

# Vegetarian Foodways

*A Cross-cultural Perspective*

**Joanna Maria Michalowska**



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Department of Social Anthropology

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

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## Summary

Vegetarian foodways are relatively universal – identifiable in different parts of the world and in different local contexts. However, owing to the particularities of these local contexts, vegetarian foodways are also culturally specific. I use the empirical example of vegetarianism in Japan on the one hand in order to both illustrate the transnational vegetarian foodways and show them in a context different from the original Western one. On the other hand, vegetarian foodways in Japan serve as an example of a *distinct* local variant of the transnational phenomenon. In addition, Japan has significantly contributed to the development of the transnational vegetarian foodways by means of the spread to the West of Zen Buddhism, macrobiotics and more general holistic attitudes to food and health, as well as certain foods.

I start by presenting developments in modern Western foodways concerning the consumption of meat and attitudes to it, and within these developments, the advancement of vegetarianism as a dietary option, a lifestyle and a social movement. I point out Japan's contribution to these developments and identify the main tenets of the transnational vegetarian ideology resulting from the meeting of 'West' and 'East': compassion for all living beings, human health and vitality of vegetarian food, and concern about the natural environment. I proceed to present vegetarianism in Japan through a series of contextualised empirical examples consisting of a vegetarian organisation and four individuals operating in Japanese society. I identify all the three tenets in the rhetoric of the vegetarian organisation, whereas the individuals represent various combinations of them.

My conclusion is that vegetarianism in Japan is both part of the transnational phenomenon, and a distinct local articulation of it. The distinctiveness stems from the specificity of the Japanese context, including the traditional Japanese worldview and a traditional 'vegetarian' practice which is part of that worldview.

## **Preface**

This paper does not make a claim to being either an exhaustive or even necessarily a representative picture of vegetarianism in Japan. It is a personal account by a fairly ignorant outsider to Japanese language and culture, though an insider to the transnational phenomenon of vegetarianism.

I owe a debt of gratitude to all the people who – in so many different ways – have contributed to this paper seeing the light of day, not least to my supervisor, Arne Røkkum.

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# Contents

<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>PREFACE</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>THESIS STATEMENT</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>CONCEPTS, NOTIONS, ANALYTICAL TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<i>Agency</i> .....	<i>12</i>
<i>Foodways</i> .....	<i>12</i>
<i>Food avoidances and prohibitions</i> .....	<i>13</i>
<i>Social movements</i> .....	<i>13</i>
<i>The Japanese worldview in perspective</i> .....	<i>15</i>
<i>A 'two-way stream'</i> .....	<i>17</i>
<b>VEGETARIANISM AS A DEFINITIONAL CHALLENGE</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<i>The challenges</i> .....	<i>19</i>
<i>The definitions</i> .....	<i>20</i>
<i>Other approaches</i> .....	<i>23</i>
<i>Positioning</i> .....	<i>24</i>
<i>Japanese terms</i> .....	<i>25</i>
<b>VEGETARIAN FOODWAYS IN WESTERN PERSPECTIVE</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>THE TAILS OF THE COIN: MEAT-EATING</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<i>'Good to eat' or 'good to think with'?</i> .....	<i>28</i>
<i>Developments in meat-eating</i> .....	<i>30</i>
<i>A way of life in crisis?</i> .....	<i>32</i>

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THE HEADS OF THE COIN: VEGETARIANISM.....	34
<i>The development of modern vegetarianism</i> .....	34
<i>'Cranks' and other alternative '-isms'</i> .....	40
<i>The hierarchy of foods</i> .....	42
<i>The vegetarian social profile</i> .....	44
<i>Vegetarian motivations</i> .....	45
<i>More than a diet</i> .....	46
<i>From challenge to incorporation</i> .....	47
<b>VEGETARIAN FOODWAYS IN JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE .....</b>	<b>50</b>
THE LOCAL CONTEXT .....	50
<i>Japanese foodways</i> .....	50
<i>The traditional worldview and approach to life</i> .....	61
<i>Diversification of values and lifestyles</i> .....	62
VEGETARIANISM IN JAPAN .....	64
<i>JAPAN VEGETARIAN SOCIETY</i> .....	66
<i>KEIKO: Health and Environmental Protection</i> .....	78
<i>HELEN: The Natural Food Movement</i> .....	90
<i>NATSUME: Animal Rights and Lay Buddhism</i> .....	99
<i>TENKAI MIKI: Monastic Buddhist Vegetarian Foodways</i> .....	109
<b>CONCLUSION: VEGETARIANISM - TRANSNATIONAL AND LOCAL.....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>120</b>
FILMOGRAPHY.....	150

## INTRODUCTION

Modern vegetarianism is primarily a Western phenomenon. The West – in my argument shorthand for Western Europe, primarily Britain, and North America – is where vegetarianism in its modern guise originated, where it is most widespread and where it has also partly spread from to other parts of the world.

This paper is going to trace these developments: the occurrence and advancement of modern vegetarianism in the West and its spread to one particular other country, Japan. At the same time, as will become apparent, the movement of ideas, foodways and foods has not just gone from the West to Japan. Japan has contributed to the development of what has become *transnational* vegetarianism.

### Thesis statement

Having developed in the West, with a contribution from Eastern<sup>1</sup> thought and practice, modern vegetarianism is today a transnational phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> **Vegetarian foodways<sup>3</sup> are relatively universal – identifiable in different parts of the world and in different local contexts, including non-Western and culturally distinct ones. However, owing to the particularities of these local contexts, vegetarian foodways are also culturally specific.** That is true even for the various Western countries,<sup>4</sup> although, especially when contrasted with Japan, these are usually treated

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably, Indian since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Twigg 1983) and Japanese since the 1960s (Cwiertka 1999; Clarke 2000b).

<sup>2</sup> Obviously, it does not exist *everywhere* on the planet. As will be discussed below, its existence is dependent among other things on reliable food supplies and on scope for exercising volition in the choice of foodways.

<sup>3</sup> Foodways are “cultural attitudes and patterns of behaviour toward food” (Simoons 1994:297).

<sup>4</sup> For example, there are statistical differences in vegetarian motivations in Britain and North America. Also, macrobiotics is more significant in North America and in France than in Britain; e.g. London has no macrobiotic restaurants, whereas Paris has at least two.

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here as a unit – ‘the West’ – which constitutes the basis for identifying the transnational vegetarian foodways.

I use the empirical example of vegetarianism in Japan on the one hand to illustrate the transnational vegetarian foodways, showing them in a context different from the Western one, and on the other hand to serve as an example of a *distinct* local variant of the transnational phenomenon. Japan is of special interest for my purposes for several reasons. First, vegetarianism in Japan has to my knowledge not been covered by social scientific investigation. Second, Japan is a non-Western as well as a historically, socially and culturally distinct place.<sup>5</sup> Third, Japan has significantly contributed to the development of the transnational vegetarian foodways by means of the spread to the West of Zen Buddhism, macrobiotics<sup>6</sup> and more general holistic attitudes to food and health, as well as certain foods.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, the Japanese context includes an interesting example of a traditional ‘vegetarian’ practice fitting into a traditional worldview, a holistic approach to life which is, like modern vegetarianism, a niche phenomenon in today’s Japan. The traditional and the modern alimentary practice and ideology overlap to some extent. As an additional challenge, there seems to be a certain discrepancy and an apparent paradox<sup>8</sup> in the common perceptions of the historical and the modern vegetarian practices in Japan.

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<sup>5</sup> Though similar enough for vegetarianism to have taken root there.

<sup>6</sup> A diet-based cure and dietary guidelines stemming from a synthesis of Chinese philosophy and Western science, devised at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a Japanese army doctor, developed further in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> As a British vegetarian put it, Japan is “the country that made *tofu* famous” (Edwards 2003, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph). Interestingly, Ashkenazi and Jacob (2000) report that *tofu* with herbs, a Western modification, has now appeared on the Japanese market.

<sup>8</sup> According to Clammer, “a central anthropological issue in the analysis of Japan is the balancing of apparent paradoxes” (1997:11).

