Food, security, and the obstacles in between: the case of China, India, Japan, and South Korea

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1. Food security: definitions and issues

Among the definitions of food security available, one of the most accurate and well-established is that provided in 2001 by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) presenting food security as the condition met when "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2003). This definition, which provides the starting point for the reflections on food security in East Asia explored in this book, results from a decades-long debate on food security. In the 1974 World Food Summit discussing the volume and stability of food supplies, food security was defined as "availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices" (FAO, 2003). In 1983, FAO extended this concept to consider access by vulnerable people to available supplies. Emphasis was placed on the importance of demand and the supply side in the food security equation: "ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need" (FAO, 2003). The 1986 World Bank "Poverty and Hunger" report (FAO, 2003), focusing on the temporal dynamics of food insecurity, moved one step further stressing the difference between chronic food insecurity, associated with problems of continuing or structural poverty and low incomes, and transitory food insecurity, which involves periods of intensified pressure caused by natural disasters, economic collapse or conflict. The resulting definition presented food security in more inclusive terms as "access of all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life" (FAO, 2003).

By the mid-1990s food security established itself as a significant issue both at the individual and global levels. Importantly, the focus was no longer only on quantity, but also on the quality of food, and most notably on the supply of protein and nutritional balance. Socially and culturally determined food preferences were included in the analysis in view of the impact they exert on an active and healthy life. Specific attention was also accorded to food safety as the contamination of food by harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemical substances was recognized as an aspect inextricably linked to food security. The 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report marked a turning point in the approach to food security, linking its destiny to the concept of "human security". Unlike national security, which stressed arms-based territorial security at the expense of people's security, human security was conceived as a "new development paradigm" that "puts people at the centre of development, regards economic growth as a means and not an end, protects the life opportunities of future generations as well as the present generations and respects the natural systems on which all life depends". The components of "human security" were identified as economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (UNDP, 1994, 24-5).

All these developments concurred to refine the conceptualization of food security, as shown by the 1996 World Food Summit report stating that "Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2003). This definition was further enlarged in *The State of Food Insecurity 2001*, where food security was described as "a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2003).

Starting from the early 1980s, the growing debate among UN agencies was paralleled by attempts to reconceptualize the notion of security in the field of International Relations (IR). A turning point was the release of Barry Buzan's *People, States and Fear* (1983), raising the issue of the "underdeveloped" nature of the security question. In the bipolar context of the Cold War dominated by the security dilemma, security was mainly conceived in realistic terms, i.e. a "derivative of power" almost exclusively concerning military issues and the policy interests of specific actors. More

generally, in the field of IR there was a vast body of literature on the empirical implications of security (especially in the sub-field of Strategic Studies), but there was very limited research on conceptual aspects, despite the normative centrality of the category. As Buzan argued, many scholars tended to refer to a "simple-minded concept of security", "an understanding of national security that is inadequately aware of the contradictions latent within the concept itself, and/or inadequately aware of the fact that the logic of security almost always involves high levels of interdependence among the actors trying to make themselves secure" (Buzan, 1991, 25). While this oversimplified view rested upon a security largely conceived in national and militarized terms, the reality of the international system showed that it was time to recast the concept in broader international terms, extending its components to political, economic, societal and environmental aspects. Furthermore, it was imperative to approach security in holistic terms, without thinking of its different objects and dimensions as being unrelated.

The structural changes to the political, economic, and normative environment resulting from the end of the Cold War brought into further question the understanding of security prevalent during the bipolar era. It would come to be referred to as "traditional security". More specifically, it challenged the assumptions of Realism framing security as the priority obligation of States in an anarchic international system where uncertainty and lack of trust reign and self-help and the development of offensive military capabilities are the only means to survive (Mazzei, 2012, 73-9). Some scholars saw growing regional integration as a factor that would profoundly transform the political order based on nation-States as the universal standards of political legitimacy and the related idea that security, conceived in military terms, ought to be the primary concern of States. This scenario appeared at odds with increasing levels of interdependence, especially in Europe, where the establishment of the European Union inaugurated a new era of political interaction based on deeper supranational decision-making procedures. Other scholars drew attention to the risks and dangers associated with the process of globalization. Global warming, nuclear accidents and other threats were presented as elements beyond the control of nation-states, requiring a global level of coordination as well as a recasting of the very idea of security (Bailys, 2001, 254-5).

