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Advancing Food Sovereignty or Nostalgia: The Construction of Japanese diets in the National *Shokuiku* Policy

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Abstract

Food sovereignty is a trans-national movement that asserts the right of people to govern their own food system as an alternative to neoliberal food policies. In 2005, the Japanese government introduced the Basic Law of Shokuiku (food and nutrition education) to promote national food self-sufficiency, improve public health, and preserve local culinary culture through domestic food consumption. This paper argues that the campaign attempts to advance both governmental and public interests in food sovereignty by constructing common images of Japanese diets and nostalgia for rural agriculture; along the way it attempts to increase a sense of solidarity between urban consumers and rural producers. Nevertheless, the campaign focuses on consumer's food literacy, thus framing food sovereignty as responsibilities of people, and diverts public attention from structural issues embedded

within the nation's food system, including national dependence on other countries for food security, as well as the marginal economic status of rural agriculture. Simultaneously, the feeling of nostalgia for rural agriculture remains, expanding an imaginary of food sovereignty among some urban consumers. Drawing on an investigation of policy discourses and in-depth interviews with young adult consumers in urban Japan, this paper examines how the notion of food sovereignty and Japanese diets have been constructed and advanced through the nationwide Shokuiku campaign. The decade-long campaign has evolved to become an agent of social control of urban consumer food consumption rather than helping consumers to play a role in establishing a system underpinned by food sovereignty as an alternative to the industrial present.

Keywords: food sovereignty, nostalgia, traditional diets, consumer society, Japan

Introduction¹

Food sovereignty is a trans-national movement that asserts the right of people to govern their own food system, including national markets and traditional food cultures. The idea for a food sovereignty movement arose to counteract the totalising embrace of the corporate food regime and its claim for global food security through free trade (McMichael 2014). The idea has laid down a global platform for social agitation to transform food and agriculture systems. Yet, food sovereignty theory lacks specification of the scale at which it operates -- the nation-state, a region, a locality, the people -- as well as the scope of sovereignty itself (Edelman 2014). Thus, its interpretation is diverse and is society- and agent-specific.

Many discussions on food sovereignty have focused on post-colonial conflicts between (North) food exporting countries, such as the United States and Australia, and (South) food importing countries; however, this 'North' and 'South' distinction obscures structural differences within these blocks delineated by their development and geo-political relationships (Hisano 2015). Japan belongs to the 'North' as a high-income country. Equally, it is the second largest net food importer globally after China. Japan's degree of food self-sufficiency has declined rapidly since the 1970s, and now is extremely low compared to other developed countries (MAFF 2015). Reflecting this situation, the agricultural sector's contribution to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been about one percent over two decades (Cabinet Office 2013c), and it involves only three percent of the working population (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2015). Thus, the current Japanese food system is inseparable from the global food system. Despite its marginal contribution to the economy, rural agriculture continues to play a vital role in the political strength of farmers (Mulgan 2013), as well as in the representation of Japanese national and ethnic identity (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993). At the same time, discontent with contemporary urban life drives the development of nostalgia for rural agriculture among urban consumers (Creighton 1997).

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The Basic Law of *Shokuiku* (food and nutrition education) originated from a grassroots movement in the early 1990s and was introduced nationwide by the Japanese government in 2005 in response to a wide range of issues about food in contemporary Japan, including: (1) a lack of appreciation of food; (2) an increase in irregular and nutritionally unbalanced diets; (3) the rise of obesity and chronic diseases such as cancer and diabetes; (4) an obsession with a slim body image; (5) a number of incidents of food safety; (6) overdependence on food imports; and (7) decline of traditional culinary cultures (Cabinet Office 2005; Melby et al. 2010). The *Shokuiku* law emphasised interconnectedness among food production, ecology, health, and local culinary culture, and encouraged awareness of food-related issues and the importance of civic engagement in food and its environment. Although the *Shokuiku* policy did not explicitly mention food sovereignty, this whole of food system approach was concordant with food sovereignty principles (Wittman 2011, 90). The reintroduction of ‘traditional’ culinary culture, including diets, wisdom, and practices, resonated with social food movements elsewhere, such as the slow food movement, and their dedication to a holistic understanding of food. It was an approach which differs from nutrition education, which focuses more narrowly on the nutritional values of dietary intake. The more ecological emphasis was regarded as an alternative to the hegemony of nutrition science as a basis for the global food economy (Dixon 2009, 327-328).