There is a notion among both some Japanese and non-Japanese, not least among vegetarians, that primarily due to Buddhism, premodern<sup>9</sup> Japan was in fact if not in name a society of vegetarians: “Japan was essentially a nation of vegetarians supporting the “pesco” prefix every now and again on special occasions [...] until the beginning of the Meiji Era (1868-1912) when the dietary delights of the Western world arrived” (Delaney 2000, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph); “[I]n fact we could say that Japan used to be a country where vegetarianism prevailed.” (Kakimoto 1998, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph); “Meat has never been eaten in Japan in the quantities it has in the West, and in fact was rarely eaten at all until Japan began to Westernize and the government actively promoted meat eating as “modern”” (Fukuhara and Takahata 1997:9).

At the same time, a common conception I have encountered among both lay people and Japan-scholars – especially when I first started to research vegetarianism in Japan in 2002 – is that not only is there no modern vegetarian movement to speak of, but it is actually very difficult to follow a vegetarian diet and lifestyle in contemporary Japan: “There are very few vegetarians in Japan. [...] Most people in Japan think that vegetarians are weird – it’s something that only *gaijin*<sup>10</sup> do.” (Edwards 2003, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph); “Vegetarianism in Japan is almost completely an aspect of Zen Buddhism [...]. Secular vegetarianism exists, but even the largest cities have little to offer in the way of vegetarian restaurants. Moreover, and perhaps surprisingly, it is not easy to select a completely vegetarian meal at an ordinary Japanese restaurant.” (Hosking 1996:231); “I believe attitudes are changing, but [...] [t]hey really think you’re strange if you don’t eat animal protein!” (Schinner 2000) Asked to shed some light on the issue, one Western Japan-scholar said out right that there is no such thing as vegetarianism in Japan.

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<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this paper, premodern Japan means in general Japan before the Meiji restoration of 1868. More specifically, between the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century and late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>10</sup> Japanese for ‘foreigner(s)’.



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In sum, as Schinner puts it: “Japan is not a country of vegetarians, despite a long tradition of vegetarian cooking in its Buddhist temples [...], and the abundance of vegetable- and legume-based dishes that can be found in traditional Japanese cuisine. In fact, the idea of vegetarianism is almost foreign” (1999:8).

My research has resulted in an understanding that these perceptions require modification. This paper will demonstrate that modern vegetarianism does indeed exist in contemporary Japan, albeit admittedly as a niche phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> I will show that vegetarianism in Japan is part of the transnational social movement and that one can identify within it the main vegetarian foodways. I will also point out some culture-specific elements in the articulation of these universal vegetarian foodways and the distinctly local flavour and meanings that vegetarianism in contemporary Japan has due to the particularity of the Japanese context, including the traditional ‘vegetarianism’. Concerning the historical<sup>12</sup> practice, I will argue that it did exist, but not quite the way popular belief has it. As for being a vegetarian in contemporary Japan, I conclude that it can be both a challenge and a rewarding experience.

## Approach and methodology

Defined as voluntary abstention from the consumption of meat – and potentially of other animal products as well – vegetarianism centres on food. However, in the words of an anthropologist studying contemporary food and eating patterns in Britain, “food is never ‘just food’” (Caplan 1997:3). Arguably, this is the case especially with a modern vegetarian dietary preference, perhaps with the exclusion of those who were raised as vegetarians and have not ‘converted’ to vegetarianism themselves, precisely for reasons of conscious choice being involved, rather than following the mainstream foodways. As Twigg explains, adherence to modern vegetarian inclination in the

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<sup>11</sup> More common in the West, but still a minority lifestyle choice and social movement.

<sup>12</sup> I am making a distinction between ‘historical’ and ‘traditional’ practice of meat-avoidance. The two are connected in that the traditional stems from the historical.

West today<sup>13</sup> is a result of individual choice and depends on the person having “a highly individuated sense of the self” (1983:19). As a social movement, vegetarianism involves an ideology which combines moral, physical, political and spiritual issues. In addition, in Twigg’s view, vegetarianism “rarely occurs alone, but comes in conjunction with a complex of other beliefs, attitudes and parallel movements” (Twigg 1983:19-20).

So that – borrowing from Caplan again and extending her ideas to Japan:

“If [...] we are to make sense of food and eating in the West today [...] we need to understand not only a variety of social, cultural and historical contexts, but also the many layers of knowledge and meaning held by different subjects, and even by a single subject, in relation to food and eating. Such knowledge is both socially and culturally constructed, as well as being developed by particular subjects in terms of their own identities, their life histories and their views of themselves and their bodies. We need, then, to see food consumers as agents, imbued with volition and intentionality, and as social beings, continuing to use food to express significant relationships.” (1997:25).

In the case of vegetarian agents, these significant relationships expressed through food often include relation to animals and the rest of the natural environment. Vegetarianism is a social movement set in a social, cultural and historical context, with an ideology centred on food, composed of individuals pursuing a lifestyle encompassing a relatively wide range of diets, motivations and layers of meaning, more of which later. This adds up to what I chose to call vegetarian foodways. My primary focus is not on food as such, but on cultural attitudes and patterns of behaviour towards it (cf. Simoons 1994:297).

My approach is interdisciplinary: it is anthropology aided by sociology, cultural studies and history.<sup>14</sup> The social scientific texts I use to present vegetarian foodways

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<sup>13</sup> Unlike in India, where vegetarianism is “fully part of the social structure” by supporting the social hierarchy connected to the caste system – modern vegetarianism in the West is egalitarian – and unlike in mediaeval Europe, when eschewal of meat was connected to denial of the body and to religious piety (Twigg 1983:19).

<sup>14</sup> A historical gaze helps us to see the present as ‘strange’, not as the familiar which we largely take for granted (Lupton 1996:14).

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in the West, their development and the context for that development have been written by anthropologists, sociologists, scholars of cultural studies and – to a lesser extent – social historians, though the developmental perspective is significant in my thesis.<sup>15</sup> My own empirical data concern mostly Japan.

The ethnographic data based on participant observation are the result of a brief visit to Japan in the late summer of 2005, including participation in a vegetarian festival in Tokyo and a ‘reconnaissance’ of various vegetarian and natural food ‘communication-distribution centres’<sup>16</sup> – in other words, rather “thin stuff for thick descriptions” (Melhuus 2002:84) and yet another reason and need to re/-construct indigenous and anthropological contexts, or circuits of meaning, in order to compare (cf. Melhuus 2002:82). Fieldwork also included interviews, conversations, texts and media – books, newspapers, newsletters, brochures and posters – email, websites and films, cf. ‘polymorphous engagements’ in contemporary fieldwork (Gusterson in Hannerz 2003:34). The language used to collect data was English.

In declaring a personal interest in the subject of vegetarianism, I acknowledge a risk of assuming knowledge and insight – but also an advantage in being able to involve my own experience, using myself as an informant, part of the field and an anthropological tool.

On a technical note, Japanese names, when they occur in their entirety, are presented in the Western fashion – with the given name first and the surname last. Most of my informants have fictitious first names only. Macrons in Japanese words denote long vowels, but have been omitted in well-known words such as city names.

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<sup>15</sup> According to Eades (2000:4), interdisciplinary approaches combining anthropology, sociology and history have recently been more common among studies of Japan, and fruitful.

<sup>16</sup> A term used by Kandel and Peltó (1980:338) to describe a type of organization within the health food movement, including vegetarianism, such as health food shops and restaurants as well as organic farms.

## Concepts, notions, analytical tools and frameworks

I will now turn to a presentation and discussion of the major concepts, terms and notions that are going to constitute the tools and framework for my analysis.

### **Agency**

As quoted above, Caplan (1997:25) stresses the need to see food consumers as agents. Also Twigg (1983) points to agency in the context of vegetarian foodways.

Similarly, Clammer suggests conceptions of the social actor – an embodied being with emotional drives and motivations, concerned with relationships and identity maintenance (2000:222) – or the human agent (2001:12-15), as an appropriate tool for studying Japanese society. The author puts forward that notions of the human agent in Japanese context are linked to the ideas of the unity of body and mind, and the unity of human and nature, both of which can be traced back to the two main religions of Japan, Buddhism and Shintō.

