

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

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This paper was written in May 2012 for SSF publication. Some notes need to be added to the original paper. In December 2012, a major change occurred to Japanese politics. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) lost in the House election, and was replaced by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The DPJ government, which was in office, was determined to restart Ōi nuclear plant, though the decision was heavily criticised by a wide range of people. The conservative LDP government, as well as the DPJ government, seeks to restart other nuclear plants. It also announced that the government would join TPP negotiations in March 2013. This means that nuclear power and TPP are still two of the most controversial issues in Japanese politics and difficulties which farmers faced have not ended.

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For a while after Japan was struck by a major earthquake and tsunami on 11 March 2011, gloomy and depressing atmosphere was dominant. Corporations refrained from distributing their commercial messages (CMs) on TV after the disaster occurred. Japanese people are exposed by the enormous amount of CMs every day, but during the few weeks they could not but repeatedly watch CMs produced by private non-profit agency AC (Advertising Council Japan) when they turned on the TV. 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 were damaged by the earthquake and tsunami. One of them, Uchida Atsuto, a brilliant soccer player who is affiliated with a German club, cheered 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 disaster. They are also challenged by

Transpacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPP), a regional economic partnership agreement, which aims to facilitate trade liberalisation in the Pacific and Asian region.

The Nuclear Disaster and Farmers

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, which occurred immediately after the earthquake and tsunami, caused serious damage to a large number of 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 disaster 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 disaster. When visiting a small town in Fukushima in April last year, 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.

Philosopher Takahashi Tetsuya emphasises that Fukushima and Tōhoku - a region located in the northeast part of Japan which includes Fukushima - as well as Okinawa, are victimised by Tokyo and other big cities in the history of modern Japan.¹ Few thousands ago the livelihood of Tōhoku was primarily hunting, fishing, and foraging. Its economy was distinguished from the economy of the southwest part of Japan, in which people relied mainly on rice crop. Mountains and sea gifted much of food and energy to people living in Tōhoku.² A report written approximately 100 years ago states that Futaba district, in which the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant is today located, was advantaged by the gift of nature at that time: inexhaustible fish resources was reserved in the Pacific Ocean, mountains were full of forest products, agriculture and dairy farming were flourished on the plain field, and vast areas of coalfield was located in the south³.

Since several districts in Tōhoku region had fought against political elites who would be founders of the modern Japanese state, they were disadvantaged when the state was built in 1868. As a sanction imposed by the elites, the Japanese state did hardly invest in developing

¹ Takahashi Tetsuya, *Gisei no Shisutemu: Fukusima Okinawa*, Shōeisha, 2011.

² Takahashi Tomio, *Tōhoku no Rekishi to Kaihatsu*, Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1973, p.128.

³ Kawako Kenkichi (ed.), *Fukusima ken Shiryō Shūsei Dai3pen*, Fukushima ken Shiryō Shūsei Kankōkai, 1952, p.960.

new industries of this region. Tōhoku was gradually integrated into the national economy when Japan was rapidly modernised in the early 20th century. This led the economy of Tōhoku to shifting its main products to rice. When Tōhoku suffered from the poor harvest of rice and other crops due to cold weather in the early 1930s, their suffering was sensationally reported in the media. Japanese people often ate white radishes without boiling at that time, but a photo of a kid gnawing a white radish was represented as Tōhoku's poverty in many newspapers.

As American political elites came to see people living in South America, Asia, and Africa as being in “underdevelopment” after the Second World War,⁴ Japanese political elites regarded Tōhoku people as being “poor”, ethically obligated themselves to rescue them from poverty, and gave themselves legitimacy to intervening in the determination of Tōhoku's course through various kinds of development programs. Tōhoku development programs focused primarily on facilitating electric power generation; waterpower generation was particularly central in these programs due to the abundant supply of water of the region⁵. A problem was that these programs did not lead to the development of local industries in Tōhoku, and they devoted their energies mostly to promoting electric power generation.⁶

In the period of rapid economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s, the Japanese government invested in industrial zones of the Pacific Ocean coastline ranging from the Tokyo metropolitan area through Nagoya and Osaka to Fukuoka, a large city in the northwest part of Japan, in order to develop the national economy. As Japan was integrated into the international market, the government slowly gave up giving support to domestic farmers (discussed more later). A large number of farmers in Tōhoku could not but migrate to large cities to look for casual jobs because of the declining price of agricultural products.

