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Short Communication

The Characteristics of Modern Diets and the Shift to Agroecological Ways of Eating

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Our diet is immersed in the industrial agricultural and food system. In our daily lives, we buy and eat what we want, whenever and wherever we want, cheaply and stably, with little awareness of this fact of immersion. Its contents are not limited to domestic food, but food that has come from all over the world, and may be a novel dish that we are seeing for the first time. This system is strong and has provided a sense of security that it will not change in the future. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fact that it is fragile. For instance, it became difficult to go out for eating at restaurants. Besides, it was no longer possible to obtain foodstuffs as desired, or the prices skyrocketed. In particular, this tendency corresponds to imported agricultural and food products. Some countries restricted export of basic grains. As for domestic products, there were delays in the transportation process. What we learned during this time is that many essential workers are also engaged in the agricultural and food system, and that our diets are based on their "sacrifices". Although farmers are also essential workers in the agricultural and food system, we do not pay much attention to this fact.

The results mentioned above is to highlight the value of eating. In many countries, even in Japan, non-regular workers and part-time students lost their incomes due to the slump of food and beverage industry, and they faced so much poverty that they could not afford to buy food. It means the vulnerability of food security at the individual level. Food banks, 'Kodomo Shokudo', cafeterias for children in need, and the voluntary giving of gifts by agricultural cooperatives, farmers, and fishermen are functioning as safety nets against this situation. Such initiatives can be an opportunity to create a new "solidarity through stomach". At the time of the Lehman Shock, the argument of self-responsibility prevailed, and even when "soup kitchens" were held, there were still many people who were reluctant to accept the food because they felt guilty. This time, however, even though the news was reported on TV, many people accepted the support honestly, saying they were grateful for the help. This is significant not only because it highlights the importance of food, but also because it has revived compassion, mutual help, and gratitude over stomachs.

From this trivial fact, I would like to decipher the restoration of "eating". We have chosen some things and discarded others in the pursuit of convenience. What we got was convenience, freedom from time constraints, cheapness, homogeneity, etc. Generally speaking, we got "efficiency". Instead, we have thrown away health (increased heart disease, diabetes and obesity due to increased meat, oil and sugar inoculations) and increased waste. More important thing is the loss of communication through food and the weakening of social and cultural aspects beyond that.

The cost of convenience is now erupting in many ways. The Covid-19 pandemic was a good opportunity to reflect on that. Informatization of food and "cutting corners" of diet seem to be the result of our own choices. However, the reality of such trends is that we are trapped in the industrialist agricultural and food system, that is, in the logic of capital. If we turn a blind eye to this fact, we will not be able to approach food security in the sense of securing the food we want for ourselves.

So how do we escape the jugular of the industrialist agricultural and food system that we are so immersed in? Above all, it is important to develop a better perspective on food and to extend the restoration of the right to eat, which has been revealed during the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to reach this perspective, it is effective to reconsider the meaning of eating not only for the functional purpose of taking in nutrients and calories, but also to eat with feelings, that is, to eat consciously. The way of eating based on the idea of "Medicine and Food are the same body" or "Body and earth are not two" contain a gaze toward the climate, nature, and the way we live. We can find a variety of hints to reflect our daily diet. A way of life that relies on agricultural products produced in a way that does not overwhelm the living system is a way of life that is good for the body and the environment. It includes to avoid, to the extent possible, summer vegetables and strawberries in winter, which are grown with a lot of energy, and imported produce brought from distant places. It can lead to a sustainable society. This way of life can be positioned as the practice of an agroecological way of eating, because an agricultural and food system consistent with the logic of the ecosystem, in other words, a system that does not overwhelm the living system, is one of the aims of agroecology, which is rooted in the local community.

One proposal for an agroecological way of eating is to increase opportunities for local self-sufficiency and cannibalism based on this. Japanese local self-sufficiency movements in the 1970s and 1980s, while calling for a review of dietary habits, focused on individuals and households producing and eating on their own. In this sense, the concept of individual completion was weak, though this movements advocated for regional self-sufficiency.

On the other hand, Johann, who conducted a survey involving commercial large-scale operations in New York State, USA, found a broader view of self-sufficiency. It is noteworthy that not only do people consume their own food, but they also bring their own agricultural and livestock products and their processed products to eat and enjoy together. This is considered as the purpose of life, and is positioned higher than earning income. The three interconnected phases of material self-sufficiency, cultural self-sufficiency (enjoyment), and social self-sufficiency (community empathy) have enhanced community ties and even created social and economic circulations such as mutual aid and the formation of local markets. His study is illuminating so much. In addition, Fakhri, M., a UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food, proposes the establishment of an international food agreement based on new human rights principles along with self-sufficiency, dignity and solidarity, and the abolition of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. He places self-sufficiency as a correlative principle that implies community, under the fundamental understanding that food is the hub that connects humans and the complex ecosystem of animals, plants, microbes,



spiritual beings, and landscapes into a long-term relationship of mutual care.

As mentioned above, self-sufficiency is not a self-contained concept, but a socially expansive idea and practice. 'Kodomo Shokudo' in Japan can be reconsidered as a form of communal eating with this kind of expansion. Another direction is localization. Reducing the distance between food and agriculture is also compatible with the logic of self-sufficiency. It is also consistent with the shortening of supply chains that is being promoted to reduce food mileage and carbon footprints. Local production for local consumption, farmer's markets, marches, direct sales, in-shop sales, and other local systems are springing up all over the world, and some are even changing the way they package their products, such as selling by weight without packaging. It is Food Citizens that will play an important role in these directions. Food Citizens not only engage in ethical purchasing activities that consider the environment and social justice (human rights), but also occupy an important position as actors in the reintegration of food and agriculture. They are also organizers of CSA (Community Supported Agriculture). They are often partially or completely involved in agricultural production. In other words, they are emerging as "prosumer" (consumers who produce).

In making autonomous decisions, Food Citizens will consider both phases: the reduction of global issues such as the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, plastic and microplastic issues, and farm workers' human rights, and issues related to the basis of livelihoods such as strengthening local communities and social relations, mutual trust, and social justice. As a result, they will choose local and domestic products. We can prospect that an agricultural and food system will shift from value-added products driven by the market system to production methods that prioritize ease of production that is suited to local conditions and nature, and to agroecological ways of eating that avoid ecologically unreasonable diets by practices of Food Citizens. This short paper is based in part on the following Japanese article; "Nihon no Syoku no anzenhosho wo dou rikai suruka?" in "Nogyo to Keizai" 2022 Winter Issue, (How Do We Understand Food Security in Japan, Agriculture and Economy, 2020 Winter Issue.

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