### **Foodways**

*Foodways* are “the beliefs and behaviour surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food”. They are used in defining community and relating to other people, to gods and to the dead. They constitute a system of meaning accessible to everyone socialised into a culture. The meaning is conveyed by what one eats as well as by what one avoids eating, the characteristics of food, its presentation and the social setting for eating (Counihan 1999:2, 13, 19). Foodways facilitate then the construction of identities and socialities. They define people’s relationships with their bodies, with other people, with animals, with the environment, as well as with their cultural history (Paxson 2002, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph).

At a different level, “human foodways are a complex result of the interaction of human nutritional needs, ecology, human logic or lack of it, and historical accident. Humans [...] construct their foodways within limits set by biology, economics, and psychology.” (Anderson 2005:2).

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## Food avoidances and prohibitions

Vegetarianism fits into a more general anthropological discourse of food avoidances, prohibitions and taboos. These concepts are not always consistently used in literature and they are subject to modification due to theoretical orientations.

To Mary Douglas (1996:57-8, 61), “a taboo is always part of a whole system of rules [...], part of a classification [of the universe]”, and as such it supports the social structure. An example of this would be the Indian practice referred to by Twigg (1983:19) and mentioned above.

According to Grivetti (2000), in a volume on the history of food, unlike food ‘aversion’, experienced by an individual based on biological or cultural criteria, food ‘taboo’ – and the resulting food ‘avoidance’ – is imposed onto individuals or groups of people on moral or religious grounds. Similarly to dietary ‘prohibition’, food ‘taboo’ involves a food-related ban for specific, positive or negative, reasons concerning the individual, the society or the environment. The restrictions involved are of ecological, economic, religious or social character, e.g. their aim may be protection of crops, economic advantage or regulation of social behaviour (2000:1495-6).

Anderson (2005) distinguishes technically between *taboo* and *avoidance*. According to him, the former is a religious law, and does not really concern American Christians apart from certain sects, e.g. Seventh Day Adventists, which observe Old Testament rules. The latter may be difficult to explain and exists in abundance, with examples such as dogs, horses and insects (2005:156-7).

## Social movements

Maurer (2002) puts forward that the vegetarian movement is not just a dietary choice and lifestyle, but that it has an organisational structure and ideology of a social movement. A social movement is “a collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or a group which it is a part” (Turner and Killian 1987:223 in Maurer 2002:xi). Most authors include vegetarianism in the

natural/health food movement. Maurer, having a starting point in the vegetarian movement, treats the health food movement as one of the “related and overlapping social movements”, together with the animal rights movement and the environmental movement.<sup>17</sup> All of these have helped change perceptions of how animals ought to be treated and whether they should be consumed (2002:58).

Although, like Maurer, I regard these movements to be separate, I will be employing in my analysis certain concepts derived by Kandel and Pelto (1980:332-7) from their study of the health food movement, which in their view includes vegetarianism. According to the authors, the health food movement is based on an ideology which differs from the established ideas and which is in the form of a theme with variations, allowing individuals to construct their own more or less idiosyncratic versions of it. The belief system of the health food movement has three ‘key ideas’. The *natural food idea*, related to the health properties of food, can be divided further into the *vitamin motif* preoccupied with the nutritional content of food, the broadly defined *organic motif* concerned with food being as pure and natural as possible, and the *mystical motif* characterised by the belief in what the authors perceive to be symbolic rather than nutritional properties of food, such as ‘life energy’ contained in raw food, ‘growth force’ of sprouts or the ideal yin/yang balance of brown rice, which are transferred to the eater. The *vegetarian idea* covers various practices and motivations connected to the avoidance of animal protein. The *spiritual idea* considers food a necessary though not sufficient in itself means of achieving a righteous life, and combines it with such practices as meditation, yoga or prayer. Kandel and Pelto put forward that the movement can be looked upon from two related perspectives. It can be seen as a social revitalisation or transformation movement, and as an alternative health maintenance system. They contend that participants in the movement are often “trying to improve their health, their lives, and, sometimes, the world as well”

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<sup>17</sup> These three movements are linked to the three main tenets of the vegetarian ideology that Maurer has identified (2002:71). I will discuss these tenets and movements in the course of presenting the Japanese empirical material.

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(1980:332). The authors identify in addition four types of social involvement in the health food movement: ‘potential members’, ‘independent or “reading and eating” members’, ‘peripheral social members’ and ‘joiners’. These categories can be fluid, and the dietary strictness and the grade of social involvement, though in general parallel, do not always go together (1980:332-7).

There are several terms pertaining to diets followed out of “concerns about the processing, adulteration, denutrition and contamination of food”, all of which can overlap with vegetarianism (Hamilton 1993:223-4). These terms often seem to be used indiscriminately and inconsistently in literature, but they might also be perceived as having slightly indistinct outlines in relation to each other. It appears that ‘wholefood’ equals ‘natural food’, with ‘health food’ as a subgroup, while the label ‘organic’ denominates a stricter category of ‘whole-/ natural food’ – including ‘health food’ – especially when that quality has been certified. For the purpose of this study, ‘health food’ = ‘natural food’ = ‘wholefood’, while the label ‘organic’ is reserved for products certified as such.

### **The Japanese worldview in perspective**

It might be useful in this context to consider the Japanese worldview in comparison with the Western in relation to nature and the environment. Brian Bocking (2003) compares the two generalised attitudes stemming from the respective worldviews based on religious influences. In sum, the Western view of nature, influenced by Christianity, Judaism and Islam, is a universalistic one. Nature, i.e. everything other than humans – being fundamentally separate from human beings and existing in order to fulfil the needs of all human beings – is to be properly managed. Failure to do that posits a realistic threat of bringing about the destruction of the human race (2003:249-251).

By contrast, the traditional Japanese worldview, based on the combined influence of Shintō, Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, is local, concerned with the well-being of the immediate social environment, but not beyond. It considers human beings to be part of the world inhabited by animate and inanimate beings, which are all indebted

to each other, so that human beings do not have a particular stewardship obligation to other beings. In addition, this traditional Japanese worldview is fundamentally optimistic, believes in solving problems when they occur and does not contain a view of a total destruction of the world in the face of mismanagement (Bocking 2003:249-51).

Western environmentalism is, according to Bocking, a kind of Western-style quasi-religion, which professes an environmental end of the world if repentance in the form of changed attitudes to nature and behaviour thereto is not implemented (2003:248, 251). Kalland and Asquith (1997) point out that Western environmentalism is based on the Cartesian worldview, separating humans from the rest of their environment (cf. Bocking 2003 above) – a view which can both be the underlying reason for environmental degradation, and make possible looking at nature from the outside and appreciate it in its wild state (1997:29). At the same time, Western environmentalists often look to Eastern philosophy, as in the case of the ‘Deep Ecology’ movement which has been strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism, the mediaeval thinker Dōgen in particular (Devall and Sessions 1985 in Kalland 1995:243). Both by the Japanese and by Westerners, Zen is credited with inducing the Japanese with a profound love for and appreciation of nature, which Kalland regards as misconceptions (1995:243). Similarly, the alleged Japanese identification with nature, supposedly based on Zen, is a misconception in Kalland and Asquith’s view (1997:4).

In any case, argues Kalland (1995), a worldview in which human beings are integrated with nature is not in itself a sufficient precondition for a good stewardship of the natural environment; it might even obstruct it. In the case of the Japanese, the primary attitude to nature is one of exploitation based on the desire to control and tame it – without, however, distancing oneself from it, and without nature being perceived as the opposite of culture. Nature in its tamed, idealised form is appreciated by the average Japanese who likes using it in literary and artistic metaphors, but this should not be mistaken for love of nature and desire to protect it (1995:255). On the whole, “[i]t is just as difficult to get [the] Japanese to fight against environmental



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destruction *per se*, as it is to get them to fight for human rights in distant countries”, posits Kalland (1995:255).

Clammer (1995) argues along the same lines that due to firm distinctions between in-groups and strangers existing in the Japanese society (cf. Bocking 2003 above), social movements such as the environmental movement have a hard time gaining support for a cause and developing universalistic ideologies (1995:53). In order to make the Japanese care about global and local environmental issues, it is necessary to show these issues as relevant to the Japanese themselves and their social group. Therefore, groups of people in the Japanese society most likely to care about environmental protection are fishermen, farmers, loggers, as well as the tourist industry to the extent it has a vested economic interest in ‘nature’ (Bocking 2003; Kalland 1995).