Some small villages in Tōhoku, which were not included in a part of national economic development, made a decision to accept the construction of nuclear plants in return for receiving payment from the government and power companies. Since its fiscal condition was drastically improved when nuclear reactors began to be constructed in the late 1960s, Futaba-machi, a small town in which the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant is located, was able to work in finance without receiving local tax grants from the central government in the 1970s. This was extremely rare in financially weak towns like Futaba-machi. In this way, Fukushima and Tōhoku were seen as a supplier of cheap energy, food, and labour for Tokyo and other large cities. The relationship between the Tokyo metropolitan area and Fukushima/Tōhoku was becoming very similar to that of colonising and colonised countries: while the former produces highly valued

⁴ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, 1995.

⁵ Satō Atsushi, *Nihon no Chiiki Kaihatsu*, Miraisha, 1965, p.16.

⁶ Ibid., p.86.

industrial goods to the latter, the products of the latter are food and natural resources, which are often depreciated and sold at low price.

However, various attempts to overcome this colonial-like relationship are found in the history of Japanese civil society. An example is ties between urban consumers and rural producers through organic food. Since the 1970s, many consumers who looked for safe and healthy food have given support to organic farmers who did ecological farming. The consumers visited rural areas, talked with farmers and their family, and had an experience with farming. This helps them to have a deeper understanding of farmers' pleasure and worries.⁷ Fukushima and Tōhoku are particularly well-known for a great production area of organic food.

The consumers reflected on their convenient lives in cities in which they could buy any vegetable for almost the same price regardless of seasons or weather. It is often pointed out that these connections between cities and villages of Japan mediated by organic food preceded community supported agriculture (CSA) developing in other countries.⁸ The significance of organic farming to urban consumers was not only to gain safer food but also to build fairer relations with rural farmers. This means that both consumers (Tokyo) and farmers (Fukushima/Tōhoku) worked together to transform the relationship between colonisers and colonised.

However, these attempts are being in crisis after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster occurred: soil and water are contaminated by the radiation release; this greatly affects agricultural products. At the end of March 2011, 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. Even now many Fukushima farmers are still under constraint in producing rice. An increasing number of urban consumers stop purchasing organic food produced in Fukushima and neighbouring prefectures due to their concerns about radioactive contamination. This separation of consumers from Fukushima farmers results in a growing sense of isolation among them.

Organic farmers feel desperate. On 24 March 2011 an organic farmer who produced cabbage in Sukagawa of Fukushima committed suicide. After the nuclear disaster his son heard him mutter, "We, farmers in Fukushima who produce vegetables, are hopeless". According to Ōuchi Shinichi, an organic farmer in Nihonmatsu, a town of Fukushima, the amount of his monthly sales is reduced by more than half after the nuclear disaster. 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

⁷ Masukata Toshiko, *Yūki Nōgyō Undō to Teikei no Nettowāku*, Shinyōsha, 2008, p.64.

⁸ Thad Williamson, David Imbroscio, and Gar Alperovitz, *Making a Place for Community: Local Democracy in a Global Era*, Routledge, 2002, p.255.

worried about radiation contamination. But most of them just said, “we do not need any more”. I could not but say “Yes. I see”.”⁹ Many Japanese organic farmers have built close relations with consumers from cities for more than 30 years. This Japanese version of CSA is now in crisis.

TPPA and Farmers

In this difficult situation, farmers in Fukushima and Tōhoku are facing another difficulty, that is, liberalisation in the agricultural market. Liberalisation is now promoted through Transpacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPP). This regional free trade agreement began negotiations in 2006: participating countries are the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Chilli, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Peru. TPP aims to liberalise the manufacturing and agricultural markets without exceptions. It is an inclusive agreement: agendas contain government procurement, investment rules, and intellectual property.

