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WTO, FTA and Seeking Common Agricultural Policy in Asia

Masayoshi Honma

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Masayoshi Honma

Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics

The University of Tokyo

Abstract:

This article examines the current stage of WTO negotiations on agriculture and discusses the power structure in major players in the negotiations. The difficulty to reach agreement in WTO leads many countries to FTA for further liberalization in trade. But agricultural sector tends to be a stumbling block there also. To discuss agricultural issues in FTA three countries of China, Japan and Korea are selected for an example of a multiple country FTA in Asia. Examined are how agricultural should be treated and possibility of substantially including agricultural sector in China-Japan-Korea FTA. Despite the difficulties, agricultural sector should be included in the list of tariff reductions for the C-J-K FTA. It is a good opportunity for reforming agricultural sector to be viable in international competition toward the total globalization. It is no doubt that the direction of world agricultural trade is toward freer trade. FTA is a good step for that and provides preparation for a global integration of agricultural trade. It may be desirable to establish an international forum, particularly among Asian countries, to discuss important agricultural issues in the region. This forum should consider not only agricultural tariff reductions, but also sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures that might be addressed in working toward a broader FTA in Asia. In organizing such a forum that shall be called “Agricultural Partnership in Asia” for wider cooperation of

agricultural policy and agricultural resource management in Asia, China, Japan and Korea should take a strong leadership and make substantial steps toward the domestic agricultural reforms as well. It may lead the region to establishing an Asian type of Common Agricultural Policy in the future.

Key words: WTO negotiations, FTA and agriculture, globalization, C-J-K FTA, Common Agricultural Policy in Asia

1. Introduction

WTO agricultural negotiations seem to be at stalemate as of the end of June, 2006. Agriculture is the key to either progress or unraveling for the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) as a whole. Without movement in the agricultural negotiations, movement in the other areas won't translate into a successful liberalization package in Hong Kong.

Agricultural negotiations consist of three pillars of market access, export competition, and domestic support. Among them the most troublesome and tough to agree are the issues in the market access pillar for tariff reductions. Tariffs will be grouped according to the tariff levels and put into the bands, with each band assigned different rates of tariff liberalization. All products in every band would be subjected to uniform rates of reduction, but products in the higher bands, meaning products with higher initial tariffs, would be subjected to higher rates than those in the lower bands. In addition, capping tariffs at a certain level would be discussed to impose.

On the other hand, many countries tend to make agreements on FTA to promote liberalization through it rather than WTO though which it takes long time to reach agreements because of the large number of member countries. In Asia, there are some ideas being discussed towards the East Asian Community beyond FTAs among Asian Countries. It provides an opportunity to consider the forms of international cooperation not only in economic activities but also in social and political relationship.

In this paper, first discussed is the current stage of WTO negotiations on agriculture. Then discussed are the issues on FTA and agriculture in consideration of possibility of the FTA among China, Japan and Korea, which may lead to the greater FTA in Asia. Finally it is examined whether Asian countries can establish a framework of the

Common Agricultural Policy in Asia that is consistent with the concept of the Asian Community to be established in the future.

2. Current dimensions of WTO negotiations on agriculture

The previous Uruguay Round resulted in the conclusion of the two-party, Blair House Accord between the United States and the EU. However, this was merely an arrangement composed of measures that would benefit the two parties. Other member nations, particularly developing nations, felt strongly that they had been left out of the negotiations. In fact, many expressed dissatisfaction with the Uruguay Round Agreement, claiming developing nations enjoy no benefit from it. The negotiations were once again concluded by Europe and the United States, but in the current situation, with three of four WTO members being developing nations, it seems clear that the same method of reaching an agreement will not work.

In fact, the traditional alliances of agricultural producers were transformed in reaction to the US-EU proposal in August 2003 and the counterproposal from developing countries later known as G-20 countries. The emergence of the G-20 group, led by Brazil, China, and India, has complicated negotiations by polarizing the debate into a North-South debate on the most sensitive issue in the Round that is agriculture.

Since the September 2003 the Cancun Ministerial Conference ended in deadlock, WTO members made efforts to put the negotiations and the rest of the work program back on track. Work intensified in the first half of 2004, with the new target date of reaching agreement on a package of framework agreements by the end of July, in effect Friday 30 July. The first draft of the “July package” was circulated on 16 July, and members negotiated intensively in various formats and agreed on 1 August 2004.