### **A ‘two-way stream’**

Vegetarian foodways are part of a more general flow of ideas, attitudes, commodities and foods in the world. This flow, known as globalisation – though, I prefer to call it transnationalism<sup>18</sup> – has largely been coming from the West. However, especially in intimate areas such as food, it is usually adapted locally. In the words of the editor of a volume on the interaction between Western and Asian foodways in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “In the circumstances of today’s trans-national interconnectedness, the local cannot escape the global implications, nor can the global manage without its local articulation.” (Cwiertka 2001:2). Japan has a long experience of indigenisation, not least in the realm of food. The very essence of Japanese tradition is said to be the combination of reviving and adapting own traditions on the one hand and modifying

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<sup>18</sup> Iwabuchi (2002:16-7) puts forward that ‘transnationalism’ is often a better term than both ‘internationalism’ and ‘globalisation’ because it does not confine actors to the nation-state or national organisations on the one hand and because it focuses on multi-directionality of cultural flows on the other hand. The author refers to Hannerz’s (1996:6) comment that ‘transnationalism’ is a more humble term than ‘globalisation’.

borrowed ones on the other hand exemplified by the relatively recent natural food and village revitalisation movements (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:220-1).

In addition, the transnational flow has been a two-way stream. Another side to globalisation has been the assimilation of influences coming from the periphery to the centre (Hannerz 1996:77 in Cwiertka 2001:7). Clarke (2000a) posits that when the global and the particular meet they are both effected by it. The meeting of the global and the local results in the creation of something new. Clarke makes a case for 'reverse' globalisation which involves acknowledging the influence non-Western societies exercise on the modern global society (2000a:1-3).

This is true in the case of modern vegetarianism, which, developing as an organised social movement in the West in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century – the practice going back at least to Pythagoras – was influenced and reinforced by contact with India from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Twigg 1983:19) and later also with Japan. Zen Buddhism, with its notion of non-violence, transmigration of souls and Buddha nature inherent in all living beings – which incidentally is rather close to what Pythagoras believed in (cf. Whorton 2000:1554) – arrived in the West at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, initially as the religion of Japanese immigrants. Macrobiotics was transplanted in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Interest in both took off in the 1960s when the counterculture engaged in Eastern religion and philosophy, as well as vegetarianism and natural foods, not least Japanese ones (Clarke 2000b:275-7; Cwiertka 1999:56). Vegetarianism has managed to join East and West through the counterculture's interest in Asian religions (Whorton 2000:1563), as well as foods and foodways. Contemporary transnational vegetarianism, which resulted from these encounters, very soon started making its entry into Japanese society to exist alongside and be strengthened by the indigenous notions of Zen and macrobiotics, as well as by Seventh Day Adventism which had arrived in Japan at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. SDA vegetarian diet, adapted to Japanese palates, gained importance in the 1980s as a reaction to the onslaught of lifestyle diseases (Kakimoto 1998).

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## Vegetarianism as a definitional challenge

On the surface of it, vegetarianism seems to be a straight forward concept. However, under closer scrutiny, it turns out that the term means quite different things to different people – be it (self-defined) vegetarians or non-vegetarians, lay people and researchers alike.

### **The challenges**

Beardsworth and Keil (1997), British sociologists studying food habits in the UK, point to several definitional challenges encountered by the social scientist attempting to define the term ‘vegetarianism’. Firstly, one has to establish whether the practice in question is voluntary or involuntary as the latter would imply one forced by poverty or scarcity of animal foods that is by economic or ecological limitations,<sup>19</sup> and only the former would be considered ‘vegetarianism’. Secondly, the concept of ‘vegetarianism’ is “by no means clear-cut”, it covers in fact “a complex set of interrelated foodways” on a linear scale of strictness of exclusion – adherence to which is not permanent, they add in one of their studies of vegetarianism in Britain (Beardsworth and Keil 1992b:266). The third dilemma posed by attempting to define vegetarianism, and one closely related to the second one, is whether to construct an objective definition – or a set of definitions for the different practices – or whether to make use of people’s self-definitions with the idiosyncrasy that implies. The authors conclude that the subjective conceptualisations of dietary patterns are as important to the scholar as are the actual patterns (Beardsworth and Keil 1997:218-226).

By any measure, vegetarianism is a minority inclination. In addition, statistics show that about half of the individuals who say they consider themselves to be vegetarians, do not qualify for that ‘label’ by objective definitions. As Caplan (1997:15) puts it, commenting upon the results of Willetts’s (1997) study presented below: “In

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<sup>19</sup> Economic and ecological limitations resulting in a limited presence of meat in the diet were significant in the West and Japan respectively in the past.

actuality, it appears to matter less whether or not vegetarians sometimes eat meat, than that people define themselves as vegetarians in the first place as part of their individual identity.”

### **The definitions**

Whorton (2000) writes that the term ‘vegetarianism’ “is usually reserved for the practice of voluntary abstention from flesh on the basis of religious, spiritual, ethical, hygienic, or environmental considerations”. He points out that, although the practice of abstention from eating flesh even in Western societies existed already in antiquity, as an organized movement and under its present name, vegetarianism started to consolidate in the mid-nineteenth century. According to the author, unlike in Asian societies, where the religious basis for vegetarianism has been most prominent (notably among Hindus, Buddhists and Jains), a mix of philosophical, scientific, and – to a lesser degree – religious arguments has shaped the basis of vegetarianism in the West.<sup>20</sup> The various considerations creating the basis for the choice of a meat-free diet have, according to Whorton, resulted in the distinction between – from least to most strict (my gradation): “lacto-ovo” vegetarians who avoid eating flesh, but eat eggs and dairy products, and who compose the biggest subgroup, “ovo-vegetarians” who eat eggs but not milk, “lacto-vegetarians” who reject eggs but consume milk, “vegans” who do not include any animal products in their diet, “fruitarians” who “eat only fruits and nuts”, as well as “raw foodists” whom Whorton does not define, and “natural hygienists” who reject even vegetable foods that have been processed or refined (2000:1553-4).

Beardsworth and Keil define fruitarians as people who consume only those “vegetable products which do not entail killing the donor plant” (1997:219). They add another (nameless) category of vegetarians, which they place between dairy-eating vegetarians and vegans: those who only use dairy products (like rennet-free

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<sup>20</sup> Maurer (2002:25) observes, however, that the North American vegetarian movement is deeply rooted in religion.

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cheese) which do not contain ingredients from slaughtered animals (1992b:263). The authors also point out that there are finer distinctions within veganism: apart from the discourse concerning whether honey is an animal product and should be consumed, there is a debate among vegans as to the use of non-food animal-derived products like wool, leather, certain types of medication, as well as cosmetics and detergents that are (potentially) tested on animals (1997:219, 1992b:263-266).

Unlike Beardsworth and Keil (1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1997) and most other authors basing themselves on the vegetarian self-definition, Whorton (2000) does not extend the term to fish-eaters (so called “pesco-vegetarians”) or to “demi-/semi-vegetarians”, who include fish, poultry and even a certain amount of red meat in their diet. This might have to do with his account not being a sociological or anthropological one, but historical. Belasco (2007:247) uses the term “flexitarians” to describe the 30-40 percent of the American population who “avoid animal products at least some of time and are potential consumers of meatless products”.

Japan Vegetarian Society lists the following types as represented by their members: vegan, lacto-, lacto-ovo-vegetarian, macrobiotic and pesco-vegetarian, the last one being in minority (e-mail of 22.04.2008). It appears that macrobiotics is a separate subgroup of vegetarianism in Japan, as I have seen it treated in that way in other contexts as well.

In his anthropological study of meat – meat as a social phenomenon and its place in the western food system, as well as its symbolic value – Nick Fiddes (1991:4) argues for the necessity of considering the reasons for meat-eating in studies of vegetarianism, because “meat eating and vegetarianism are two sides of the same coin – each being significant in opposition to the other”. He gives the standard definition of meat as ‘animal flesh destined for human consumption’, while pointing out that until about the fourteenth century ‘meat’ – Old English *mete* – used to mean any foodstuff in English. Over time its meaning became restricted to food of animal origin, and finally currently it can even exclude poultry and fish. The operative definition of meat Fiddes chooses for his analysis is “simply that which people regard

as meat” – in Britain and other Western societies most commonly so-called red meat. According to him, “[v]egetarians do not eat meat (or, at least, some meats)” and the only characteristic all vegetarians have in common is that they exclude animal flesh from their diet (1991:3-4). This last point has been confirmed by a local vegetarian group leader in the US, who pointed out that in the light of there being so many different motivations for being a vegetarian, the only thing they all have in common is what they do not do (Maurer 2002:84).

