

Double Challenges to Japanese Farmers: The Nuclear Accident and Transpacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement

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For a while after Japan was struck by a major earthquake and tsunami on 11 March this year, gloomy and depressing atmosphere was dominant in Japanese people. As soon as the disaster occurred, corporations refrained from distributing their commercial messages (CMs) on TV. Japanese people are usually exposed by the enormous amount of CMs, but could not but repeatedly watch CMs produced by AC (Advertising Council Japan), a private non-profit agency, during the few weeks. Most of the agency's CMs are more public than those of other private companies, such as a CM to enhance women's awareness of breast cancer screening tests. Many Japanese people watched again and again a CM that three Japanese soccer players sent solidarity messages to people who suffered from the earthquake and tsunami. One of them, Uchida Atsuto, a brilliant soccer player who is affiliated with a German club, tried to cheer up Japanese people by saying, "each person should do what he or she can do. *Japan is like a team*". He advised his fellow Japanese people to be united (like an organised soccer team) in order to overcome difficulties. The representation of Japanese people as a whole and coherent unit is not new, but it is much more influential in the media after the earthquake and tsunami.

I do not intend to deny this kind of nationalism to recover from the disaster. Rather I am just concerned that this representation can lead us to overlooking the unfair relationship between different groups of Japanese people. The list of people who are disadvantaged includes casual workers, people living in Fukushima, and farmers and fisheries. This paper focuses particularly on Japanese farmers who suffer from the nuclear accident. They are also challenged by Transpacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPPA), a regional economic partnership agreement, which aims to facilitate trade liberalisation in the Pacific and Asian region.

The Nuclear Accident and Farmers

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, which occurred immediately after the earthquake and tsunami, caused serious damage to many Japanese people: high levels of radiation are being released from the nuclear reactors, and are seriously polluting the air, land, and water. Highly disadvantaged by the nuclear accident are people living in Fukushima; more than 100,000 people have been forced to leave their communities; many other people are still facing a difficult decision whether to leave their communities or stay despite their concerns about radioactive contamination.

Not all of the damage is visible. Fukushima people are mentally, as well as physically, damaged by the accident. When visiting a small town in Fukushima in April, I had a talk with a staff working in a local branch of Japan Agricultural Cooperatives (JA). He said “Fukushima is like an isolated island”. Fukushima people are mentally hurt by many stories: staffs of several hotels in neighbouring cities refused to accept evacuees from Fukushima who looked for temporary accommodations; a kid who evacuated from Fukushima and changed his school was bullied by other school kids saying that he would infect them with radiation. These depressing stories result in a growing sense of isolation among Fukushima people.

This sense of isolation is particularly serious in Fukushima farmers. Fukushima is well-known as a food-supplier of rice, vegetables, and fruits to a large number of people living in Tokyo and other large cities, but their soil and water are contaminated by the radiation release. Inevitably this greatly affected agricultural products. At the end of March higher levels of contamination than the national standard was detected in vegetables, the Japanese government ordered farmers in the entire area of Fukushima to restrict the distribution of their agricultural products. Most of the restrictions are now lifted, but even in the middle of November contamination was detected in rice produced in Fukushima.

Organic farmers feel desperate. On 24 March an organic farmer who produced cabbage in Sukagawa of Fukushima committed suicide. After the nuclear accident his son heard him mutter, “We, farmers in Fukushima who produce vegetables are hopeless”. Many Japanese organic farmers have built close relations with consumers from cities for more than 30 years. Consumers who looked for safe and healthy food gave financial support to organic farmers who did ecological farming. This Japanese version of CSA (community supported agriculture) is now in crisis. An increasing number of urban consumers stop purchasing organic food produced in Fukushima and neighbouring prefectures due to their concerns about radioactive contamination. Ôuchi Shinichi, an organic farmer in Nihonmatsu, a town of Fukushima, the amount of his monthly sales is reduced by half after the nuclear accident. While scrapping vegetables which was produced by him but returned from the market, he said, “I would have been able to be convinced if they (consumers) stated that they stopped purchasing because they worried about radiation contamination. But most of them just said, “we do not need any more”. I could not but say “Yes. I see”” (*Tokyo Shinbun*, 14 October 2011).

