchanges between relatives and neighbors during personal important life joints such as birth, growth, marriage, celebrations for the birthday of a senior person, and funerals, they are all closely related to giving various gifts among the villagers. "Steamed food" is the basic content of the gifts.

In Dangjia Village, the celebration of children's first full month is usually grand. The mother's family, relatives, and friends should send "circle-shaped steamed bread," also known as "circle steamed bun," which weighs about 0.25 kilogram and is hollow with a ring in heart shape, like a collar, with some flowers and plants or other patterns stacked on it. The meaning of this kind of circle steamed bun made by flour is nothing more than to ring and tie the baby (meaning protecting the baby). The steamed buns for congratulating the baby on the full moon have many local characteristics in Hancheng. Some are small and exquisite and made into various patterns. There is often small jujube in the pattern center to express happiness. Most steamed buns with circular patterns are called "full moon steamed buns" (满月花饅). After a hundred days, relatives and friends will also give the children "cat-shaped steamed bread" (貓饅) and "tiger shaped steamed bread" (虎饅). Although the shapes are somewhat different, and the titles can be separated that is cat-shaped steamed bread is the same as tiger-shaped steamed bread. Their moral is to let cats and tigers protect children, reflecting everyone's wish for the healthy growth of children. Since then, after the annual wheat harvest, the child's grandmother will send cat-shaped steamed bread and tiger-shaped steamed bread to pray for the child's health and vigorous growth.

When men and women in Dangjia Village are engaged, the bride's family usually brings a pair of "tiger-shaped steamed buns" (老虎饅). The pair of "sitting tiger" (坐虎) face to face given by the mother-in-law to the future son-in-law is majestic, expressing the hope that the future son-in-law will be powerful, strong, and lively, and will be able to protect her daughter (Photo 5). When the bride leaves, the bridegroom's family will give her back a pair of "fish diamond lotus-shaped steamed bun" (魚兒鑽蓮

饅), or “fish-shaped steamed bun” (魚兒饅), which means that her mother-in-law hopes that her future daughter-in-law can be as light as a fish and as pure as a lotus. The shape of the fish on the opposite side is like “fishes go through the Lotus” (魚鑽蓮) and “fishes play with the lotus” (魚戲蓮). Generally, it is almost a certain form in the Hancheng area (Li 1992: 92–93). The gift-giving and returning of the tiger-shaped steamed bun and the fish-shaped steamed bun is like an agreement or tacit understanding between the two parties (the bride’s family and the bridegroom’s family) of a marriage. During the wedding, the mother of the bride’s family usually steams a basin-sized steamed bread for her daughter, which is called “jujube cake” (棗糕子). Its base is lotus-shaped, and the shape of the base is quite complex. It is inserted, piled, or pasted with lotus pods, flower buds, water plants, birds, and fish. The jujube steamed bun can be regarded as the bride’s returning gifts to the bridegroom’s fish-shaped steamed bun. At the same time, it is also the deepest blessing of the bride’s mother for her daughter’s marriage.

The steamed flower buns for the celebration of the birthday of the elders in Dangjia Village are “peach-shaped steamed bun” (壽桃饅) and “plate-shaped steamed bun” (壽盤饅) offered as a birthday present for celebrating longevity. The celebration of the birthday of the elderly is generally held every year from the age of 60, and there will be a big birthday party held only every 10 years. They are the “twelve zodiac signs” (十二生肖) among the steamed flower buns in Dangjia Village, which are usually steamed in the zodiac year of the birthday man or woman to make a specific shape of the zodiac sign, and then used to give gifts and express blessings. Celebrating the birthday for the elders is regarded by the villagers as a basic way of filial piety for their children and younger generations. At that time, nephews, nieces, nephews, and nieces generally send “peach-shaped steamed bun” and “plate-shaped steamed bun.” Even for general neighborhood relations, neighbors often give peach-shaped steamed buns to the birthday man or woman. In addition, they can also send eggs, longevity plaques, and longevity couplets. Peach-shaped steamed bread is usually in even numbers, such as four or six. Some of them are simple in shape, just like peaches, some make various patterns on them, and even make the pattern of “five blessings holding longevity” (called 五福捧壽)³⁾, etc. The weight of the plate-shaped steamed bun is much heavier than that of an ordinary peach-shaped steamed bun. It is larger than the peach-shaped one, each one weighs more than 1 kg and is in the shape of a disc. It is sandwiched with broken fillings such as honey, sesame, walnut kernel, and peanut kernel. In addition to some “flowers.” there are patterns such as “five blessings holding longevity.” “longevity” (壽), and the

3) The five blessings (五福) refer to the five blessings of fortune (福), emolument (祿), longevity (壽), happiness (喜) and property (財). Centered on longevity, it is surrounded by five bats representing blessing.

shape of small peaches. Because the plate-shaped steamed bun takes a lot of time and trouble to make, it can be used to express the wish of congratulations to close relatives and elders. In recent years, influenced by the urban lifestyle, the birthday cake has slowly become popular.