The July package includes agreement of market access in agricultural negotiations as follows: tariff reductions will be made through a tiered formula that takes into account their different tariff structures; progressivity in tariff reductions will be achieved through deeper cuts in higher tariffs with flexibilities for sensitive products; the role of a tariff cap in a tiered formula with distinct treatment for sensitive products will be further evaluated; without undermining the overall objective of the tiered approach, Members may designate an appropriate number, to be negotiated, of tariff lines to be treated as sensitive, taking account of existing commitments for these products.

The negotiations moved to the stage at which specific numbers on tier or band and reduction rates of tariffs are discussed. For example, the G20 proposed five bands (four for developing countries) with each band assigned different rates of tariff liberalization. All products in every band would be subjected to uniform rates of reduction, but products in the higher bands, meaning products with higher initial tariffs, would be subjected to higher rates than those in the lower bands. In addition, tariffs would be capped at 150 per cent for developing countries and at 100 per cent for developed countries. However, the EU and the G10 favor a more flexible formula while the US, Australia and New Zealand favor a more radical formula.

At the end of June, 2006 the World Trade Organization talks were held in Geneva but the world top trading partners ended the meeting deadlocked, which threatens to scuttle a commerce liberalization pact that has been billed as a recipe for lifting millions of people out of poverty. The meeting, between Australia, Brazil, the E.U., India, Japan and the U.S. failed to reach an agreement on a new trade deal.

Unless a blueprint for a binding treaty is agreed to this summer, diplomats say, the whole process may have to be put on ice until after U.S. presidential elections in 2008

because U.S. President George W. Bush's fast-track authority to strike trade deals expires next year.

3. Development of FTA

While the WTO negotiations are at stalemate, the efforts to expand international trade are made through increases in number of FTA in many countries, particularly in developed countries. Asian countries also promoted negotiations on FTA and increased the number of established ones. (See Table 1) In most cases agriculture has been a major issue in FTA negotiations; agriculture is considered a negative factor against the FTA, particularly for industrialized countries like Japan and Korea because such countries are protecting agriculture heavily and facing difficulties to reduce the tariffs on agricultural imports to zero in a limited time of period.

Agricultural issues will be more serious in further negotiations on FTA with those countries who expect to export more agricultural products to Japan and Korea. On the other hand, Japan and Korea need to tie with other countries for greater FTA beyond bilateral agreements. In fact, Japan is seeking a possibility of building the East Asian Community, which is actively discussed in many occasions. Agricultural issues are again very important toward that direction and we should examine agricultural sector for mutual cooperation among the countries.

In the following we take China, Japan and Korea for a multiple country FTA as an example of greater FTA in Asia. Examined are how agriculture should be treated and possibility of substantially including agricultural sector in the C-J-K FTA. Despite the difficulties, agricultural sector should be included in the list of tariff reductions for China-Japan-Korea FTA. It is a good opportunity for reforming agricultural sector to

be viable in international competition toward the total globalization. It is no doubt that the direction of world agricultural trade is toward freer trade. FTA is a good step for that and provides preparation for a global integration of agricultural trade.

However, there are many obstacles and political pressures against total inclusion of the sector in the FTA among China, Japan and Korea. This paper investigates how agricultural should be treated and seeks possibility and feasibility to include it in the C-J-K FTA.

4. Agricultural Trade among China, Japan and Korea

China, Japan and Korea are all important traders of agricultural products in the world market. Agricultural trade by these three countries accounts in value about 40% in Asian agricultural trade and about 10% in the world agricultural trade. Table 2 shows intra-regional agricultural trade among China, Japan and Korea in 2001. The most important agricultural trade among the three is Chinese exports to Japan which amounts to 5.6 billion US dollars. Chinese exports to Korea are similar in value to Korean exports to Japan, each of which amounts to about 1.5 billion US dollars. Japanese agricultural exports to China and Korea, each amounting to 0.2-0.3 billion US dollars, and Korean exports to China with 0.1 billion US dollars are less important than other trade flows among the three. Exports of China, who is the major supplier of agricultural products in the region, to Japan and Korea account for 47% in Chinese total agricultural exports.

Table 3 indicates Japanese imports and exports in recent years of agricultural, forestry and fishery (AFF) products from/to China and Korea. Japan's imports of AFF products from China are increasing and reached to 950 billion yen in 2002, which

accounts for 13.2 % of total imports of AFF products in Japan. AAF products imported from China are, for example, prepared eels, fresh and frozen vegetables, corns, shrimps, and chicken among others. Japan is the largest markets of AFF exports for China.