Overall, reconceptualization after the Cold War stressed the multidimensional nature of security. This resulted in a shift from an agenda focused on inter-State conflicts to a set of "non-traditional" issues encompassing individual and group security and economics and the

environment (Hughes, Yew Meng, 2011, 19-20). Awareness of the growing importance of non-military threats had already arisen in the 1970s, when the food crisis and two oil crises (1973, 1979) showed the dramatic impact of economic and energy-related issues on national security. The Japanese case was rather enlightening in this respect. Contractions of food production caused by weather and crude oil price shocks and the oil prices restrictions adopted by Arab countries against pro-Israeli governments exposed the country to an unprecedented vulnerability, worsened by the strategic anxieties caused by the Sino-American rapprochement, the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, Sino-Soviet rivalry and the US defeat in the Vietnam War. One of the enduring legacies of the shocks Japan experienced in the 1970s was the "comprehensive security" policy (*sōgō anzen hoshō*). As explained in a 1978 report of the National Institute for the Advancement of Research (NIRA) and the Nomura Research Institute, the policy was based on the understanding that Japan should put in place comprehensive and varied responses to national security threats according to the political, economic, or military nature of those threats (Akaha, 1991, 324-5). In the 1980s, the idea that security should be framed in more comprehensive and holistic terms was further on expanded by Buzan, as shown above. Yet, it was only after the collapse of the bipolar system that security came to be largely conceived as a versatile and genuinely multidimensional category encompassing aspects related to energy, resources, the environment, and public health.

Not surprisingly, the very term "comprehensive security" (*zongti guojia anquan guan*) has been more recently used by Xi Jinping at the first meeting of the National Security Commission in April 2014, as detailed in Siddivò's paper. In line with this reference, as the author points out, since the 2000s the concern for "non-traditional security" has been persistently evoked in Chinese official documents. It is interesting to note that attention to non-military aspects of security coexisted with a growing military budget. Chinese military expenditure progressively expanded in the 2000s. In the 2010-2019 period, the official defense budget increased from 533.3 to 1213 billion yuan (at current prices). On the other hand, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates, considering ten possible additional components outside China's official national defense budget, suggest that the actual figures should be set at 714.4 and 1660 billion yuan, for 2010 and 2019 respectively. Whatever the calculation method adopted, in 2019 China had the second highest military spending in the world, behind only the United States (SIPRI, 2021).

Another important result of the post-Cold War debate was the redefinition of the object of security. The idea that the State is the only "referent object" as far as security is concerned has been reconsidered in the light of the growing importance of cross-border transnational relations and non-State actors. The diffusion of power, as Nye framed it, namely diffusion from State to non-State actors multiplied the number of factors beyond the control of even the most powerful States. Accordingly, it was no longer enough to "think in terms of power *over* the others", but it was increasingly necessary to "think in terms of power to accomplish goals that involve power *with* others" (Nye, 2011, XVii; Nye's emphasis). Behind this profound transformation was the information revolution which lowered the barriers to entering world politics, giving greater prominence to the transnational dimension of interactions within the international system. While revealing new opportunities, this change brought with it the emergence of new threats such as those associated with cybercrimes or transnational terrorism. In such a new environment, according to Nye, the distribution of power in the world came to resemble a complex three-dimensional chess game. On the top chessboard, largely unipolar and dominated by the United States, lies military power. The middle chessboard, on the other hand, is multipolar, characterized by the coexistence of major players such as the United States, Europe, Japan and China, plus other emerging ones. Finally, the bottom chessboard is the realm of "transnational relations that cross borders outside of government control and it includes nonstate actors as diverse as bankers electronically transferring sums larger than most national budgets at one extreme and terrorists transferring weapons or hackers threatening cybersecurity at the other" (Nye, 2011, XV).

