

FAST FOOD AND SLOW FOOD : A THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY AGRIFOOD PROBLEMS

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Abstract

Contrastive types (as M. Weber's *Idealtypus*) of agrifood value and lifestyle are constructed as fast food vs. slow food. The former is industrial *civilization*, the latter is *culture* (referring to classical sociology of culture). The former expands its system globally like McDonald's Corporation. The latter is an alternative movement to recover the circular link between local agrifood production and local consumption based on people's life world (*Lebenswelt*). Fast food corresponds to the quantitative solution of mass consumption. To solve the starvation problem, it is necessary to devise quantitative solution anew. Slow food corresponds to the qualitative solution of the problem which has been caused by fast food system. The problems are as follows: What is authentic taste? How is it possible to avoid dangerous materials and chemicals? How to recover the locality and human relationships in daily life?

Slow Food International movement, 'CHISAN-CHISHŌ' campaign and food education in Japan and organic agriculture are all included in the wider sense of 'slow food'. Slow food has turned the table and become the mainstream within the institutional and legal frames and in eating habits of people's choice.

Key words : Fast Food, Slow Food, Agrifood Social Movement

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1 Introduction 2 Ideal Types of Fast Food and Slow Food 3 Contrastive Features and Resulting Characteristics 4 Slow Food as the Mainstream 5 Forms of Slow Food Movement : Background and Agents 6 Concluding Remark : For Case Studies of Organic Agriculture

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss slow food in contrast with fast food from the viewpoint of agrifood value and lifestyle of eating habits.

Fast food and slow food are contrastive : civi-

lization vs. culture, global vs. local, quantitative solution vs. qualitative solution. Fast food corresponds to the quantitative solution of mass consumption. Slow food is an alternative movement in response to fast food. Slow food aims to recover the circular link between local agrifood production and local consumption based on people's life world (*Lebenswelt*).

The word 'slow food' is used here in wider meaning of the concept; that is, besides the Slow Food International network, slow food includes such alternative native productive movements as campaign to consume local products (CHISAN-CHISHŌ), organic agriculture movement (e.g. rice-duck farming) and food educa-

tion (SHOKUIKU).

How has slow food become the mainstream against fast food within the institutional and legal levels and in people's choice of foods?

There are two types of slow food movements like movement with up-down style and that from the grass roots.

In this paper my discussion concentrates on the following subjects: ideal types of fast food and slow food, contrastive features and resulting characteristics, slow food as the mainstream, forms of slow food movement, forthcoming case studies of organic agriculture.

IDEAL TYPES OF FAST FOOD AND SLOW FOOD

We are going to discuss fast food and slow food as ideal types (*Idealtypus*) constructed from reality. In the most fundamental value orientation, the two types of food are contrastive: Fast food's global character vs. slow food's local character of agrifood problems and fast food's quantitative solution vs. slow food's qualitative solution of agrifood problems.

Fast food is to be understood literally as its name indicates. The mass production and supply of foods in industrialized society function as efficiency-centered system. The concept of slow food is more difficult. For example, consider the case of SUSHI. SUSHI is considered to be healthy slow food, but SUSHI is instantly ready to serve as if it were fast food. A circulating SUSHI line (KAITENZUSHI) looks like an assembly line of an automobile factory, and this service system is similar to a fast food service system. Whether SUSHI is fast food or slow food depends, to some extent, on to what criteria its analyst directs his/her interests. In the *nuance* of the word "slow food", various elements are implied: natural authenticity,

healthy nutrition, nearness to local life world, ecological consciousness, alternative movement against fast food and psychological comfort.

The word "slow" here is not a temporal concept but represents the essence or quality of agrifood lifestyle.

The word 'slow' in 'slow food' originated from the "Slow Food International" movement in an Italian town. This association was founded in 1989 in response to the fast-paced fast food lifestyle that seemed to threaten the "slow" enjoyment of good foods, good wines and good friends¹. Besides this international network, slow food in this paper includes such alternative native products' movement as campaign to consume local products, organic agriculture movement and food education (SHOKUIKU). To sum up, slow food is an alternative social movement aiming to 'better' qualitative agrifood production and consumption which sites mainly on local levels, but networking develops further to national and global levels.

