

Food and Education I: The Meaning(s) of “Organic” in Japan

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In reaction to recent concerns over the safety of food in Japan, “organic” produce is appearing more frequently both in large supermarkets and televised health programs (Japan Offspring Fund, 2002, p. 3). Despite its positive image, however, the word “organic” is largely misunderstood among consumers. One cause of confusion has arisen from the various usages of the term itself. The purpose of this paper is to explore two broad trends in the usage and ownership of the term organic (有機) in Japan and the broader implications for education and social change contained in the word's social history.

The term *organic* to mean the use of natural gardening methods and the avoidance of chemical fertilizers and pesticides was first used by American farmer J.I. Rodale in the early 1940s. In 1942, Rodale began publishing *Organic Gardening* magazine, and the world organic movement was born. Today, misunderstanding surrounds the word organic, despite 60 years of grassroots activity on every continent and recent government moves to standardize and legalize food labeling in developed countries. One reason for misunderstanding comes not from the meaning of the word itself but how the meaning is ascribed, whether by top-down legal processes or bottom-up popular processes. The different usages of the word organic in Japan mirror the situations of other developed countries in the post-World War II era.

Perhaps the most widely understood meaning of organic is attached to global produce sold at retail markets. As a product label, organic has meant growing profits for food retailers in the past decade. Globally, in 2002 organic food accounted for 1-3 percent of the global food market, and Japan 0.2 percent. Although this figure is low, the organic food industry is growing by 20-30 percent annually. Although this growth cannot be expected to last indefinitely, it seems certain that the organic food market will become much larger in the coming several years. Although Japan cannot be called an

organic stronghold, Japanese consumers (unlike consumers in other modern industrialized nations) still buy locally: in 2002, around 70 percent of total retail food sales took place in around 1 million small food stores in Japan. Of the 1.4 million outlets for food in Japan, large retailers only account for less than 10 percent (Henson, 2002, p. 332).

Today, produce labeled organic is offered for sale in nearly every major chain supermarket and department store nationwide. The bright, clean displays often feature the name of the farmer who made the produce and sometimes even a glossy color photograph. These products are usually sold at a premium price. Another source of organic produce for today's Japanese consumer is Anew, a kind of health food convenience store. Of the 40,000 convenience stores in Japan, about 500 are Anew outlets (Moen, 1997, p. 21). They mimic the surface appearance of the established convenience stores such as Lawson and 7-11: convenient locations, bright atmosphere, easy-to-understand layout, and no mud or manure in sight.

There is, however, a deeper, more radical meaning of "organic," represented by the *teikei* (literally, *contract farming*) movement in Japan. To understand the meaning(s) and history of organic, the roots of this movement must be investigated: food security, sustainable development, local autonomy, and grassroots democracy. The movement's activities, although based in agriculture, are intimately connected to all important spheres of society: education, health, poverty, the environment. Organic, in the *teikei* sense, has the power to transform even as the transformative powers of "organic" are being threatened by government regulations and laws that define organic chemically, and by retailers who are selling out the organic movement. The organic movement in Japan came about as a direct protest against agricultural trends which began shortly after the end of World War II (Kishida, 2003, p. 7).

Farming in Japan after World War II

Along with the rest of the country, rural areas in Japan were severely depleted during World War II. Physical structures were not as affected by bombing as in urban areas, but the drain of manpower nevertheless severely damaged rural areas. Despite this, rural areas were called upon to feed the starving people in urban areas after the war. While the government was

demanding increased production, traditional landlords were forced to give up their large land holdings in the Land Redistribution Act enacted by the Occupation forces (JOAA, 1993, p. 3). The resulting increase in small, independent farmers searching for methods of increased production was ripe for the agrichemicals that began to flow in from America in the 1950s (Kishida, 2003, p. 10). Ironically, these agrichemicals were made largely from leftover poisons and gases that had been intended for use in the war. American pesticide and herbicide companies maintained a military image throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s in their advertisements: the enemy changed from the Japanese and German soldiers of the war to the ragweed and beetles of the world's gardens (Kroese, 2002, p. 24).

Despite the ecological and health damage that came with greatly increased chemical use, this was a thriving time for small independent farmers in Japan. Rural living improved rapidly, and productivity increased to exceed pre-war levels. However, in the 1950s this began to change. In 1954, the United States began exporting wheat to Japan on a large-scale basis (this wheat was a surplus of America's own early attempts to maximize its postwar agricultural output); this led to the exporting of many agricultural products such as soybeans and corn. From around 1960, the focus of Japan's economic growth changed to industry; during the 1960s and 1970s, workers were encouraged to leave their farms and rural areas and come to urban areas to work in factories. In 1961, the Agriculture Basic Law was enacted, placing productivity first among priorities in Japanese agriculture. This law defined modern agriculture as "large-scale, monocultural, mechanized, well-equipped, specialized, and dependent on chemicals and fossil fuels" (JOAA, 1999, p. 14).

