

Food pedagogies in Japan: From the implementation of the Basic Law on Food Education to Fukushima

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Japan's Basic Law on Food Education (Shokuiku kihonhō) was enacted in June 2005 as a response to various concerns related to food and nutrition, such as food scandals, an increase in obesity and lifestyle-related diseases and an assumed loss of traditional food culture. The Law defines food education (shokuiku) rather vaguely as the acquisition of knowledge about food and the ability to make appropriate food choices. In this paper, my focus is the impact of shokuiku on discourses about food safety in relation to the nuclear disaster. I will address the following problems: Firstly, the assumption that 'domestic food products are the safest in the world'; secondly, the power relations between municipal authorities, producers and consumers in Japan; and thirdly, the question of whether food pedagogies can adequately address food safety concerns after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. I argue that, although the Basic Law offers a holistic approach to food in theory,

with its focus on nutrition and the emphasis on domestic food, food pedagogies, practiced according to the Basic Law cannot adequately deal with the food safety problems that Japanese consumers face after the Fukushima nuclear accident. Because of the ignorance regarding food safety issues from official sides, Japanese consumers are left with a lack of awareness for these issues. Therefore, stakeholders who are not included in the state's shokuiku campaign, such as consumer co-ops and Civil Radioactivity Measurement Stations try to provide knowledge about food to enable Japanese consumers to make appropriate food choices.

Introduction

In March 2011, Northern Japan was hit by a triple disaster – earthquake, tsunami and nuclear catastrophe – that killed almost 19,000 people and left Japan with the worst nuclear catastrophe since Chernobyl. The aftermath of this nuclear crisis especially threatens the safety of domestic food products. When the nuclear disaster at the power plant Fukushima Daiichi occurred in March 2011, large amounts of radioactive materials were released into the atmosphere and into the sea and groundwater. Only a few days after the accident, radioactive iodine was discovered in vegetables and milk. Today, caesium in food poses the largest problem to farmers from Fukushima and its neighbouring prefectures, as well as to consumers in the entire country. The Japanese government set provisional safety levels in late March 2011, which were revised and lowered in April 2012. The exposure limits for caesium in normal food, such as vegetables, grain or meat, were lowered from 500 Becquerel per kilogram to 100 Bq/kg (MHLW, 2012). More than one year after the nuclear disaster, irradiated food detected still exceeds old and new safety standards (*Mainichi Shinbun* 29.03.2012).

In April 2005, the Basic Law on Food Education (*shokuiku kihonhō*) was enacted. This was against the background of various concerns related to food and nutrition, such as numerous food safety scandals, an increase in obesity and lifestyle-related diseases, and the fear of the loss of traditional food culture. It was developed by the Cabinet Office (Naikakufu) in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). In 2006, the Diet passed a five-year Basic Plan for the Promotion of Food Education (*shokuiku suishin kihon keikaku*). In 2011, the second Basic Plan was released.

Shokuiku is defined in the Basic Law as ‘the acquisition of knowledge about food and of the ability to make appropriate food choices’ (Naikakufu, 2005). The term *shokuiku* is usually translated into English as ‘food education’, although alternative terms such as ‘nurturing through eating’ (Takeda, 2008) exist as well. But even authors (Kojima 2011, Kimura 2011, Mah 2010) who use the translation *food education* point out that ‘*shokuiku* is not limited to just a food education or nutritional guidelines’ (Kojima 2011: 50). Since the English-language term *food education* is too reminiscent of the rather limited nutritional and dietary education in Anglo-American countries, I prefer to use the term food pedagogies when I refer to the very broad approach to *shokuiku* envisioned within the Basic Law, as food and nutrition (*shoku*) are broadly defined in Article 6 of the law as ‘all kinds of processes ranging from food production to food consumption’ (Naikakufu, 2005).

