The 1970s Global Food Crisis and the Securitization of Food in Japan

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Abstract
During the Allied Occupation, Japan imported notable amount of agricultural products from the United States through the food aid program, and even once it regained its independence, it continued to be a major market for the U.S. However, the world food crisis in the early 1970s highlighted the fragility of its food supply system and the risks linked to the high dependence on a single supplier. This led Japanese authorities to redefine the concept of national 'food security' and promote a supply diversification strategy, through investments and aid programs in the so-called 'new agricultural countries'. This article examines the impact of the 1970s global food crisis on Japan's national security discourse and on Japan's international relations. Drawing upon 'securitization theory' and 'food regime theory', this paper attempts to analyze how the 'food dependence' threat was perceived and how this perception influenced diplomatic and policy decisions of Japan's government. It will be suggested that these decisions highly influenced not only Japan's diplomatic relations but played also an important role in the transformation of the postwar international food regime.

Keywords: Japan's food security, Japan's international relations, Food regimes, Securitization, non-traditional security.

1. Introduction: Japan's "food problem"

Food security has been a crucial issue in Japan's postwar politics, as the food self-sufficiency rate of the country has constantly declined since 1945, reaching the 39% in 2015, the lowest percentage among industrialized countries (MAFF, 2015). However, this is by no means a new situation. Concerns about food supplies have been a constant element of Japanese politics since the country opened its ports to world trade in the second half of 1800s. During the first decades of Meiji period, agriculture was the dominant sector in Japanese economy and food products accounted for over one third of total volume of exports, but, by the beginning of 1890s, Japan found itself obliged to increase food imports as it was witnessing a typical Malthusian situation, with the population increasing beyond agricultural productivity (Kawashima, 2010, p. 26 and p.165).

After the colonization of Taiwan in 1895 and Korea in 1910, Japanese authorities decided to build an empire that was self-sufficient in raw materials, including food, in order to limit dependence on food imports. As such, Korea and Taiwan were transformed into Japan's "agricultural appendages" (Ho, 1984, p. 350). The Japanese strategy significantly altered the agricultural sector of these territories, shifting them towards export-oriented food production. Consequently, in the period between 1918 and 1932, rice transfers from Korea and Taiwan rose from 38.8% to 63.2% and from 15.4% to 25.0% respectively, whereas imports from other areas decreased from 45.8% to 11.8% (Francks, 2007, p. 170).

The defeat in 1945 put an end to this system and Japan was occupied by the Allied Forces. During this time, Japan imported notable amount of agricultural products from the United States under the food aid program, and even once it regained its independence in 1952, it continued to be a major market for the U.S.

However, the world food crisis that broke out at the beginning of 1970s brought back to Japan memories of the first years of the postwar period, when it lost access to the resources from colonies, on which it highly depended. This situation pushed Japanese authorities to develop a new strategy aimed at guaranteeing a stable and secure source of food supply, through a redefinition of the concept of "food security".

This paper examines the impact of the 1970s global food crisis on Japan's national security discourse and on Japan's international relations. In particular, drawing upon "securitization theory" and "food regime theory", it will be analyzed how the "food dependence" threat was perceived by Japanese authorities and how this perception influenced diplomatic and policy decisions. It will be suggested that these decisions highly influenced not only Japan's diplomatic relations but played also an important role in the transformation of the postwar international food regime.

