

## Tipping Points:

### The State of Governing Energy and Food Risks in Japan ( 2 )

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#### Food Risks in Contemporary Japan

Among all resources, even energy perhaps, food has always been the sine qua non for individuals' survival. The risk of food shortages, contamination, and other threats are a constant in human society. Of course, the rise of settled agriculture about 10,000 years ago saw more certainty in securing food resources. But it also saw a drop in caloric intake and protein levels compared to the bounteous hunter-gatherer diet that had been the norm the ice ages (Roberts 2008: 8 9). And along with agricultural society came new technologies as well as institutions for food production and distribution. There followed a series of 'agriculture revolutions,' including those associated with the oil age depicted in the previous section of this paper. Collectively, these revolutions have brought about technological innovations in farming and extended the geographical scope of food production and distribution (Lang 2006).

Today's food chain (from the farm to the dinner table) is transnational, a complex process that links a multitude of actors, both public and private as well as the powerful and the powerless. In the modern era, we access our food via a highly complex system that poses various risks due to its complexity.

Contemporary food risks are intricately intertwined with other global and domestic risks. To start with, the transnational food supply chain is unthinkable without international trade. Yet this system of trade consumes vast quantities of energy, especially liquid fuels for the aircraft, ships and trucks involved in transport; and the electricity for processing, storage and the like. And let us not forget all the implements and vehicles involved in farming, as well as the hydrocarbon-based

fertilizers and other chemicals used on the soil itself. The current escalation of hydrocarbon energy prices is therefore funneled into local food prices in a myriad of ways. These price rises are eroding consumer confidence over food security in the industrially advanced countries.

Yet this is not the end of the spillover effect of energy risks. Constraints on energy supplies have seen a turn towards the production of biofuels, in turn stimulating speculative investment in cereals such as wheat and corn by large international corporations. This has fundamentally changed the meaning of food to the global economy as well as national and global governance, while deepening uncertainty and risk surrounding food production and supply.

The Japanese government is, like others, compelled to deal with these protean and rapidly worsening food risks. Japan's food production and supply, known for its protectionism, of course is often depicted as at odds with the global trend, characterized by industrialized agriculture and multinational corporations. The realities surrounding food risk in Japan, however, have been profoundly shaped by global influences. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, for example, the Japanese state confronted a precarious shortage of food supply. The Malthusian-tinged challenge of balancing the size of the population with the growth of economic production thrust itself onto the political agenda. This food crisis in occupied Japan was, in the event, solved via the receipt of foreign aid. Yet some argue that this aid also triggered significant and enduring changes in the overall Japanese diet.

Still, Japan's food sufficiency level was 73 per cent in 1965. As Japan emerged as an economic power in the international arena, however, the food sufficiency level started to drop sharply, recording 39 per cent in 2006, one of the lowest among industrially advanced countries (Akaibu Shuppan 2008). In other words, the 'protectionist' Japanese agricultural policy regime has largely been supplemented by foreign imports, and throughout the postwar period, negotiations between domestic agriculture production and foreign imports remained as a vital political matter. Naturally, Japan's food policy has been moulded in the process of interactions with global trends in agricultural production and supply, and this is particular evident today. Indeed, the Japanese government has implemented a series of policies to tackle global food risk,

in particular, after the outbreak of BSE in 2001.

In order to understand the Japanese state's policies towards food risks, it is important first to identify the nature of contemporary food risk. To this end, we could ask detailed questions regarding political measures that the Japanese government has implemented to deal with the present food risk. Namely, what measures has the Japanese government been required to implement to deal with food risk? Are these measures conditioned by particular Japanese situations or do they have much in common with food-risk policies in other industrially advanced countries? Here, one important point to discuss is that the context in which these new food risk policies were set out was set by the neoliberal political reform of the Koizumi government. This reform placed a strong emphasis on deregulation and non-interventionist approaches towards the market. Thus the Japanese case illustrates coping with global food risks by a neoliberal government with an extremely weak agriculture industry.