However, I argue that, although the Basic Law offers a holistic approach to food in theory, with its focus on nutrition and the emphasis on domestic food, food pedagogies, practiced according to the Basic Law cannot adequately deal with the food safety problems that Japanese consumers face. On the contrary, with the law’s emphasis on firstly, domestic food, and secondly, the urge to support

the farmers in the Tōhoku area after the triple disaster (Naikakufu, 2012); *shokuiku* actually endangers the health of Japanese citizens. This pro-producer stance has a long tradition in Japanese agricultural and consumer politics (MacLachlan 2002, Mulgan 2005a, b). In addition, the long held assumption that Japanese food is safer than imported food makes it difficult to sensitise Japanese consumers to alternatives. The paper concludes that in the context of the nuclear disaster the Japanese government is unable to achieve the goal it has formulated in the Basic Law and its related action plans: to provide adequate knowledge about food to enable the Japanese citizen to make appropriate food choices. This paper is based on the analysis of various materials including laws, national and local plans for the improvement of food pedagogies, articles by social scientists critically commenting on food pedagogies, as well as insights from a recent qualitative consumer survey I conducted in Summer 2011, and qualitative interviews with local nutritionists, food distribution networks' members and farmers I carried out in February 2012 in Japan.

Principles of the Basic Law

Food pedagogies (*shokuiku*) comprise intellectual (*chiiku*), moral (*tokuiku*), and physical (*taiiku*) education. The physical aspect of education involves the concept of healthy nutrition. According to the Basic Law, this means a regular and well-balanced diet that consists of at least three meals a day as well as sufficient exercise. On the moral level, the Basic Law focuses on teaching children to learn gratitude towards food, nature, and everybody involved in food production. The intellectual aspect of these food pedagogies includes the acquisition of food-related knowledge (Shimomura, 2007). The wide perspective on food, however, does not mean that the Basic Law and its related campaigns aim at empowering consumers by providing knowledge about the ills of the modern food system, as Kimura (2010: 477) points out. *Shokuiku* rather focuses on 'creating consumers' who

make the right purchasing decisions but does not name and address actually existing neoliberalising processes of the food system that are also responsible for food safety problems. This becomes especially evident when private food corporations such as supermarkets or fast-food chains such as Aeon or Mos Burger participate in *shokuiku* activities (ibid).

The aims of the Basic Law are:

1. the establishment of a national campaign for the promotion of food pedagogies
2. the implementation of a state-supported system for the protection of 'traditional Japanese food culture'
3. the enforcement of measures to ensure food security
4. the promotion of healthy nutrition (Kobe Toshi Mondai Kenkyūsho, 2006).

These aims are to be implemented through co-operation between the state, the local authorities, food-related businesses, farmers, educators, and families (Naikakufu 2005: Article 9-13). The Japanese government claims that, from an international perspective, the law is a unique concept to Japan, because of its wide approach to food pedagogies compared to the West (MAFF 2006: 4).

Criticism of the Basic Law

The Basic Law has been criticised on a number of counts. First, for attempting to intervene in the private sphere of Japanese citizens; secondly, for its anachronistic image of Japanese society, family, and gender relations (Kojima 2011, Kimura 2011) and thirdly, for its neoliberal approach (Sasaki, 2006). This neoliberal approach, according to Shimomura (2008), becomes evident, because the law mainly sets only responsibilities for local authorities and citizens. According to Kojima (2011) *shokuiku* is merely understood as a responsibility for citizens, but not as a civil right. This means that, for instance, Japanese citizens are held responsible for consuming more

domestically grown foods in order to raise the self-sufficiency ratio out of a 'sense of responsibility for the nation', although domestic food is more expensive, but the Japanese government does not offer assistance to compensate citizens for their expenses (Kojima 2011: 54). In addition, these neoliberal tendencies are also met by a sometimes acrimonious nationalism, as Takeda (2008) has detected in the law.

In this paper, my focus is the impact of *shokuiku* on discourses about food safety in relation to the nuclear disaster. Overall, the Japanese government has been harshly criticised for acting too late; for denying the dangers emitting from irradiated food; and for their weak attitude towards testing during the last year (Foodwatch, 2011). Moreover, government officials encouraged Japanese consumers to buy farm products from Fukushima and the neighbouring prefectures to support disaster-stricken farmers. The government's stance on the food safety problem tended to favour producers and not to consider consumers' interests. The following statement by a MAFF official illustrates this: 'We hear the calls for more disclosure, but revealing more detailed data would just hurt too many farmers' (Fackler, 2012).