2. Theoretical framework: 'Food regimes' theory and 'securitization' theory

Food regime theory was first developed by agrarian sociologists Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989). A simple definition of "food regime" is given by Friedmann, who describes the concept as a

"rule-governed structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale" (Friedmann, 1993, p. 30). The key innovation of this theory has been the capability to situate the dynamics of the agri-food sector in a world-historical perspective. Friedmann and McMichael identified three global food regimes in history.[1] The first food regime, also called "colonial diasporic food regime", covers the period between 1870 and 1930,[2] when, within a general rhetoric of free trade and the system of the gold standard, European countries imported cheap tropical products such as sugar, coffee, tea and tropical oils, from their colonies and from settler states like the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, in exchange for capital and manufactured goods (Friedmann, 1992, p. 242). The second food regime, called "mercantile food regime", started in the 1950s and lasted until the 1973 food crisis. This regime saw the emergence of the United States as the new world *agricultural* power, thanks to the results of agricultural policy implemented after the economic depression in the 1930s that increased American production, thus generating food surpluses. In order to dispose of agricultural surpluses, "food aid" was created as a policy instrument. Foreign economic aid was based on the role of the dollar under the Bretton Woods monetary system. Within this system, the U.S. started to distribute food surpluses to countries that were facing food shortages, such as Europe with the Marshall Plan or Japan. Food aid was not only a solution to the domestic agricultural situation; it also served as a foreign policy instrument. Particularly in the context of Cold War rivalry with the U.S.S.R., it was used as an instrument of containment, by strengthening ties with recipient countries (Friedmann, 1993, pp. 39-42).

During the second food regime, Japan became highly dependent on agricultural imports from the United States. The loss of its colonies meant for Japan the loss of its principal sources of food and the Japanese experienced a situation of deprivation and sacrifice. At the beginning, mass starvation was not considered a priority problem by the U.S. government and Japanese alone were made responsible for avoiding "acute economic distress" (Fuchs, 2007). However, in May 1946, when several protests demanding for food spread quickly around the country, Washington agreed to dispatch several ships of rice and wheat to Japan. But it was the emergence of the Cold War, around 1947, which led to a significant change in the international arena, and also influenced the American occupation strategy in the archipelago. The U.S. sought to bring Japan into the anti-Soviet line of defense in Asia and gradually abandoned the policy of constraining the

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[1] In their first article (1989), Friedmann and McMichael talked about only two historical food regimes, the pre-war and the post-war food regimes. Philip McMichael supposed the emergence of a third food regime in 1992, and its main characteristics have been analysed in later studies. See: Friedmann, H. (1992). From Colonialism to Green Capitalism: Social Movements and Emergence of Food Regimes. *Research in rural sociology and development* 11, pp. 227-264; McMichael, P. (2005). Global Development and the Corporate Food Regime. *Research in rural sociology and development* 11, pp. 265-299; Pechlaner and Otero. (2010). The Neoliberal Food Regime: Neoregulation and the New Division of Labor in North America. *Rural sociology* 75 (2), pp. 179-208.

[2] In this chapter I make use of McMichael's periodization. Friedmann (2005) prefers to date the first food regime between 1870 and 1914, others between 1860 and 1914. See: Winders (2009). The Vanishing Free Market. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 9 (3), pp. 315-344.

Japanese economy. The U.S. helped Japan through two aid-programs: the Government and Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA) program and the Economic Rehabilitation in Occupied Areas (EROA) program. These two programs provided Japan with food, raw materials and machinery.

Even once the occupation ended, Japan continued to import agricultural goods from the U.S. through food aids. On March 8, 1954, the two governments signed the *U.S.-Japan Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement,* under Section 550 of the *Mutual Security Act* of 1951 for the sale of American surplus wheat, valued at $50 million.[3] On July 7, 1954, the U.S. promulgated the *Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act,* also known as Public Law 480 or PL480 and Japan signed two agreements with the United States under this law. The first was signed on May 31, 1955 and provided for sales of wheat and barley, as well as tobacco and cotton, valued at $85 million. The second was signed on February 10, 1956 and provided agricultural commodities worth $65.8 million.[4] The aim of these agreements was twofold: on the one hand, it enabled the U.S. to dispose of its agricultural surpluses and Japan to buy the food needed at a convenient price; on the other hand, the agreements strengthened the military alliance between the two countries, allowing the United States to build up military infrastructure at the U.S. bases in Japan and allowing Japan to rebuild its arms industry. Between 1954 and 1964, Japan received $445 million in PL480 food aid and imported $10.8 billion of food from conventional trading channels (Moen, 1999: 35). As such, Japan became the number one importer of U.S. food and its food self-sufficiency rate started to decline steadily.