### **Food Risk and Security in the Global World**

The World Food Summit Plan of Action, issued after the World Food Summit held in Rome in 1996, explained the idea of 'food security' as follows:

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

(World Food Summit 1996)

Concretely, 'food security' refers to two 'interconnected but distinct' areas of food risk: food supply and food safety (Snyder 2004: 14). Of the two, food supply remains the immediate focus of global concerns over food risk. The International Food Policy Research Institute notes that economic development and international aid programmes have certainly helped reduce the number of undernourished people, from 920 million in 1980 to 798 million in 2001. But it also observes that there are still many structural, institutional and political obstacles (for example, water scarcity, the lack of technological adaptation, political and civil conflicts, and the continued threat

of disease epidemics such as HIV) hindering many regions from the improvement of food availability. Indeed, when China, where rapid economic growth is ongoing, is excluded from the calculation, the undernourished people in developing worlds (in particular, in Sub-Saharan Africa) increased by nearly 28 million during a period of 1995-2001 (von Braun et al. 2005: 1). Food supply risk tends to be concentrated among the most vulnerable members of the global community. More than a half of hungry people in the world are found in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Paarlberg 2002: 7-8), while approximately eighty per cent live in rural areas where 'access to markets, health care, education, and infrastructure such as telecommunications and roadways is scarce' (Braun et al. 2005: 1). Moreover, approximately seventeen per cent of the un-nourished people 'are very young children, less than six years of age' (Braun et al. 2005: 3) and a large part of these children reside, again, in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, food supply risk is by no means limited to the developing countries. Even in a highly developed country such as the United Kingdom, there are still vulnerable groups of people who can be more severely affected by the reduction in consumer buying power incurred by price rise as they tend to spend a larger portion of income on food. Referring to studies in the UK, Midgley reports that, for example, 'low-income consumers go without food because they cannot afford it' and 'one in five families with a disabled child in the UK cuts back on food when times are tough' (Midgley 2008: 15-16, the quotes are from p. 16).

Food supply risks weigh heaviest on the most vulnerable groups of people, but food safety risks seem to be omnipresent both in developed and developing countries. In fact, as world trades of food resources expand and global food chains become more interconnected, concerns over food safety risk are increasingly shared by developed and developing countries. Yet this does not mean that food safety risk is experienced and dealt with by the national government and its people in a similar way. First, deficiencies in the social and public infrastructure (poor sanitation, inadequate drinking water and insufficient health services, for example) exacerbate some of food safety risks in developing countries. Diarrheal diseases (cholera, campylobacteriosis, E coli gastroenteritis, and salmonellosis, for example) 'are the dominant form of food-borne illness in the developing world, and indeed one of massive proportions' (Kaferstein 2003). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) estimation, 'about seventy per cent of the approximately 1.5 billion episodes of diarrhea occurring globally each

year have been caused by biologically contaminated food' (Unnevehr 2003 ; Käferstein 2003).

Second, the national governments in developing countries are required to mediate food safety risks not only because their citizens are more likely to be exposed to those risks ; but also because their agricultural products are exported to the developed countries. This means it is essential that regulations on food safety in the developing countries comply with the standards of the international regulatory framework to govern food-related risk. In other words, it take a 'farm to folk' approach, which is the mainstream policy framework for food security in the industrially advanced countries. Otherwise, their agricultural products may be excluded from the international food trade market. Indeed, there is a concern that 'countries may be tempted to use food safety regulations as a means of protecting domestic industries from foreign competition' (Caswell 2003).

Third, it requires much effort to provide safe food that satisfies the regulatory regime from the "farm to the table." It is thus a time-intensive commodity. Naturally, it often falls into the category of a luxury commodity. Snyder argues that :

Poor people are most vulnerable to the consumption of unsafe food. Poverty is not the only cause of a lack of food safety, but it is among the most important. Any programme to achieve food safety needs to take this factor into account.

(Snyder 2004 : 14)

Food security risks, therefore, vary with the extent of national and regional economic and social developments and individual socio-economic circumstances within a particular national context. Thus, the role of the national government to implement political measures to govern food-related risks is crucial. According to an analysis by Paarlberg, deficiencies in global food security governance are rooted in deficiencies in the traditional nation-state institutions, which are still the dominant institution in food security. The capacity of the institution of global governance to provide public goods to ameliorate food risks remains limited (Paarlberg 2002 : 3 11).