Incorporating diverse issues and stakeholders, however, has proved challenging. For example, the implementation of *Shokuiku* relies on existing resources, such as nutrition teachers and community dieticians (MEXT 2005). These practitioners are trained in nutrition science, and they are not necessarily experts on traditional culinary culture or food production. Moreover, Kimura (2011a, 480) describes how the food literacy framework that was adopted within the majority of *Shokuiku* campaigns and was shaped by business enterprises has limited not only the original content and goals of the *Shokuiku* law, but also its potential for social change.

Foucault (1972, 227) states that ‘every education system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse with knowledge and powers it carries with it.’ In particular, government-sponsored health education imposes specific ideologies and social practices by declaring benevolent goals and allowing the state to exercise its power over the physical bodies of citizens (Lupton 1993). Health education is a powerful agent to shape normative ideologies and practices. Like breastfeeding campaigns, government-sponsored health education campaigns tend to focus on issues at the individual-family level and rely on normative discourses to convince individuals to change their own behaviours and values (Kukla 2006). The campaigns are also subject to a government’s political agenda and market conditions. Like other capitalist nations, successive Japanese governments are reluctant to disturb the profitability of large food businesses by intervening to advance food sovereignty.

The institutionalisation of *Shokuiku* represents a case study of an initiative to tackle a wide range of food-related issues through encouraging the consumption of ‘traditional’ Japanese diets. The ways in which these issues were presented reflect a series of compromises among a large number of stakeholders, demonstrating key social and political tensions within Japanese society. We argue that a growing public interest in food sovereignty principles within Japan

is juxtaposed with the top-down promotion of food literacy that incorporates nostalgia for ‘traditional’ Japanese diets and rural agriculture. This paper consists of two sections. In the first section, based on existing literature, we illustrate how the notions of food sovereignty and Japanese diets have been constructed through the evolution of *Shokuiku* from civil activism to national policy and from a holistic approach to an individualistic one promoting family meals. In the second section, based on in-depth interviews of young adults in urban Japan, we examine how food sovereignty and traditional Japanese diets are understood and incorporated in young people’s everyday consumption. Our findings draw on in-depth interviews conducted in 2012-13 with 31 young adults aged from 20 to 40 living in the urban area of eastern Japan including Tokyo (the Kanto region) and coming from diverse backgrounds with regards to occupations, employment status, marital status, and housing arrangements.

The Evolution of the *Shokuiku* Campaign

From Activism to National Policy

The promotion of *Shokuiku* started with grassroots activism— led by high-profile enthusiasts such as a food critic Yukio Hattori, journalist Toshiko Sunada, psychologist Yoko Murota, and professor of food environment Miyuki Adachi -- in the early 1990s (Watanabe 2010; Kojima 2011; Takeda 2008). The word *Shokuiku* originated from Sagen Ishizuka, a medical doctor in the Japanese imperial army in the nineteenth century, who advocated that food education provides the foundation for the cultivation of body (*tai-iku*), knowledge (*chi-iku*), and cultural wisdom (*sai-iku*) (Ishizuka 1896, 1898, 1909). Although Ishizuka inspired movements to promote this idea in the early twentieth century, these movements were limited to the wealthy and educated who could afford the nutritious diets with a variety of grains and vegetables (Sato 2009, 94). A century later, the national *Shokuiku* campaigns have reclaimed the concept and advocated broader understandings of food beyond commonly adopted nutrition education. Ishizuka’s idea of *Shokuiku* was flexible enough to bring together a number of concerns around food in contemporary Japanese society ranging from food security to public health into a single campaign.