As we will see more in details later, the second food regime entered into crisis in 1973, when the world faced the biggest food crisis since 1945. In 1972, in the climate of *détente*, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. made a deal over the sale of wheat and other grain commodities. This deal created an unexpected shortage of grain on the international market, noticeably pushing food prices up (Luttrell, 1973). As such, the main feature of the second food regime - food surpluses - disappeared and a new regime emerged. There is some debate in the literature about the contours of the third food regime (Friedmann, 2009; Pechlaner and Otero, 2009). However, two characteristics deeply distinguish this regime from the previous one: (1) the emergence of new centres of food production in developing countries (mostly in Latin America and Asia), the so-called "new agricultural countries" (N.A.C.s); and (2) the creation of new commercial relations led by transnational agribusiness corporations that have undercut the ability of single states to regulate their domestic agriculture and trade (McMichael, 1992).

"Security" has been defined as an "essentially contested concept" (Buzan, 1983, p. 6), because it is not objectively definable and inherently disputed. For long time,

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[3] Full text available at:

http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/treaty/pdfs/A-S38(3)-252.pdf

[4] Full texts available at:

http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/treaty/pdfs/A-S38(3)-260.pdf; and

http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/treaty/pdfs/A-S38(3)-261_1.pdf

the discipline of International Relations has associated the concept exclusively with the territorial and political integrity of the state (Walt, 1991). In this sense, these studies focused mainly on the so-called "traditional" threat, e.g. "military". During the 1980s, Critical Studies have challenged this understanding, suggesting that there are other "non-traditional" threats such as environmental degradation, economic recessions and population growth that cannot be dealt with the traditional way.

The Copenhagen School has played a fundamental role in broadening the concept of security after the Cold War. The scholars of the School basically argued that threats to national security should not only be conceived in military terms, rather they should be securitized by the relevant actor before it can be regarded as security issue. (Waever, 1989, p 107). In that context, the School has developed a framework that can be applied in all areas by focusing on the process of classifying a threat, named "theory of securitization" (Waever, 1989, 1995; Buzan, de Wilde, Waever, 1998). The School first define the security issue as a problem presented as an existential threat to an object to be determined.. According to them, securitization is "radically constructivist" and does not question what threat really is; rather, the constructivist approach takes a security issue as if made by act of securitization. In other words, the scholars of the School underline that: "When a securitizing actor uses a rhetoric of existential threat and thereby takes an issue out of what under those conditions is 'normal politics', we have a case of securitization" (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, 1998, p. 25). However, presenting something as an existential threat is not a securitization. Only when the issue is accepted by the audience and emergency measures are authorized to fight that threat does the issue becomes entirely securitized. (Buzan, *People, State, Fear*, p. 46). In this way, every issue can be transformed into an existential threat and it can become the justification to extraordinary measures by the state or other securitizing actor

The "food regime theory" and the "securitization theory" are particularly useful to assess and understand the impact of 1970s food crisis on Japan's food security policies. The historical framework offered by food regime theory will help to reveal the main features of the international food system and to understand Japanese food dependence from an international perspective and how Japan contributed to the maintenance and the change of this system. At the same time, the "securitization theory" will be used to describe the process by which Japanese authorities have securitized the food issue, making the food dependence from imports a threat to Japan's national food security.

