Commodification of Local Resources and its Paradox
—A case of traditional vegetables in Kyoto—

Yoshifumi IKEJIMA (PhD student, Grad. School of Economics, Kyoto University)
Shuji HISANO (Assoc. Prof., Grad. School of Economics, Kyoto University)

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

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

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**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 \(\leftarrow\) 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
  - \(\rightarrow\) 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 nationwide ➔ 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

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**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

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
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)

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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
Commodification of Local Resources and its Pradox

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  \(\rightarrow\) KV as use-value
  - Reproduction cycle B (production – sale – production)
    - As a means of revitalizing local economy  \(\rightarrow\) KV as exchange-value
  - Commodification effects
    - Pursuing exchange-value  \(\rightarrow\) “Kyoto vegetables going nationwide”

- Increasing danger of the loss of locality
  - Varietal factor: local inbred lines  \(\rightarrow\) easily grown by anybody
  - Institutional factor: public institutions  \(\rightarrow\) 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  \(\rightarrow\) 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?