A columnist from the Kyūshū newspaper *Saga Shinbun* gets at these issues in June 2011:

Food safety and the carefree consumption of food are important topics of *shokuiku*. However, due to radiation released from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant we now look at our domestic food products that we thought of as the safest in the world, with increasing concern. [...] At the end of last month, the Board of education [BOE] in Kashima city in Ibaraki prefecture published the following information concerning school lunch: 'we are obliged to use local food, but at the moment we prefer to order ingredients from West Japan.' Hereupon the BOE was criticized by local farmers for supporting harmful rumours (*fuhyō higaï*). Shortly after, the content of the BOE's website was revised as follows: 'We cannot guarantee all local food products' compliance

with safety standards, so we use food from West Japan instead of those local food products. We use those local products as ingredients whose safety is ensured' [...] According to the second Basic Plan on Food Pedagogies, the focus of food pedagogies in the next five years lies on 'the transfer of knowledge about food and the ability to choose food, and to promote food pedagogies that enable people to practice a healthy diet. Tasks [of food pedagogies] include the discussion of the ties between families and the regions, with complex topics such as the food self-sufficiency ratio, but the most urgent problem at the moment is the radioactive contamination of food. (Taira, 2011)

This quote refers to three related problems I will address in the following: Firstly, the assumption that 'domestic food products are the safest in the world'; secondly, the power relations between municipal authorities, producers and consumers in Japan; and thirdly, the question of whether food pedagogies can adequately address food safety concerns after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The Basic Law on Food Education (*shokuiku kihonhō*), defines its *shokuiku* as 'the acquisition of knowledge about food and of the ability to make appropriate food choices' (Naikakufu, 2005). But a critical question is: who is supposed to provide this knowledge? Pedagogy has been defined by sociologist of education, Basil Bernstein (2000: 78) as: a 'process whereby somebody(s) acquires new forms or develops existing forms of conduct, knowledge, practice and criteria from somebody(s) or something deemed to be an appropriate provider and evaluator'. But we need to ask: who are these appropriate providers and evaluators in the Japanese case? In particular, whose interests are they serving in relation to the threats posed by irradiated food? To answer these questions, I will examine three different groups of stakeholders at the centre of food pedagogies in Japan: municipalities, food producers and consumer co-operatives. I will compare their current practices with the goals envisaged by the Japanese government in the Basic Law.

The Basic Law on Food Pedagogies

Food pedagogies, food safety and food security

Before comparing the approaches of the aforementioned three groups of stakeholders, I will provide a brief outline of how ideas about ‘food safety’ are presented as interconnected with ‘food security’ in the Basic Law. This is vital to an understanding of the difficulties most of these stakeholders and the Japanese government have had with taking a clear stance against irradiated food from the affected areas in the aftermath of the disaster. According to FAO (2003: 29) ‘food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life’. Food safety refers to an aspired absence of health risks in relation with the consumption of food (Busch, 2004).

In essence, the Law and its related plans promote the image of domestic food as safe. In addition, they make it the responsibility of the individual consumer to eat more domestic food products, especially rice. They do this as a solution to the low food self-supply capacity. Let me quote from Articles 7 and 8 (Naikakufu, 2005) that deal with the food self-sufficiency ratio and food safety:

Contribution to an increase of the food self-sufficiency ratio

Article 7: Food pedagogies have to promote our country’s outstanding traditional food culture, nutrition that revitalises regional characteristics, and food production and consumption that takes into account its balance with the environment; it has to further the citizens’ understanding of the situation of our country’s food demand and supply, and through the planning of exchange between food producers and consumers, it contributes to the revitalisation of farm and fishing communities and to the increase of our country’s food self-sufficiency ratio.