3. The 1970s food crisis

At the start of the 1970s, the American economy was hampered by a strong inflation. On August 15th 1971, president Richard Nixon announced the *New Economic Policy,* which ended dollar convertibility to gold and implemented a price control system. The *New Economic Policy* marked the beginning of the end of the Bretton Woods international monetary system and temporarily halted inflation (U.S. Department of State. Office of Historians). However, from January 1973, consumer prices grew considerably as result of the growth of foodstuffs prices. This increase was connected to the rise in meat consumption in Europe and

Japan that, in turn, provoked an increase in world demand of grains for fodder. But, there was another important event in 1972 that had a significant impact on the global relations of food trade and that is remembered with the name of "the Great Grain Robbery": it is the grain deal between the U.S. and the U.R.S.S., signed on July 1972. According to the food regime theory, this deal can be considered as the main cause of the crisis of the postwar food regime (Friedmann, 1993, p. 99). Because of a bad harvest, at the beginning of 1970s, the Soviet Union were obliged to ask help to the United States, the main grain producers in the world at that time.

Taking advantage of the ongoing process of *détente*, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger used agricultural exports as a major instrument for furthering both farm and foreign policy interests, and building a new U.S.-U.S.S.R. relationship. In July and August 1972 six U.S. export companies contracted with Exportkhleb (the Russian trading agency) to sell over 400 million bushels of U.S. wheat valued at about 700 million dollar. Each contract was fixed price, calling for shipment of U.S. wheat from the 1972-73 crop (USDA, 1974, p. 6). To facilitate the sale of U.S. grains, the United States and the Soviet Union signed on July 8, 1972, "the largest long-term commercial trade purchase agreement ever made between two countries" and the U.R.S.S. agreed to buy a total of $750 million worth of American grain during the three-year period beginning August 1, 1972 (U.S. Government, 1972, p. 1142). The sales would make the Soviet Union the second largest purchaser of American grain, just after Japan (USDA, 1972, p. 145). Secretary of State Henry Kissinger saw this agreement as "a major step forward in the conclusion of more comprehensive arrangements in other fields as well" (U.S. Government, 1972, p. 1144). However, the hope for a more comprehensive collaboration quickly faded away. The U.S.S.R. purchased the entire contracted $750 million worth of grain in the first year of the agreement, using its credits to the fullest extent possible. Then, using its hard currency reserve, Moscow bought nearly $500 million of additional grain. As result in 1972-73 crop year, the Soviet Union bought around 30 million metric tons of grain, which amounted to three quarters of all commercially traded grain in the world at that time (Friedmann, 1993, p. 40). The scale of this transaction was so high that it created a sudden shortage in American grain surpluses, which were the pivot of the postwar international food regime. Moreover, world food production declined because of poor weather conditions worldwide. The consequences were devastating for American economy as the surplus shortage sent grain prices soaring, pushing the inflation up. For this reason, the U.S. government was to pay large grain companies $333 million in export subsidies and over $46 million in shipping subsidies to help move the grain to the U.S.S.R (Porter, 1984, p. 6).

As a response to this crisis, Nixon administration imposed several export embargoes on agricultural goods between 1973 and 1975. In particular, on June 27, 1973, Secretary of commerce Fredrick B. Dent, with the approval of the Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz, declared "the most dramatic food policy decision of 1973" (Destler, 1978, p. 627): a complete, temporary embargo on American exports of soybeans, cottonseeds, and other agricultural products. In the intentions of the government, this decision had the only purpose of controlling food prices at home. However, though it proved to be short-lived, it had serious negative impact on American foreign policy. The so-called "soybean embargo" "challenged the

credibility of the U.S. commitment to free trade among nations and its reputation as a reliable supplier" of farm products and the government's failure to communicate to its allies its intentions to impose restrictions raised serious doubts in Europe and Japan (USGAO, 1974, p. 7).

The post-war food regime based on American surpluses had come to an end.