Slow food corresponds to the qualitative solution of the problems which have been caused by fast food system. Fast food corresponds to the quantitative solution of mass consumption. Authenticity, nutrition, health, taste, communication, identity and safety which various slow food movements pursue, are qualitative sides of agrifood life. There are two stages of quantitative solution. The first is the problem of population explosion which the food can't be provided enough. To solve population problem by supplying much foods, green revolution was epoch making. A Japanese entrepreneur tries to extend fast food chain of potato croquette depots in African countries which will contribute to the solution of starvation problem, employment or self-support² (Koro-chan system). The second is the phase of the mass production and

mass consumption in an era of industrialization.

The mass supply of foods can be made by adopting Fordism or artificial chemical measures. The typical case is the McDonald system which expands globally.

CONTRASTIVE FEATURES AND RESULTING CHARACTERISTICS

Let us compare these two agrifood systems from the viewpoint of social system, organizational structure and communication.

The value of fast food, especially that of McDonald's system, has its roots in the Ford automobile industry. McDonald's system is the first application of Fordism to the restaurant industry. The value of slow food is related to a recursive movement toward the traditional value of local or national agrifood.

As ideal types, the two agrifood systems are characterized as follows. The product of fast food is not called 'foods' but industrial 'products'. Slow foods are natural products and of organic nature. Fast foods are produced by big businesses and slow foods are produced by small and middle sized / self-employed enterprises and restaurants. In the case of fast foods, semi-cooked material is prepared at a central kitchen and transported to small outlets or shops.

In the case of fast food, there is only part time's job without having cook's role. In the case of slow food, the cook is often dealt with as professional craftsman and there is role differentiation such as cook, waiter / waitress, *sommelier*, and so on.

In the case of fast food, there is little communication. The meal or snack is generally taken hastily. In the case of slow food, on the other hand, people take a meal together while communicating with hosts or among family or

guests. The fast food system is compared to the supermarket system, while the slowfood system is compared to the traditional market system. Fast food is characterized as industrial civilization, whereas slow food is a sort of 'culture'.

Let us summarize the resulting characteristics of these contrastive values using the basic concepts of Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann. Fast food is supported by formal rationality or especially strategic rationality. Slow food is supported by essential (or communicative) rationality referring to Habermas' rationality conception.

Referring to Luhmann's and revised theory of program (Chart 1), the case of fast food system is executed especially by routine program, whereas slow food is executed by adopting searching-for-means-program and searching-for-goal-program besides routine program (Luhmann 1971, 1973 ; Usui 1999, 2000, 2003 b).

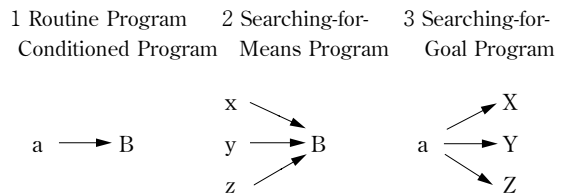


CHART 1 Types of Program
(Revised Theory of Luhmann's Program)

By relating the 'rationality' conception of Max Weber to this dichotomy, we can say that fast food is related to formal rationality in means-end linkage and that slow food is related to material rationality that stems from *wertrational* consistency³.

The former case of fast food is primarily efficiency-oriented, while the latter case of slow food aims to reach an understanding and consensus (*Einverständnis*). While the former

causes global uniformity, the latter movement results in local diversity.

Concerning the environmental problem, the fast food industry causes some ecological crises through the standardization toward efficient species of animals (e.g. large size of livestock) and plants (e.g. large size of potato). The local contribution to protect traditional agrifood shares the activity to preserve biodiversity on the planet. Members of 'Slow Food International' have stronger concern for maintaining biodiversity.

SLOW FOOD AS THE MAINSTREAM

The system and institution of agrifood are now changing. According to the results of various surveys, Japanese tend to pursue healthy, safe and tasty foods even if fancy interest in health and foods affairs is something like 'food-faddish' (It is called 'MINO'MONTA Syndrome' according to a popular TV program⁴). There are much problems around foods and eating habits such as indulgent satisfaction, obesity or undernourishment and anorexia. Industrial technology has produced much artificial foods against natural genuine foods.