The role of food pedagogies for securing food safety

Article 8: Food pedagogies mean, given that securing food safety and a carefree consumption are the base of a healthy nutrition, to offer a wide array of information about food and in the first

place on food safety and to exchange views on these issues. By furthering citizens' knowledge and their understanding about food, [food pedagogies] aim for citizens who realise an appropriate nutrition and who approach this aim by a positive stance towards international co-operation.

Interestingly, food pedagogies, according to the law, only promote *knowledge* about food safety. The law does not address the need for better controls, higher safety standards or labelling. Since the 1990s, MAFF, one of the initiating ministries involved in the law, promotes the preservation of Japan's food self-supply capacity. It claims that this is necessary, in order to ensure the stable supply of food at stable prices and maintaining food safety (Mulgan 2005b: 165). Japan's food self-sufficiency rate has decreased steadily from 73% (based on calories) in 1965 to 40% in 1998. Since then, it has stabilised on around 40% as average level (MAFF, 2011).

According to Kojima (2011: 51), the term *shokuiku* itself was introduced to National Diet Proceedings in 2003 by Takebe Tsutomu, then head of the MAFF. He had learned the term from journalist Sunada Toshiko, who had used the word to refer to nutritional and dietary education in foreign countries. From that time, the term appeared in MAFF publications as one of its policy objectives. Before this, due to agricultural protectionism and high food prices, the interests of farmers and consumers were perceived as conflicting. Politically, the discursive combination of producers' interests and consumers' interests, according to Mulgan (2005b: 165), became necessary in order to justify MAFF's rejection of agricultural trade liberalisation. Due to the lack of competition on the food market that this rejection caused, food prices in Japan stayed high. Consequently, to justify high food prices for domestic food produce, consumers had to believe that these products were safer than imported foods. However, since 2000, Japanese consumers were faced with successive food scandals around domestic food safety. Most of them involved Japanese producers such as Snowbrand, Meathope

or Fujiya (Kawagishi 2008: 17). Nevertheless, when in 2008 the so-called *gyōza jiken* occurred and frozen dumplings filled with meat from China caused food poisoning to several Japanese consumers, the blame was laid on Chinese producers only, although safety inspections by their Japanese trading partners were also insufficient, because they valued low costs over safety issues (ibid. 104). In a qualitative survey I conducted among 60 consumers from Kyūshū, Kansai and Kantō in 2011, 51% still responded to the question ‘What do you think about imported food from China?’ with ‘I would rather not buy/ eat it’.

Takeda (2008) also points out this form of nationalism inherent within the Basic Law on Food Pedagogies. Despite the acknowledgment of the hybrid nature of Japanese food within Japanese society, its particular Japanese elements are singled out and positively opposed to the non-Japanese elements. This becomes evident when Western-style food is considered unhealthy, while Japanese-style food is referred to as a ‘dietary pattern that [...] suits Japan’s climate and culture’ (MAFF, 2006). Ohnuki-Thierney (1995: 232) elaborates on how “amid a flood of Western foods, the Japanese continue to reaffirm their sense of self by reconstructing their own ‘traditional’ food. Rice is the defining feature of the ‘traditional Japanese cuisine’.” However, the ‘purity’ of Japanese white rice has been threatened – from the perspective of MAFF officials and farmers – by trade deregulation since the 1990s when, for the first time, rice from Southeast Asia entered Japan and was sometimes even mixed with Japanese rice.

However, more than half of the food Japanese consumers buy and eat is imported. According to JETRO (2010), this particularly concerns seafood, meat, grains and vegetables. About a quarter of all imported fresh and processed foods originate from the US, while 20% is imported from China. This problem is also addressed as ‘the problem of the dependence on food from overseas’ (Naikakufu, 2005)

in the introduction of the Basic Law, where it is mentioned as one of the problems that have to be solved by *shokuiku*. It therefore is quite surprising when the mass media ascribe problems related to food safety solely to imported foods, as the example of the gyōza incident demonstrates.

Shokuiku practitioners

Having provided a brief introduction to some of the key terms and politics in the Law, I now provide a summary of each of the three ‘deliverers’ or ‘pedagogues’.