US Obama administration, which is now losing public support in the country, is passionate about ratifying TPP; 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 TPP negotiations on 1 October 2010. PM Yoshihiko Noda, the successor of Kan, expressed his intention to begin talks with participating countries about Japan’s joining TPP negotiations on 11 November 2011. He maintained that TPP would facilitate the reconstruction of the Japanese economy, which had been badly damaged by the earthquake and tsunami.

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. The reduction of food self-sufficiency rate derives from the transformation of national policy in the Japanese state. When we trace back to the history of Japanese agricultural policy, two, mutually inconsistent principles have coexisted since the end of the Second World War: protection of small farmers and modernisation of farming.

The former is symbolised in the Land Reform implemented in 1947-50. This reform made a great contribution to producing a great number of farmers who owned approximately 1 hectare land in average. The principle of the Agricultural Land Act enacted in 1952 was that only farmers who cultivate the land were allowed to own the agricultural land. Agricultural cooperatives were also formed in order to give support of finance, sales, and purchasing to newly generated landowning farmers. These reforms were promoted when the USA occupied Japan in 1945-52, which had been defeated in the Second World War, but many Japanese political elites welcomed it. They gained support of their rule from rural farmer who were

⁹ *Tokyo Shimbun*, 14 October 2011.

organised by agricultural cooperatives while giving preferential treatment to them. This is why the Liberal Democratic Party was so powerful in elections that it had stayed in power for decades.

The latter, modernisation of farming, was facilitated by the Agricultural Basic Act enacted in 1961. The aim of this Act was to modernise Japanese agriculture and farmers: the scale of each farmer's land would be expanded to 2 hectare in average; the cash income of each farmer would increase; the number of farmers was supposed to reduce from 5.8 million to 2.5 million households; the price of agricultural products would be subordinated to the market. This principle of modernising farming was contradictory to that of protecting small farmers. A feature of Japanese agricultural policies immediately after the Second World War was in that both principles coexisted with each other. When Japan was in the middle of rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, more emphasis was put on modernisation of farming than protection of small farmers, but many small farmers did not stop farming.

Japanese agricultural policies were head toward the pole of modernising farming when Japan's liberalisation in the food market was facilitated in the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) Uruguay Round in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This trend was accelerated after WTO (World Trade Organisation) was formed in 1995. These international trade institutions played a role in supervising each state's industrial policies and preventing it from protecting its domestic agriculture by providing subsidies, tariffs, and other protections.

Since WTO Doha Round negotiations were stacked in 2006 due to conflicts between member countries, many leaders of the Japanese export industries, such as automobiles and electronics, have been irritated with slow liberalisation. They criticised the agricultural sector for opposing trade liberalisation and obstructing export expansion. Many political leaders also firmly believed that export expansion would result in revitalising the long depressed Japanese economy. They sought to facilitate trade liberalisation through bilateral and multilateral trade talks, but were not satisfied with the result.

This trend of trade liberalisation in the agricultural market resulted in transforming national agricultural policies. For example, rice price supporting policy, which had been implemented since 1942, was eventually abolished in 1998. The Food, Agriculture, and Rural Areas Basic Act, which was enacted in 1999, means that the government virtually gives up protecting small farmers. However, the Act also defines the goal of lifting the national food self-sufficiency rate of Japan. If so, who is supposed to play a role in producing food for Japanese people instead of small farmers? Political elites assume that agribusiness would increase the influence of food production. This is clearly shown in the revision of the Agricultural Land Act, which was implemented in 2009. The revised Act facilitates liberalisation of land ownership and gives an approval in using agricultural land to corporations if requirements are met. In this way, Japanese

agriculture has shifted to the pole of modernisation and the growing influence of corporations for the last few decades. The issue of Japan's participation in TPP negotiations appears on the agenda in this political context.

Nuclear Power and Agriculture

This paper has so far argued that Japanese farmers are now challenged by the nuclear disaster and TPP. What would the double challenges bring to farmers in Fukushima and Tōhoku?