Japan is the largest AFF market also for Korea although Korean share in Japanese market declined from 3.5% in 1999 to 2.3% in 2003. More than half of Korean exports of AFF products go to Japan. The export value of AFF products from Korea to Japan was 164 billion yen in 2003, declined from 245 billion yen in 1999 as seen in Table 2. Among Japanese imports of AFF products from Korea, the most important are fisheries products that occupy more than half of total AFF products in value. In agricultural products, livestock products were important but the latter were declined since 2000 because of hog cholera that caused import prohibition of pork from Korea to Japan.

Japanese exports of AFF products are minimal amounting to 300-400 billion yen in recent years. Japanese exports of AFF products to China and Korea are about 30-40 billion yen each. Major items of exports from Japan are salmon, trout, and pig skins to China, and cigarettes, compounded feeds, and pearls to Korea. It is noted that Japanese exports of fisheries products both to China and Korea have been increasing in recent years.

5. Structure of Agriculture in China, Japan and Korea

In discussing the competitiveness of agriculture in China, Japan and Korea, it is important to examine the structure of agriculture in those three countries. Trade statistics above seem to show that China has comparative advantage in agriculture among the three countries. However, China has increased domestic food consumption as its economy develops rapidly. Indeed, the current food calories intake is at the same

level and that of Japan. On the other hand, domestic production of agricultural products is at the hands of a large number of small farmers in rural areas and facing difficulties to increase the productivity and efficiency.

As indicated in Table 4, two thirds of population in China lives in rural areas and arable land per farm household is only 0.55 hectare, which is much smaller than that of Japan and Korea. Land is a scarce resource compared with labor in China. Necessary is structural adjustment in agriculture and increases in job opportunities in rural area is essential to absorb the redundant labor in agricultural sector. At the same time, China needs to seek comparative advantage in different products from the traditional ones as agricultural trade is liberalized further through the WTO and FTA negotiations following the trend for globalization. China is declining comparative advantage in grain and other land-intensive crops but seems to increase exports of labor-intensive products like fruits and vegetables.

Japanese agricultural production created farm-gate sales of 9 trillion yen and value added of 5.5 trillion yen in 2000. There are 2.9 million workers engaged mainly in agricultural activities from 3.12 million farm households as of 2000. The weight in total economy, however, is declining. The share is 1.0 percent in GDP and 4.4 percent in labor force. It is noted that the number of workers engaged mainly in agriculture is less than that of farm households. This means that in some farm households there are no workers engaged mainly in agriculture. It depends on the definition of a farm household that covers many small part-time farm households.

Japan's Agricultural Census defines a farm household as one that operates on 10 ares (0.1 hectare) or more of farmland, or annual sales of agricultural products of 150,000 yen or more. Thus, it includes very small units of farm operations in which there are no full-time farm workers. Indeed, full-time farm households in which there are no

workers engaged in other employment account for only 13 percent of total farm households. On the other hand, non-commercial farm households, which operate on less than 30 ares of farmland or annual sales of less than 500,000 yen, account for 23 percent of total farm households. In addition, among part-time farm households the majority is Type II part-time farm households whose income from non-agricultural sources exceeds agricultural income and they account for 50 percent of total farm households. (Type I part-time farm households are farm households whose income from farming exceeds income from non-agricultural sources.)

Agricultural workers in Japan declined from 12million in 1960 to 2.8 million in 2000 but the number of farm households in 2000 maintains a half of that in 1960. Together with the decreases in agricultural land, this resulted in just a small increase in agricultural land per farm from 1 hectare in 1960 to 1.5 hectares in 2000. Japanese size of agricultural land per farm is so small. It is only one 127th of the United States or one 20th to 45th of European countries. This fact is indispensable to consider the comparative advantage of Japanese agriculture, particularly of land intensive sectors.

Part-time farm households have tended to concentrate on rice farming because it is a very staple crop offering a high return on only intermittent labor. Because rice marketing had been carried out through the channels determined by the government until the former Food Control Law was abolished in 1995, rice farmers were guaranteed a high price and could sell easily their harvest through agricultural cooperatives. In addition, agricultural research and extension services have traditionally concentrated on rice crop to the extent that rice cultivation has become highly standardized and there is relatively little difference in productivity between part-time and full-time farmers. The fact that the production of Japan's staple crop has been geared to part-time farming in this way is a major factor encouraging part-time

farming and impeding the consolidation of farms¹.

Korea has similar structure in agriculture to that of Japan with a small size of agricultural land per farm household that is about 1.5 ha, though the shares in GDP and labor force are much larger in Korea than in Japan. Differences are in the ratio of fulltime farm household, number of family members in farm household, composition of products in agricultural production and income of farm households.