At the same time, some argue that the traditional nation-state has trouble

dealing with contemporary globalized food risks (Caraher and Convey 2004; Smith, Marsden and Flynn 2004; Flynn, Marsden and Smith 2003). To start with, the process of food policymaking is today increasingly conditioned by global factors. Besides world food trades that include a wide scope of geographical territories and transnational actors, legislation is conducted at the international and regional levels, as exemplified by deals over agriculture trades made through the World Trade Organization (WTO) or Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) of the European Union (Caswell 2003; Midgley 2008: 7-9; Flynn, Marsden and Smith 2003: 39-42; Shogenji 2008: 9-11; Murakami 2004: 155-8). Naturally, actors in the policy making process as well as policy implementation have been diversified and new participants such as food retailers have raised the stakes in the regulatory framework for food security (Flynn, Marsden and Smith 2003: 42-5; also see Flynn and Marsden 1992). Analyzing the development of the UK food security policy in the 2000s incurred by a series of food scares on the one hand, and the institutional changes at the EU level, Flynn, Marsden and Smith observe a shift from 'government' to 'governance' in the food policy paradigm (Flynn, Marsden and Smith 2004: 544). The political transition from 'government' to 'governance', in which the territorial state starts to play particular political functions in a coordinated network with other (domestic, international or transnational) institutions and actors, was discussed by British scholars in the late 1990s, to understand the role of a state under the progress of globalization at that time (Jessop 1997; Jessop 1998).

The recalibration of the regulatory system for food security continues. Furthermore, risks in food supply and safety have become increasingly complex and critical, interlocking with other types of risks. The contemporary extended international food chain consumes a great deal of energy in both the cycles of production and consumption. This means, on the one hand, that the ongoing rise in energy prices tends to be translated into consumer food prices. On the other hand, the environmental impact of the globalized food chain now attracts considerable attention. Of course, contemporary large-scaled commercial agricultural production depending on technologically advanced equipment is also energy-intensive and hence, it often appears environmentally harmful (Nugent and Drescher 2006; Shiva 2000). This is why food policy experts ardently call for 'sustainable agriculture' and food policies to include environmental aspects (Caraher and Coveney 2004: 592-3; Nugent and Drescher 2006). As these

discussions suggest, today's food-related risks are inherently intertwined with energy and environmental risks. Without acknowledging these interconnected links, food security cannot be realized and in this sense, food risks are certainly 'concatenating'.

More worryingly, however, a new element has been added to the degree of concatenation of food risk. Concerns over energy supply (especially liquid fuels supply) and environmental risks have spurred the production and consumption of biofuels, creating new business opportunities in agriculture production. Major cereals such as corn and wheat have been diverted to energy production rather than human consumption. The demand for agricultural crops to produce biofuels has therefore accelerated over the past several years. At the same time, cereal production has decreased in major exporters such as Australia and Canada. All this has put great strains on the international cereal market, and contributed to rapid price rises (von Braun et al. 2005: 2; Shibata 2007: 12 19). Reacting to such momentum in cereals markets, an array of actors have increased their speculative investment in agricultural crops as well as infrastructure. Some states (for example, China and the US) encourage the buying of cereals for biofuel production as a part of their national energy strategy (Shibata 2007: 69 76). The development of biofuels thus links food security with financial and political risks.

It is this highly complex amalgam of risks that the contemporary Japanese government has to face when dealing with food risk. Below, measures taken by the Japanese government will be examined.

### **Food Risk and Security in the Japanese Context**

The first and most urgent task that the newly organized postwar Japanese government had to engage in was the management of food risk. Japan's unconditional surrender was accompanied by devastation caused by the war. In macroeconomic terms, as Nakamura estimates, the total war set the Japanese economy back to about the level of 1935, with a fourth of national wealth destroyed. The wartime economy compelled a concentration on heavy industries for the production of armaments. Light industries such as the textile industry, the main driving force of the Japanese

economy and a key player in the production of materials for the Japanese population in earlier years, had been largely neglected. Consequently, the Japanese economy lost one third of its overall production facilities (Nakamura 1986: 147-54). Despite the poor state of the national economy, the Japanese population grew rapidly, by a rate of two to five percent per year. This was due to repatriation from ex-colonies (in total approximately 6.25 million) and an increase in the rate of childbirth caused by the so-called ‘baby boom’ of 1947-9. According to Obuchi, the total number of the Japanese population increased by about ten million, which was five times the rate of increase from 1990 to 1995 (Obuchi 1997: 19-21). As a result, a genuinely Malthusian situation developed in Japan, namely via a surplus population that exceeded the limits of national economic production capacity. The fallout was experienced in the everyday lives of the Japanese people in the form of shortages of food. For instance, the total rice supply in 1946 could only sustain half of the population as compared to prewar consumption standards. Referring to the survey conducted by Minami Ryozauro, Obuchi points out that, even by 1951, the domestic production of food was still only able to support less than seventy percent of the total population (Obuchi 1997: 23-3).

