

Summary of Articles

The Response of Agricultural Cooperatives to Economic Liberalization in Niigata Prefecture, a Center of Rice Production

Kuniaki SAITO

This paper examines the response of agricultural cooperatives to trade and financial liberalization and the development of social movements in Niigata Prefecture since the 1970s. The significance of using Niigata Prefecture as a research field is twofold. First, Niigata Prefecture is one of Japan's leading rice-producing regions. Second, from the 1970s to the 1990s, local politics in Niigata Prefecture underwent rapid change. Although Niigata had been a stronghold of the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party, support for the left-wing Socialist Party grew during this time. Therefore, Niigata Prefecture suggests an important case for political and economic analysis in contemporary Japanese area studies.

Niigata Prefecture's agricultural production peaked around 1990 and then began declining, while urbanization and industrialization progressed. In addition, agricultural cooperatives merged with each other under the pressures of "financial liberalization", while rice prices declined due to the "deregulation of food controls". Accordingly, Niigata Prefecture's agriculture faced a turning point around 1990. In the midst of this agricultural crisis, some farmers and agricultural cooperatives collaborated with consumers and started direct marketing, mainly through co-ops. This enabled them to organize councils to share information on agricultural production and technology, and to bring network externalities to the participants.

It was under these circumstances that the election for Niigata governor was held in 1989. The farmers, in alliance with consumers, staged tractor demonstrations against rice liberalization and the introduction of the consumption tax, but the Socialist Party's candidate they supported lost in a close race against the Liberal Democratic Party's candidate. Despite this defeat, however, the farmers did not stop their campaign. They held demonstrations in Tokyo and Brussels against the GATT Uruguay Round, with the result that food protection policies remained in place for some time longer. The farmers' movement still continues. They are the key players in the organic farming movement and in the movement to revive local agriculture. Therefore, their movement can be regarded as a network-type community movement.

The Transformation of Consumer Perspectives in Japan from the 1970s to 1990s

Kosuke HARAYAMA

This paper traces the transformation that took place in consumer issues concerning rice in Japan during the dismantling of the Foodstuff Control System from the 1970s to the 1990s. The process involved the "two liberalizations," the loss of a shared platform of consumer interests, and the dismantling of the national-economy ideology, and thus reflects fundamental changes taking place in capitalism in this period.

Liberalization of domestic rice distribution was promoted from the end of the 1960s following the establishment of rice self-sufficiency in Japan. Consumer activist groups generally opposed such liberalization, arguing against both the introduction of a semi-controlled rice management system and the abolition of the application of the Price Control Ordinance to rice.

Therefore, until the mid-1980s, while the business community called for lower rice prices through improved productivity, consumer activist groups favored using government subsidies to maintain the dual system of "producer rice prices" and "consumer rice prices". In other words, they sought the coexistence of a low rice price for consumers and high rice prices for farmers. However, the consumer movement began to diversify from the 1970s, as more and more regional consumer groups had little interest in rice prices. These consumer groups focused instead on environmental issues and food safety.

In other words, for the time being, the consumer groups were losing the widely shared perspective that had united them. However, this changed again after 1986, with the beginning of the GATT Uruguay Round negotiations. The Uruguay Round

negotiations pressured the Japanese government to accept the import of rice. While business communities took the free-trade position, many consumer activist groups strongly opposed rice imports. They sought to revive a so-called national-economy framework, rehabilitating the argument that rice was associated with Japan's unique history, culture, and traditions.

Following the governmental/political decision to accept the "second liberalization", namely the import of rice, consumer activism once again lost its common target. Consumer issues became more diversified and fragmented, and it became extremely difficult to view the nation or society entirely through the lens of consumer issues. The experience of consumer activism over the liberalization of rice reflects the changes that took place in capitalism, the dismantling of the national-economy ideology, and the fragmentation of consumer interests.

Regional Economies and the Cooperative Movement in the U.S. Rust Belt : Wisconsin's Rural Electric Cooperatives

Kunio NISHIKAWA

The "Rust Belt Phenomenon" is a conservative movement of the U.S. Rust Belt that led to the victory of Donald J. Trump in the 2016 presidential election. It is an outgrowth of the long-term structural change of the regional economy and politics brought about by "trade liberalization". This article analyzes the structure of the regional economy and change in public consciousness regarding politics as a result of the "Rust Belt Phenomenon" as well as the roles of the cooperative movement as a traditional mass movement, focusing on rural electric cooperatives (REC) in Wisconsin.

First, this article emphasizes the point that the Rust Belt Phenomenon is not only an issue of industrial adjustment in manufacturing but also a rural problem. The economic damage caused by trade among developed countries and by NAFTA has been especially serious in rural areas where small manufacturing enterprises are concentrated. Second, the article emphasizes that cooperatives, which shifted from a component of the New Deal coalition to supporters of conservative candidates, represent the political and economic transformation of this region as a whole. Although previous studies have focused on how the weakening of labor unions affected this transformation, they have not yet paid sufficient attention to the changes taking place in the cooperatives.

Rural residents are dissatisfied with their current economic situations, claiming that their standard of living has not been rising despite their "Hard Work." They blame government and policies protected by taxes and labor unions. RECs were opposed to the Clean Power Plan, a federal environmental regulation aimed at eliminating coal-fueled power plants, because it raised the price of the electric power supplied by RECs and therefore imposed a cost burden on rural residents. RECs and their members complain that the government neglects the economic disadvantages experienced in rural areas and overlooks the fact that the government itself had originally promoted the coal-fueled power plants.

RECs have shifted to a passive acceptance of the idea that they should gradually adopt renewable-energy power sources and work to educate their members to understand the change, because technical innovation reduces the cost of renewable energies and the market mechanism promotes the shift away from coal-fueled power. This leads to our conclusion that the cooperatives in the Rust Belt are not players that themselves bring about change, but that they act as "mirrors," reflecting the overall reality.