

Food Security in Brazil: A Shiology Perspective

By Walter Belik for the IFZ Blog | March 23, 2026

Reflecting on poverty, food security, and health promotion in Brazil gains greater depth when situated within a broad historical arc and, at the same time, interpreted through a perspective capable of restoring the unity of the food experience. Over the decades, Western thought has repeatedly shifted its focus in response to economic, social, and technological transformations. Yet a persistent challenge remains: the difficulty of coherently integrating production, distribution, and consumption. In this context, Shiology offers a particularly fertile interpretive framework by restoring food to its status as a total practice, inseparable from social life.

A key turning point came with Josué de Castro in the 1940s, when he introduced the concept of “hidden hunger.” By demonstrating that food deprivation extends beyond caloric insufficiency to include qualitative deficiencies, he moved the debate beyond traditional metrics. From that moment onward, the food issue was continuously reframed. The advance of urbanization in subsequent decades raised concerns about food supply; later, land concentration led to proposals for agrarian reform as a structural response. In the 1970s, attention shifted to distribution systems, while the inflationary crisis of the 1980s brought the cost of living to the forefront.

The 1990s introduced a new food regime characterized by the retrenchment of public policies and the liberalization of markets. In the early 21st century, international commitments once again placed hunger eradication at the center of the global agenda, though results have fallen short of expectations. Gradually, the debate expanded to include new issues such as diet quality, food homogenization, and the environmental impacts of large-scale production. While necessary, this expansion has also contributed to analytical fragmentation.

At this juncture, Shiology proposes a decisive shift. By starting from the eater—the concrete subject who eats—it reorganizes the problem around lived experience, without separating physiological needs, cultural practices, and material conditions. Food, conceptualized as *shi*, is not merely an object; it includes the very act of eating, forming a continuum that connects body and world. The concept of *Shiance* further expands this understanding by encompassing the entire set of food-related practices—from production to consumption—understood as parts of a single relational reality.

This approach brings into sharp focus the tensions within the Brazilian case. A significant reduction in undernutrition coexists with a marked rise in obesity, creating a scenario that defies simplistic explanations. This is a configuration in

which access to food is not denied in quantitative terms but remains compromised in its qualitative dimension. The food environment—understood as the interplay among production, pricing, regulation, and sociocultural context—strongly shapes the range of available choices.

The so-called “triple monotony” of contemporary food systems helps illuminate this process. The concentration of production in a few crops reduces agricultural diversity; the standardization of animal production reinforces this trend; and the homogenization of diets, driven by ultra-processed foods, impoverishes the food experience. In Brazil, these dynamics are intensified by rapid urbanization, which transforms consumption habits and reshapes food supply systems.

From a Shiology perspective, it becomes clear that eating behavior does not stem solely from individual choices but is deeply conditioned by structural factors. When fresh foods are less accessible and more expensive, while industrialized products are widely available and heavily promoted, consumption patterns tend to follow this logic. In this context, promoting health requires more than nutritional guidance; it calls for a reorganization of the conditions that shape everyday food practices.

Public policy thus assumes a central role. The concept of “Shi order” provides a demanding criterion for evaluation, taking into account not only economic efficiency but also the capacity to promote health, sustainability, and equity. In Brazil, past experiences have shown that state action can significantly reduce hunger. However, current challenges call for a deeper qualitative advancement of these policies.

It is necessary to encourage diversified production, strengthen local food supply networks, and expand access to fresh foods, particularly in urban areas. At the same time, regulating the ultra-processed food industry becomes increasingly important, especially with regard to advertising and product composition. Together, these measures can contribute to building a food environment more conducive to health.

Technological transformations introduce new possibilities. Digital platforms can shorten distribution chains and bring producers and consumers closer together, while also valuing regional food identities. However, their potential depends on consistent public guidance to ensure quality, transparency, and inclusiveness.

The cultural dimension of food deserves particular attention. Eating involves memory, belonging, and forms of social interaction that cannot be reduced to nutritional parameters. In Brazil, culinary diversity constitutes a living heritage whose preservation can play an important role in promoting healthier diets.

Integrating this heritage into public policies enhances their effectiveness and strengthens social bonds.

Within this framework, the relationship between poverty and food emerges as multifaceted. Income remains a decisive factor, but it is not sufficient. Diet quality, stability of access, and cultural appropriateness are equally determining dimensions. Shiology allows these elements to be integrated without reducing them to isolated variables, offering a more comprehensive conceptual foundation.

The food issue, therefore, goes beyond the dichotomy between scarcity and abundance. It concerns the way collective life is organized, encompassing economy, culture, health, and the environment. By placing the act of eating back at the center of reflection, Shiology invites a more attentive understanding of human experience.

The simple question of whether one has eaten thus takes on a broader meaning. It refers to the quality of the relationships that sustain existence—the ways in which food is produced, distributed, and shared. Rethinking food security and health promotion policies from this perspective implies recognizing that eating is not only a vital necessity but also a form of participation in a shared world. It is here that the possibility emerges for a food system that is more just, more diverse, and more attuned to the complexity of social life.