Municipalities

The two key terms I am using are municipalities and prefectures. By these terms, I mean different levels of government on local and more regional levels. Japan is divided into 47 prefectures which each consist of cities, towns and villages – the municipalities. In Article 10, the Basic Law defines the role of the municipalities and prefectures (Naikakufu, 2005). They are expected to co-operate with the central government to plan their own *shokuiku* activities and to implement them on the basis of the understanding of *shokuiku* defined in the Basic Law. Prefectures are requested to design their own plans for the promotion of *shokuiku*, based on which the municipalities in each prefecture should draw up individual programs. Although governments in countries like the US or Germany launched nutrition programs such as “Five A Day” to promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables, there are no concrete expectations for local authorities connected with food education. This difference can be explained by the centralised state structure and the top-down structure of policy implementation processes. Although local autonomy in Japan was strengthened since the 1990s, the attempt to set responsibilities for local authorities in the Basic Law is strongly reminiscent of the systems called *kikan inin jimū*, according to

which the central government could utilise local governments as its administrative agencies (Hüstebeck, 2009).

However, decentralisation has contributed to a certain lack of enthusiasm for *shokuiku* on the local level. This is because various plans touching upon issues of nutrition and food were already in place before the central government passed the Basic Law on Food Pedagogies. While the *shokuiku kihonhō* commits local authorities to drafting individual support plans, it fails to explain whether and how older plans can be linked to the new plan and to provide financial resources (Shimomura, 2007).

Regarding their content, most local plans define *shokuiku* in accordance with the Basic Law. However, many add local issues, emphasising the uniqueness of local agriculture and of the prefectures themselves. Food pedagogies in many rural municipalities are an important form of support for local agriculture (Shimomura, 2007), community planning, and regional revitalisation (Reiher, 2009).

Generally speaking, *shokuiku* by municipalities comprises cooking classes, lectures on nutrition, gardening in schools, and the promotion of local food. Many municipalities have recently hired nutritionists (Cabinet Office 2010: 20). They often co-operate with local civic groups and neighbourhood associations.

Because of the economic difficulties in many rural areas (Kitano, 2009), the promotion of domestic food, respectively local food, is of utmost importance for local economies. Therefore, one of the objectives of the many local plans for the promotion of food pedagogies is the promotion of local food by, for example, increasing the use of local produce in school lunches (Arita-chō, 2008). One nutritionist from Kyūshū states that she thinks domestic foods are probably safer than imported foods (Interview Ms. A., 2012). Another nutritionist from Kyūshū believes that local food is best for the locals' health, because it is fresh. This, combined with aspects of shipment,

costs, and local revitalisation were many good reasons to buy local farm products, because everyone would profit (Interview Ms. H., 2012).

Producers

Having provided a summary of the municipalities' response to the Basic Law, I now turn to producers. The Law on Food Pedagogies calls on farmers, fishermen, and the food processing industry to 'offer opportunities for people to experience a variety of farming-, fishery- and forestry- related activities. This is, in order to enhance their understanding of nature's benefits and the importance of human activities in food production and distribution' (MAFF 2006: 4). Policy makers in Tōkyō expect farmers to co-operate with schools and municipalities. They expect farmers to increase the direct selling (*chisan chishō*) of their products to enhance communication with their customers. The Law expects them to cater to local schools, and invite children and customers to offer them agricultural experiences. The direct selling of local produce is expected to boost the Japanese self-sufficiency rate and to assist local farmers (Hirata-Kimura & Nishiyama, 2007).