The *Shokuiku* campaign was legalised as the Basic Law of *Shokuiku* by the Japanese parliament in June 2005. The ‘Basic Law’ was an appropriation bill setting out the relevant authority for policy administration and how the policy would be funded. The policy’s administration was overseen by the *Shokuiku* promotion council in the Cabinet Office, which establishes basic plans and evaluates performance. The council members consisted of all of the cabinet ministers and twelve stakeholders. The *Shokuiku* council described *Shokuiku* as a nationwide civil movement (*kokumin undo*) based on a combination of efforts by national and local governments, food producers, business, schools, and households (Cabinet Office 2007). However, in reality, the budget from the Cabinet office was small, and most of the campaigns were to rely on budgets from three ministries: the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

(MEXT), and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW). The contents of *Shokuiku* promotion varied according to each ministry's focus: MAFF focuses on the improvement of local food production, supply, and consumption to counteract Japan's dependence on imports; MEXT enlists nutrition teachers into the improvement of school lunch programs and school curriculum related to food and health; MHLW focuses on food safety and health risks associated with food intake and eating behaviours (Watanabe 2010). As a common aim, all ministries perceived that globalisation, in particular westernisation, of food consumption with high fat and meat intake has contributed to various food problems: dependency on import products, increased risks of developing chronic diseases, and the decline of 'traditional' food culture. Thus, promotion of the 'Japanese-style dietary life (*nihon-gata shoku seikatsu*, JSDL)' was presented as the alternative to advance domestic food production and food sovereignty, as well as citizens' health and well-being.

Not surprisingly, the concept of JSDL has been shaped by a nationalistic idealisation of Japanese food and criticism of foreign or western influences (Kimura 2011b). Some government documents defined JSDL as a rice-centred diet which is suited to climate and natural features in Japan (Cabinet office 2014a). Other government documents, written by a nutrition expert, however, described the JSDL as frequent consumption of nutritionally balanced diets, developed in the 1980s, which consists of rice as a staple food, a main dish, some side-dishes, dairy products, and fruits (MAFF 2014). The latter description indicates that the government-aided Japanese diet is not associated with a long history of consumption among the Japanese; it even encourages the consumption of dairy products and meats which were not consumed as much formerly as they are today by the average Japanese citizen (MHLW 2014)². Thus, the representation of Japanese and non-Japanese food remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, at least among government officials, the promotion of Japanese culture is a powerful ideology which helps transform economic anxiety in the present Japan to hope for Japan's cultural industries in the future (White 2011).

Additionally, Kojima (2011) noted that Ishizuka's idea of *Shokuiku* addressing the physical, intellectual and moral education of individuals was suitable for the neoliberal agenda of the Koizumi cabinet. When it became a national law, the *Shokuiku* campaign legitimated responsibilities of citizens rather than a sense of rights which citizens can claim from their governments (Kojima 2011, 49). In this way, the rights for which grass-root movements had been advocating were replaced by the self-responsibility principle.

Accordingly, the concept of *Shokuiku* was promoted nationwide by national and local governments and stakeholders through mass media, learning events such as farming and cooking classes, and symposiums including the national *Shokuiku* promotion assembly (*shokuiku suishin zenkoku taikai*) held every year in different cities. The word *Shokuiku* appeared everywhere in Japan including supermarkets, schools, city halls, workplaces and mass media. As noted by Ikegami (2008, 211), the massive onslaught of information regarding *Shokuiku* and spread by a range of agencies made the original purpose of *Shokuiku*

² According to the National Health and Nutrition survey (MHLW 2014), the average consumption of meat products per person in a day increased from 8.4g in 1950 to 89.6g in 2013. The average consumption of dairy products increased from 6.8g in 1950 to 125.8g in 2013.

principles unclear. Ideas of food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty, which were difficult for the public to understand, were gradually replaced by information about health and nutrition.