Against the background of the post-Cold War debate on security and the promotion of the above-mentioned concept of "human security", food security gained greater prominence in international politics. World food price inflation (2007-2008) further confirmed the crucial importance of a constant and affordable food supply. In contrast to the prolonged slump in commodity prices from 1995 to 2002, the FAO food price index rose by 7% in 2006 and 27% in 2007. The increase continued in the first half of 2008, when the FAO food price index averaged 24% above that of 2007 and 57% above 2006. Food price increases, accompanied by higher price volatility, varied significantly from one commodity to another. While almost all agricultural product prices increased in nominal terms, international prices of cereals, oilseeds or dairy products increased far more dramatically than the

prices of products such as coffee or cocoa and raw materials such as cotton or rubber (FAO, 2009, 3-8).

The 2007-8 food crisis produced several negative consequences exacerbated by the concomitant financial crisis and global recession. It affected consumers, contributed to rising inflation, and caused higher food import bills. High food prices had the greatest impact on consumers in developing countries, where food can account for 50% and up to 70-80% of the household budget. While in some cases adjusting the consumption pattern was the answer to soaring prices, in others, social unrest occurred and more often in urban areas where dependence on imported food and exposure to international food prices is greater. Riots in Burkina Faso in February 2008 were followed by those in Cameroon (March 5, 2008), Côte d'Ivoire (March 31, 2008), Haiti (April 1-20, 2008), Somalia (May 5, 2008) and Mauritania (August 9, 2008). Whereas poverty, social injustice, unemployment, and other factors concurred to foment protests — which in some cases also led to the overthrow of the government (Haiti, Mauritania) — spikes in food prices played a key role in setting the stage for the revolts (Holland, 2012). It was also in the developing countries that the effects of inflation were more tangible and damaging. In this case too, the greater share occupied by food in the household budget played an important part, as it heightened the risk of fueling general inflation. Lastly, higher food prices on world markets resulted in higher food import bills and problems in the balance of payments. In 2007, the total cost of food imports for developing countries was 33% higher than in 2006, and annual food import bills for low-income food-deficit countries subsequently doubled their 2000 level (FAO, 2009, 25-9).

In addition to the specific consequences for the food system briefly presented above, the 2007-8 food crisis had a dramatic impact on the global perception of food security and the way it was addressed in the States' agendas. Firstly, the crisis abruptly swept away well-established expectations concerning the availability of cheap food. Until the crisis broke out, real prices of food had been spiraling downward for decades, as a result of technological advances and widespread subsidies in OECD countries. Indeed, up until 2006, the real cost of the global food basket had fallen by almost half over the previous thirty years, with prices of many products falling on average by 2 to 3% per annum in real terms (FAO, 2009, 7). Secondly, the political effects of the crisis dramatically showed the costs of food security failure. The 2008 riots were replicated on a larger scale in 2010-2011, when peaks in global food prices were recorded once again.

Protests and changes of government took place in North Africa and the Middle East, spreading social disruption and instability. Just as in 2008, the protests were followed by "land grabs", large-scale acquisitions of land to grow food for export to foreign markets – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. While it would be inappropriate to deterministically seek causal links between food prices and sociopolitical instability (Barrett, 2013), the 2007-8 food crisis and the so-called Arab spring of 2011 unequivocally showed the relation between food security and political volatility.

Thirdly, the crises brought to the forefront the issue of policy response to food insecurity. Against this background, "sovereignty" came to be regarded as the solution to the uncertainties deriving from the availability, production and supply of food. On the one hand, States called for greater determination in managing resources affecting food security often matching these efforts with attempts to promote "gastronationalism". Food production, distribution, and consumption were exploited to create and sustain the emotive power of national attachment, as the chapters about the case of Japan and South Korea in this book show. On the other hand, workers, scholars and public intellectuals, farmers and peasant movements, NGOs, and human rights activists invoked food sovereignty in the name of "the right of peoples to democratically control or determine the shape of their food system, and to produce sufficient and healthy food in culturally appropriate and ecologically sustainable ways in and near their territory" (Shattuck, Schiavoni, VanGelder, 2018). At the same time, the vast impulse given to mega Free Trade Agreements (FTA) such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, suggested that market liberalization would play an increasing role in the global food system. The very fact that these cross-regional trade deals of unprecedented scope proliferated and established themselves as a significant trend in the international trade system exposed the limits of the "sovereignty" option, while strengthening the idea that international trade could be an ally in making the food system stabler and efficient, bringing greater absolute gains for all.