Nonetheless, agricultural experience (*nōgyō taiken*) is nothing new (Shimomura, 2007). Particularly in rural areas, farmers have always offered opportunities for agricultural experience to people who wanted to help during the rice-harvest, for example. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was quite common that municipalities from the Tōkyō area would choose rural partner communities to where they would send municipal employees and school children for agricultural experience and recreation in nature (Kitano, 2009). Today, farmers provide all kinds of agricultural activities. In Arita, a small municipality in Northern Kyūshū, local farmers let fields to people from urban areas where they can grow their own vegetables. However, since the city

dwellers only visit occasionally, a large part of the work remains with the farmers:

They basically come to plant the crops and then to harvest. Meanwhile, me and my wife, we water the plants and care for it. Personally, I don't think that they learn much about farming through this. But they are proud of the vegetables they eventually bring home and I earn a little (extra) money. (Interview Mr. S., 2012)

Many farmers have also started to sell their produce directly to customers. But this does not necessarily have the pedagogic impact that customers learn more about crop growing or food safety. Especially when it comes to food safety, the average farmers, who are not involved in organic farming, do not reflect too much on agricultural pesticides (Interviews Mr. S., Mr. O., Mr. U., 2012).

In the same manner, Japanese farmers sell directly to locals for different reasons, but there is little evidence so far that it is because they care about or have even heard of *shokuiku*. One older farmer from Saga prefecture who lives by himself considers moving around town with his truck and selling vegetables to housewives a chance to meet people, and, as he smilingly said, young women in particular (Interview Mr. O., 2012). Thus, farmers are involved in *shokuiku* activities sometimes on request by local authorities and schools, sometimes by local JA, and sometimes on their own initiative. However, most of the farmers I have interviewed in Saga prefecture and the Tōhoku area in 2012 have not even heard of the term *shokuiku*. Younger farmers, however, such as one organic farmer I visited in Chiba prefecture, communicate with customers and a wider public via the internet: they write blogs about organic farming and make movies they publish on YouTube and other channels. As they need to attract customers, they promote their own/domestic agricultural products as safe and delicious.

Consumer co-operatives

In this final section I look at the role of consumer co-operatives. Japan has one of the largest and most influential consumer co-operative networks in the world. In the 1970s, consumer co-operatives were founded in Japan to provide consumers with cheaper and safe milk. By collectively ordering food, housewives in the same neighbourhood not only saved money, but the different local community groups also developed close relationships with local and regional farmers (Gelb & Estevez-Abe 1998: 265). During the 1970s and 1980s, with a large number of more than several 100,000 members, consumer co-operatives contributed to the spread of awareness of food safety issues among Japanese consumers. At this time, safe food basically meant the production of domestic food and the use of only little pesticides or none at all. Some consumer co-operatives exclusively contracted with producers to ensure that these ecological standards for safe food were followed. Brand name products were established to publicise that those products were guaranteed to have been locally and organically grown (Jussaume et al., 2001). Seikatsu Kurabu, for example, is a retail co-op that today caters to 350,000 households in many parts of Japan. The co-op offers low-pesticide, additive-free, non-genetically-modified food. Customers of consumer co-operatives are mostly health-conscious and ecologically minded, and order food from catalogues every week (Interview, Seikatsu Kurabu, 2012). During the 1970s, especially young mothers joined the co-operatives, and the local groups already offered on a regular basis what is now called ‘agricultural experience’ by the *shokuiku kihonhō* (Interview, Esukōpu Ōsaka, 2012). Since many of the consumer co-operatives advocate the idea that building a long-term relationship with domestic farmers ensures food safety, families often spend weekends at farms and help with farm work. By doing so, they are promoting what the *shokuiku kihonhō* calls ‘understanding of [...] the importance of human activities in food production’ (MAFF, 2006).

These co-operatives also do other important pedagogical work on food issues. For example, many local consumer groups and consumer co-operatives today are members of the national Seikyō-Network, which organises meetings, spreads information, and supports financially weak groups. Besides organising trips to the country side in order to get in touch with farmers and to help them, local groups also offer cooking classes and lectures (Interview, Hiomerukai, Kobe, 2012). However, the content of the lectures goes beyond mere nutritional issues, as is the case with most municipal *shokuiku* activities, and further addresses food safety issues, such as genetically modified organisms, food labelling, or the global agri-food system. Moreover, most of the groups are politically active and try to lobby bureaucracy and political parties (Interview, Esukōpu Ōsaka, 2012). While some groups write protest letters to government officials and organise or participate in demonstrations, members of the so-called *seikatsusha* networks that arose from the Seikyō network successfully run for local council elections in urban areas (Tsubogo, 2010).

