

Shin-ichi Shogenji

Dean, Graduate School of Agricultural and Life
Sciences / Faculty of Agriculture, The University of Tokyo

It is my pleasure to take this opportunity to deliver my Opening Remarks on behalf of the University of Tokyo which is supporting this symposium. First of all, let me express my warmest welcome to the distinguished participants, especially to the excellent speakers who came from abroad.

For our school, the Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences, where research activities on food and agriculture are carried out with an international perspective, it is quite an honor that this auditorium, the Yayoi Auditorium, was selected as the venue of this event. Likewise, as an agricultural economist, I am personally very pleased to make the welcome speech for this symposium where the role of social sciences will be discussed.

I am confident that that year 2009 is indeed an unforgettable year as a historic turning point for human society. Firstly, we are now in the midst of a worldwide recession, which was triggered by the crash of the Lehman Brothers and is often described as the worst one so far since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Secondly, the recent soaring prices of grains and oilseed have been seriously threatening food security, in particular that in developing countries. As you may know, the current number of undernourished population exceeds one billion according to the estimation by FAO. And thirdly, the COP15 UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen will appeal to the world on the crucial importance of the mitigation of, and adaptation to global climate change as the most urgent challenge for mankind. In the sense that we are now standing at the very threshold of change in terms of three vital issues: food, economy and environment, one can say that the new century, or even the new millennium, has just started in the year 2009.

In view of this drastically changing world, it is quite useful and timely to have this opportunity to discuss effective ways of research and development for agriculture. No doubt, enhancing the supply capacity of food production is one of the most pressing needs in the developing world. In this context, the role of aid by developed countries will attract more attention than before. It is needless to say that the transfer of food itself, as an emergency aid, may have played an indispensable role during that period such as in the year 2008 when the food prices soared up. Yet, food aid alone does not lead to a sustainable solution for the problem of food security. Furthermore, food aids have not necessarily been carried out with a purely

altruistic intention. As most of you might know, a positive correlation was observed in the past between the amounts of food aid and the level of the global stocks of grains.

What is needed for the sustainable improvement of food security in the developing world is the type of development aid whose aim is to strengthen the supply capacity of food stocks. Different from a mere transfer of food itself, the enhancement of food supply capacity is normally accompanied by income creation in agricultural and related industries. The food security problem in the developing world is nothing but the problem of shortages and uneven distribution of purchasing power. In this sense, the role of development aid which effects into income creation should be strongly stressed.

Let me add one thing more. That is to say, an improvement of food security conditions in the developing world is closely related to the food security problem in developed countries. In some developed countries like Japan, where the domestic food production capacity is regarded as insufficient, the problem of food security as a part of national security attracts the people's strong concern. This sort of concern about national food security will be shared among countries where the domestic food production capacity is stagnant or declining due to the high rate of economic growth. I would like to stress that the improved food security condition in the developing world will contribute in alleviating or even eradicating the causes of local conflicts which in turn will contribute in making human society as a whole much more stable. In this sense, international cooperation towards improvement of food security in the developing world will reduce the burden of developed countries in ensuring their own food security. International cooperation for agricultural development meets the needs of people in the developed world who are hoping to see a more peaceful human society. We know that sometimes the serious problem of food shortages existed behind or caused some tragic scenes of violence in history.

The outcomes of research and development cannot be easily transferred into the rural areas of the developing world. It is a well-known fact that the transfer of technology without careful attention to the actual factor endowment which gives comparable advantage to a local area of concern tends to be unsuccessful. Here, coolheaded analysis and proper orientation based on empirical studies by social sciences are highly needed. Likewise, as a researcher who has been deeply engaged in local irrigation systems for a long time, I would like to add one more argument. That is the proper understanding of bequeathed wisdom, especially the proper understanding of the managerial wisdom regarding local commons. Essentially, agriculture is a human activity which utilizes reproducible natural resources in a local area. Therefore, through its long history, rural society must have accumulated large amounts of wisdom regarding the

sustainable use of local resources. In this sense, a sensible agricultural development can be said to be a well-balanced fusion of traditional wisdom and newly introduced technology.

It is widely known that Garret Hardin stressed the mechanism of the tragedy in human society, using the metaphor of the shared commons which everybody used for grazing. According to his argument, human society, as it is, will collapse as a result of the unmanaged commons. Of course, some actual commons in rural areas were properly managed and were sustained for a long time. In view of the great challenge against global warming, what is badly needed now is to alter the earth as an unmanaged commons into the wisely managed commons. In this context, there must be a lot to learn from inherited wisdom in rural society. The role of social sciences in agricultural development, in my view, lies not only in the proper orientation of development but also in the discovery of the historical wisdom of human beings and its preservation towards our common future.

I hereby conclude my Opening Remarks here, while expecting fruitful discussion this afternoon and tomorrow as well.