What followed amounted to an agricultural crises. The JOAA has identified 10 problems from this time:

- (1) More and more farmers depend on another occupation to make a living
- (2) There are fewer and fewer young males to engage in farming (many of whom have difficulty getting married)
- (3) Farmers will not grow crops which do not pay well
- (4) Soil fertility is being lost due to the lack humus
- (5) Large-scale successive monocultures damage the soil and the health of the

crops

- (6) Plant diseases and pests occur frequently due to the disruption of the ecological balance
- (7) Human bodies, agricultural produce, soil, underground water, rivers, and streams, and the air are contaminated by agricultural chemicals
- (8) Livestock is kept in extremely artificial and inhumane environments
- (9) The area available to farming is decreasing
- (10) Japan's food self-sufficiency rate is declining (JOAA, 1993, p. 13).

These problems were first identified in the late 1960s; all of them continue today.

In reality, despite great increases in technology, chemistry, and mechanization, Japanese rural farming culture has been effectively gutted and dispersed in the years following World War II. One indicator of the crises is food self-sufficiency: while Japan produced 70% of its food (based on caloric intake) domestically 30 years ago, that figure has dropped to around 40% today (MAFF, 2001, p. 2). This has not been the result of any agricultural disasters or a decision from the farming community: the reduction of Japan's food self-sufficiency and the increase of unnecessary imports was a conscious decision made by the Japanese government, not for the sake of farmers or Japanese people but for import and export revenues and to redress the trade imbalances. Concerned with increasing imports of automobiles and microchip technology into the United States, massive quantities of agricultural products were imported to offset the trade imbalances of the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately, the situation is not unique: developed and developing countries around the world, usually under pressure from the WTO, tend to favor globalization over protection of local markets and food security (Shiva, 2000, p. 12). In large part due to the globalization of the international food supply and the global standards of free trade determined and enforced by the WTO and the IMF, food has become simply another tradable commodity.

Depopulation is another problem facing Japanese agriculture. 28% of farmers were older than 65 in 2000, compared to only 10% in 1965. In 1960, half of Japan's farming population was still under 42 years old; by 1990, the median age had increased to 60 — retirement age for most of the rest of Japan

(JOAA, 1993, p. 4). In the 1990s, there was a slight increase in people entering the farming profession, but the median age continues to increase. At the urging of the WTO, the Japanese government in 1992 presented a plan for fewer farmers to manage larger farms and for farms to become more efficient in order to compete with other agricultural products on a global scale. By the 1990s, the Japanese government was fully subscribing to the concept of “competitive advantage” (buying from the cheapest global market and selling to the most expensive) and had almost completely abandoned the small family farmer (Hawken, 2000, p. 168).

Another problem of industrial agriculture is environmental damage. In *Complex Pollution* (1979), Sawako Ariyoshi warns of the dangers of food pollution from agrichemicals. She defines *complex pollution* as contamination by multiple harmful chemicals simultaneously. As a result, a kind of synergy results, and the harmful effect becomes greater than the sum of its parts. For example, we breathe air poisoned by exhaust gas, eat rice poisoned by agricultural chemicals, and use soybean paste made from imported genetically modified wheat and soybeans (also contaminated with agricultural chemicals) (1979, pp. 164-166). Not only do we not know all the facts about what goes into the food we are eating, we do not know the complex effects of combining several kinds of poisons in our bodies. The basic ingredients of the Japanese diet, miso, dashi, seaweed, rice, and tea, are contaminated by many kinds of chemicals unknown (and largely unknowable) to the average consumer. According to Ariyoshi, these chemicals combine in our bodies to form hundreds of kinds of poisons. Like *Silent Spring*, *Complex Pollution* caused a small uprising when first published serially in the early 1970s. Again like *Silent Spring*, despite a wide readership, the problems detailed in her work have actually become much more widespread since initial publication. Unlike Rachel Carson, however, Sawako Ariyoshi is practically unknown outside Japan, and no full-length English translation of *Complex Pollution* is currently available.

The Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA) and *teikei*

In response to the above-mentioned problems, the Japan Organic Agriculture Organization (JOAA) (日本有機農業研究会) was founded in October 1971, around the time of Japan's greatest post-war economic and

industrial growth. Although by the early 1970s, Japan's annual net GNP growth rate was more than 10%, this was also the time when the adverse effects of rapid post-war industrialization were first being investigated and voiced. Especially in rural areas, new diseases and poisoning cases caused by environmental pollution and chemical usage were beginning to be documented (Kishida, 2003, p. 12). This was also the decade of the infamous Green Revolution in agriculture, a "revolution" started by major agrochemical companies in the U.S. that resulted in drastic increases in the amount of agricultural chemicals used worldwide, especially in developing countries such as China and India (Shiva, 2000, p. 80).