In a nutshell, consumer co-operatives not only fulfil the requirements by the Basic Law to provide an understanding about food by offering agricultural experience and cooking classes, but exceed the Basic Law's objectives with activities attempting to change the existing food system and food legislation. However, the assumption of domestic food being better, although not necessarily safer than imported food, is shared by most consumer co-operatives alike.

Challenges to food pedagogies in Post-Fukushima Japan

In this section, I will elaborate on how the Japanese state failed so far to provide adequate knowledge on irradiated food to Japanese consumers, although, according to the Basic Law, citizens are required to acquire 'knowledge about food and of the ability to make appropriate food choices'. I will show how other actors replace the state as food pedagogue in this critical situation.

Today, many consumers are dissatisfied with the information on irradiated foods and insufficient testing. Although the government assures consumers that only food below the safety limit is sold, there exists no obligation to sufficiently label foods with information on radiation. Since monitoring by municipalities, prefectures and state-run facilities is insufficient, producers, consumers and retailers take the initiative and undertake their own measuring. Municipalities often lack the money to buy measuring devices, as they depend on state subsidies to implement a sufficient measuring system for food (Nakamura & Koizumi, 2011). At the same time, as the aforementioned quote from the *Saga Shinbun* illustrates, they try to support local farmers and are expected to do so, even at the expense of consumers.

Especially in Fukushima prefecture and in the Tōkyō area, Civil Radioactivity Monitoring Stations (*shimin hōshanō sokuteisho*) were founded. For a small fee, consumers and producers can bring in foodstuff and let them get measured. The results of the monitoring are published on the internet (CRMS, 2012). Some co-ops such as Daichi o mamorukai have established their own safety standards and offer an extensive monitoring system (Daichi o mamorukai, 2012b). According to MAFF, alternative safety standards are confusing consumers. MAFF calls on food producers and retailers to stick with the official limits and to abandon their own standards (*Asahi Shinbun online*, 21 April, 2012). As this appeal by MAFF illustrates, the Japanese government is afraid of losing the power to define what safe food is. This indicates that after the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe, the power relations between the state, consumer co-operatives, producers and retailers are contested.

Since consumer co-ops principally have a very close relationship to their contracting producers, it has become very difficult for them to provide information on irradiated food. On the one hand they do not want to sell irradiated food to their health-conscious customers; on

the other they want to support the producers in the Fukushima area. In the case of Daichi o mamorukai, this dilemma has resulted in the paradox situation that they sell vegetable sets for children which do not contain food from Northern Japan, but at the same time also sell “Support Tōhoku sets” (*Tōhoku fukkō ōen setto*) with food from the disaster-stricken areas (Daichi o mamorukai, 2012a). Especially in Tōkyō, many shops and stalls offer farm products from Tōhoku. Their initiators argue that it is their patriotic duty to support the farmers in Fukushima. However, in Fukushima prefecture and Tōkyō, other groups, mostly initiated by parents, have installed shops where only food products from Western Japan are sold (Fackler, 2012).

As shown above, the problem of irradiated food is not limited to the prefectures close to the Fukushima Daiichi power plant. Since processed foods are sold in the whole country, it was no surprise when in December 2011 irradiated infant milk powder was discovered in Japanese supermarkets all over the country (Interview Mr. K., 2012). Therefore, consumers not only in Tōkyō and Northern Japan are concerned with food safety now. Some nutritionists in charge of *shokuiku* in the municipalities report that in the first months after the nuclear disaster, many consumers called for information on which kinds of food were safe to eat and to feed to their children. Some prefectures started research on the topic and provided municipalities with information or invited them to lectures. One nutritionist from Kyūshū stated:

It is difficult, because in my position I am not allowed to tell people ‘don’t eat irradiated food’. I feel that it is the task of each individual to take care of his or her own health and to cultivate skills to make judgments about it. I am expected to tell people: ‘**please try to increase the knowledge you need to protect yourself on your own**’. [...] Since they are on their own, they need to understand that they must not be indifferent about what they are eating. They must think about nutrition, but also about food safety. That is of utmost importance. (Interview Ms. H. 2012).