More recently, the Covid pandemic and the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine have put food security at the center of the debate once again. After Covid-19 food insecurity became an issue in many countries across the globe (Martina, 2020). The pessimist outlook for global food production and supply worsened still further after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, when millions of Ukrainians became internally displaced, and many others

fled to neighboring countries and elsewhere. This had severe repercussions on the agricultural sector both at the national and international levels. Food shortages and lack of access to water were followed by disruptions to local and global food value chains in which both Ukraine and the Russian Federation play an important role. Both are among the most important producers and net exporters of agricultural products of cereal grains, oil seeds and fertilizers in the world. More importantly, among the countries that are highly dependent on Ukrainian and Russian staple food supplies many are particularly vulnerable since they belong to the Least Developed Country and Low-Income Food-Deficit Country groups, according to FAO (FAO, 2022).

2. China, India, Japan, and South Korea: four key-countries in the global food security debate

The multidimensional nature of food security — most notably, its intertwining with demographic, environmental, energy and economic issues — emerges conspicuously in South and East Asia, where the countries discussed in this miscellaneous volume are located: China, India, Japan, and South Korea. The aim of the book is to analyze how food security has been addressed, with an emphasis on the post-bipolar period. The focus is on policy responses rather than on the analysis of economic and social drivers of food insecurity. How did the four countries approach food security? What policies did they put in place? How were food security related issues framed in the national security policy? What implications did this have for discourses on national identity? The authors answer these questions combining social science methodologies with extensive use of first-hand sources in the original language. The choice of considering the cases of China, India, Japan, and South Korea is driven by two sets of reasons. First, the four countries play a decisive role in the global food security debate because of their geoeconomic and geopolitical weight. Second, they share two distinctive characteristics: assigning a central role to the State in the food security sphere, and using the "securitization" of issues related to the production and availability of food as a discursive practice for self-legitimation purposes.

China, India, Japan, and South Korea represent different aspects of the food security environments characterizing East and Southeast Asia. Japan and South Korea, along with Taiwan and Singapore, belong to an area boasting a consolidated economic development, where availability of, and

access to, food is not a critical issue. On the contrary in "emerging Asia", which contains Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, food security still ranks as a priority in the welfare and political agenda. Policy actions and investments in the large-scale development of plantation-based food production improved food security in these countries, but much remains to be done. Even worse is the situation in "least developed Asia," including Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, and East Timor. In this area, the success of economic modernization and growing productivity in rice cultivation coexist with important challenges to food security, which makes access to food a serious concern for a significant portion of the urban and rural population. Since the world rice economy centers in the region, the group of countries mentioned above is crucial to the global food security debate. Suffice it to recall that it includes the two largest rice exporters, Thailand and Vietnam, and the two largest rice importers, Indonesia and the Philippines (Timmer, 2013, 453).

China and India, home to the two oldest Asian civilizations, occupy a distinctive position in this regional setting. Despite the persistence of pockets of poverty, the two countries boast considerable economic development with a rapid pace of growth. This noticeably affects resource demands, giving China and India a central role in the global food commodity demand and supply dynamics. In India, food security has been a priority since the country gained independence in the wake of the Bengali famine. The economic precarity of a very large number of Indians and an extremely low level of human development formed the background of the policy actions put in place to tackle food insecurity over the last few decades. More recently, environmental challenges have added a further complication to the scenario. As ably explained in Maiorano's contribution, the progress made so far in ensuring production, supply and access to food is exemplified by "two extremes": the major achievement of preventing famines and the major failure to ensure minimum adequate nutrition. In other words, over the last few decades Indian food security policies have focused on preventing hunger, while less attention has been paid to preventing malnourishment.