4. The impact of the crisis on Japan and its response: "resource diplomacy" and "comprehensive security"

The 1973 embargo on soybean exports affected Japan significantly, as over 90% of the imported soy came from the U.S., while Japan accounted for over 20% of American soybean exports (USITC, 1983: 5). The day after the announcement of the embargo, the Minister of Agriculture of Japan, Sakarauchi Toshio, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ōhira Masayoshi, called the U.S. ambassador in Japan, Robert Ingersoll, to discuss about soybean embargo. They specifically requested Japan be permitted to receive all of the 660 thousands tons of soybeans on contract for shipment to Japan between July and September of that year (US Department of State, 2005a). Sakurauchi also said that the soybean issue was most worrisome because it revived fears about U.S.-Japan trade problems that might seriously damage relations between the two countries (Ibidem). Ingersoll, for his part, replied that the U.S. would have tried to meet Japan's demand for a stable supply of soybeans and he also mentioned that the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz had stated that "he would give special consideration to agricultural exports to Japan" (Shurtleff, History of soybeans, p. 1711).

As previously mentioned, the embargo proved to be short-lived since it lasted only a few days - from June 27 to July 2 - and it was soon replaced by a system of export control until October of the same year. From a mere agricultural and economic point of view, the embargo did not change Japanese food imports nor did it provoke an increase in food prices, but the psychological effects were notable. For the first time in the post-war period, Japan understood the fragility of its food supply system and the risks associated to heavy dependence on a single supplier. In early 1974, Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, during a five-days visit in Japan, announced that the embargo on soybean exports was a mistake and that the U.S. "should never impose an embargo again" (U.S. Department of State, 2005b). Also President Nixon admitted that the embargo "might have been good for domestic politics" but it was "disastrous" in terms of foreign policy, impairing relationship with Japan (U.S. Department of State, 2011, Memorandum 179). President Ford as well, during the visit of Japan's Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei in Washington on September 21, 1974, and on his visit in Tokyo, on November 19, 1974, assured Japanese that U.S. was a reliable supplier (Ibidem: Memorandum 195 and 198). On August 12, 1975, Earl Butz encountered in Washington, DC his Japanese counterpart, the Minister of Agriculture and Foresty, Abe Shintarō. The document that emerged from this meeting, known as the "Butz-Abe gentlemen's agreement", sought to improve the stability of U.S.-Japanese agricultural trade relations by setting minimum annual quantities of wheat, feed grains, and soybeans that the United States would supply to Japan in the following three years. The approximate amount was 3 million metric tons of wheat, 3 million tons of soybeans, and 8 million tons of feed grains (USDA, 2009, p. 11). From the U.S.

point of view, the Butz-Abe gentlemen's agreement served to attempt to restore Japan's confidence in U.S.'s reliability as a supplier of agricultural products. However, as we have already pointed out, the embargo had a deep and lasting psychological effect.

Japanese government was not only concerned about the economic aspect of food dependency, but it was worried also about the use of food as a political and diplomatic weapon by the United States. In the August of 1974, a month before the World Food Conference held in Rome, a report from CIA came to the conclusion that "the U.S.'s near-monopoly position as food exporter would have an enormous, though not easily definable, impact on international relations [and] (i)t could give the U.S. a measure of power it had never had before" (CIA, 1974, p. 39). The Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, as well, declared: "Food is a weapon. It is now one of the principal tools in our negotiating kit" (Weinstein, 1975).

The 1970s crises (food and energetic) brought back to Japan memories of the first years of the postwar period, when it lost access to the resources from colonies, on which it highly depended. This situation led the then Prime Minister, Tanaka Kakuei, to pursue a more proactive foreign policy, going beyond the framework of bilateralism with the United States. From the point of view of agricultural and food imports, Japan launched an indipendent and vigorous campaign of "resource diplomacy", as a way to re-establish its access to these vital supplies. The Japanese government thus decided to launch a food diversification strategy, encouraging joint public-private ventures to consolidate alternative food sources. During the 1970s and the 1980s, Japan applied the principle of *kaihatsu-yunyū* (literally "development and imports") for Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects. One of the main purpose of "resource diplomacy" was to enhance "comprehensive security". These two concepts have been the subject of a vast and rich literature but they have seldom been applied to food imports and food security, as most of these studies have focused on oil and energy imports (Nakajima, 2015; Shiratori, 2015; Morse, 1981). Hereafter, we will attempt to analyze the two concepts from the point of view of Japan's food security policies.