From a Holistic to an Individual-based Approach

The power relations within contemporary Japanese food politics became more visible when the *Shokuiku* campaign agenda was revised in 2011, shifting from promoting public recognition of the policy to encouraging civic engagement with the policy. The second basic plan for *Shokuiku*, settled in March 2011, set three main important items (*jyuten kadai*) that focused on health promotion for individuals: (1) continuous food education over the course of life; (2) food education for preventing chronic diseases; (3) food education for children and young people through family meals (Cabinet Office 2011, 4-5). The new plan stated that sharing meals (*kyo-shoku*) is ‘a foundation of *Shokuiku* (*shokuiku no genten*)’ (Cabinet Office 2011, 5). The new agenda employed the family as an education agent for children and young people and framed family meals as a multi-functional practice to fulfil a wide range of goals of *Shokuiku* from public health to preservation of Japanese culinary culture. The cabinet office’s report by nutrition scholars Takemi and Eto (2012) introduced a variety of studies to support the health and psychological implications of family meals, such as encouraging healthy food choices, good mental health, and a low obesity rate. The council set a target of family meals (breakfast and dinner only) of more than ten times per week by 2015 regardless of the background of the population (Cabinet Office 2013a).

Although the *Shokuiku* promotion council intended that the advancement of family meals would accomplish the holistic goals of *Shokuiku*, the government’s efforts were limited to appealing to an individual sense of morality, while structural issues, such as long working hours, were rarely discussed. The attention to family meals is associated with a moral panic about the loss of family togetherness and home-cooking. Kimura (2011b, 216) noted that the emergence of eating alone and individualisation of family practices sparked public debates over the revitalisation of family meals and home-cooking associated with the notion of ‘traditional’ family. Although discourses of both family meals and home-cooked meals are relatively new to Japan (Cwierka 2006, Omote 2010), the *Shokuiku* campaign presented family meals and home-cooked meals as an established tradition which has been lost from contemporary Japanese society (Kimura 2011b, 216). In many consumer societies, a concern for the decline of cooking skills and knowledge is a site of moral panics and appeals to a belief that ecological links between food production and consumption, as well as ‘traditional’ wisdom which has been passed down through generations, are being replaced by industrial diets (Coveney, Begley, and Gallegos 2012, 619). Furthermore, the moral discourses about home-cooking embody anxieties over food safety and food security. These discourses overlook the fact that the industrialisation of food changed not only the nature of family labourers from food producers to consumers, but also the meanings of food (Julier 2013, 20-21). Yet, the notion of ‘home-cooking’ has obtained strong associations with food safety and well-being in response to the industrialisation of food. The family meal promoted within

Shokuiku focuses on the moral responsibility of individuals and families, while the active discussions about the more holistic concepts of *Shokuiku*, as well as food sovereignty and food security, disappeared from the main agenda.

This policy shift has gradually displaced discussion of other social issues around food. Before the Basic Law of *Shokuiku* was institutionalised in 2005, there were active discussions of how the *Shokuiku* campaign connects the public to the local food system. The *chisan-chisho* (locally produced, locally consumed) movement, which advocates localisation of food production, supply, and consumption, established a grassroots movement in the 1990s. The *Shokuiku* campaign incorporated the idea into school lunch programs and promoted local exchanges between local producers and local schools (Cabinet office 2015). However, once institutionalised, the government and the Agricultural Cooperatives focused on branding some local products, but they did not attempt to address historical and structural issues in which the current food crisis was taking place, as well as social justice issues, such as inequality between large- and small-scale farmers (Kimura and Nishiyama 2008). Like the narrow family meal promotion, the *chisan-chisho* movement has not been able to expand the discussion beyond the consumption of local foods at the individual-family level.

Furthermore, the incident of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011 affected the understanding of Japan's food safety and the way that it became embedded within *Shokuiku* promotion. Due to concerns for the radioactive contamination of food, many consumers started to avoid agricultural products from the affected regions, which are major producers of fresh vegetables and fruits. Reiher (2012) suggested that the dominant food pedagogy present within *Shokuiku*, focusing on public health and the consumption of local products and traditional diets, was not helpful for governments or citizens to deal with the food safety issues raised after the Fukushima incident. In response to the radiation contamination, the *Shokuiku* council modified the description about 'locally-produced food' from the one produced in the same prefecture to the one produced in any prefectures of Japan (Cabinet Office 2013b). The incident shed light on limitations to promote locally-produced food when its safety is not assured.