In China concern for food security surged in the early 2000s, when "non-traditional security" issues rose in importance in the agenda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As stressed in Siddivò's contribution, the reasons behind the "securitization" of the matters regarding production, supply and access to food go beyond the dynamics of trade and economics, touching on domestic and foreign politics and, ultimately, the legitimation of the CCP. What is remarkable, as the author points out, is the fact that the

Chinese leadership anticipated anxieties about a probable food crisis well before the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian War brought food security to the center of global attention. The far-sightedness of this approach as well as the idea that it is up to the State to ensure an adequate food supply are neither a distinctive characteristic of the Xi Jinping administration neither of Communist China, as a longue-durée perspective on the history of the Middle Kingdom suggests. In Imperial China — where the emperor was considered the Son of Heaven and the father of the people ruling under the Mandate of Heaven — the State played a major role in ensuring famine control and managing factors affecting food insecurity, such as flood and droughts. The State determined water rights and encouraged the cultivation and storage of rice and other grains. Whenever he failed in fulfilling his duty to ensure adequate production and availability of food, the ruler was sanctioned in accordance with the Mandate of Heaven doctrine, which entitled subjects to rebel against a ruler who does not guarantee a good government that brings about prosperity, peace, and social stability. It is no coincidence that the succession of dynasties was punctuated with droughts, flood and other calamities causing severe food shortages (Vogelsang, 2014, 27-362).

In ancient and premodern Korea and Japan, where China's centralized bureaucratic State was adopted as the model, there was a similar concern for susceptibility to risks affecting food security. Indeed, the physical and historical setting was rather different, because of the smaller scale of the two countries and the way they both adapted Chinese institutions to the local environment. Yet, the notion that the State was to be extensively involved in natural-resource management and put in place long-term policies to ensure an adequate supply of food was as important as in China. With a capacity for maintaining and improving natural resources in a way that today we would not hesitate to define as "sustainable", Japan was a case in point. Japanese rulers were acutely conscious of the limited size of their island nation and the scarcity of resources. Accordingly, they conceived development in a way that would ensure their best use, while limiting dependence on countries abroad. This is true of the Edo period (1603-1868), when the use of natural resources reached a degree rarely seen in the world at that time (Hayami, 2004, 7), but also of the more remote Nara period (710-784), when regional chronicles (*fudōki*) describing the natural features of an area were compiled in compliance with a decree of the Imperial court issued in 713 C.E. (Manieri, 2022, 21-31). The accurate survey of the morphology of the territory, the extant resources and the food products contained in *fudōki* were

instrumental in territorial control. What is more important here, it was also fundamental in allowing the government to gain important information about the production of food and its availability throughout the national territory.

As shown in Farina's contribution, the provision of a stable and sufficient supply of food is still an important theme in the Japanese political agenda. Far from being left to the regulatory hand of competition and the market, this task has been considered a chief prerogative of the State both in modern and contemporary Japan. Strong reliance on food imports reinforced this trend, prompting the State to improve food security by focusing on self-sufficiency and raising high trade barriers. After 2013 this approach was redefined in view of the "Japan is back" strategy providing for an increase in agri-food exports and a promotion of *washoku* (the traditional cuisine of Japan). Despite these efforts, as the author points out, Japan's food self-sufficiency rate barely reached 37 percent in 2020, the lowest among the most industrialized countries.

South Korea is apparently on the safe side, when it comes to food self-sufficiency, at least if one considers the indicators of "The Global Food Security Index" (2021 edition) Milano mentions in her contribution. However, as the author argues, many factors strip this honorable ranking of meaning, such as import dependency, the increasing rate of population poverty, and the scarcity of local labor in rural areas. As happened in Japan, the State played a major role in addressing food security, with an eye to the nationalist potential of the issue. Since the late 1980s, food security has been addressed in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it has been perceived as an imminent threat to national sovereignty and identity. The proposed solution was a strategy aimed at food self-sufficiency by controlling consumption choices. On the other hand, especially since the 1990s, food security was framed as a potential risk to national security. In this respect, the case of South Korea presents interesting similarities with that of Japan, where the structural factors affecting food security are perceived as menaces threatening the nation and its people.

