

CUS 510J Workshop in Cultural Practices
Harvesting the Future: Farming and Food Movement
Agriculture and social transformation: the case of Taiwan and Japan
Sep 25, 2015

1. Development or dependence? The contradiction between sugar and rice in early 20th century colonial Taiwan

1.1 the generic (or, textbook) model of colonialism

- colonization, system of landownership changes from communal or feudal to private, peasants change from subsistent to labour-selling proletariat, and types of crop change from subsistent crops to cash/commodity crops

1.2 the (almost) perfect Japanese design

- Taiwan became the major sugar producing and exporting colony after Japanese annexation in 1895
- the commodification of sugar, however, did not lead to concentration of farm land and proletarianization of peasants, instead, family farm persisted
- sugar plants exploited cane peasants not by industrializing the production of sugar cane, but by purchasing from the self-exploiting family farm at a barely surviving price
- late 1910s rice shortage in Japan stimulated a sudden increase of rice export from Taiwan (and Korea), in mid-20s, up to 40% of rice were produced for export, rice price surged
- the situation exploded the original mechanism for regulating sugar price and unintentionally dragged up the price of sugar
- as a result of the out of control of rice price, Japanese colonial government confiscated the rights to trade rice by state monopoly

1.3 food for thought

- The strategic maintenance of small holding family farms
- short-circuiting of family farm and Japan metropolitan market, did it mean development?
- The subtle differences between subsistence rice and commodity rice

2. The post-war Taiwan wheat (and other grains) mania, or how did geo-politics expressed itself through our taste and our agricultural structure?

2.1 Staple food of Taiwan

- according to popular sociology of nutrition, intake of carbohydrate decreases with increasing income
- Taiwan, a place where wheat is not growing very well, however, witnessed a continuous increase of wheat (and other grain, such as soya and corn) import and consumption during the post-war year
- Buns were even served only in funerals

2.2 brief background of food aid and post-war geopolitics

- the food production capacity of the U.S. began to increase dramatically to the point of over-production during the war years
- the "International Wheat Agreement" implemented since 1949 institutionalized the

- worldwide dumping of surplus wheat of the U.S.
- with the establishment of PRC and the out-break of Korean War, the U.S. began to focus on exporting wheat to East-Asian and Southeast-Asian countries, subsidizing their respective industrialization (via low-price wage food), and at the same time securing the U.S. geopolitical dominance in the Asia
- the so-called "Great Crescent" spanning from south to east Asia: Pakistan, India, Burma, Malaya, Singapore, Thailand, French Indochina, Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, Formosa and Korea
- starting from 1960s, the aid stopped and trade began. Hence the transformation of U.S. from stabilization of her geopolitical network to implicating Asian nation-states into her agro-food complex

2.3 strategies and implications

- propaganda and training
- road show and media campaign
- professional training
- student school meals
- production of nutritional knowledge
 - from mid-60s, import restrictions of wheat, soya and corn lifted
 - wheat-derived products began to infiltrate market of Taiwan
 - modern pig-fatten system established through the use of imported grain-feed, in-line global contemporary establishment of agro-food complex
 - Taiwan changed from self-sufficient to dependent in terms of food import/export ratio
 - hence deeply implicated into the unstable global food system, or the 2nd food regime (McMichael)

3. Japan from Meiji restoration: change of taste, taste the change

3.1 the traditional ordinary Japanese meal

- rice
- pickled vegetables
- fish/tofu
- miso soup

notorious for no supply of flour, bread, butter, lard, bacon, ham, milk, coffee, etc.

3.2 Army building as the model of the nation: the experience of modernity

- slogan: fukoku kyohei (rich country, strong army富國強兵)
- almost unlimited supply of white rice (that's how later the importance of colonial production and 嘉南大圳were felt)
- incorporation of canned meat (symbol of U.S. progress) and bread/biscuit (to cure beriberi)
- in 1920, adoption of western ingredients (potatoes, meat) and method (deep-fry, stew, curry), and beer sometimes
- the progressive image of military and navy (foods that were hitherto not in the menu of Japanese cuisine) founded the basis and standard of modern Japanese cuisine
- militarization of mass diet: neighbourhood associations

4. Ramen: a case study

- brought to Japan by Chinese students in late 19th century
- became popular in the 1920s-30s in major cities all over Japan
- fast, cheap, filling meal packed with fat, carbohydrate and protein all in a bowl, ideal for working class in early industrialization
- severe food shortage until a few years after the war, ramen re-emerged in the black market as a result of bureaucratic corruption, operators being military returnees, Chinese and Korean
- securing emergency wheat import from the U.S. became the state's source of legitimacy against communist propaganda
- by 2000, 40+ bowls per capita, while domestic production account for 10+% of total consumption
- these figure testifying the degree of entrenchment of Japan in the global wheat market

5. Post-war bifurcation of Japanese Agricultural system

5.1 state monopoly of rice

- state administered rice exclusive distribution and sales since before the WWII
- allied government implemented land reform to abolish owner-tenant relationship, hence splitting farmland into even smaller holdings
- "stabilization of farm and labour constituencies through protection of key economic sectors was legitimized in (post-war) Keynesian policies of national regulation." (McMichael and Kim)
- political exchange between the vote from farmers to Liberal Democratic Party and state purchase
- state government calculated the purchasing price of rice by even wage increase of urban workers
- by 1990s about 85% of rice farmers were part-timer, taking government subsidy as well as working other non-farm jobs

5.2 to the limit: bifurcation of agricultural system

- on the one hand Japan tried everything to resist rice import
- on the other imports came not only in other industries (e.g. automobile) but the food industries (industrial animal protein sub-sector)
- other cheap imported grains keep labour cost low (e.g. ramen)
- by mid-80s Japan's trade surplus with the U.S. exceeded US\$200 billion
- an excuse for Japan to open hitherto protected market
- the Nokyo paradox: well into 1990s Nokyo (the Japan's association of agricultural cooperatives) still dominated rice trade, together with feeds import, trading and banking businesses, it ranked 15th in the Fortune 500 in 1990s, next to Toyota only

6. Summary and conclusion: provision of food without agriculture?

- taste: a matter of personal choice, propaganda, market provision, state policy, geopolitical and international dynamics
- the meaning and significance of "subsistent"

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