First of all, it is expected that double challenges would disrupt local communities in this region. In the political system of Japan, the national government was able to make decisions on how much it distributed subsidies to local governments, so the central government controlled local governments through the subsidies.¹⁰ In reality, Japanese local governments lack the flexibility to be able to raise their own sources over the long run to pay for large projects or higher levels of service. The central government's regulation of local taxes is especially restrictive - even when compared to other unitary systems - and grants and loans are typically given solely for purposes defined by the central government.¹¹ Inviting large-scale infrastructure projects, such as dams and nuclear plants, is attractive to local governments; it provides local governments with revenue sources and is expected to improve their fiscal condition.

In the 1990s and onward, the national government downsized the budget of fiscal spending for local communities, because its tax revenue declined rapidly due to the depressed national economy. In the same period, many factories and offices in local communities were withdrawn and moved overseas such as China, in which labour and other cost is much cheaper than in Japan. The overseas transfer resulted in the loss of employment in local areas of Japan. This shows that Japanese local communities particularly in Fukushima and Tōhoku were already in crisis before 11 March 2011, and are now badly damaged by the nuclear disaster.

The disruption of local communities will be worsened if Japan joins TPP. Some economists claim that TPP would provide Japanese farmers with business opportunities by exporting their value-added agricultural products, but this will not work. TPP would divide Japanese farmers into two: a large number of losers and a small number of winners. While the former is forced to give up farming due to import of low-price agricultural products and leave rural communities to look for jobs in cities, the latter, who stay there, also faces difficulties in maintaining

¹⁰ See Reed, Steven R. *Japanese Prefectures and Policymaking*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986.

¹¹ Scheiner, Ethan. *Democracy without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.109.

community works, such as water and forest management, by themselves as the members of communities rapidly decrease.

Economist Kawasaki Kenichi argues that TPP would facilitate transfer of incomes from agricultural sectors to export industries such as automobiles.¹² Given that many farmers live in rural areas particularly, and headquarters of most companies in the export industries are located in urban areas, TPP would actually lead to transferring incomes from villages to cities. There are many farmers in Fukushima and Tohoku district, which was badly damaged by the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster. This means that TPP would impede people's efforts to recover from loss caused by the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster. Interviewed on the day of PM Noda's announcement, Suzuki Tetsuya, a rice farmer in Iwate prefecture, a part of Tohoku region, 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?"¹³

Second, the double challenges undermine alternatives to economic development, which are developed in Japanese civil society. As is shown in the case of organic farming, many Japanese people living in cities and villages work together to build the fair relationship and look for lifestyles different from convenient and affluent lives. These grassroots actions are damaged by the nuclear disaster and TPP: a large number of urban consumers are today reluctant to purchase agricultural products made in Fukushima and Tohoku due to their concerns about radioactive contamination; more and more small farmers of the region decide to stop farming because they cannot find a hope for their future.

The diversity of lifestyles is being deprived by the nuclear disaster and TPP. The lifestyles of people who live in villages of Fukushima and Tohoku are distinct from those of people living in cities like Tokyo. They live in harmony with nature and depend on the gift of nature, such as vegetables, mushrooms, and seafood. Their semi-self-sufficient lives are not special in this region. However, they are forced to give up their lifestyles due to radioactive contamination and the disruption of local communities.

This means that they will come to rely for their livelihood more on big companies than before. For example, automobile giant Toyota recently announced that it, as a reconstruction project of the nuclear disaster and tsunami affected area, plans to construct large-scale "vegetable factories" in Fukushima, that is, buildings to produce vegetables only with water in order not to use contaminated soil of this area.¹⁴ The anticipated outcome of this project is that small farmers, who worry about radioactive contamination and the declining price of

¹² http://www.rieti.go.jp/jp/columns/a01_0301.html

¹³ *Tokyo Shimbun*, 12 November 2011.

¹⁴ *Asahi Shimbun*, 27 October 2011.

agricultural products, give up their farming, and will be replaced by agricultural workers who are employed by corporations.