One of the political measures that the Japanese government implemented to deal with the food crisis immediately after the Second World War was the promotion of family planning. This policy was presented as key for the Japanese nation-state to become and remain a ‘democratic and peaceful’ state (Tsurumi 1984/1991: 244-6). Simultaneously, as an emergency measure, aid from the UN and US was brought into Japan. The aid was largely used for school meals throughout the country, with the emphasis on bread and milk, an abrupt shift from the rice-centred diet (Ehara 1999: 56-7). Also, the Occupation Forces introduced radical agriculture reforms through which many farmers had opportunities to own their own lands, departing from the prewar landlord system and giving farmers incentives to improve production (Shogenji 2008: 171-5). The postwar agriculture reform implemented by the Occupation force was consolidated in the 1952 Farm Land Law (Nochi-ho).

The Japanese economy recovered from its early postwar chaos, and then began its “miraculous” growth. The existential food supply risks of the immediate postwar period were certainly past. But with rapid growth of heavy industry, Japanese agriculture began to exhibit evidence of decline. The proportion of workers in the



agriculture sector declined from 45.4 per cent in 1950 via 17.9 per cent in 1970 to 6.4 per cent in 1990 (Shogenji 2008: 82), being absorbed into the growing secondary and tertiary sectors. The industrial development also facilitated the process of reorganization of land use and the total area of farm land in Japan started to decrease in 1961. The figure in 2005 was 1.39 million hectares, reduced by 23 per cent to the 1961 figure of 6.09 hectares (Shogenji 2008: 81). Despite the shrinking size of the agriculture industry, however, the production of rice as staple food steadily increased and the Japanese government introduced policies for reducing rice acreage in the 1970s to control the amount of national stock as well as rice prices. From the perspective of farmers, such agriculture policies meant that farming was increasingly an unattractive occupation. Higher income s were available by working in the developing industries or simply selling their farms, and many farmer households went part-time to optimize their socio-economic situations. These developments further marginalized the agriculture sector (Shogenji 2008: 92 8).

Today's food risks derive in large measure from these earlier experiences and the policy frameworks set in place to deal with them. Some elements in the earlier structure of agriculture and food policy have been of course been enhanced. First, the weak agriculture industry is a persistent feature of Japan's food policy, but the food distribution system in the 2000s is more than ever globalized. Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio declined to the lowest level (40 per cent, on a calorie basis, in 2001 5 and 39 per cent in 2006) in comparison with other industrially advanced countries (122 per cent for the US, 121 per cent for France, 99 per cent for Germany, 69 per cent for Italy and 61 per cent for the UK, in calorie, in 2001) (Shinohara 2005: 92; Matsunaga 2005: 180 4; Yamashita 2006: 2 5; Naikakufu 2006: 16 18; Akaibu Shuppan 2008: 4 5). Two reasons are commonly held to account for this 'uniquely' low level of food self-sufficiency of the contemporary Japanese state. First, the transition of popular eating habits - in particular, the so-called "westernization" of food - has increased the consumption of commodities that are difficult to grow on Japanese soil (grain, vegetable oil, stock farm products) while rice consumption, the principal crop in Japanese agriculture, has declined significantly. According to data compiled by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), rice provided 48.4 per cent of the calories consumed, per capita, by Japanese citizens in 1960. But by 2005 this figure had declined to 23.3 per cent. The reduction in rice con-

sumption was compensated by mainly stock farm products and vegetable oil, both mostly imported from abroad (Naikakufu 2006: 17).

Second, the decline of agriculture in Japan has continued to this day. Yamashita reports:

While agricultural output as a proportion of GDP has declined from 9 per cent in 1960 to its present level of 1 per cent, the proportion of farmers older than 65 has risen from 10 per cent to 60 per cent. The proportion of full-time farming households has declined from 34.3 per cent to 19.5 per cent, while the proportion of part-time farming households (for which other income exceeds income from farming) has increased from 32.1 per cent to 67.1 per cent.

(Yamashita 2006: 3)

In other words, Japan's food distribution system cannot be sustained without foreign imports with its extremely weak agriculture sector-globalization of foods is an essential element of Japan's foods distribution system.