However, it would follow from Fiddes’s reasoning that there is no contradiction between eating poultry or fish and calling oneself vegetarian – as long as one does not conceptualise those as meat or flesh. In fact, another British anthropologist, Anna Willetts (1997), basing herself on her own research conducted on self-defined vegetarians and vegans in South-East London, comes to a conclusion which explicitly negates Fiddes’s contention about meat-eating and vegetarianism constituting two oppositional dietary practices accompanied by equally distinct world-views:

“[V]egetarianism does not necessarily involve abstaining from meat and eating meat does not place vegetarians in a precarious moral position, at least in their own eyes. [...] While food choice is a fundamental component of individual and cultural identity, questions of identity cannot be reduced to the presence or absence of meat in the diet. What is clear is there are no set rules for being a vegetarian, rather individuals define and enact this identity each in their own way.” (1997:128)

In fact, 66 % of the self-defined vegetarians and vegans in Willetts’s study did include meat in their diet, either through ‘lapses’ or on a regular basis (1997:116). Several of her informants used qualifiers, such as ‘true’ or ‘proper’, in relation to vegetarianism in terms of total avoidance of animal products in and beyond food, such as leather, cosmetics tested on animals (1997:117). Fiddes calls those ‘zealous vegetarians’ (1991:113). Harris (1986), who strictly speaking is not studying modern vegetarianism, defines vegetarians as those “who supposedly prefer plant foods over animal foods”. He also uses the term ‘true vegetarians’, “technically known as vegans”, who declare “a bias against all foods of animal origin”, but who are “few and far between [a]nd for good reason” (1986:22). Harris concludes that vegetarianism is a “misleading” concept (1986:22) while for Atkins and Bowler it is “an umbrella term for a wide range of food practices” (2001:241), whereas Ashley,

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Hollows, Jones and Taylor (2004:191) call it a “slippery concept that has different meanings for different people”. Beardsworth and Keil (1993:229) point out that vegetarianism “consists of a spectrum of interrelated food selection and food avoidance patterns”.

### **Other approaches**

So far the attempts at defining vegetarianism have focused on exclusion, avoidance, rejection and bias. However some authors put more emphasis on what vegetarianism aspires to. In one of her early studies of vegetarianism in Britain, the sociologist Julia Twigg argues for example that vegetarianism offers something which is very rare in the West – “an explicit food ideology”, as well as “an articulate body of ideas relating to meat”, the latter being a development of notions which are present – largely implicitly<sup>21</sup> – in mainstream foodways (1983:18, 29). According to Twigg, the vegetarian food hierarchy, which is in effect a reflected version of the dominant food hierarchy,

“presents vegetarian food not just negatively in terms of avoidance or abstinence from the undesirable, but in terms that stress its own positive and superior qualities. It is something of itself and not just dominant food minus the meat [...]. This is extended into the way vegetarianism as a way of life and a commitment is perceived. Vegetarian food is also wholefood and as such links with a series of other positive images of wholeness – moral, psychological, medical – that are part of this milieu.” (1983:28).

Consuming vegetarian foods, Twigg continues, involves “ingestion of vitality”, and connected to that is the stress on “the virtues of rawness”. These foods are asserted to embody “a different sort of ‘power’ and ‘vigour’ from that traditionally embodied in meat”: their life-giving properties are connected to “images of lightness, sunshine and eternal youthfulness” and juxtaposed with images of “death, decay and corruption” which become pinned on meat. These qualities ascribed to vegetarian food constitute the basis for vegetarian political, aesthetic and moral ideas (1983:28-29).

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<sup>21</sup> Fiddes (1991) discusses this idea in more detail.

In a study of vegetarianism as a social movement in North America, Donna Maurer, a sociologist and vegan herself, also maintains that for many people vegetarianism is much more than a dietary preference. It is in fact “a way of life”, “a form of self-expression and creativity”, and an ideology which “provides both a critique of meat eating and the vision of a vegetarian world” (2002:1-2). She posits that the health and vitality component of modern vegetarianism, which has been dominant in the North American vegetarian movement from the beginning, is expressed in its name. The name, according to Maurer, comes from the Latin *vegetus*, meaning ‘whole, sound, fresh, and lively’, and focuses on the positive, enlivening properties of vegetarian foods<sup>22</sup> (2002:74-5).

## **Positioning**

From the foregoing it appears that the definitions of vegetarianism researchers adopt have a lot to do with their positioning – their scientific discipline, theoretical approach, personal preferences, possibly gender, and whether they define themselves in or out. As mentioned above, Whorton gives a historical account of vegetarianism, whereas the sociological and anthropological studies by respectively Beardsworth and Keil, and Willetts focus on actual practices in their own contemporary society. Twigg’s analysis of the same society a decade and a half earlier is informed by structuralism, which will become more apparent when I discuss it more closely later in this paper. Fiddes goes a long way in presenting meat consumption as a symbol of human domination over nature, and the observable changes in that consumption as a possible change in that particular world view, whereas Harris adopts a clearly dismissive attitude in his materialist approach attempting to explain dietary preferences in practical terms. It might be making a difference that both Twigg and

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<sup>22</sup> John Davis, the International Vegetarian Union’s historian, writes that the connection between the word ‘vegetarian’ and the Latin word *vegetus* is in fact a long-lived myth, and that already in the 1850s the Vegetarian Society in Britain defined a ‘vegetarian’ as “one who lives on the products of the vegetable kingdom” (Davis 2008, 12<sup>th</sup> paragraph).



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Maurer, the two authors that give ‘positive’ definitions of vegetarianism, are female. Maurer is in addition a vegan, i.e. a participant, and a pronounced sympathiser, as well as a sociologist (2002:xii-xiii).

In this paper I adopt the same terms that my informants use, rather than translating them into my own. Following the usual practice, the term ‘veganism’, is a subset of the term ‘vegetarianism’. It will, however, be used specifically where applicable. My definition of ‘vegan’ is the equivalent of what Maurer terms ‘total vegetarian’ reserving the ‘vegan’ label for people who – primarily for reasons of compassion for animals – avoid the use of not only any animal-derived foods, but also other products, such as leather, wool and silk (2002:77). In my understanding, there is a range within veganism, which covers both practices. In cases when that is significant, I use the term ‘dietary veganism’ to denote the former category. Dietary veganism is what is required of members of the Vegan Society in the UK.

In the context of vegetarianism being a voluntary practice, some scholars, for example Beardsworth and Keil (1991, 1992b), exclude religiously inspired avoidance of meat consumption. In this paper this kind of practice occurring both in Western and Japanese context will be included. In Western societies as well as Japan that seems to be no more problematic than regarding as vegetarian children raised in vegetarian families – religious or secular. As will become evident from at least one of the ethnographic examples, also religiously inspired vegetarianism involves volition and agency.

### **Japanese terms**

The Japanese terms are worth mentioning, even though they are not going to feature in my analysis. According to *Langenscheidt Pocket Japanese Dictionary* (1998) the Japanese word for ‘vegetarianism’ is *saishokushugi*, whereas ‘a vegetarian’ is called *saishokushugisha*. The last term is built up of the following main segments: *sai* – vegetable; *shoku* – food; *saishoku* – a vegetable/plant diet or dish; *shugi* – principle, belief, -ism; *sha* – person, and is usually literally translated as ‘a person of vegetable eating principles’ (Arne Røkkum, pers. com.). *Kodansha’s Furigana Japanese*

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*Dictionary* (1999) has two words for the noun ‘vegetarian’: *saishokushugisha* and *bejitarian*. ‘Vegetarian food’ is translated as *shōjin ryōri*, traditional Buddhist food.<sup>23</sup>

*Saishokushugisha*, the older of the two terms, is written in kanji, the Chinese characters, and stems from the time right before the Meiji Restoration, when a group of English words ending in -ism and denoting various ideologies were translated into Japanese. The more recent word, *bejitarian*, written in katakana, the syllabic script used for words of foreign origin, is a phonetically adjusted direct loanword from English, dating back to the late 1960s (Delaney 2000). The intelligibility of these terms varies. The older term seems to be somewhat outdated. For example, one of my Western informants recalled an incident in a restaurant in Japan, when – having been instructed before arriving in the country that the Japanese word for vegetarian was *saishokushugisha* – she used the word when placing her order, but the young waiter did not understand what she meant. Finally, an elderly Japanese person came to her rescue and explained to the waiter that it was *bejitarian* she was going on about. In general, the International Vegetarian Union recommends using the term *saishokushugisha* in rural areas and when talking to elderly people. In Tokyo one can use the English word – vegetarian (IVU Vegetarian Phrases in World Languages: East Asia, 2006).