How food sovereignty was obscured by food literacy campaigns

One of the significant factors diminishing the original message of *Shokuiku* is that a majority of *Shokuiku* campaigns focus on enhancing food literacy among Japanese consumers. Food literacy is broadly defined as 'the collective set of knowledge and skills needed to use food to meet needs' (Vidgen and Gallegos 2011, 3). Authorities, including governments and experts, encourage citizens to obtain certain knowledge and skills about food in order to 'eat properly'. Kimura (2011a, 480) suggested that the food literacy approaches in *Shokuiku* have gradually diverted public attention from questioning the current food system and politics in Japan, and the motivation for promoting *Shokuiku* is obscured by culturally-inscribed family and gender ideals. In particular, the implementation of *Shokuiku* relies on existing resources such as nutrition teachers and community dieticians (MEXT 2005) who are trained in

nutrition science, but are not necessarily experts on traditional culinary culture or food production. Although the policy emphasises holistic goals, most policy messages are shaped by expert views of food, such as the biomedical understanding of food. In this way, the nationwide *Shokuiku* campaigns have limited not only the original content and goals of the *Shokuiku* law, but have also diminished their potential for social change.

In part, this is due to an overemphasis upon individual knowledge, which tends to ignore structural issues. Vernon (2007) illustrated how politically motivated food policies that are founded on class prejudice can unleash a backlash and increase the problems that they were intended to solve. He described how the introduction of nutrition science for tackling hunger served to shift the notion of hunger from under-nutrition or insufficient food to the concept of malnutrition or incorrect food. This shift framed hunger as no longer an issue of social welfare, but rather a matter of individual consumers who are 'responsible for promotion of their own nutrition health' (Vernon 2007, 274). Likewise, the promotion of family meals as healthy eating emphasises the individual and family's responsibility to manage their health and lifestyle rather than highlighting the structural issues that prevent people from eating home-cooked food together from ingredients that are local in origin.

The ideal image of family meals in Japan highlights the middle-class values that flourished during the post-war economic development period and the rise of consumer society. Not simply confined to Japan, there is a history of middle-class domesticity being scientifically validated and imposed onto rural people, the poor, and ethnic minorities throughout the development of the welfare state in Scandinavian countries (Frykman and Lofgren 1987) and in the United States through the home education movement (Dixon 2009, 323). Middle-class domesticity has become dominant in Asia through globalisation and has redefined the ideals of motherhood, sexuality and gender identity (Donner 2008). As discussed earlier, the *Shokuiku* promotion of family meals also gained momentum from the introduction of scientific studies conducted from the 1990s to the 2000s. The majority of studies were based on laboratory experiments and questionnaires which focused on associations between individual behaviours and nutrition intake, and ignored the socio-cultural dynamics of family meals. However, healthy eating and family meals are very different phenomena, and the construction of healthy eating is bolstered by the cultural, religious, and social meanings of family meals shared among policy makers and experts. Addressing health associations does not change how family meals are conducted in the society, but instead intensifies the fault-lines between who is, and is not, a good citizen.

Nostalgia for Japanese Diets, Culture, and Rurality among Urban Young Adults

In this section, based on in-depth interviews of young adults, we illustrate ideas of Japanese diets (*wa-shoku/nihon-shoku*) and locally-produced foods and their consumption among young adult consumers in urban Japan. Young adults in their 20s and 30s are often considered the cohort which has been left out of the *Shokuiku* promotion, because of their low

participation with the campaigns and the lowest attainment rates of most of the *Shokuiku* goals set up by the council (Cabinet Office 2015).

Consumption of Japanese Diets

Despite the policy shift in 2011 and policy makers' perceptions of young adults, we found that many young people embraced enthusiasm for locally-produced foods and culinary cultures reflected in the early version of *Shokuiku*. However, similarly to a study about consumers at a farmer's market in the United States (Pilgeram 2012), most of these participants' interest in locally-produced food and Japanese diets was motivated by health and moral concerns rather than social justice or protection of Japanese culture. In other words, these participants valued Japanese diets even more than non-Japanese diets, such as bread and pasta, not because they wished to enhance the nation's food self-sufficiency or loyalty to the nation, but because they associated the memories of family meals with rice, miso-soup, and fish dishes with the Japanese diets and home-cooked dishes made by their parents and grandparents.