The implications of this situation are twofold. On the one hand, the heavy dependency on foreign imports has recently stirred up the debate over the strengthening of 'food security'. As Matsunaga rightly points out, the Japanese state is particularly vulnerable to a global food crisis or if countries exercised economic sanctions against the Japanese state and food imports were stopped. 'Compared to these [global food crisis and economic sanction], there is no bigger risk in terms of both the probability of incidence and extent of damage' (Matsunaga 2005: 180). On the other hand, this situation has brought about some critical views towards the national government's agriculture and food policy that has prioritized the development of industry over protection of everyday life. For example, in a new edition of the widely circulated publication, *Taberu na Kiken* (Don't Eat, Dangerous Food!), the authors locate beef and oranges, two agricultural products whose import to Japan was liberalized in the process of bilateral negotiations over the lifting of control of agricultural imports between the US and Japan to curtail Japan's trade surplus, at the top of each category (meat and vegetables), emphasizing how little the Japanese government can implement control over food safety of these products in order to

compromise with requests by the US government (Kowaka and Shokuhin to Kurashi no Anzen Kikin 2005). It is grass-roots consumer movements, from the perspective of the authors, that can offer countermeasures to such 'pro-America' and 'pro-industry' government that trade-off food safety for economic development through exports of high-tech industrial products (Shokuhin to Kurashi no Anzen Kikin 2005: 108 11).

Second, the concerns and anxieties over food safety in the 2000s intensified as the commodification and industrialization of everyday meals progressed. The increase in single households resulted from the demographic transition as well as changes in people's lifestyles, in particular, the increase of married women in paid-employment, boosted demands for dining out and 'home-meal replacement' or 'ready-made foods' that can be purchased at shops. According to a White Paper on food published by the Prime minister's Office in 2006, restaurant dining as a proportion of total spending of food consumption was 35.9 per cent in 2003. If we add the sum of the total spending on prepared or ready-made foods, the figure increases to 44.5 per cent (Naikakfu 2006: 2). According to Iwamura Yoko who has conducted a large scale interview survey of housewives born after 1960 on the current situation of family meals, dependency on externally produced foods is a widely spread tendency among young families. Efficiency and convenience in terms of meal preparation offered by dining out and prepared or ready-made foods certainly has appeal to housewives who are generally in charge of the daily organization of family meals. Moreover, Iwamura points out that the externally-prepared foods provide housewives with some senses of leisure or freedom from their families (Iwamura 2003: 137 48). Data compiled by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) informs us that the proportion of external food consumed as lunch for women in the age groups of 30 39 and 40 49 were 37.8 per cent and 32.1 per cent, respectively, in 2003 (Naikakufu 2006: 3).

The spread of the externalization of meals among Japanese families suggests the increase of probability of food risks due to the highly cumbersome cooking and distribution process of foods in comparison to home cooking. Furthermore, externalization necessarily implies that a large part of the control over foods safety has come to be handled by the food service industry.

And a third point of the contextual changes to concerns over food safety is that

the lifestyles of Japanese families are now diversified and accordingly, the ways in which family meals are organized indicate some significant differences from the ones in the early postwar period. One point that bears a particular importance here is the individualization of meals, namely the increase in the number of individuals who have meals on their own. Combined with the general decrease in frequencies of the family meals at home, the individualization of meals means that many families in Japan are no longer taking the role of risk absorber as a unit of everyday life in terms of food safety (Naikakufu 2006: 4). Unlike in the earlier period when housewives solely shouldered the domestic responsibilities and knowledge over food safety was transmitted from mothers to children (in particular daughters), today in Japan, individuals including children frequently purchase food at shops, fast food chains and restaurants and eat them, often without access to sufficient knowledge about what they are going to eat. In this sense, the individualization of meals tends to make each individual far more vulnerable to food risks.

Summing up the above discussion, the contextual changes in the concerns over food safety in the 2000s, tend to increase the degree of ungovernability of the state over food-related risks. The globalization of the food distribution process has extended areas that the state cannot exercise its control over. The externalization of meals resulted in yielding more discretion over the management of food safety to private corporations, which, under the neoliberal environment, are encouraged to independently strive for maximizing profits without being harnessed by state regulations. Finally, many Japanese families have changed their ways of organizing meals and through this lost its functions as the risk absorber. All in all, the ungovernability over food-related risks as become further intensified in the 2000s. Faced with such situation, the Japanese government embarked on some institutional changes to deal with food related risks. The next section will examine these new measure in detail.