Because of *Complex Pollution* and other reports, Japanese consumers became aware of the dangers in their food and began to organize to demand safe, uncontaminated food. At the same time, farmers were becoming aware of the damage to human, animal, and soil life through the use of agricultural chemicals and started practicing and researching organic farming. In Kobe, a group of concerned homemakers contacted several local farmers and asked them to grow organic produce for their families. This was the birth of the *teikei* movement. After several similar groups had been formed, farmer Teruo Ichiraku, former president of the Cooperative Research Institute, suggested forming a larger organization (the JOAA). The organization's original philosophy was highly influenced by 4 people: Masanobu Fukuoka, author of *The One Straw Revolution* and pioneer of "natural farming" with a Buddhist basis; Giryō Yanase, a doctor who studied the relationship between chemically contaminated food and human disease; Shunichi Wakatsuki, a doctor who studied disease, poisonings, and other health problems in rural areas; and Sawako Ariyoshi. Of the other initial 29 members were activist homemakers, specialists in microorganisms, and natural farming researchers (JOAA, 1993, p. 15). Today, there are about 3,000 members in the JOAA, about 25% of which are farmers and food producers. The other 75% consists of researchers, doctors, economists, journalists, and consumers. The organization publishes a quarterly journal *Soil and Health* and has produced several books, including *The Organic Handbook*, a guide to self-sufficient, sustainable living.

Essentially, the JOAA defines organic as "[a set of] laws and principles behind the dynamism of natural phenomena leading to the belief that farmers

must adapt themselves to these laws and principles and help them work” (JOAA, 1993, p. 8). They have also applied *organic* to the relationship that must be built between consumers and producers. The key point is that nature comes first and cooperation rather than coercion is the appropriate human role, whether in confronting nature or building relations with another human being. It is an organic agriculture that begins with compost and ends in fully formed, harmonious human relationships (Moen, 1997, p. 22).

An important concept of *teikei* organic is sustainability: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and social sustainability. While industrial agriculture relies on professional distributors and retailers to connect producers and consumers, the *teikei* system calls for direct self-distribution. Typically, a single medium-size producer or several small producers gather their produce for delivery to (or pick-up by) a consumers' group. The produce is then distributed among smaller consumers' groups and individual households in the community. The produce is never handled by anyone outside of the *teikei* group. By keeping the producer and consumer as close as possible, gasoline and other transportation costs are reduced and environmental impact is lessened.

The size of the farm and the variety of produce are also important. According to the JOAA's definition of organic, the ideal farm should be small and should not produce too much of one thing but rather grow a variety of foods (JOAA, 1999, p. 24). This idea runs counter to the “monoculture” model of industrial farming (large farms producing a single product) first developed in the U.S. Monocultural farming not only weakens plants and soil fertility, it robs the small farmer's ability to feed his or her family by taking away self-sufficiency (Norberg-Hodge, 2002, p. 14). On the other hand, a healthy farm should be able to produce its own compost, fertilizer, and seeds (Fukuoka, 1976, p. 38). The primary point of the healthy farm is not to create products for the market but rather to nourish the family living there. The non-farming, urban-dwelling consumer is provided with the farmer's excess; the consumer basically shares in the food the farmer has produced for his family. The farmer and the consumer are part of one large extended family, and there is no artificial capital division between the producer and the consumer.

One obvious problem facing the move to *teikei*-style organic farming has

been the rural labor shortage. Organic methods, emphasizing the reduction of unnecessary inputs and the use of machinery, naturally require more human-power. Today's Japanese farms are not well equipped for such a move; the average age of farmers is high and there is a severe shortage of successors and young people to take up the challenge of farming. *Teikei* offers a partial solution to this problem by encouraging consumers to visit the farms that provide their food and volunteer their time to help with the farm work. Members are encouraged to come with their young children to pick up their weekly vegetables and together enter the farm and pick what the family needs. In the *teikei* system, not only is the management of the farm shared, but member's children gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of where their food comes from. Here, *teikei* suggests a kind of empowering, environmental education: all consumers, young and old, have the privilege of seeing where their food comes from while participating in the joys and hardships of creation.

The eating habits of *teikei* consumers have also changed; members have adjusted to eating seasonally instead of asking the farmer to work unnatural miracles. Fukuoka writes of this in *The One Straw Revolution*: Because consumers have become accustomed to having such improbabilities as eggplants in the winter, farmers must build greenhouses, use excessive fossil fuels and water and time, because consumers cannot wait until summer to eat eggplant again. This may be seen as evidence of the great advance of technological civilization; it may also be seen as a new method for squandering fossil fuels and damaging natural soil fertility by growing out of season (Fukuoka, 1978, p. 64). *Teikei* treats food as a gift, not a purchase. Because the value of food is fully recognized, consumers develop and seek out recipes that utilize the entire vegetable: one of JOAA's mottos is "to eat from root to leaf." Through *teikei*, a new kind of consumer is born as shopping and eating habits are modified and improved. A "drifting" relationship with food, determined by the lowest price and empty desire is replaced with an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness and an awareness of the seasons.