However, since people have begun to realize environmental aspects and health aspects of agrifood problems, the situation has been changing in favor of the slow food movement. Eco-conscious, health-minded and community-minded orientations have become remarkable in people's consumption. A parallel phenomenon can be found in the case of the automobile industry. Eco-cars seem to have popularity both for car-makers and for consumers probably because of the concern for the problems of the sustainability of the environment. Eco-conscious consumers tend to purchase hybrid cars or fuel-efficient cars. Parallel to this, the

agrifood industry is also changing its value from the fast food paradigm to the slow food paradigm. Fast food industries (including corporations, processors and restaurants) must adapt to the new trend in qualitative eating habits. In the era of slow food, it becomes a new style of viewpoint to discuss about 'Fast Food under the Age of Slow Food'⁵. We are now at a turning point when slow food is becoming the mainstream.

Consumers are eager to identify the actual sources of products under a traceability system since there are many cases of false labels of products. One example in Japan is oysters produced in Korea being sold under MIYAGI oyster labels. Local brands of agrifood have recovered high popularity (e.g. direct sales' depots of vegetables, CHOKUBAI-SHO).

The Fundamentals of Food Education Act was passed in 2005. In 'food education' (SHO-KUIKU) areas, there are many active participants; corporations concerned, processors and distributors, school lunch and nutrition experts, training schools for licensed cook, restaurants, family and so on. People have become more and more healthy-minded and are searching for organic foods or healthy food life. To some extent, it depends on the economic level of the household, since people with low incomes are obliged to get minimum foods for their survival above everything.

The healthy food market is expanding and food processing corporations are eager to produce and advertise such foods.

Imported foods contain many dangerous residual chemicals. For example, frozen spinach including residual chemicals has been imported from China. Residual chemical food additives and preservatives have caused various health problems such as allergy and atopic dermatitis.

To prevent such dangers, people are obliged to search for alternative agrifood systems. Contemporary fast food life and efficiency-oriented 'fast' systems are apt to lose the quality of life in search of quantitative production. People have become sensitive to and eager to pursue the slow food as quality of life. While global-transnational agrifood business (agribusiness or fast food system) has spread worldwide, the local character of agrifood life is being reevaluated. The value of SHUN (as fresh in-season vegetables, fish and so on) has been evaluated and the food stuffs are supplied from local areas. It is necessary to reestablish a local circulation system around the production and the consumption. These movements can be characterized by the following motto: Think Globally, Eat Locally⁶.

FORMS OF SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT: BACKGROUND AND AGENTS

As noted before, the concept of 'slow food' movement here is wider than usual use of the word. In other words, it is a 'new agrifood movement' that is being developed in Japan, too. On the grower's or producer's side, slow food movements are directed to organic agriculture and have characteristics of local brand. CHISANCHISHŌ (地産地消) is a designation that means literally local production and local consumption. For restaurant and consumer, 'slow food' orientation means to search for authentic taste of local foods. The food education or custom in family life and school lunch have a decisive meaning in shaping the children's taste. It is thought that the fast food system is making the sensitivity of taste weaker, since the taste system of human beings is learned in the early stages of growth. It would be essential to establish the know-how of

networking on both the producer's and the consumer's sides. CHISANCHISHŌ has been campaigned to develop local consumption nationwide. This movement has been designed by the central government (Ministry of Agriculture) and prefectural governments. Various organizations have been mobilized to the process of the movement. This campaign is called "SHUNSAN-SHUNSHO" (旬産旬消) too, which means the consumption of in-season fresh products locally. Nowadays, even drinking water from wells or waterworks has lost its freshness. Another name for CHISANCHISHŌ is "SHINDO-FUJI" (身土不二), which means 'The living body and local climate are two sides of the same coin.' This idea comes from Buddhism and is shared in some East Asian countries such as Japan, China and Korea. This religious background of food life is reevaluated from the self-reflexive point of view.

What has given rise to the new agrifood movement in Japan?

First, the ratio of agrifood self-sufficiency has been greatly lowered in Japan. So-called 'Food-Mileage' is used as an index of this self-sufficiency. Food life in Japan depends too much on imported food resources. Harmful elements such as residual chemicals and conserving materials after-harvest accompanying with imported agrifood resources are brought. Another factor is the spread of fast food civilization, which has caused biased nutrition or malnutrition. Many young people do not eat breakfast in the morning.

Thirdly, there is an increasing number of sparsely populated and aged communities. Reconstruction of village communities as the base of agricultural production has therefore become a critical issue.