### **Institutional Changes under Neoliberal Political Reform**

As noted earlier, food security risks can be divided into food supply risk and food safety risk. As for food supply risk, agriculture policies have undergone a series of reforms since the 1990s in order to improve Japan's performance of food production and trade. In terms of food safety risks, political measures implemented by the

national government can be observed in the areas of scientific assessment and communication of food risks. First, in 2003, the Basic Law for Food Safety (*Shokuhin anzen kihon hō*) was promulgated, and as its effect, the Food Safety Commission (Shokuhin anzen iinkai) was established within the Prime Minister's Office. This institutional and administrative enhancement to govern food safety was supplemented by the legislation of the Basic Law for Shokuiku (Nurturing through Eating, *Shokuiku kihon hō*) whose purpose is to promote the campaign of Shokuiku, an enlightenment activity over food knowledge and eating practices as a national movement (*kokumin undō*) that is expected to contribute to improvement of risk literacy. The notions of risk communication and risk literacy are situated at the heart of the framework of both the Basic Laws and the Shokuiku campaign.

### ***Agriculture reforms and Food Supply***

Japan's agriculture policy often appears to be regarded as the very symbol of protectionism (Mulgan 2006). Some observe, however, significant changes in the agriculture policy framework, in particular, after the introduction of the Food, Agriculture and Farming Village Basic Law (Shohenji 2008; Shibata 2007; Sasada 2008). On the effect of the Basic Law, the Cabinet approved the Food, Agriculture and Farming Village Basic Plan in the next year, and the second Basic Plan was set up in 2005.

Reviewing the policy changes since the late 1990s, Sasaki argues that the electoral reform of 1994, which places a relatively higher weight on urban voters in comparison with the previous system, drove institutional change (Sasaki 2008). In contrast, the food analysts Shibarta and Shohenji - the latter was involved in the legislation process of the 1999 Basic Law - point out that new policies were introduced in order to, first, comply with international requirements set by the WTO and other agriculture agreements, and second to rebuild Japan's agriculture industry by fostering competent producers (Shohenji 2008: 108-26; Shibata 2007: 214-18). Hence, the provision of subsidies to farmers has been revised in line with the WTO agriculture agreements by eliminating or reducing cases of financial support with trade distorting effects. Second, in order to achieve efficient and stable management of agriculture, it is deemed necessary to raise individual agriculture producers income to the average standard of workers in the other industry. For this purpose, the state is

revising its policy framework to enlarge the scale of farm by concentrating lands in the hands of competent producers.

Finally, the policy changes since the late 1990s suggest a shift in the policy making perspective from producers and consumers. The consumer-centred policy making is today the mainstream approach in the food policy of industrially advanced countries, and the Japanese state also has taken on board the global trend.

### ***Food Safety***

The establishment of the Food Safety Commission under the Basic Law for Food Safety was a government reaction to the BSE outbreak in Japan.

The purpose of the Commission is precisely to conduct scientific assessment and organize communication processes of food related risks. The basic idea on which the Commission and Basic Law is founded is that there is no 'zero-risk' food. Any foods can be risky when they are consumed by individuals, depending on the ways or amount consumed. Of course, there is always the possibility that unknown harmful bacteria or chemicals are contaminated in foods. On this understanding, the Commission is obliged to undertake scientific research to assess the risks of various foods. The risk assessment by professionals of the Commission is passed onto the MHLW and MAFF to set up policies, regulations and administrative systems to deal with risks identified by the Commission. In addition, the information as regards risk assessment conducted by the Commission is released to the public through the 'risk communication' process. Besides the numerous publications on different food related risks and online materials including homepages, the Commission organizes public meetings in which any interested party may participate and make inquiries to the professionals on the Commission. In 2005 and 2006, topics such as BSE, residual pesticides, methylmercury contaminated in fish, imported soya beans and genetically modified foods, were discussed in public meetings organized by the Commission and sub-regional authorities across Japan (Naikakufu 2006: 103-117; Matsunaga 2005: 160-7; Inubushi 2005: 77-81).

The Food Safety Commission and *Shokuiku* campaign certainly have been playing educational functions, benefiting many Japanese with opportunities to access a wide range of information regarding food-related risks. Also, various institutional

reforms have been made to smooth 'risk communication' through the activity of the Commission and campaign. One example of the reforms is the improvement of food labelling to convey information in a more effective manner.