The concept of "comprehensive security" broadened the traditional meaning of "security", putting emphasis on economic and diplomatic means for pursuing national security. As it was pointed out, Japan was an "economic giant" but with a big limitation of resources. The expression "comprehensive security" emerged in Japan at the beginning of 1970s, when the oil and food crises enhanced the perception of insecurity due to the a high dependence from external markets,

During the 1970s, many governmental reports about the redifinition of national security were published.[5] But it was in 1978, when prime minister Ōhira established the Research Group for Comprehensive Security, that it was systematically developed. In 1980, the Group published its final report (Report on Comprehensive Security).[6] The report put the accent on the changes that took

[5] Among them, we can cite these reports published by the Minister of Industry and Trade: 'A vision on the resource problem (*shigen gaikō no tenbō*), 1971; 'Our country economic security (*wagakuni keizai anzen hoshō*)', 1974; 'Research about Japan's economic security (*Nihon keizai sekyuritei ni kan suru kenkyū*)', 1974.

[6] The full text in Japanese is available at:

place in the international system since World War II, and also sought to widen the concept of national security. The report suggested that national security needed to be considered as «the protection of people's life from external threats» and not only as the protection from military invasion. In this perspective, the report mentioned six areas of national security, and one of these was food security. According to the report, the main threats to Japan's national food security were: interruption of food supplies (such as embargoes), bad harvests in producing countries, bad diplomatic relations between producing and consuming countries, increasing of world population. The report suggested that, in order to achieve national food security, it was not sufficient to increase national production and to have good relations with producing countries, but Japan should have also diversified its food suppliers, by investing in the so-called "new agricultural countries (N.A.Cs)", through direct investments and development aids, increasing world food production.

In the light of this document, it is easy to understand how "resource diplomacy" was an instrument used by Japanese government for achieving national food security. Japanese authorities used ODA funds to promote agricultural development in developing countries (Hilmann and Rotherberg, 1988, pp. 46-7) and, through tax incentives, the government tried to help Japanese agribusiness corporations to invest in these countries in order to produce food to import to Japan (Hongo and Hosono, 2012, p. 3). The most famous of these projects is probably the PRODECER, a 22-year program started in 1979 for the development of soybean production in Cerrado, a vast area in central Brazil. The Japanese government provided 28 billion yen of ODA for the transformation of over 334,000 hectares of Cerrado into soybean farmland.[7] Thanks to Japanese investments, in few years, Brazil became one the principal producers of soybean and recently it has become the first soybean exporter in the world, pushing the U.S. at the second place (FAOSTAT).

5. Conclusion

After the defeat in 1945 and the loss of its colonies, Japan became highly dependent on food and agricultural imports from the United States. But it was only in 1973, after the soybean embargo, that Japanese authorities started to consider this dependency as a threat and to securitize the food issue. As it has been pointed out, the embargo never affected Japan's supply nor there was any kind of food shortage, for this reason in this article we claimed that the threat posed by the embargo - and, more in general, by the dependency from food imports - was more a perception than a real one.

Through the development of the concept of "comprehensive security", the government made food security an integral part of the strategy to ensure national security. As we have seen, the "resource diplomacy" was the instrument implemented to achieve the "comprehensive security". In particular, from the point of view of food security, Japan played a primary role in the transformation

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http://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/JPSC/19800702.O1J.html

[7] See: http://www.maff.go.jp/j/kokusai/kokkyo/toushi/pdf/1304mgj4.pdf

of the international system of food trade and tried to preserve its own food security by the diversification of food supplies and investment in new food production in every corner of the globe, posing a major challenge to U.S. supremacy in food exports. This last aspect will undoubtedly merit consideration for further research.

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