Beyond the divide between cities and villages

The divide in Japanese society, particularly between Fukushima/Tōhoku and Tokyo or between agricultural sectors and export industries, is now on the surface. However, an increasing number of people living in cities come to join actions on streets to decommission all nuclear reactors throughout Japan. Various public opinion surveys conducted by the media show that about the rate of those who agree on Japan's shift to reducing dependence on nuclear power reaches 70% of Japanese people. The number of participants in a demonstration to stop nuclear reactors which started from Meiji park of Tokyo on 19 September 2011 reached approximately 60,000. Actions to stop Japan's participation in TPP negotiations are also becoming popular. On 25 April 2012, more than 4,000 people joined a demonstration against TPP in Hibiya park of Tokyo, though it rained hard. These actions on streets are done more frequently than before, and come to influence discourses of the media.

Interestingly they begin to realise that the issues of nuclear power and TPP are closely related. Seiji 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 TPP. I feel that two issues of TPP and the nuclear disaster are mutually connected on the fundamental dimension."¹⁵

Local small industries throughout Japan have been replaced by nuclear plants for decades; TPP 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 TPP. An increasing number of Japanese farmers and citizens come to realise the similar structure between nuclear power and the free trade agenda. They now act to reclaim local sovereignty, that is, the power of local people's self-determination.

However, actions on streets are not sufficient enough to reclaim the power of self-determination in local communities, particularly in Fukushima and Tōhoku. There are several questions under discussions. First of all, how can agriculture and fishery be reconstructed? Local communities in Fukushima and Tōhoku are different from big cities like Tokyo in that they cannot but depend on the primary industry for their livelihood. Then who will be in charge of reconstructing the primary industry in this region? Small farmers and fishing people or big companies like Toyota?

¹⁵ *Tokyo Shimbun*, 20 October 2011.

Secondly, how can the relationship between Fukushima/Tōhoku and Tokyo be reconstructed? An example of grassroots activism is Tokyo-based NGO APLA (Alternative People's Linkage of Asia)'s support for organic farmers in Nihonmatsu of Fukushima. This organisation has been committed to fair trades with small farmers and fishery in the Philippines, Indonesia, and East Timor since the 1980s. It has helped these farmers to do farming sustainably and build local communities. After the nuclear disaster, APLA launched the new project of supporting organic farmers in Fukushima.

APLA now works together with a small group of organic farmers in Nihonmatsu, whose farming is opposite to energy-intensive farming. The group's farming is badly disadvantaged by radioactive contamination of soil and agricultural products. The main product of this group was rice, but radioactive materials in the soil such as cesium are easily transited to rice. After the process of trial and error for a year, they finally find that radioactive materials are less easily transited to carrots than rice. They decide to shift to selling carrot juice, in order to compensate declining incomes due to the loss of purchasers. When radioactive contamination of carrots was measured in a high-performance radiation detector, contamination was very little (1bq/kg in the first and 0bq/kg in the second lot). APLA helps the farmers to sell this carrot juice by using its ties with groups of urban consumers.

It is best for the farmers to produce and sell rice, but this is quite difficult in the present. Once they stop farming, it would be very difficult to return to it in the future. The farmers believe that this would result in the end of the primary industry in Fukushima. They look ahead to the next 10, or 100 years, and continue to do farming while changing items of products and looking for better ways of farming in order to avoid transiting radioactive materials to their products. Their farming is supported by urban group APLA; this organisation plays a role in distributing information on the value of their farming to consumers living in cities.

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As is discussed in this paper, double challenges to Japanese farmers are destroying the relationship between Fukushima/Tōhoku and Tokyo. However, various attempts to build fairer relations between villages and cities are coming out in Japanese civil society in crisis. Prospects for the future are still unclear, but working together with urban activists, farmers in Fukushima and Tōhoku have begun to make a step toward the reconstruction of their livelihood and the building of local economies without nuclear power.



Loss from the tsunami



Contaminated cherry blossom in Koriyama of Fukushima



Farmers' protests against the Tokyo Power Company in April 2011



A farm in Nihonmatsu of Fukushima



An action against TPP on 25 April 2012



Bottles of carrot juice made by farmers' group in Nihonmatsu