As eating habits change, so do attitudes toward the land which hosts our food. The cornerstone of Japanese agriculture, rice paddies not only produce rice but control flooding, protect underground water supplies and preserve

the rural environment in general; the *teikei* ideal holds that not only the rice from the paddy but *the paddy itself* must become the focus of attention (Hashimoto, 2001, p. 9). Not only the farmer who “owns” or uses the paddy, but the families who live around it, the families whose drinking water is affected by the paddies' water, the animals who depend on the paddy for shelter and food, everyone who eats the rice grown in the paddy: all are connected to the paddy's health. The paddy is everyone's place; the use of the paddy is everyone's responsibility. Of course, ultimately, the paddy belongs to no one but rather humans belong to the land—this is the *teikei* meaning of organic agriculture, discovering the laws and principles inherent in our soil and farming and eating in accordance with them. As in the story of Fukuoka's eggplants, humans can do anything but they must also have an appreciation of their limits.

Until the 1980s, the term *organic* in Japan was understood largely in the *teikei* context outlined above: *organic* was one aspect of a sustainable, localized, community-based agriculture and exchange program dependent neither upon agricultural chemicals or international trade policies. That the food was grown without dangerous pesticides and herbicides was a crucial factor but not the only one. However, food fears in Japan and elsewhere reached new heights in the mid-1980s, especially after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident (Moen, 1997, p. 15). Urban consumers began to demand “organic” foods on a larger scale and, independent of the *teikei* movement, retailers responded by flooding the market with expensive products dubiously labeled “organic,” “no-chemical,” “less chemicals,” and “natural farming.” This second wave of products had no connection with the original *teikei* movement or sustainable practices; it was the beginning of the commodification and consumer-centering of organic food in Japan. This was the trend that ultimately led to the implementation of JAS (Japan Agricultural Standard) organic labeling laws in 1993 and again in 2001 (JOAA, 1993, p. 14).

The Legalization of Organic: the Japan Agricultural Standard (JAS)

The history of organic labeling laws in Japan began when the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (MAFF) enacted the “Special Labeling Guideline on Organically Grown Vegetables and Fruits” in October 1992,

and enforced it in April 1993 (Hashimoto, 2001, p. 9). With this law came "The Specified JAS Standard," a standard for growing crops. Although the original intention of the law was to standardize labeling of food products, the JAS Standard showed that the government had an interest in the certification of processes, too. The labels established at this time were unsatisfactory and reportedly were influenced by the demands of profit-seeking retailers and corporations (Moen, 1997, p. 16). The standards were vague and allowed for varying degrees of organic, like "reduced chemicals" or a "small amount of chemicals." These early JAS standards managed to satisfy almost no one: consumers were confused at the plethora of ambiguous labels, farmers were suspicious of the government's motivations in labeling, and the international organic trading community found the fuzzy classifications useless as a means of import and export. At the time, countries such as New Zealand and the European Union operated under the assumption that Japan has no organic industry (because of the lack of strong government standards) (Hashimoto, 2001, p. 20).

A newly revised set of organic standards went into effect in April 2001, a chemical definition of organic processes and ingredients aimed at soil conservation and the production of "safe" food for consumers (JAS, 2001, p. 2). Under the 2001 law, only products certified and marked under the Japan Agricultural Standard (JAS) can be legally called "organic." Ironically, this has resulted in a decrease in the amount of organic products available to consumers (Moen, 1997, p. 16). Admittedly, until that time, some farmers may have been producing foods that reduced or eliminated chemical inputs and selling them under the term "organic." On the other hand, small farmers who been producing genuinely organic food but who could not or would not pay for additional government certification were also prevented from selling their produce as organic. After the new law went into effect, a large numbers of farmers who could not be certified by the national standard have had to stop using the word organic. At the same time, large monocultural farms who follow the chemical guidelines of JAS could be certified "organic," and certified organic food from the U.S. and Australia were imported into Japan on a massive scale. The new government standard has in some ways confused the situation for consumers and obstructed the exchange of organic foods at the local, grassroots level (Hashimoto, 2001, p.

21).