This quote shows that, while *shokuiku* in the municipalities is usually exerted in accordance with national *shokuiku* policies, not all local officials in charge of *shokuiku* agree with the national handling of food safety issues after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Some call for lower safety limits on radioactivity in food, demand food labels that give information on radioactivity in food, and call for more information on the topic in general. This situation not only raises grave concerns about what constitutes food pedagogies at this moment in Japan, but also expresses the ambivalence of the power relations between the policy makers at the national level and the actual pedagogues – nutritionists – at the local level who cannot speak freely about how irradiated food poses risks to consumer’s health.

Conclusions

Through the implementation of the Basic Law on Food Pedagogies, the Japanese government attempted to react to challenges in the realm of food and nutrition. In order to boost the food self-sufficiency rate, the law promotes that domestic produce is safer, better for the health of Japanese citizens, and to be preferred to imported foods. Nutritionists employed at the municipalities teach children and mothers about ‘balanced’ Japanese-style meals and how to cook local food. Municipalities often cooperate with local farmers who sell local food to local consumers and tourists, and invite urban consumers to their farms to experience Japanese agriculture. Some consumer co-ops who are closely related to their suppliers also stress the fact that (organic) farm products from domestic farmers are safer than imported foods. There exists a discursive interconnectedness between the low food self-sufficiency rate and threats to food safety through imported foods, which is also evident in the legislature, and through activities concerning *shokuiku*. The dependence on imported foods and the threats they pose to food safety are often considered far more

dangerous than the dangers irradiated foods pose to public health (Otake, 2011).

With its focus on nutrition, cooking and gratefulness towards domestic food producers, *shokuiku* in Japan, as practiced according to the Basic Law by municipalities, schools, and national organisations, is not an adequate concept to deal with the problems Japanese consumers face after the nuclear catastrophe at Fukushima. This rather proves the opposite to be true: with the law's emphasis on domestic food and the proliferation of the assumption that Japanese food is safer than imported food, it further endangers the health of the Japanese citizens. However, the preferential treatment of (food) producers is not surprising when taking into account the post-war history of consumer politics (MacLachlan, 2002) and the handling of food poisoning caused by environmental pollution by the industry. Victims of the 1950s mercury poisoning in Minamata, for example, still fight law suits against Chisso, whose chemical plant in Kumamoto prefecture released its sewage into the sea and contaminated the fish population in the surrounding waters (George, 2012).

Consequently, many established food education practitioners still have not changed their assumption of 'domestic food = healthy and safe food' after the Fukushima nuclear accident. However, food education faces a huge challenge due to this situation, because the ignorance regarding food safety issues from official sides leaves Japanese consumers with a lack of awareness for these issues. Therefore, the Japanese state is not an appropriate provider of adequate knowledge on food safety. Instead, stakeholders who are not included in the state's *shokuiku* campaign, such as consumer co-ops, try to provide their members with information on radiation in food. Most interestingly perhaps is the appearance of new actors in the field of food pedagogies, such as the Civil Radioactivity Measurement Stations that try to truly achieve the objective of the *shokuiku kihonhō*: 'the acquisition of knowledge about food' and its

dissemination to enable Japanese consumers 'to make appropriate food choices' (Naikakufu, 2005).

As I have shown in the beginning of this essay, food safety has always been a subordinate aspect of Japanese government's food pedagogies. However, one would have expected policy makers to change their focus more towards the issue of irradiated food after the nuclear catastrophe. But as the Shokuiku White Paper from 2012 (Naikakufu, 2012) makes clear, this is not the case. The emergence of other, mostly community-based and civic, stakeholders shows that there is a need for this kind of food pedagogies among Japanese consumers. Therefore, in these times of crisis it is of utmost importance to further challenge and complement the Japanese state's approach to *shokuiku*.

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