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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a harvest festival held in both America and Canada. For Americans, the holiday is just as big as Christmas. This month, I'm going to introduce some of the history and customs of Thanksgiving.



Jennie Augusta Brownscombe, *The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth*, 1914

Harvest festivals have been celebrated by various cultures and religions from long ago, but when and where the first Thanksgiving was held by colonists on North American soil is debated by historians. Many Americans believe that the first Thanksgiving was held in the Plymouth Colony in the fall of 1621. English colonists called the

Pilgrims, seeking religious freedom, arrived in the area on the Mayflower the previous year. However, the first winter was hard, and about half of them died from malnutrition and disease. The remaining Pilgrims were able to survive thanks to the help of a local Native American tribe, the Wampanoag. The Wampanoag taught the Pilgrims how to farm crops native to North America such as corn and pumpkins. Blessed with a bountiful harvest, the Pilgrims held a Thanksgiving feast for three days with their Wampanoag neighbors. It's a well-known story, and in elementary school I even acted in a play of the first Thanksgiving. (I was a Pilgrim.)

From then on, Thanksgiving celebrations spread throughout the colonies. About 150 years after the first Thanksgiving, the American Revolutionary War started, and many loyalists, the colonists who remained loyal to England, fled to Canada. When they fled, they took their American Thanksgiving customs with them. By the way, there are some historians who claim that the first Thanksgiving was actually celebrated in Canada.

However, there is no compelling proof of this, and even if Canadians did celebrate first, it was likely limited to a religious service, without the feast. In my opinion, a Thanksgiving without a big meal doesn't count. Anyway, Thanksgiving became a national holiday in the US in 1863, and in Canada in 1879. American Thanksgiving is celebrated on the 4th Thursday of November, and since winter comes earlier and is much colder in Canada, they celebrate earlier, on the second Monday of October.

Thanksgiving customs are very similar between the US and Canada. The most important thing is the Thanksgiving meal. The menu has remained largely unchanged from olden times, and features many ingredients native to North America. First of all, the turkey is the star of the show. In fact, many people call Thanksgiving "Turkey Day." If you have a big family, it's common to serve a ham as well. Also, if you have vegetarian or vegan relatives, you have to serve them something meatless, such as a "tofurkey" (tofu turkey). The standard side dishes are mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing (made from bread, vegetables, and herbs, and often stuffed inside the turkey and cooked), sweet potato casserole topped with marshmallows, green bean casserole, Brussels sprouts, creamed corn, corn bread, and cranberry sauce. The most popular dessert is pumpkin pie, but apple, sweet potato, and pecan pies are also common.



A typical Thanksgiving dinner



Roast turkey

In America there are the North and the South, the East Coast and the West Coast, and each region has its own culinary culture. Also, the population of North America is made up of people from all over, so what is eaten on Thanksgiving depends on the culture of the family. For example, among my friends in America, Chinese Americans prefer chicken over turkey. Filipino Americans eat fried spring rolls called lumpia along with the typical sides. African Americans eat macaroni and cheese and collard greens, a vegetable related to kale. The family living next door to me had immigrated from the east African country Eritrea, so on Thanksgiving they ate their staple food of injera, which looks like a spongy crepe, topped with spicy stew called tsebhi. In addition, Eritrea was formerly a colony of Italy, so due to Italian influence, my neighbors often ate lasagna on special days like Thanksgiving. My mother is from Massachusetts, and is a descendent of the pilgrims, so we always ate the standard fare. However, when we received some of the spicy dishes from our neighbors, it was a nice change of pace for our taste buds.

In addition to the Thanksgiving meal, people watch parades and football. Particularly health



conscious people run marathons on Thanksgiving morning in order to offset the calories that will be consumed at dinner time. The day after Thanksgiving is Black Friday, the official start of the Christmas season. Many people line up outside of stores from before the crack of dawn, hoping for a good deal.

Recently, there have been discussions about whether or not Thanksgiving should be celebrated at all. The Indigenous peoples of the Americas have had their land and resources stolen, they've died from diseases, and they have been murdered in large numbers by European colonists. Some feel the Wampanoag made a mistake by helping the Pilgrims on the first Thanksgiving. For many Indigenous peoples, Thanksgiving is not a day of thanks, but a day of mourning. How can Americans and Canadians continue to celebrate when

Indigenous peoples have suffered so greatly? It is necessary for us to reflect on the crimes of the past, learn more about Indigenous peoples' history and culture, and have respect for the Indigenous peoples of the Americas while cooperating for the future. In addition, we need to stop idealizing the romanticized myth of the first Thanksgiving, and give thanks for the truly important things in life, such as our family, friends, and good health. ★



National Day of Mourning protest held on Thanksgiving



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1. stuffing 2. green bean casserole 3. tofurkey 4. collard greens 5. cranberry sauce 6. pumpkin pie 7. macaroni and cheese 8. pecan pie 9. lumpia 10. injera and various kinds of tsebhi