As agents of the new agrifood movement,

many roles from growers, producers, via process and distributive role (transportation, restaurant) to consumers are included. Also there are many roles of food education ; experts of nutrition, teachers, school lunch's cooks, and so on. There are many eco-conscious participants. Some of them enter the new agrifood movement from the experience of co-op activities.

Generally CHISANCHISHŌ movements have spread taking a top-down style. On the other hand, the slow food association movement (called *convivium* or chapter) and organic agriculture movements are initiated from grassroots.

CONCLUDING REMARK : FOR CASE STUDIES OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

In this paper, I have been discussing slow food in contrast with fast food from the viewpoint of agrifood value and lifestyle of eating habits.

Fast food and slow food are contrastive : civilization vs. culture, global vs. local, quantitative solution vs. qualitative solution. The latter is an alternative movement in response to the former. Fast food corresponds to the quantitative solution of mass consumption. Slow food aims to recover the circular link between local agrifood production and local consumption based on people's life world (*Lebenswelt*). Slow food has turned the table and becomes the mainstream within the institutional and legal levels and in eating habits of people's choice.

As an area of slow food studies, I have focused on the organic agricultural production. Details of the following topics are to be dealt with in another paper. The first main topic is the criteria of certification at national and local levels. The second main topic is the networking of organic growers and consumers.

Organic agriculture movements also develop keeping steps with slow food movements. Through two case studies from southwestern Japan, we'd like to reveal the conditions to keep the organic agricultural network well.

First, in Okayama Prefecture, there are thirty-three organic agricultural groups. These groups are connected through the prefectural network association (USUI, 2005). Through hearing, it becomes clear that there are hard conditions to maintain organic farms for some farmers because of severe regulations (positive list).

Secondly, in Aya-chō, Miyazaki Prefecture, growers deliver organic products to Eco-Co-op (Green Co-op) in Fukuoka Prefecture by way of the Agricultural Co-op. The organic products are delivered to Hyōgo Prefecture for use in school lunches. Public hall (JICHIKŌMINKAN, 自治公民館) groups generally have strong cohesion as the base of agricultural production (Gōda 1998). It is important here to explain what conditions influence the maintenance of stable networking between producers and consumers.

Certification system of these southwestern Japanese cases are most developed one, so they will be treated in another paper⁷.

POSTSCRIPT

This paper is based on my following article but newly revised edition : USUI, Takashi, "Post-Fastfood Values and Organic Agriculture : From Case Studies in Southwestern Japan" presented at Research Committee 7 (Future Research), Session 3 (Values and Religion in a Globalizing World, Part 2), World Congress of Sociology, International Sociological Association, Durban, South Africa, July 25, 2006. For the opportunity to present my paper, I am in-

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ternartive Undō ni Kansuru Shakaigaku teki Kenkyū (Sociological Study of Alternative Agri-food Movements against the Globalization of Food Production), 2006-2008, which we have accepted.

NOTES

- 1 Smith, Andrew F. (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*, 2 Vols. Oxford University Press, 2004, II p.445. Article "Slow Food Movement".
- 2 Koro-chan system from Gifu-Prefecture, *Japan Times*, July 18, 2006.
- 3 YOSHIME, Katuhiko, *Max Weber no Hihan Zyoron (Critical Studies of Max Weber)*, KŌSEI-SHA-KŌSEI-KAKU, 1994, p.159.
- 4 KAMIYAMA, Michiko, *Shokuhin no Anzen to Kigyō Rinri (The Safety of Foods and Corporate Governance)*, HASSAKU-SHA, 2004, Chapter 6. *Diamond Weekly*, 2006.8.5. special issue 'Dangerous Dining Table'. p.31. Comment by Kuniko, TAKAHASHI.
- 5 SATŌ Akira, Slow Food Jidai ni Okeru Fast Food (Fast Food under the Age of Slow Food), *SEKAI*, Iwanami-Shoten, 2005, No.8, pp.226-235.
- 6 Smith (ed.), *op. cit.*, II p.219, Article "Organic Food".
- 7 USUI, Takashi, Regulations in Organic Agriculture: Two Case Studies from Southwestern Japan, *Journal of KIBI International University Graduate School of Sociology*, No.8, 2007, forthcoming.

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