The overlap between the local niche tradition and the modern practice might not be obvious to people. A couple of my Western vegetarian informants have reported being asked in Japan whether they could eat soy bean products<sup>24</sup> commonly used in the traditional Buddhist vegetarian cuisine as well as in mainstream cuisine. Perhaps it is the literal meaning of the older Japanese word, *saishokushugisha*, a ‘vegetable

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<sup>23</sup> The transliterations are added by me; the dictionary does not use the Latin alphabet to transcribe Japanese words.

<sup>24</sup> Quite apart from being asked whether they could eat potatoes on the one hand and fish on the other hand, as well as being served bacon when ordering a vegetarian dish in a restaurant. The latter, according to an Australian vegetarian who has lived in Japan for several years, happens less and less often.

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eater' that is confusing.<sup>25</sup> Some Western vegetarians find it most practical to say that they eat *shōjin ryōri*, the traditional Japanese Buddhist cuisine.

In addition, there is a word for 'vegan' – *biigan* [/en] – which, although in my experience on the whole well understood in specialized places such as vegetarian restaurants and wholefood shops in Tokyo, is said not to be intelligible to the general public. However, the recent vegan café trend, which I will discuss below, might be changing that.

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<sup>25</sup> This would make it the equivalent of the meaning of the word 'vegetarian' suggested by Davis (2008).

## **VEGETARIAN FOODWAYS IN WESTERN PERSPECTIVE**

In this chapter I will trace the development of modern vegetarian foodways in the West. Various influences from among other Japan have participated in this process since the 1960s, which has resulted in transnational vegetarian foodways.

As mentioned above, Fiddes (1991:4) argues for the necessity of studying vegetarianism and meat-eating together on account of them being “two sides of the same coin – each being significant in opposition to the other”. As the discussion will show, they cannot be totally separated from each other, either.

### **The tails of the coin: meat-eating**

#### **‘Good to eat’ or ‘good to think with’?**

Harris’s analysis of meat-eating and its avoidance (1986) rests on the assertion that “there generally are good and sufficient practical reasons for why people do what they do, and food is no exception” (1986:14). In his opinion one can trace specific food preferences and avoidances, and major differences in world cuisines, to ecological conditions as well as nutritional and practical choices based on an estimate of costs and benefits (1986:15-7). Harris does not deny that, like other foods, meat has a symbolic value and conveys messages, but he thinks that food preferences and aversions come before the messages and meanings. As he puts it: “Food must nourish the collective stomach before it can feed the collective mind.” (1986:15)

Animal foods and plant foods play, according to Harris, fundamentally different roles in human foodways. He explains that the reason why there is in human cultures across the globe a general craving for animal foods and meat in particular – the notorious ‘meat hunger’ – is that while plant foods can sustain life, animal foods give

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health and vitality<sup>26</sup> beyond mere survival.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, animal foods are especially difficult and not very cost-effective to produce, and it is “this combination of utility and scarcity” that gives animal foods their symbolic power (1986:22). As far as voluntary avoidance of animal foods is concerned, to Harris’s mind, “vegans no more refute the existence of a universal preference for animal foods than the fasts of holy men refute the preference for food over hunger [...] [, therefore] such practices are not only unpopular but they don’t last long” (1986:22-3). However, Harris does not believe that humans are genetically programmed to seek out and consume animal foods. Rather, he thinks that our physiology and digestive processes predispose us to learn to prefer them because they are especially nutritious (1986:31).

Harris receives a lot of criticism from Fiddes (1991:171) for his supposed determined denial of a social component in social activities. Certainly not all the criticism is justified. In the case of genetic programming, Fiddes seems to have directly misunderstood Harris’s point explained above (Fiddes 1991:13-4). Anderson (2005:160-1) defends Harris by pointing out that his materialist-ecological theory is useful provided it is taken as originally intended by the author – who himself on occasion went beyond his original intentions – i.e. as far as it can go, and then supplemented by other explanations.

Fiddes is of the opinion that food feeds our minds as well as our bodies, and that the symbolic function of meat has to do with the fact that its economic and social importance is much greater than its nutritional value and health benefits would suggest (1991:38-41, 68). In fact, according to the French sociologist Pascal Lardellier (2003), meat has a symbolic value unlike any other foodstuff. Meat consumption reminds us of our predatory nature, and thus of our connection with

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Health and vitality’ is exactly what is claimed on behalf of plant-based diets, cf. *vegetus* as the origin of ‘vegetarian’.

<sup>27</sup> The French word for meat, *viande*, is etymologically connected to the Latin *vivenda*, meaning ‘that, which promotes life’ (Lardellier 2003).

nature: nature enters culture through our meat consumption. Fiddes (1991) suggests that the very nature of meat, and the fact that meat is a food substance commonly available for use as a metaphor, may give rise to certain ideas globally. Most importantly, meat represents sustained human dominance over other species, and thus has both positive and negative connotations: as prestigious, nutritious and therefore highly desirable food on the one hand, and as immoral and potentially unhealthy foodstuff on the other hand (1991:2). In Britain as well as in the rest of the West meat is part of the 'habitus', says Fiddes, and the idea of control over nature encapsulated in it is omnipresent and mostly unquestioned, although usually not explicit. While all food selection is imbedded in social rules and laden with social meaning, meat is particularly rich in that meaning. As human attitudes to meat reflect a certain world view, changing habits in the consumption of animal flesh may represent a change in that world view (1991:3, 5).

Beardsworth and Keil (1992b) conclude on the basis of a qualitative study of a sample of vegetarians, that food must first of all be 'good to think with', yet it clearly also has to be 'good to eat' in nutritional and economic terms. After all, contemporary voluntary vegetarianism is only possible thanks to today's economically affluent, industrialized, consumer-oriented society, with a huge range of foods to pick from, unrestrained by place, climate and season (Beardsworth and Keil 1992b:289-290).

### **Developments in meat-eating**

The history of meat-eating in Europe is characterized by relative scarcity until the late Middle Ages when oxen were replaced by horses for the purpose of transport and as work force, releasing the former for human consumption.<sup>28</sup> Up until then it was only the members of the secular upper class who – even by today's standards – ate a lot of meat. In general, Western Europe, and Britain in particular, was very carnivorous

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<sup>28</sup> In premodern Japan oxen were initially very scarce and precious and later used as work animals, and this has been put forward as one of the reasons why there were repeated bans on meat-eating issued by the state (Ishige 2001; Hanley 1997).

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compared with East Asia (Elias 1939:118 in Fiddes 1991:22; Goody 1982:134). Meat consumption grew in terms of quantity and significance from about the seventeenth century onwards along with the increasing need to dominate nature advocated by science and absolved by mechanistic philosophy. A series of agricultural and technical innovations from the eighteenth century onwards, coupled with industrialization and urbanization, consolidated that development of mentality as well as food habits. In the nineteenth century the ongoing environmental and imperialist conquest as well as further technological advancements – notably within transportation and refrigeration – facilitated greater and slightly more evenly distributed meat consumption, though it was still the most affluent that ate most meat by far. Significantly, one could now transport meat from America and Australia to Europe. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that it became fashionable among the upper classes to consume lighter food including more fresh fruit and vegetables (Fiddes 1991:23-6; Goody 1982). Levenstein (2003:4-5) points out that carnivorous diet was prevalent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on both sides of “the British North Atlantic” with a special fondness for beef<sup>29</sup> and a relatively low esteem granted to vegetables. He comments that the vegetarian ‘crusades’ of the 1830s and 40s “faced an enormous challenge” – and few vegetables available for human consumption with some fed to farm animals instead.

