

Defining Japan's Food Security in East Asia: From the Perspectives of the Distribution Revolution, Environmental Degradation and International Cooperation

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Summary

At the end of the last century, the expression "The East Asian Miracle" raced around the world. During this era, when such high economic growth was achieved that this kind of expression was used in other regions, great changes also occurred in the fields of agriculture and food economy in this region. The production of rice has increased in the region as a whole, due to the introduction of high-yield varieties in the 1960s, as a result of which the real price has declined throughout almost the entire region. The middle class that has arisen due to this high growth has changed patterns of food consumption, with demand for fresh vegetables and animal products increasing, and agriculture has diversified into the production of such items. At the same time, driven by the globalization of the economy, changes that one could go so far as to call a "revolution" have emerged in the structure of the markets where food and agricultural produce are traded in each country. However, despite these changes, there can be no doubt that the countries of Asia, including Japan, share the problem of making preparations for short-term fluctuations in food production. It is precisely this unchanging problem that can be described as the problem of food security. Furthermore, an awareness is beginning to emerge that global warming is the greatest, most difficult problem to emerge in the history of mankind, and the way in which monsoon rain falls in East Asia is changing. Moreover, we are seeing salt damage on the plains and soil creep on slopes in the mountains in many areas. The degradation of agricultural production resources such as soil and water is becoming a profound problem right now. The issue of the long-term maintenance and conservation of food production capacity, which attracted barely any attention at the time when the era of high economic growth in East Asia began, has now become the fundamental problem of food security.

In other words, the short-term problem of a stable supply of food, which has existed since time immemorial, and the long-term problem of the degradation of agricultural resources, which is a 21st century phenomenon, are the central issues of food security in East Asia and, indeed, across the globe. Furthermore, the problem of food security in Japan can no longer be thought of in terms of one country alone. Japan, which cannot live without international society, must think seriously about what mechanisms it can use to combine these two securities, which differ in terms both of their dimensions and time horizons. We cannot focus suddenly on the world as a whole and it is precisely in the region of East Asia that Japan should demonstrate leadership in formulating ideals relating to such mechanisms.