If an elder dies, villagers will send “plate-shaped steamed bun” (盤子饅) and “small round steamed bun” (小圓饅) to the family of the deceased. The plate steamed bun is generally plain and has no pattern. It is flat and round. A plate-shaped steamed bun weighs about 0.5 kilograms, implying that the deceased has a complete life of merit and virtue. Small round steamed buns are hemispherical. If converted, about four small round steamed buns are equivalent to one plate-shaped steamed bun.

In Dangjia Village and its affiliated Hancheng area, the exchanges and intercommunication with steamed food (what they called 蒸食往來) that using steamed food as gifts often express both people’s gift-giving behavior and people’s mutual assistance behavior. Such as at weddings or funerals, many steamed buns as gifts brought by relatives and friends are received by the host’s family, which reduces the burden of preparing large-scale dinners. In Dangjia Village, a variety of steamed food (steamed flower buns or steamed bread used as a gift) constitute a fairly complete symbolic system. We can regard each steamed flower buns or steamed bread used as a gift as a materialized symbol, which is saturated with specific meaning, value, and emotion shared by the local people. This local tradition of steaming and eating reflects the basic characteristics of interpersonal communication in the local rural society in Dangjia Village. There are established rules for the types, shapes, quantity, conversion relationship between steamed bread used as a gift and steamed flower bun, as well as the season and object of gifts. These traditional rules are the most common life knowledge of local villagers. From the perspective of researchers, these are all very important “folk knowledge.”

The types, patterns, forms, sizes, and quantities of gift steamed buns or flower steamed buns presented, accepted, or returned to each other by the villagers, to varying degrees, they also very clearly reflect the nature of social communication between the gift-giving persons, according to their seniority, the distance of blood relation and even the closeness of personal friendship. The relation between the gift-giving person can even be guessed from the type and size of steamed bread or steamed flower bun they give to each other. And, peach-shaped or plate-shaped steamed bread (壽桃饅 or 壽盤饅) or the steamed bread as a sacrifice to gods (獻爺饅) must be sent by the younger generation to the elders. It means filial piety and respect. While circle-shaped steamed bun (圈圈饅), shell-shaped steamed bun, and inkstone-shaped steamed bun must be given by the elders to the younger generation. Their moral is love and kindness. Those who receive a circle-shaped steamed bun often give back with steamed bread as a sacrifice to gods,

which implies the seniority in the family between the gift-giving persons.

The villagers determine the number of steamed buns as a gift or steamed flower buns according to the distance of kinship. The number of steamed food is often calculated in “100.” The number of steamed buns for the most important person is 300, followed by 200, 100, half 100 or less. For example, the gifts for the closest person such as parents in law and nephews, the gifts given for the funerals of parents-in-law (lower generation to upper generation), and the gifts given for the marriages of nephews (upper generation to lower generation) should all be presented with 300 steamed flower buns. The gifts given between the general relationship between aunts and cousins, the gifts for the funeral of aunts or uncles, and the gifts from aunts to their sister’s children for marriage are all 200. The others are all 100. The steamed food exchanges between neighbors are generally on small scale, but they can also be based on good relationships or deep friendships. However, villagers will also give 100 steamed buns or half a hundred steamed flower buns for an important friend or relative to maintain or construct a better relationship, people can achieve or construct it by taking out more steamed bread used as a gift. The person who receives the gift of steamed buns generally records the number of all these steamed food and gifts in the account book for future reference as the basis for returning gifts in the future.

Future research topics

Recently, the Chinese government has included the folk custom of “steamed flower buns” (花饅) in some areas in Shanxi and Shaanxi into the national intangible cultural heritage list, indicating that such research topics have begun to attract widespread attention. Steamed flower buns and steamed bread used as gifts are developed from steamed bread, which is the most common “food.” Because of different scenes, they may be used as “sacrifices” or “gifts,” but they may also be a kind of folk grassroots “works of art.” Because they are consumed quickly, it is difficult to retain the “works.” It can be said that they are fleeting “works of folk art” (Zhou 2008: 35–42). However, by searching relevant literature, we can see that there are few rigorous relevant books or papers on steamed flower bun, which means that there is still a lot of space to explore the research on steamed flower buns or steamed bread used as a gift in the future. The author intends to continue to conduct more in-depth field investigation on steamed flower bun and related issues in the future and hopes to further report the new research experience in academic circles.

(Translated by Huang Jie and Qiao Zhou)

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Photo 1 the steamed bread used as a gift at the wedding



Photo 2 the steamed flower bun coming out of the steamer on the evening of the double seventh day: fruit shaped steamed bread (水果饅頭 such as peach-shaped or grape shaped steamed bread), inkstone shaped steamed bread (硯台饅頭) or shallow basket-shaped steamed bread (殼兒饅頭)



Photo 3 the steamed bread as a sacrifice to gods (獻爺饅頭) and the table for offering sacrifices to gods or ancestors



Photo 4 the juzube steamed bread (棗糕子) presented by mother



Photo 5 a pair of tiger-shaped steamed bread (老虎饅) received from wedding