TPPA and Farmers

In this difficult situation Japanese farmers are facing another difficulty: liberalisation in the agricultural market. Liberalisation is now promoted through Transpacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPPA). This regional free trade agreement began negotiations in 2006: participating countries are the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Chilli, Brunei,

Malaysia, Vietnam, and Peru. TPPA aims to liberalise the manufacturing and agricultural markets without exceptions. It is an inclusive agreement: agendas include government procurement, investment rules, and intellectual property. Obama administration, which loses public support in the country, is interested in TPPA; it seeks to expand export in the Pacific and Asian market in order to create jobs for unemployed people in America. Following the USA's policy, former Japanese PM Kan Naoto announced his government would consider Japan's participation in TPPA negotiations on 1 October 2010.

Japan's food self-sufficiency rate is now below 40 percent (on a calorie supply base). The rate is the fourth lowest in OECD countries. Japan's liberalisation in the food market was facilitated in the GATT Uruguay Round in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This trend was accelerated after WTO was founded in 1995. Since WTO Doha Round negotiations were stacked in 2006, many leaders of the Japanese export industries, such as automobiles and electronics, are irritated with slow liberalisation. They criticize the agricultural sector for opposing trade liberalisation and obstructing export expansion. Many political leaders also believe that export expansion would result in the development of the Japanese economy. They seek to facilitate trade liberalisation through bilateral and multilateral trade talks. On 11 November 2011 PM Yoshihiko Noda made a decision to begin talks with participating countries about Japan's joining TPPA negotiations. He maintained that TPPA would facilitate the reconstruction of the Japanese economy, which had been badly damaged by the earthquake and tsunami.

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF), Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), and the Cabinet Office published individual surveys about the impacts of TPPA on Japanese people. Economist Kawasaki Kenichi claims that TPPA would result in 0.8% GDP growth in the next decade, but he adds that it would also facilitate transfer of incomes from agricultural sectors to the export industries. Two economists Takamasu and Xi's joint research shows that TPPA, if it is enforced, would result in 65-83% reduction in the value of rice production.

Pro-TPPA economists stress that TPPA would provide some Japanese farmers with opportunities to make money by exporting their value-added agricultural products. I believe that this will not save Japanese farmers who are in crisis. TPPA would divide them into two: a small number of winners and a large number of losers. Losers will be forced to leave rural communities; winners who stay there will also face difficulties in doing community works, such as water and forest management, by themselves as the members of communities rapidly decrease. This means a disruption of small communities in rural areas. As was shown in economist Kawasaki's survey, TPPA would result in the shift of incomes from agricultural sectors to the export industries. Given that many farmers live in rural areas, and headquarters of

most companies in the export industries are located in urban areas, TPPA would actually lead to transferring incomes from villages to cities. There are many farmers in Tohoku district, which was badly damaged by the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident. This means that TPPA would impede people's efforts to recover from loss from the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident. Interviewed on the day of PM Noda's announcement, Suzuki Tetsuya, a rice farmer in Iwate prefecture, said, "Why did the government do this (its decision to join TPP negotiations) when it should first reconstruct the economy of areas in which people suffered from the earthquake and tsunami?" (*Tokyo Shinbun*, 12 November 2011)

Nuclear Power and Agriculture

This paper shows that Japanese farmers are now challenged by the nuclear accident and TPPA. The divide in Japanese society, such as Fukushima and big cities like Tokyo or the agricultural sector and the export industries, is on the surface in these political conflicts. Many farmers and citizens organise and join actions to decommission all nuclear reactors and scrap TPPA. Interestingly they begin to realise that the issues of nuclear power and TPPA are closely related. Masatoshi Sugeno, an organic farmer in Nihonmatsu of Fukushima, said, "Building a nuclear-free society is a must in defending community-based and ecological organic farming. Since Fukushima people failed to foster local industries and create employment, they could not but accept nuclear plants. Jobs in agricultural sectors would be deprived if Japan joins TPPA. I feel that two issues of TPPA and the nuclear accident are mutually connected on the fundamental dimension." (*Tokyo Shinbun*, 20 October 2011)

Local small industries have been replaced by nuclear plants for decades; TPPA would deprive local communities of many jobs. Both nuclear power and free trades are contradictory to localisation. Local people would lose their own sovereignty if they accept nuclear plants and TPPA. An increasing number of Japanese farmers and citizens come to realise the similar structure between nuclear power and free trade. They now act to reclaim local sovereignty, that is, the power of local people's self-determination.