[[‘I’ve lost an opportunity to eat fish since I lived alone and started to work at a university hospital. I realised that I don’t buy *sashimi* or whole fish for myself, because it is time-consuming to prepare dishes accompanying fish. Whenever I return home, my mother prepares fish dishes for me. Maybe she realises I don’t eat fish these days. I wish I could make good fish dishes like my mother. Also, I wish I could have a wife to make nice fish dishes instead (28 year-old man, physician)’]].

[[‘When I think of family meals, I think of my grandfather’s fish dishes. My mother was transferred away from home, so my father and grandfather cooked. Grandfather cut up a whole fish, and made a nice stewed fish with homemade miso-paste (37 year-old man, university lecturer)’]].

These participants expressed respect for the labour and skill related to preparing fish dishes, such as removing inner parts from fish and stewing it for a long time. Both interviewees not only valued the home-cooked dishes made by family members, but also admitted that it is difficult to prepare and eat home-cooked dishes every day when they live alone. Likewise, Melby and Takeda's study (2014) showed that the majority of Japanese participants living in urban Japan viewed a Japanese-style breakfast as healthy and ideal. However, they chose to eat western-style breakfast consisting of bread or cereal or they skipped breakfast completely because of the time constraint required to prepare the Japanese breakfast consisting of many dishes: rice, miso-soup, fish and some side-dishes. Having western-style meals for breakfast is a common solution in a busy lifestyle. These results illustrate that people in urban Japan perceived the current form of Japanese diets to be not practical enough to suit an urban lifestyle, compared with the western diets available in Japan. Thus, the discontent with busy urban life and the feeling of losing childhood diets and practices in the busy urban present expand nostalgia for Japanese diets with rice and fish, which used to be made by their family members.

Nostalgia for Locally Produced Foods and Rurality

There were some, though not all, participants who expressed nostalgia for locally produced food and rurality, including its landscape and the way of life. The feeling of nostalgia is closely associated with identity discontinuity resulted from displacement, and it helps maintain or retain identity continuity (Milligan 2003). Some of these participants had moved from a fishery town or agricultural neighbourhood to Tokyo for university and work, or others had family connections with rural areas, and missed the fresh food environments of their hometown and their memories of family meals.

[[‘When I was in Kyoto, I saw different kinds of fresh vegetables at supermarkets during different seasons of the year. Those vegetables tasted like ‘real vegetables’ and were different from ones I buy here (Tokyo). This is a reason I don’t cook often now. I don’t enjoy shopping and cooking any more. I hardly see unique vegetables here (37 year-old man, university lecturer)’]].

[[‘I am from Yamaguchi prefecture where I could get fresh fish directly from a fishery village. I don’t want to buy and eat raw fish at supermarkets in Tokyo. I only eat grilled ones. I might overreact, but I think I will get stomach-aches if I eat them raw (27 year-old woman, administrator)’]].

Although they explicitly described the characteristics of a local food system, two participants also described the gap between urban food systems and their perceptions of ‘real foods’. From their experiences, supermarkets in Tokyo have a variety of foods throughout the year, but they cannot see the connection with local producers. They described this sense of distance or disengagement in terms of their physiological reactions, such as taste and stomach-aches, and this ontological insecurity as described by Fischler (1988, 289-290) discouraged them from having positive relationships with food-related activities, such as cooking and grocery shopping.

A few participants were interested in agriculture and had visited rice paddies and farms to participate in food production.

[[‘I go to a farm in Ibaraki prefecture [two hours from Tokyo by trains] every month. This might be a reaction from my occupation as an engineer, and I felt an irresistible desire to go to a farm. Next week, we will harvest rice, and get newly harvested rice, about seven kg. Also, it is nice to see people from different occupations. Most of them are working in Tokyo (33-year old man, engineer)’]].