In Japan, part-time farming is very common, particularly in rice farming, and the ratio of full-time farm households is only 14 percent in total farm households. On the other hand, full-time farm households in Korea share 65 percent in total farm households. The number of family members in Japan is still as large as 4.31, of which persons who mainly engage in farming is less than one, though. In Korea, the number of family members in farm households is 2.91 on the average. The difference between the two comes from the difference in job opportunity in rural areas. Namely, in Japan job opportunities are widely available in rural areas so that family members can be employed staying in the farm household while in Korea family members have to leave their farm households if they try to get off-farm jobs because of less job opportunities in rural areas. Meanwhile, in Korea the share of grains, mostly rice, in production is 38 percent in value, which is much greater than in Japan.

These figures result in an important difference in income of farm households between Japan and Korea. In Japan the average annual income of farm households in 2000 was 8.3 million yen, of which income from farming was only 1.1 million yen. In Korea income of farm households was 23 million won (2.3 million yen), of which two third was from agricultural activities. This fact suggests that the liberalization of

¹ For further discussions on Japanese agriculture, see, for example, Honma (1994), Honma (2000), Honma and Hayami (1989), and Okuno and Honma (eds.) (1998).

agricultural trade may cause more serious impacts on agriculture in Korea than in Japan as far as income of farm households in general is concerned. It is important to consider the political economy of agricultural policies in Japan and Korea in this regard.

6. Strategies to Take Advantage of FTA for Agriculture

It seems to need a lot of political energy to change the system and conduct reform in agricultural sector. On the other hand, FTA is considered a “must” for each country, particularly for Japan to recover from the economic recess and to seek sustainable growth in international cooperation. Agricultural reform is essential to make the C-J-K FTA fruitful.

China and Korea’s agricultural exports to Japan are expected to increase particularly in fruits, vegetables, floriculture, and some livestock products if an FTA is established among China, Japan and Korea. At the same time, Japan may also increase agricultural exports to China and Korea in some agricultural products. The direct effects of FTA are attributed to the tariff reduction and abolition but would be greater in taking into account the effects of other arrangements in non-tariff barriers like quarantine regulations.

It may happen, if the C-J-K FTA is created, that China would produce more rice fitting the taste of Japanese and Korean people, and export rice to Japan and Korea. Economically rice seems to be more important in Korea than in Japan because of heavy reliance of farming on rice and less job opportunity in rural areas in Korea. In Japan, the majority of rice farmers, who are part-time farmers, do not depend on rice as their source of income. It is necessary, though, to concentrate rice farming at the hands

of full-time large farmers and the recent guideline for rice policy reform is along it. It is the time for Japan to consider the rice policy not for protecting farmers but for the national interests.

The key to get success in negotiations on agricultural issues is to seek commodities that have comparative advantage within the sector each other and promote the so-called intra-industry trade. Rice could be an example. Rice is now highly differentiated in quality and rich consumers are willing to pay for high quality rice. It appears that in Asian countries the demand for Japonica varieties of rice is increasing rapidly as their income goes up. Japan may have comparative advantage in high quality of rice to export to some countries. Important is to consider and search comparative advantage beyond the traditional classification of agricultural products and to find strategies for exports. China-Japan-Korea FTA should be the first step for that direction in Asia.

In addition to agricultural sector, sensitive is fishery sector, particularly in Japan and Korea. Korea seems to have much advantage compared with those in Japan. Japanese fishing industry has been rapidly losing the competitiveness and the self-sufficiency ratio of edible fish declined from 71% in 1991 to 53% in 2001. Particularly, coastal fishery households are facing the difficulty to keep their income from fishery with less job opportunities out of fishing.

Japan maintains quantitative restrictions of imports of herring, cod, yellowtail, mackerel, sardine, horse mackerel, and saury to protect domestic inshore fishing. Therefore, the trade liberalization of fisheries would damage those households who are operating inshore fishing. However, Japan may have comparative advantage to Korea in cultured fisheries. Income of cultured fishery households are much higher than that of coastal fishery households, and even higher than that of commercial farm

households. Thus, the strategies for seeking intra-industry trade can be applied to fisheries as well.

On the other hand, between Japan and Korea there have been longtime issues of the Japan-Korea Fisheries Agreement. In the surrounding fishing grounds that both countries have commonly access to, sardine, mackerel, saury, crabs, and other marine products are competitively caught. Negotiations between the two countries have faced difficulties particularly on management and conservation of their common resources because they deal the issue of resource management quite differently while each country uses common resources in each of their exclusive fishing zones. From the perspectives of resource management and maintenance of regional communities, Japan enforces import restrictions and imposes relatively high tariffs on these products.