The new system of governing food-related risks means individuals have real opportunities to equip themselves with knowledge and technologies to better their everyday lives. But there are also some worrying signs. Reporting exchanges at one public meeting over food-related risks organized by the Food Safety Commission, Matsunaga points out the difficulty of 'risk communication' rooted in the information gap between producers and consumers. Consumers, who often live in the urban environment, are generally so detached from the realities of the agricultural industry that they sometimes end up in bringing back misunderstanding. Matsunaga introduces one example in a discussion of misunderstanding over "seeding." Japanese farmers tend to use a particular variety of crops that can cultivate one-generation only and hence buy seeds rather than grow them. Matsunaga describes the reaction of a consumer who heard that farmers are making efforts to buy good seeds argued, in the public meeting, that "farmers who do not grow seeds are just hopeless!" (Matsunaga 2005: 164). This case suggests that risk communication meant to avoid risks can in fact create new risks due to miscommunication and inadequate information.

Furthermore, the sheer volume of information on food-related risks seems to confuse many people. Iwamura interviewed a number of young mothers just after the outbreak of BSE, and her work turns our eyes to the discrepancies between ideals and realities in those mothers' discourse. According to Iwamura, the mothers tend to talk about ideal situations of family meals by resorting to their knowledge in interviews, but the pictures of family meals painted in the interview are far from lists of actual menus submitted by them. Iwamura attributes this to the difficulty of practising the ideal in the information society. Most of the housewives Iwamura interviewed know that purchasing organic foods, going to cooperative shops and more importantly, home-cooking are essential to avoid food-related risks. They have the knowledge, but they still use mass-produced products from supermarket chains, in particular, ready-made dishes, because of the inconvenience of changing their patterns of behaviours (cheaper prices, saving time and work, and preference of families and so on). Inter-

estingly, those mothers tend to use a method of collecting information that endorses their unchanged behaviours - they actively select only the information that fits what they want or need to do and ignore the rest. Otherwise, they are literally torn between information given by different parties, government, local authorities and mass media. They have very few tools to reach a clear-cut understanding of food related risks. To cope with this situation, this classic cognitive dissonance, indifference and neglect can be a good strategy. Simultaneously, however, the rational behaviour that the government expects in order to curtail food related risks has ironically resulted in maintaining risks among Japanese people. Yet, it may not be a problem for the state, as the responsibility of mediating risks has already been transferred to supposedly 'autonomous' and 'competent' individuals.

Yet the most serious issue relating to the Food Safety Commission is derived from its institutional setting and structure. From its onset, questions were posed to the degree of independence of the Commission. Japan's food policies tend to get embroiled in political problems; in particular, trade conflicts with the US. Given this, it was crucial for the Commission to fully exercise its authority without political intervention. But the development of BSE cases demonstrated the Commission's inability to act independently. This undermined the Commission's political functions and increased the level of uncertainty over food risks (Aonuma 2008: 104-22).

### *The Shokuiku Campaign*

As discussed earlier, the *Shokuiku* campaign was seen as a device to disseminate knowledge about food including food risks and healthy eating. The *Shokuiku* campaign was voluntarily initiated by some enthusiasts led by a celebrity chef, Hattori Yukio, in the early 1990s. The campaign was incorporated into the national political process through the legislation of the Basic Law for *Shokuiku* (literally translated, 'nurturing through eating') in 2005. The *Shokuiku* campaign attempts to spread a wide range of knowledge of foods and public health, from nutrition via healthy eating and cooking to food education for children, among Japanese people. As the First White Paper on *Shokuiku* in 2006 delineates:

It is an urgent task to promote the *Shokuiku* campaign as a nation-wide movement, in which all Japanese people autonomously participate and play the lead



role. In so doing, each Japanese person independently acquires pertinent and proper knowledge and decision-making ability that enable him or her to voluntarily practice a healthy lifestyle with healthy eating.

(Naikakufu 2006 : 20)

It is worth noting that the national campaign of *Shokuiku* is not the first time in the postwar period in Japan that the national government has expressed political interest in the organization of the everyday lives of the people, and attempted to deploy a nation-wide movement. The *Shokuiku* campaign has certainly drawn on the prior experience of these national livelihood improvement movements, and installed similar kinds of tactics, to disseminate concrete knowledge and skills for the management of food, cooking practices and nutrition. For example, it groups housewives in communities and provides them with opportunities to access professional support and teaching. Simultaneously, today's *Shokuiku* campaign was introduced into the national political process, in order to tackle the acknowledged ungovernability of food distribution and consumption caused by globalisation and the diversification of eating practices and dietary habits, as discussed above.