[[‘I decided to go to a farm to make friends. I didn’t know many people in Tokyo. I was not good at making friends, but I also thought it’s hard to live without relating to people in the society. Agricultural work is closer to the nature and animals. I didn’t need to communicate well [when I relate to the nature and animals]. I feel relaxed when I touch dirt (27 year-old woman, administrator)’]].

These participants sometimes went to a farm to meet people who were not part of their existing social network. In their interviews, they also described some of the discomforts associated with urban lifestyles, such as long work-hours with computers and social isolation. The temporary connection with rural agriculture helped them reduce the discomforts of urban everyday life. The interest in rural life is indeed growing among urban residents in Japan. According to a latest national poll (Cabinet Office 2014b), about one third of respondents living in urban areas reported that they have thought of moving to farming and fishing villages, and the rate was highest among men in their 20s (47.4%).

Nostalgia for rural agriculture is not new to modern Japan. According to Creighton (1997), travel advertisements promoting rural areas as a reunion with Japanese identity emerged in the 1970s, became popular in the 1980s, and continued their popularity in the 1990s. The advertisements appealed to the feeling of ‘homelessness’ among urban consumers by using the imagined past stressing the agrarian heritage of the Japanese (Creighton 1997). Likewise, the narratives emphasised urban young adults’ discomfort with busy urban life, on one hand, and, on the other hand, participants’ personal or family connections with rural areas and agriculture rather than their loyalty to the nation.

The current *Shokuiku* campaigns focusing on moral education have not successfully addressed structural constraints of the Japanese food system, and they have made little impact on the nation’s food security and food sovereignty. Instead, they have expanded moral obligations to eat properly and the legacy of middle-class domesticity. At the same time, awareness of the contradictions of urban lifestyles and personal connections with rural areas have stimulated some urban consumers to become engaged with rural agriculture. This growing awareness of the contradictions of urban lifestyles driven by nostalgia can be a potential resource for linking more urban consumers with rural agriculture and advancing food sovereignty in contemporary Japan.

Conclusion

The *Shokuiku* campaign was transformed from civil activism to national policy in 2005, in response to growing public concern with a range of food-related issues. The early campaign emphasised interconnectedness not only among food production, ecology, health, and local culinary culture, but also among different stakeholders and ministries. In 2011, the *Shokuiku* council launched a new agenda which focused on consumption at the individual-family level, with the promotion of family meals exemplifying this policy shift. The rationale for this change was that family meals enhance not only the transmission of traditional culture and knowledge, but also healthy eating behaviours and lifestyles. As a result, moral discourses around family meals eclipsed the earlier version of *Shokuiku*, which emphasised holistic approaches to enhance food sovereignty in Japan.

Moral discourses around food literacy and family meals, which are often observed in food-related policies in developed countries, divert attention not only from holistic aspects of the *Shokuiku* campaign, but also from the dynamics of everyday realities. In modern Japan, there

is a strong post-war ideology that all 100 million Japanese are middle-class (*Ichioku sou churyu*); consequently, public policies overlook the diversity within the society, including socio-economic and urban-rural disparities. By focusing on normative discourses, the *Shokuiku* campaign serves to marginalise socially and emotionally vulnerable populations, as well as rural agricultural producers inside and outside of Japan.

Our in-depth interviews with young adults in urban Japan reveal that some young people's enthusiasm for traditional diets and food sovereignty echo the original version of *Shokuiku*, with some participants also describing obstacles to eating a Japanese diet every day. Their enthusiasm reflected discontent with busy urban lifestyles, contradictions within an urban food system driven by convenience, and nostalgia for rural agriculture. These desires encouraged some urban consumers to engage with rural agriculture. The *Shokuiku* campaign has not as yet successfully addressed the structural issues that underpin the Japanese food system, including import dependence, but it has expanded an imaginary of food sovereignty among urban consumers. Whether this can be sustained in the face of contemporary urban lifestyles and pathways to earning a living, and translated into greater citizen control over the food system, is unclear.

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