Many Japanese farmers, along with the JOAA, are suspicious of a labeling system originating from a bureaucratic agricultural policy that demonstrably has little concern for the conditions of local farmers. There is also the concern that the standards, adapted partly under pressure from Western countries' recently implemented standards, may not be completely suitable for agriculture in Japan (Kishida, 2003, p. 56). A global organic standard based on chemical usage is much more difficult to decide, implement, and enforce than locally determined organic standards based on globally recognized goals, ideals, and practices. The basis for organic agriculture, JOAA has argued, is the adaptation of human techniques to match the natural surroundings of an area, of discovering the best way to get along with the nature we live inside. Finally, the high cost of certification (without which the term *organic* cannot now be legally used) increases the price for consumers and the production costs for farmers. *Teikei* systems have always made a point of offering the lowest, fairest prices they can; furthermore, the money exchanged is kept locally. Is the extra certification money well spent? One result of the certification requirement is that small farms who cannot afford 60,000 yen or \$600 a year for government certification tests must stop using the word organic. This has caused considerable bitterness among small farmers in Japan and the United States, who feel that a term developed and nurtured by working people for over 60 years has been taken away by the government (Hashimoto, 2001, p. 8). Besides the cost of certification, the economics of organic farming have been upset in other ways. In *teikei* systems, vegetables are produced very cheaply, equal to or less than the price of an average major supermarket. Yet now organic vegetables have a reputation of being expensive, and a false market of *quality equals high price* has been created around organic produce, so supermarkets and retailers can inflate the price. Customers expect to pay more for organic produce, and they do. But it does not have to be this way. Another of the Japanese government's expressions for organic produce is *high value-added farming* (*kofuka kachigata no nougyou*) but whose value is this? It is clear that neither consumers nor small local producers are the recipients of this added value.

The conventional marketing systems, not addressed by organic

certification laws, do not support the sustainability of method and management of organic agriculture, and the conventional market system cannot guarantee high prices for organic produce. Market prices are set in accordance with the balance between supply and demand: as more organic farmers enter the market, prices will decrease. Current high prices simply reflect a greater demand than supply.

The needs of the consumers and the demands of the market — developed in the absence of dialogue — cannot guarantee sustainability of food production. An agriculture focused only on the needs, demands, and whims of consumers with money is dangerous: it leads to unreasonable demands such as perfectly shaped vegetables with no insect damage, an ample supply of all foods year round, and an eventual erosion of the culture of eating within the season. It creates unnecessary difficulties on the producers' side, such as how to produce summer vegetables in the middle of winter, leading in turn to environmental strain and imbalance. “With the conventional market where producers and consumers are completely separated, the sustainability of organic agriculture management cannot but be uncertain. The most hopeful alternative is *teikei*” (JOAA, 1999, p. 24)

Ichiraku Teruo sums up the problem well: “If you simply stick to the technical viewpoint that organic agriculture is agriculture managed without the use of chemicals, you will fail to notice many paradoxical problems you face today” (Moen, 1997, p. 16). The *teikei* movement began with the assumption that agriculture was not the sole problem affecting Japan's food supply. Rather than attempting to create a technical definition of organic, they claimed that many aspects of Japanese society were “deformed”: technical systems, management systems, philosophy, distribution systems, consumption structures, and agricultural policies. An organic revolution entails reforming these aspects.

To understand how to create organic solutions to industrial agriculture, we must understand industrial agriculture's appeal to consumers. First of all, why are agrichemicals necessary? Apart from increasing production and protecting against the diseases typical of monocultures, another significant reason for the use of agrochemicals is to insure uniform size, color, and general appearance of produce. The twisted cucumber and the cabbage with some worm holes in the outer leaves, while a common sight on the natural

farm, have become unacceptable for consumers shopping at large chain supermarkets. Packaging has also become quite elaborate and wasteful in modern stores. The *teikei* system has sought to remedy this by asking that consumers accept everything, big or small, with or without slight insect damage, muddy or clean. This has further simplified the distribution of foods and has reduced waste in uneaten vegetables. Wasteful packaging is avoided by using reusable containers and recycled bags to transport produce. By distributing food themselves, consumers and producers can make regular, weekly contact. Bonds are formed, faces and names become familiar, and families open up. False divisions between urban and rural, consumer and farmer, agriculture and community, built up since the end of World War II, are broken down.

The JAS certification was created to serve the conventional market system, where retailers and wholesalers come between the producer and the consumer. It is a market where appearance and efficiency are more important than the quality of the food and the welfare of the person who made it.

Paulo Freire, education, and the meaning of organic

The distinction between definitions of organic—the government definition and the *teikei* definition—can be seen as a top-down approach versus a bottom-up approach. The JAS guidelines, decided by experts without the participation of average farmers and consumers and handed down as law, represent a top-down approach, while the *teikei* movement, created by numerous local units of people actively communicating their needs to one another, represents a bottom up approach. In the top-down approach we find what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire calls *communiqué*-style communication: a set of one way messages which are not expected to be questioned. Bottom-down approaches such as *teikei* utilize dialogue-based communication where all voices are recognized and accorded value. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire labels top-down processes as “banking education” and bottom-up processes as “problem-posing education.” The word “education” here should be taken in its broadest possible meaning: any social action where the exchange or transmission of information takes place between humans (Freire, 1970, p. 23).