The national *Shokuiku* campaign sets out the seven areas of policy implementation, and “to support activities to hand down Japanese food culture” is listed as the sixth item (Naikakufu 2006 : 29). The national government and local authorities bear the responsibility of policy implementation, and a number of ministries (MEXT, MHLW and MAFF) are involved in organizing various activities. Yet, simultaneously, the Basic Law specifies the *Shokuiku* campaign should be carried out as a ‘national movement’ (*kokumin undo*), in which individual Japanese are the very agents of activities of the *Shokuiku* campaign. Cooking and nutrition classes and other food-related events are organized and offered to families at schools and in communities, to disseminate traditional local culinary practices.

The agenda of “handing down Japanese food culture” was further strengthened in 2006 by the formulation of the “Intellectual Property Promotion Plan 2006” (*Chiteki zaisan suishin keikaku* 2006). The plan was designed by a government working team to develop a strategy for promoting the “Japan brand” based on “lifestyle” both in and outside of Japan. It specifies the fostering of a “rich food culture” as one of the

four main measures to achieve this goal, since “with fresh and abundant agriculture and marine products, Japanese food culture has been built up by skilfully taking in both Japanese lifestyles and foreign recipes and seasoning, and hence fusing traditions and creativity. Therefore Japanese food culture is Japan’s unique intellectual and cultural property” (Naikakufu 2006 : 102).

On this ground, the *Shokuiku* campaign eagerly promotes the “Japanese element” of Japanese food. Specifically, school meals are now organized with more emphasis on Japanese dishes, rather than the early postwar menu based on bread and milk. School teachers are also encouraged to incorporate agricultural experience into their curricula, to widen pupils’ knowledge on local dishes and products. The importance and benefit of consuming locally or domestically produced products or organic products is also stressed, not only by the government or educational institutions but also by the retail and food service industry. Moreover, contrasts are drawn between the so-called “Western diet” laden with protein and fat and the well-balanced “Japanese-style dietary life” (Naikakufu 2006 : 95 101 ; Hattori 2006 : 76 85 and 109 11).

Yet, the most noticeable emphasis seems to be placed on rice in today’s *Shokuiku* campaign. As the national staple food, conventionally, rice has been loaded with a set of symbolic meanings in Japan (Onuki-Tierney 1993) and indeed, the Japanese term to refer to boiled rice, *gohan*, also means ‘meal’, implying the centrality of this ingredient in Japanese food culture. Simultaneously, rice has been a focal point of Japan’s food policy. Domestic self-sufficiency in rice production is 95 per cent, and the protectionist policies implemented by the national government have been heavily criticized, both internationally and domestically. Moreover, as mentioned above, the rice-centred dietary habit was regarded as a negative aspect of Japanese culinary practices at one point in the postwar history, vis-a-vis the idealized “Western cuisine.”

Contrary to earlier discourses, today’s *Shokuiku* campaign tends to give unreserved celebration to traditional rice-centred dietary practices. To start with, the Dietary Life Guideline (*Shokuseikatsu shishin*) approved by the government in 2000 encourages the population to “make sure of eating enough cereals *such as rice*

[authors' emphasis]. Also, in "making full use of food culture and local products, and then, sometimes try new dishes," "Japan's unique food culture" is defined as the assortment of various cuisines, centred on rice and associated with food products rooted in regional climates and cultures."

The centrality of rice is endorsed by many PR documents of the campaign, which are often decorated with photographs of bowls of warm, white boiled rice (in many cases, with various people eating rice). Such photographs are generally accompanied by written texts that explain the advantages of eating rice. For example, one of the promotional documents introduced comments made by a three-time Olympic gold medalist in Judo on eating rice :

I feel uneasy when I am abroad for international competitions and there is no Japanese restaurant. I was told that as an athlete in the national team who is obliged to play matches in any country, I have to prepare myself for doing my best by eating any kind of meals. But when I feel I need to do my best, eating rice helps me in gearing myself up. My heart, rather than my body demands rice.

(*Gohan* Museum Magazine, Autumn 2006)

### Conclusion

Recent studies on food policy in industrially advanced countries highlight the following two points. First, its institutional form tends to take a shape of a multi-layered, networked governance model, in which a multitude of actors, both private and public, are involved (Smith, Marsden and Flynn 2004). Second, the focus of food policy has largely been placed on "the transfer of knowledge and skills," over-emphasizing "behavioural explanations and encouraged health promotion to favour lifestyle intervention rather than tackle structural factors" (Caraher and Ceveney 2004 : 595). The recent institutional and policy changes over food risk policy in Japan appear largely to be in line with these points. Indeed, while lifestyle interventions have been promoted and consumers are appearing the object of scrutiny, structural factors, in particular, those in the food distribution process, have been left aside.

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