After 1949 the general trend in Britain was a gradual increase in the consumption of meat, peaking in the period 1965-1969. Since 1969, and especially since the 1980s, when a link between the consumption of animal fats and heart disease, cancer and obesity was made, there has been a slight decline in the overall meat consumption, along a shift from ‘red’ meat towards ‘white’ meat types perceived as healthier, such as pork and poultry, as well as free-range and organic meat. However, there has also been an observable counter-trend, as sales of meat have actually risen in areas such as

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<sup>29</sup> Consequently, beef became *the* meat type promoted during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Japanese government.

fast food, so that on the whole, sales of meat have not fallen significantly (Fiddes 1991, 1997; Franklin 1999).

### **A way of life in crisis?**

Fiddes asserts that meat consumption is a way of life<sup>30</sup> (1991:45). At present this way of life is experiencing a crisis connected to both health-related issues and compassion for other animals (Fiddes 1997:252). Moral positions as well as daily habits have been changing noticeably in the West, especially in recent decades, as witnessed by the growing numbers of vegetarians of various kinds (1997:254, 256-8), “[o]ne of the most illuminating measures of change in human-animal relations [being] our willingness to eat them” (Franklin 1999:7). Since the 1970s, with the transition from modernity to postmodernity, human-animal relations in general have been changing away from human benefit and hegemony (Franklin 1999).

Another example of changes in mentality is the way meat is being marketed, aiming to dissociate the foodstuff from its, once living, source. Franklin points out that slaughterhouses have been modernised and moved to the outskirts of human settlements, as well as being renamed using in English the French word ‘abattoir’ – from *abattre* ‘to fell trees’. Also the ‘butcher’s’ is on its way out, in reality as in language, becoming replaced by ‘meat market’ and ‘fresh meat department’. The labour division, and the methods employed, as well as the use of machines and euphemistic terminology means that nobody is really responsible for the killing (1999:148, 156-7). Supermarkets and fast-food restaurants sell hygienically packed, pre-prepared, sliced or chopped meat or ready-made meals rather than ingredients. Also at this level the names obscure the origin of the food: chicken ‘nuggets’,<sup>31</sup> fish ‘fingers’, schnitzel and goujon, in addition to the more established beef, pork,

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<sup>30</sup> Just like vegetarianism is, as pointed out by Twigg (1983) and Maurer (2002), and discussed above.

<sup>31</sup> One of the campaign slogans of the animal rights organization PETA features a drawing of a chicken saying: “I am not a nugget”.



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venison.<sup>32</sup> All these efforts are employed to try and tackle meat's highly ambiguous identity (Franklin 1999:148, 155-6; Fiddes 1991:95-8; 1997:254-5; see also Lardellier 2003 for a French point of view). Furthermore, meat is no longer considered a vital component of a healthy diet, partly at least losing ground to fresh fruit and vegetables (Fiddes 1997:254-5).

Fiddes argues that all these developments have underlying deeper meanings beyond the immediate issues at stake. The identity crisis of meat and other animal-related issues represent "the cultural crisis of the late industrial era", the so far ruling ideology of perpetual materialist growth and conquest coming to an end due to both its success and its failures. Related to that is on the one hand the image of an environmental catastrophe approaching inevitably, threatening the survival of the human race,<sup>33</sup> and on the other hand the lack of faith in the ability and even the intention of the traditional authorities and experts to protect the general population, including providing safe food (1997:260-1).

The perceived required social change is so radical that it has to occur in the realm of cultural values, not more technological development, Fiddes (1991, 1997) puts forward. Many of those who approach the challenge in a positive way – rather than despair or become apathetic – are trying out 'new' belief systems, new political and religious engagements, and various 'alternative' lifestyles including spiritual paths, holistic health systems, environmental activism, as well as declining meat. In this context refusing to eat the flesh of other animals becomes a statement of rebellion towards the old technocratic world-view. As the ideology of conquest and possession has proven to be bringing about greater insecurity instead of safety, more emphasis is being put on qualities such as physical and mental health, social affirmation, spiritual enlightenment, and sensitivity to ecological relationships. The highly industrialised

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<sup>32</sup> Quoting vegetarian rhetoric, Twigg (1979:19) adds to this list the word 'meat' used instead of 'flesh' or 'bodies'.

<sup>33</sup> This outlook is said to be typical of the Western worldview (Bocking 2003).

meat production is a perfect target for people who demand safe food. To a still relatively small, though constantly growing section of the population looking for a way to express their belief in simple truths and common sense, vegetarianism becomes a variant of natural eating (Fiddes 1997:262-3; 1991:186-193). Beardsworth points to vegetarianism as well as “wholefoods” and “health foods” as some of the most striking examples of “alternative dietary ideologies” emerging as new ways of coping with food anxieties (1995:134-5). Also Ashley *et al.* consider vegetarianism in a wider context of food scares and anxieties (2004:188).

However convincing Fiddes’s argument might appear, Beardsworth and Keil (1997:217) warn, nevertheless, against ascribing too much significance to the decline in meat consumption being a potential indicator of broader changes in ecological awareness and sensitivity in society – in the light of there being other forms of consumption with at least as much power to symbolise human domination over nature which are still enthusiastically engaged in.

## The heads of the coin: vegetarianism

### **The development of modern vegetarianism**

The practice of voluntary abstention from the consumption of animal flesh on ethical and/or health grounds has been known since antiquity with such pronounced advocates as Pythagoras, Ovid, Plutarch and Porphyry. Christian orthodoxy followed the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas claiming human domination over animals, overriding the belief in kinship between animals and humans upheld by the ancient ‘vegetarians’. The fringe, sectarian Christian meat abstainers considered meat a desirable foodstuff, which they gave up in order to suppress their carnality (Whorton 2000:1554). In addition, their meat avoidance was of a calendar-based character and their practices cannot therefore be considered (voluntary) vegetarianism (Franklin 1999; cf. Twigg 1983).

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### *Early days*

Arguments for a meatless diet based on compassion for “fellow creatures” as well as human health emerged in Britain in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and continued throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century amidst debates over whether animals could feel pain, sparked off by Descartes’s mechanistic view of animal nature. As early as 1789, a notion was put forward that animals had a “right” not to be exposed to suffering, and in 1822 – prompted by the politically oriented Evangelical religious movement – the British Parliament passed animal welfare legislation concerning work animals. In such an atmosphere and given the Romantic spirit of the times, the numbers of Pythagoreans, as they were known, following the “vegetable regimen”, were growing, relatively speaking. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several medical doctors had become involved in advocating a vegetable diet as physiologically superior, one of the arguments being that meat is an unnatural foodstuff for human beings. Among the people convinced by this argument was the Romantic poet Percy B. Shelley, who even authored a pamphlet on the “natural diet” (Whorton 2000:1554-7). It appears that opposition to meat-eating increased in tact with the growing consumption of meat and occurred first in the most carnivorous countries of the West, Britain and America.

### *The establishment of the Vegetarian Society in Britain*

According to the International Vegetarian Union’s historian, John Davis, the word ‘vegetarian’ was first used in print in 1843, possibly even as early as 1839, but had already been relatively well established among practitioners. The formal beginning of vegetarianism as a modern social movement is marked by the establishment of the Vegetarian Society in Salford near Manchester in Britain in 1847. This came about thanks to the cooperation of three groups practicing abstention from meat: the Bible Christian Church – the first Christian congregation avoiding eating flesh on the basis of its perceived negative influence on human health and out of compassion for animals – established in 1809 in Salford; the Concordium/Alcott House – a school based on the socialist ideals of John Stuart Mill and a plant diet – in Richmond, Surrey near London; and the Northwood Villa/‘Hydropathic Institut’ based on the German idea of ‘Nature Cure’ and operating in Ramsgate, Kent (Davis 2008).