Based on his early work in literacy training among Brazilian farmers, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* outlines how education can have either an oppressive or liberating effect depending not only on the material taught but the style of teaching itself. Banking education is his term for top-down, traditional classroom patterns where the teacher is the keeper of knowledge and the students are empty receptacles waiting to be filled. As if the students were living banks, the teacher deposits information during class and withdraws the same information during tests. Students are expected to contain and reproduce the material more or less in the same form as when it was deposited. The students in this situation do not have the possibility of change, growth, or liberation. From the beginning of their educational experience to the end, the material (the world) is not theirs; as objects of the process, they lose their humanity and their right to take their place in their world (Freire, 1970, p. 37).

Freire's alternative to banking education is what he terms problem-posing education: a bottom-up process where teachers and students work together towards the solution of a common problem. The teacher does not know the outcome of the process, thus cannot simply input the information into students. However, the teacher does bring experiences and techniques which may be beneficial in the search for answers. The students, too, bring their experience and knowledge to the classroom in order to make meaningful contributions to the learning process (Freire, 1998, p. 18).

Freire's ideas are not limited to the traditional classroom. In groundbreaking work on participatory development methodology, *Rural Development*, Robert Chambers makes the connection between Freire, agriculture, and community: "[Pedagogy of the Oppressed] enables citizens to look critically at their world, to break out of their 'culture of silence,' and to take control of their destinies." Rural people and working people can become "actors rather than objects." (Chambers, 1983, p. 68)

The term "oppressed" can likewise be misleading: although "the oppressed" in Freire's title would seem to imply peasants in Third World countries, Linda Stout argues that "oppression can manifest in economically middle class countries where control of daily life has been taken away" (Stout, 1997, p. 9). Farmers who cannot control the kinds of food they produce and consumers who cannot control what they feed their family

everyday are oppressed, despite their outward middle class lifestyle. To understand and apply Freire's pedagogy, we first must identify the "oppressed" in Japan. Farmers in post-war Japan can be seen as an oppressed group, as can consumers who are subject to "complex pollution" and restricted food choices.

In order to overcome oppression through problem-posing education, students become critically aware of the reality surrounding them—their community, their school, their country, and their position relative to each—and in the process become *Subjects* of their lives where once they were objects. A Freirean Subject is an empowered person who, in dialogue with others, can make meaningful decisions about the course of his or her life. These critical decisions in turn are what Freire calls "cultural acts" (Freire, 1970). Cultural acts result in the creation of a new knowledge that resides not in the teacher (or other authority figure) alone but in the community of learners and teachers linked by dialogue.

In Japan, the *teikei* movement is a representative cultural act: humans taking control of their lives and enacting an alternative reality. *Teikei* allows producers and consumers to have a creative relationship, not limited by finance or controlled by retailers or outside politicians, not dictated by economic terms of war/antagonism created falsely by supply and demand market forces. Naturally, cultural acts like *teikei* are liberating and revolutionary; the small revolution of *teikei* provides the space in which to enact further social reforms. The energy created by *teikei*, understood in a Freirean context, can guide further attempts to regain the intellectual and commercial capital lost by rural communities in the post-war years (Chambers, 1997, p. 74). Through Freire, the radical edge of *organic* can be understood to mean the beginnings of a social revolution. Through an understanding of praxis, we can distinguish between creative, dialogue-based action and ambivalent legislation handed down from above.

The word *organic*, used as a Freirean *true word* combining reflection and action, spoken between subjects in full and critical awareness of their situation in a globalized world and in their own silenced community, is a rallying call for sustainable resistance. Real cultural revolution is "a clear invitation to all who wish to participate in the reconstruction of society" (Freire, 1970, p. 158). In this sense, "cultural revolution is a necessary

continuation of the dialogical cultural action which must be carried out before the revolution reaches power” (Freire, 1997, p. 30). The value and purpose of *teikei* (embodied by JOAA) lies in this preliminary work. This movement began with a human voice with the goal of putting a human face (or restoring a human face) to all of life's interactions, even those involving commerce. There is no such invitation implicit in the government definition of organic. It offers only limited participation in a misleadingly static commercial relationship.

With Freire, we can continue the initial work of the *teikei* movement and begin to apply “organic” to our schools as well. Students who have only been trained to imagine themselves as consumers are *oppressed* in the Freirean sense. They have no access to meaningful dialogue and their involuntary oppression of others (by uncritical consumption) further keeps them from becoming subjects and taking control of their communities. They neither live in the world nor can they shape the world: they are merely floating through it. Through *teikei*-style organic relations, not only can they develop the liberating ability of dialogue, they can make contact with the workers and producers who constitute their community. As teachers, our responsibility is to bring top-down and bottom-up issues to the classroom. We cannot be content teaching “skills” as if they were not in the world or with the world. We should not be guilty of silencing dialogue through top-down processes, no matter how well-intentioned. In Freire's pedagogy, any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence (Freire, 1970, p. 85). The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects and deny their liberation. Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—unfinished beings in an unfinished reality.

