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Endogenous Development Studies for Rural Revitalization in East Asia

## **Commodification of Local Resources and its Paradox**

**—A case of traditional vegetables in Kyoto—**

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## **Objectives**

- ✓ **Growing attention to traditional local vegetables**
- ✓ **Theoretical implications: the concept of “locality”**

## Declining Japanese Agriculture

- ☞ Decline of food self-sufficiency ratio: 39% (2006~)
- ☞ Even in the rice (staple crop) sector
  - Supply/demand mismatch since 1970s
    - Government support policy to increase rice production → Too much concentrated, more than successful
    - Dietary habits getting Westernized → Rice consumption decreased
  - Rice production adjustment policy introduced in 1970
  - Rising JPY (1985~) → Rapid increase of agricultural import
    - Mounting pressures on the rice sector as a symbol of agricultural protectionist policy in Japan
  - GATT-WTO Agreement (1994) → “MA” rice import
  - New Staple Food Policy (1995, rev. 2004) → “Fatal” impacts

## Agriculture in Kyoto

- ☞ Less competitive...
  - Small farm size: avg. 0.9ha (2005) <<< national avg. 1.3ha (excluding Hokkaido)
  - Rice production adjustment policy + Selective expansion policy in 1970s
    - Shift from rice to high-value sectors (eg. vegetables, fruit, livestock) → Competition among production regions intensified even in these sectors
- ☞ Kyoto government focused on its traditional vegetables (*Kyo-yasai*)
  - To differentiate from others based on the competitive advantage (uniqueness)
    - External pressure to survive intense competition
    - Internal pressure to preserve its traditional culture

## Kyoto Vegetables (*Kyo-yasai*)

- ☞ Definition of Kyoto vegetables (KV)
  - KV are kinds of indigenous varieties or those brought in but cultivated with special technique in Kyoto, and relished by local people for a long period (mostly since 1600s~1800s).
- ☞ Culinary culture in Kyoto supported by local vegetables
  - A soul of Japanese culinary culture
  - Originated in (1) court cuisine, (2) Buddhist vegetarian dishes, (3) tea-ceremony dishes
  - *Obanzai*, a traditional cuisine for the ordinary Kyoto locals, has been passed down to the present

## Characteristics of Kyoto Vegetables

- ☞ Indigenous varieties --- maintained and improved by local farmers for generations
  - Unique to and suitable for local conditions
  - Suitable for small-scale multi-cropping farms ← requiring a lot of cares
- ☞ Losing competition in the market place, because...
  - Commercial hybrid varieties overwhelming (due to their market suitability)
  - Changing dietary habits (less consumption of traditional vegetable dishes)
  - Urban farmland in Kyoto diverted to housing development
- ☞ Decline of KV production
  - → Increasing danger of the loss of local resources and traditional culinary culture



## Seed/Variety Preservation Program (1)

- ☞ The role of Kyoto governments
  - **Kyoto Prefecture:** selection and identification of original strains to be preserved (1960~)
  - **Kyoto City:** designation of local farmers for *in-situ* preservation of traditional vegetables (1962~)
- ☞ Growing demand for the revival of KV
  - Hybrid vegetables commercialized nation-wide → Less unique and attractive in terms of the quality of shape and taste
  - Traditional nature of KV is integral to traditional Kyoto cuisine
  - Traditional restaurants and chefs in Kyoto raised their voices for the revival of traditional KV

## Seed/Variety Preservation Program (2)

- ☞ Kyoto Prefecture Agricultural Research Institute
  - Preservation field (1974~)
    - ☛ Preservation of original strains
    - ☛ Breed improvement
    - ☛ Supply of breeding materials
    - ☛ Development of cultivation technology
  - Foundation-seed supply program (1977~)
    - ☛ To get seeds multiplied by farmers via local agricultural cooperatives (JAs)
    - ☛ Aimed to encourage farmers especially in Northern and Central regions of Kyoto as new production areas (because the agricultural sector in these regions was less competitive)
    - ☛ Expected not just to increase vegetable production, but also to revitalize local agriculture and economy as a whole

## Three Types of Seed System (1)

### Farmer's breeding or *in-situ* preservation

- For cultivation in Kyoto city
- For cultivation of special kinds such as *Sugukina* (turnip), *Aomi Daikon* and *Karami Daikon* (radish)



*Sugukina*



*Aomi Daikon*



*Karami Daikon*

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## Three Types of Seed System (2)

### Public breeding or *ex-situ* preservation

- For cultivation in Northern and Central Kyoto Prefecture
- For cultivation of less special, less popular kinds such as *Kamo Nasu* (eggplant), *Mangan-ji Togarashi* (bird pepper) and *Ebi Imo* (aroid, or Japanese potato)



*Kamo Nasu*



*Mangan-ji Togarashi*



*Ebi Imo*

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## Three Types of Seed System (3)