7. Concluding Remarks

Despite the difficulties, agricultural sector should be included in the list of tariff reductions and other treatment in the China-Japan-Korea FTA. It is a good opportunity to reform agriculture and fishery to be viable in international competition toward the globalization. The China-Japan-Korea FTA is not a final form of globalization but should be a step for a wider free trade area in Asia. Agricultural sector should prepare for such globalization in reform.

Agricultural policy in the world has tended to be sifted toward decoupled policy like direct payments to protect farmers if necessary. The government shall also promote to seek comparative advantage in the sector for intra-trade, assisting information gathering and investing for research and development.

In addition, it is desirable to establish a forum among Asian countries to discuss the

agricultural issues together. Not only the issue of tariff reductions but also many other problems relating to agricultural sector are to be solved in the direction toward the greater Asian FTA. It is very important, for example, for encouraging agricultural trade in Asia to harmonize the SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary) measures. We have the SPS Agreement in the WTO but the achievements in enforcing effective discipline are far behind the expectations². In particular, developing countries have failed to participate in the implementation of the Agreement as equal partners. It would be effective that Japan provides Asian developing countries with technical and financial assistance for their participation in the SPS harmonization in Asia.

In organizing such a forum to be called “Agricultural Partnership in Asia” for wider cooperation of agricultural policy and agricultural resource management with the possible partners of FTA in Asia, China, Japan and Korea should take a strong leadership and make substantial steps toward the domestic agricultural reforms as well. It may lead the region to establishing an Asian type of Common Agricultural Policy in the future.

² For the SPS issues and developing countries, see, for example, Athukorala and Jayasuriya (2003) and Finger and Schuler (2002).

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Table 1. FTA in East Asia (as of 2005)

In Action	In Negotiation
Bangkok Agreement (1976)	Japan-Korea (ROK)
AFTA (1993)	Japan-Malaysia (agreed)
Singapore-New Zealand (2001)	Japan-Thailand (agreed)
Japan-Singapore (2002)	Japan-Philippines (agreed)
Singapore-Australia (2003)	Japan-ASEAN
Singapore-USA (2004)	Japan-Indonesia
Korea (ROK)-Chile (2004)	Korea (ROK)-ASEAN
China-ASEAN (with in 10 years)	Singapore-Canada
Japan-Mexico (2005)	Singapore-Mexico
	Singapore-EFTA
	Hong Kong-New Zealand

Table 2. Intra-regional Agricultural Trade among China, Japan and Korea in 2001,
million US dollar

	Export from China	Export from Japan	Export from Korea
To China	-	179	132
Importer's statistics	-	227	113
To Japan	5648	-	1528
Importer's statistics	6419	-	1544
To Korea	1563	283	-
Importer's statistics	1549	328	-

Source: Yinchu Zeng, "Agricultural Trade Competition and Cooperation among China and Japan, Korea," paper presented in International Symposium on the WTO and Agricultural Development in East Asia, held at the University of Tokyo on December 3-4, 2003.

Table 3. Japanese Imports and Exports in Recent Years of Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery (AFF) products from China and Korea, billion yen.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
AFF imports total	7059	6914	7212	7209	7078
	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)
From China	772	824	924	950	931
(%)	(10.9)	(11.9)	(12.8)	(13.2)	(13.2)
From Korea	245	207	193	181	164
(%)	(3.5)	(3.0)	(2.7)	(2.5)	(2.3)
AFF exports total	339.4	314.9	444.2	350.9	340.2
(%)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)
To China	15.2	19.0	27.8	29.7	34.5
(%)	(4.5)	(6.0)	(6.3)	(8.5)	(10.1)
To Korea	30.3	35.0	38.3	41.9	38.3
(%)	(8.9)	(11.1)	(8.6)	(11.9)	(11.3)

Source: Japan Tariff Association, *Monthly Statistics of Trade in Japan*.

Table 4. Comparison of Agricultural Structure in Japan and Korea, 2000

	Unit	China(C)	Japan (J)	Korea (K)
Number of farm households	1000	244,320	3,120	1,384
Ratio of full-time farm hh.	%	-	13.7	65.2
Population in farm hh.	1000	853,720	13,458	4,032
Ratio to total population	%	66.6	10.6	8.7
Persons / farm household		3.49	4.31	2.91
Arable land	1000 ha	134,500	4,594	2,098
Per farm households	ha	0.55	1.47	1.52

Source: JMAFF, *Nogyo Hakusho Fuzoku Tokei-hyo* (Statistical Appendix of Agricultural

White Paper).

Korean Government, *Major Statistics of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries*.