As emerges from the analysis carried out above, China, India, Japan, and South Korea are four key-countries in the global food security debate. Because of their rapid pace of growth, China and India play a central role in the global food commodity market. China, along with Japan and South Korea, is also one of the three largest East Asian economies contributing to making Asia and Pacific the fastest growing region in the world, accounting for around a third of the global economy's GDP. Despite its high rate of inequality and vulnerabilities, India is a key player in the regional and global economy. In terms of population, an indicator that is not at all marginal in

food security issues, the group includes two demographic giants, China and India, with a population over one billion people, and two smaller countries, Japan and South Korea, with populations above 125 million and 50 million people respectively.

Material factors aside, the four countries form a rather homogeneous object of analysis due to two more aspects mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph. First, China, Japan and South Korea share a common understanding of the role of the State as a major actor in the sphere of food security. Despite the different patterns of State-market interactions they represent, these three countries consider market competition and free trade to be ancillary components of the State response to food insecurity. Moreover, what is specific about the approach of China, Japan and South Korea to food security is the long-term orientation of their policies. In India, as shown in Maiorano's contribution, State commitment has been much more sensitive to political and economic contingencies, not necessarily associated with a focus on long-term targets. Comparing India's case with the others helps clarify the specificities of the four countries' paths to food security.

A second shared characteristic is the distinctive way issues regarding food production and supply were "securitized". The concept of "securitization" was introduced by Ole Wæver and developed by the Copenhagen School, as Siddivò explains. According to Wæver's argument, policy-makers place issues within the category of security through the "speech act". "By definition, something is a security problem when the élites declare it to be so" (Wæver 2010, 185). In turn, securitization empowers policy-makers to mobilize necessary resources in pursuit of their objectives (Hughes, Lai, 2011, 22-3). While this process is not specific to China, Japan, South Korea and India, the way policy-makers included food security in the realm of policy discussion reveals a shared attitude, a similar attempt to exploit the issue for self-legitimating purposes.

In China, objective factors (trade frictions with some of China's top exporters of grain; humanitarian crises in some African and Latin American countries, and growing divergence between China and the EU) have challenged food supply, providing a factual justification for mobilization. However, as the chapter shows, the CCP has been instrumentalizing the issue for political ends since the 2000s, capitalizing on the advantages of an environment where the concept of "threat" dominates the public discourse and calls for exceptional measures, all of which is far easier than in well-established democracies. In South Korea, State management of food security-related issues has gone hand in hand with the process of building a

national identity and the legitimation of the economic and political establishment. Pak's campaigns discouraging the consumption of rice in favor of wheat and dairy products, the promotion of "tongil" (reunification) rice, the call to buy and eat Korean products in the name of the slogan "Korean is good" as a counterbalance to the liberalization policy in the primary sector, together with a constant appeal to "Koreanness" are proof of this, as documented by Milano. In Japan, food security remains a highly sensitive issue associated with notions of "threats" from outside and discourses on national identity. As Farina argues, concerns about reliance on food imports have been a constant theme in the political agenda of the Liberal Democratic Party throughout the postwar years. After the launch of the "Japan is back" strategy, food self-sufficiency began to be framed in different terms and emphasis was placed on liberalization through FTA. Yet, once again, food was understood to be a crucial component of a national discourse on "Japaneseness", which was supposed to legitimate and strengthen the party in power, as confirmed by the promotion of "washoku" as a tool of "gastrodiplomacy" in a way perfectly consistent with the tenets of Abe's rhetoric on Japan as a "beautiful country" (*utsukushii kuni*). In India, the link between national identity and food security policies was much more nuanced. On the one hand, the starting point for food policies (i.e. the economic and human development conditions of a large portion of the population) was so radically different that the margin for exploiting the nationalistic potential of food security issues was extremely limited. On the other hand, as Maiorano observes, at different times pressures from upper caste Hindus influenced access to food with considerable implications for the population.

The wealth of data collected and the authors' analyses provide precious insights into the approaches of China, Japan, South Korea, and India to food security. In a historical conjuncture marked by the complex implications of the Covid pandemic and the dramatic effects of the Ukraine war, looking at the experience of these four countries which play a decisive role in the global food security debate is not only a prerogative of area-studies specialists, but a compelling duty for all.

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