Freire's approach, first used in teaching literacy to Brazilian peasants, is based on asking questions about the root causes of social and political problems rather than focusing on the symptoms (a mistake made by most international volunteer organizations). Freire makes a distinction between *humanism* and *humanitarianism*, the latter being restricted to financial donations or the contribution of a limited amount of time volunteerism (domestic or international), out of pity or perceived obligation. On the other

hand, Friere's model of *humanism* seeks to treat all humans equally, assuming from the beginning that there are no top or bottom countries, and that the simple(re)distribution of resources (or the transfer of extra resources) cannot truly help the oppressed to become human. Likewise, a (re)labeling of commercial products carried out in the absence of dialogue cannot create a sustainable society.

Local *teikei* agriculture is a fine example of Freire's with the people, with the world, a kind of connectedness that liberates all involved. Crucial to his pedagogy is the idea of *praxis*, "reflection and action upon the world in order to change it" (Freire, 1970, p. 120). Being able to make the connection between experience, understanding, and social action to bring about social change. It is a process that people must engage in for themselves because liberation can only come from the bottom up. Nobody—no government, no teacher, no volunteer organization—can do it for another. It follows from this that liberation leads to local solutions: every group of people will find answers best suited to their locality. There is no one answer, no one magic pattern. The government cannot and should not be relied upon to provide a blanket, national solution.

As the *teikei* movement has helped build awareness of the needs for safe food, other marketers have seen the potential of a new market (Henderson, 1999, p. 217). The children of the original founders of the *teikei* movement can find organic produce in department stores and chain supermarkets, albeit often at a 50% or more premium (Hashimoto, 2001, p. 9). Is it the same thing? A Freirean approach suggests that no, it is not. What is lost is the process of grassroots, bottom-up, problem-posing dialogue. The struggle for sustainability is an ongoing process and education is the key to keeping the process alive. Sustainability is built through direct dialogue by people living together in respect.

Hashimoto (2001) points to many cases where civil groups have been born from *teikei* groups in both rural and urban areas. These groups include protests against nuclear power stations, dioxin research groups, anti-GMO, and public incinerator study groups. People are very motivated to learn more when they see common ecological problems very close to their everyday lives and not beyond their ability to make a difference. *Teikei* can help educate people to think and act both globally and locally.

Certification is certainly necessary and appropriate at times. No one wants to see the organic market saturated with dishonest or misleadingly labeled products, and in the absence of direct dialogue between consumer and producer, third-party certification is sometimes inevitable. The term *organic* should only be used by those who are producing food using sustainable practices. But a worldwide grassroots movement, slowly developed over 60 years through face-to-face dialogue between farmer and consumer, with no national standard, no involvement (or interest) on the part of big agribusiness, and no advertising campaigns, cannot be replaced with swift, “banking” processes of law. It is particularly ironic that Monsanto has gotten involved in the organic debate, as the grassroots organic movement originated in response to Monsanto's unsustainable, dangerous practices. That the company has not changed its business practices but only attached a bankable label is another symptom of top-down, one-way processes.

The struggle of the *teikei* movement in Japan and similar movements around the world goes well beyond the demand for safe, organically grown produce for consumers. This is of course a minimum demand and only just the beginning, just the first step in the struggle. The true heart of *teikei* lies in community-building based on sustainable practices and communication; sustainability begins with agriculture and extends through economics, health care, and education to touch the lives of everyone connected to a community. When linked and augmented through Freirean pedagogy, the struggle can be kept alive and rescued from becoming simply a marketing strategy. With Freire's pedagogy, the different nuances and motivations of the word “organic” are revealed. Bottom-up organic can lead to liberation.

Japan has the potential to become a leader among industrialized nations in the local foods revolution. Already, the necessary cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical elements are in place. The intrinsic values of buying local and eating seasonally continue to thrive here. Whether these cultural characteristics are exploited by transnational retailers or celebrated and protected depends on the extent to which a meaningful framework and educational system is applied to the situation. This will determine Japan's role in the food revolution. Indeed, the present problems of agriculture cannot be solved simply by converting large commercial farms to fit national organic standards. Unless attention is paid to the systems beyond those of

large-scale production and consumption, it will be impossible to create a system in harmony with bottom-up organic ideals. *Teikei* Japan is the “other” Japan, where citizens are working at the local level to create an alternative vision of sustainable economy. As Moen (1997) observes, participants in this movement are fashioning new cultural values and social relations that challenge the dominant culture's hegemony. They are defining new channels of community involvement and political resistance; they are seeking out and developing new voices in the creation of culture. By connecting organic with local education, teachers, institutions, and food makers can come together in exchange with *teikei*.