### Commercial breeding

- Without clear interest in preservation
- For cultivation in other prefecture and within Kyoto
- For cultivation of popular kinds such as *Mizuna* (potherb mustard), *Kujo Negi* (green onion) and *Kintoki Ninjin* (oriental carrot)



*Mizuna*



*Kujo Negi*



*Kintoki Ninjin*

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## Brand Strategy for Kyoto Vegetables

### Sales Promotion

- Targeted at the metropolitan market to expand demand for KV
- By taking advantage of the brand image of "Kyoto" as representing a soul of Japanese traditional culture

### Kyoto Specialty Products Price Stabilization and Distribution Association (Kyoto Prefectural government)

- Its primary mission (as shown in the name) shifted to the brand strategy --- (i) brand certification, (ii) information collection and provision, (iii) publicity/sales promotion, (iv) consultant/guidance

### Factors behind the growing sales of KV especially

- Diversification of diets
- Increasing preference for high quality foods
- Long-standing popularity of *cool* image of Kyoto



## Kyoto Vegetables Going Nationwide (1)

### KV produced in other prefectures

- Emerging new problems due to its *unexpected* success
  - Short supply for insatiable demand in the huge metropolitan market
  - Kyoto's success story → followed by other regions soon
    - Not only the concept of Kyoto model (branding), but also KV varieties (resources) have been appropriated by other regions with comparative advantages
- Ex. Production of *Mizuna* going nationwide
  - Expanding consumption
  - Mizuna* can be easily produced all over the country
  - Intensified competition among production areas:
    - Esp. Kyoto vs. Ibaraki Prefecture

## Kyoto Vegetables Going Nationwide (2)

### Impact of market mechanism

- Weakening price advantage
  - Declining average price of Kyoto's *Mizuna* in the metropolitan market ← Growing production/sales of Ibaraki's *Mizuna*
    - Kyoto: ¥936 / 178t ('99) → ¥906 / 336t ('02) → ¥663 / 95t ('06)
    - Ibaraki: ¥459 / 50t ('99) → ¥577 / 778t ('02) → ¥374 / 7,655t ('06)
  - Market mechanism of agricultural production
    - Race to the bottom
  - limited effects of the effort to enhance product quality and consumer trust by Kyoto government and farmers

## Commodification of Local Resources

- ☞ Dual characters of KV
  - Reproduction cycle A (**production – consumption – production**)
    - Preserving the traditional culture → KV as *use-value*
  - Reproduction cycle B (**production – sale – production**)
    - As a means of revitalizing local economy → KV as *exchange-value*
  - Commodification effects
    - Pursuing exchange-value → “Kyoto vegetables going nationwide”
- ☞ Increasing danger of the loss of locality
  - Varietal factor: local inbred lines → easily grown by anybody
  - Institutional factor: public institutions → open-source policy (accessible by anybody)
- ☞ Regionally-based Collective Marks System (April 2006)
  - Appropriation of seeds by other prefectures / private companies
  - But, not applicable to KV due to its non-exclusive nature

## Localized Common Goods (1)

### KV as public goods

- ☞ The unique characteristics of seed as “**public goods**”
  - Non-excludability and Non-rivalry
  - Seeds are (1) output (grain) and (2) input (seed material) of production, as well as (3) genetic resources for breeding
  - → Farmers or public breeding without proprietary rights to genetic resources as a de-facto standard
- ☞ Spatial dimension: “**local public goods**”
  - Can be provided at a specific location, but would benefit outsiders → Spill-over effect (as in the case of KV)
  - (In)validity of the concept
    - More attention to territorial boundaries between Kyoto and others
    - Less attention to producers and production processes



## Localized Common Goods (2)

### KV as packaged goods

- ☞ Structural elements of KV: supply side
  - Seed material / Genotype (inbred lines derived by farmers breeding)
  - Environment (soil characteristics, climate conditions)
  - Production (cultivation management and techniques)
- ☞ Structural elements of KV: demand side
  - Requests for breeding/cultivation from culinary point of view
  - Influence of traditional as well as daily culture
- ☞ Integrated into KV **as a package**
  - Integral element of "locality" as a space of production and consumption
  - → **Localized common goods**

## Localized Common Goods (3)

### Revitalization of local economy

- ☞ Socioeconomic circuit in the local
  - Need for attention both to **production cycle A** (production - consumption, or *use-value realization*) and **production cycle B** (production - sales, or *value realization*)
  - Economic development policy to revitalize rural areas should involve rural farmers + rural consumers + residents of nearby cities → Mutual understanding of producers/consumers
  - Socioeconomic ripple effect of public expenditure → Legitimation of the involvement of local governments
- ☞ **Rediscovering localized common goods** in each region
  - Then, various local resources can co-exist without any race-to-the-bottom kind competition among regions and avoid the loss of locality resulted from the commodification of local resources



**Thank you for your attention!**  
**Any question?**