How can we begin to make meaningful connections between college students, *teikei*, and local agriculture? Unfortunately, there are many obstacles. While school gardens are common in Japanese primary and secondary schools, they are almost unheard of at colleges. And while elementary schools in rural areas are applying the *teikei* concept in their school lunch program (by using local products, by assisting local farmers, and by inviting farmers to come and eat with the children), colleges feature convenience stores, vending machines, and commercial cafeteria food. College students are not without connections to agriculture—in the private college where I teach, most students have farmers in their immediate families, and many assist with the labor-intensive rice planting and harvesting times. But just as *touching* and *understanding* are different cognitive acts, simply being exposed to farming is not the same as knowing farming: knowing the problems facing globalized, industrialized farming, or understanding why farming is not an occupation they are encouraged to undertake. Again, here we can see a distinction between top-down organic and bottom-up organic: where introducing top-down organic may change eating habits, bottom up organic can also cause children to take a critical look at their community and their place in it.

It is unfortunate that just when children are becoming working adults and preparing to enter society as workers and citizens, most meaningful connections to the soil and the community which surrounds them are taken away. University and college teachers bear the responsibility of creating future consumers. Many college students are for the first time in their lives living alone, working longer part-time hours, managing their own

households, and paying some or all of their own bills; they will eventually be making decisions about their future job. Knowing how to fulfill these obligations responsibly, in both a local and global context, is essential; sustainable consumerism should be given some time throughout the curriculum. One way to approach this problem, largely written out of current textbooks and skills-based curriculums, is to consider community research.

As educators, we can bring food issues into our classrooms as Freire-based local studies. For those of us teaching in rural areas, it will be possible to make direct contact with local farmers and others who are involved in traditional food culture and open new channels of dialogue between student and producer. *Teikei* can take root in the classroom as students become aware that they are truly part of a community. Of course, for teachers in urban areas more initial work may be necessary. There is a 30 year history of dialogue-based social activism in Japan thanks in part to the *teikei* movement; by re-aligning and reconsidering our educational goals in the context of *teikei*-style sustainability, we can help insure that Japan's organic revolution will continue to grow. Students will be able to make critical decisions about the received top-down processes and created bottom-up processes which surround them.

Farming as an alternative international language can improve and broaden the scope of "English as an international language" education. For example, the majority of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks in Japan portray social and cultural exchange in white-collar, middle class settings: the occupations taught in the textbook-created situations are professional, college-educated, with accompanying preconceptions that lead to an inevitable outcome. By taking a bottom-up approach to the textbook, students can learn to verbalize what is really important in their own community. Outside the controlled, compromised confines of the top-down textbooks, students can find in their study of English the possibility to effect lasting, radical reform. An international education that does not begin with a bottom-up, organic examination of the student's own surroundings is compromised from the beginning.

Top-down processes are often created by experts, bureaucrats, and politicians whose fates are not directly connected to the well-being of any one community (Chambers, 1983, p. 35). Government organic certification

is one such process; in both Japan and the United States, the process has been subject to outside forces such as international free trade regulations and the interests of agrichemical companies with products to sell. Simultaneously, legal certification and labeling reduce the number of opportunities for consumer participation in the production process. The educational possibilities offered by JAS are limited and non-critical: for the consumer, organic education is reduced to being able to read a product label. The consumer may actually become less educated about food choices in this model, as the burden of research is shifted to the government and personal responsibility becomes a matter of law. Entrusting daily choices to an exterior power is an abandonment of critical inquiry and the beginning of oppression and objectification.

Introducing *teikei*-style organic concepts into our schools may involve a move away from rigid national standard of education and skills-based curriculums and towards an ongoing, deepening relationship between the teachers, the students, and the community. Freirean education views the students above all as an asset and a product of their community. As the community is responsible for each child, the educated college graduate bears a responsibility to the community that raised her. Applying *teikei*-style organic principles at every stage of education, from nursery school to college, we can build strong connections to make organic communities a reality. It is the starting point in the construction of a true community where the needs of all are considered by all, where the joys and losses, triumphs and set-backs of a community are shared and shouldered by all members equally. *Teikei*-style organic carries this potential.

Ichiraku (JOAA, 1993) has identified the basic function of food is to nurture life and the basic function of agriculture is the feed the farmer's own "family," extended to include the community who share the farmer's life. (Industrialized farming does not fit this ideal and has not since the end of World War II.) Freire writes that the basic function of education is to sustain and nurture a community in its goal of collective empowerment (Freire, 1998, p. 23). An education that does not teach us where we come from and where we are cannot be liberating. A liberating education must have a sense of place as well as time, taken together to mean education in a historical moment (Freire, 1970, p. 18).

While some teachers may be reluctant to open their classroom to the community for fear that “academic” learning may be sacrificed, Hashimoto argues that education does not have to be and should not be limited to formal settings: “There are alternatives such as visiting an organic farm where the harmony between people and nature can be seen... where farmers can explain how they suffered from an ill-defined disease after using pesticides, and where people begin to understand what goes into making the food they eat every day” (Hashimoto, 2001, p. 9). Indeed, communicative research done outside the classroom can lead to Freire's “creation of knowledge” with a result more academically meaningful than more “traditional” research. The creation of an *organic* community of learners can proceed from an enlargement of *teikei* ideals.

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