Antrobus (1998) points out that contrary to the contemporary image – supported by statistics, I shall add – of vegetarians as middle-class southerners, the modern vegetarian movement developed first among working class radicals in the north of Britain. The industrial Salford was fertile ground for that development because it had gathered many like-minded people who were developing more romantic attitudes to animals and nature as a reaction to the industrial revolution. The local clergy were prone to adopt a theology based on the idea of the kinship of nature, and the area was open to religious innovations because the state church did not have a strong foothold there. The Bible Christian Church, which was the main agent in the process of establishing the vegetarian movement, was a break-away from the Swedenborgian church – also non-meat-eating – founded by reverend William Cowherd, who – like Pythagoras much earlier – believed in the kinship of all nature and combined that belief with a liberal, egalitarian and democratic standing in general. The new congregation had to take a vow not to eat meat. When Cowherd died, he was succeeded by Joseph Brotherton, who in 1847 chaired the meeting at which the Vegetarian Society was established (Antrobus 1998).

According to Davis, the Vegetarian Society was a secular organisation despite its links with the Bible Christian Church, including the first President of the Vegetarian Society being a deacon of the Church. Connection to the Church provided stability and prosperity, while the two other institutions involved in the establishment of the Vegetarian Society died out. The Society grew steadily becoming more and more independent from the Church which it eventually outlived (Davis 2008). The Church ceased to exist in 1930, when it merged with the Pendleton Unitarians, because it was not able to attract enough vegetarian followers (Antrobus 1998).

### *The American Vegetarian Society*

Maurer (2002) points out that in North America the vegetarian movement also has historically been associated with religion, but at the same time has consistently promoted health issues. Vegetarianism in America started as one of several overlapping Jacksonian reform movements of the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, opposing the industrialisation of everyday life, and as the diet of choice of the

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temperance, abolition and feminist movements. The meatless diet ideology was brought to Pennsylvania from England in 1817 by William Metcalf and other members of the Bible Christian Church. In 1830 the church hired Sylvester Graham, a student of medicine, as temperance teacher. Graham advocated abstention from meat together with what he considered other stimulants, such as alcohol, coffee, tea, spices and sex, on health grounds, thus turning the philosophy of the Bible Church into “a secular morality” intent on social reform. Another contemporary medical doctor advocating a meatless diet as a “basis of all reform, whether civil, social, moral, or religious” was William Alcott. In 1850, three years after the formation of the Vegetarian Society in Britain, Metcalf, Graham, Alcott and the father of ‘natural hygiene’ Russell Trall, together with a few others, founded the American Vegetarian Society. At the same time, another religious group, with Ellen White as one of its leaders, started the Seventh Day Adventist Church and advocated a healthy diet involving abstention from meat, alcohol and tobacco, as a way of serving God. In the 1870s the Adventist “sanitorium” opened in Battle Creek, run by doctor John Harvey Kellogg, the man behind granola and cornflakes (Maurer 2002:24-8).

Davis contrasts the lot of the British and the American Vegetarian Societies. According to him, the latter “never expanded beyond the Bible Christian Church and ended when they did” (Davis 2008, last paragraph).

### *The arguments behind early vegetarianism*

The main argument for adopting a vegetarian diet put forward at the time of the establishment of both Vegetarian Societies in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was human health, with the traditional argument in Britain, morality, being pushed to the second position (Whorton 2000:1558-9). According to Franklin (1999), at first, the emphasis was placed on the vegetarian diet being the most natural for humans biologically, and meat-based diet being polluting and unhealthy, even though the moral dimension connected to killing animals was present. In 1892 the British social reform propagator and writer Henry Salt reversed these attitudes and put an emphasis on the need for humans to restrain their uncivilized drives, based on “animal rights” (Franklin 1999:160). To Salt, the author of *Animals’ Rights Considered in Relation to Social*

*Progress* and *The Logic of Vegetarianism*, the necessity for the abstention from meat followed from both philosophy and science (Whorton 2000:1559).

### *The proliferation of vegetarianism*

Meanwhile, vegetarian organisations were being established all over Europe and beyond, e.g. in Germany in 1866/7, France in 1879, Australia in 1886, India in 1889, Norway in 1903, New Zealand in 1882/1943 – with varying degrees of success and continuity. The first international organisation, the International Vegetarian Union, was established in 1908 with headquarters in Britain (Whorton 2000:1559; IVU History of the International Vegetarian Union, 2008). According to Maurer, IVU is mostly a symbolic organisation which hosts biannually the World Vegetarian Congress (2002:51). Vegetarian journals and magazines started appearing in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and during the 1870s vegetarian restaurants opened in major cities in Europe and North America. London had a dozen vegetarian restaurants by the end of the century (Whorton 2000:1559). However, in the early twentieth century vegetarianism was restricted to a small group of intellectual and working-class non-conformist Christians, whereas the widely underfed masses considered meat consumption a sign of health and success (Franklin 1999:160).

In 1944 Donald Watson, a woodwork teacher and a WW2 conscientious objector, gathered 25 others and established in Leicester in the UK the Vegan Society. Watson, who had stopped eating meat as a child having witnessed the slaughter of a pig, and had given up milk as an adult having understood “the biological mechanics of milk production”, coined the term ‘vegan’ from the beginning and the end of ‘vegetarian’. At the time of his death in 2006, the number of vegans in Britain was estimated at 250,000 (Elliot 2006).

The first national contemporary organisation in America, the American Vegan Society, was established in 1960, followed by the North American Vegetarian Society in the mid-1970s, the latter initially connected to the former. Unlike in Britain, the vegan and vegetarian branches of the movement are not separate in North America (Maurer 2002:51-2, 78).

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### *Popularisation by the counterculture*

In the late 1960s the price of meat started to go down, meat took to becoming a staple in most people's diet, and by the 1970s it was commonly eaten three times a day. At the same time some people – especially the emerging service class – on the one hand stopped believing in the inherent connection between meat consumption and health, and on the other hand started becoming aware of famines in the Third World, as well as the health, ethical and environmental issues connected with the intensive production of meat in the West. Vegetarianism offered a means of protest against these and other ills of modernity, as evidenced by the rapidly growing at the time numbers of health food stores (Franklin 1999:161).

This was the time of countercultures which played a significant role in the popularisation of both the natural food movement and vegetarianism (Anderson 2005:148). That happened not least thanks to their interest in Eastern religions and philosophical traditions including Zen Buddhism and macrobiotics, with Zen centres and macrobiotic food, farming and alternative medical initiatives being established in the US as well as Europe and other parts of the world (Whorton 2000; Clarke 2000b; Kandel and Pelto 1980; Kushi 1977).

The countercultures of the late 1960s and the 1970s included food politics and food ethics in their political radicalism (Ashley *et al.* 2004:189). For example, Levenstein (1993) has analysed the increasing convergence between the New Left and the growing environmental movement in the US, which evolved around criticism of the practices of the food – and especially the meat – industry (in Ashley *et al.* 2004:190). Hall and Jefferson (1976) point out that resistance to mainstream foodways was in fact one of the means of dissent utilised by the middle-class countercultures in their struggle to distance themselves from the dominant culture (in Ashley *et al.* 2004:190). A point to take note of here is that the radical foodways and ideologies of the countercultures were mostly only available to the white middle class (Anderson 2005:148; Ashley *et al.* 2004:190). A case in point being that macrobiotics, which in public discourse became reduced to “brown rice”, came to be feared as the looming

cause of death of “the nation’s white middle-class children” who were mass-converting to the diet (Belasco 2007:164).

Cwiertka (1999) maintains that the first step towards the spread of Japanese food abroad was in fact facilitated by the ecological interest of the hippie movement. Alternative diets such as traditional Asian foodways, alongside organic foods, rejuvenated health food stores in America in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Even today, following from those developments, health food stores in the West offer a wide range of Japanese foods such as azuki beans, seaweed, tofu, miso<sup>34</sup> and other soy bean products. In addition, around the same time, nutritionists in the West started recommending a low-fat, low-cholesterol, low-meat diet characteristic of Japanese cuisine (Cwiertka 1999:56).

### **‘Cranks’ and other alternative ‘-isms’**

Although there have been important differences in vegetarianism over time, says the British sociologist Julia Twigg (1983:20, 27), the main ideology has been sufficiently stable for the movement to be treated as a whole. One significant characteristic has been its connection with other ideologies and movements. In the 1880s and 1890s it was associated with a progressivist milieu embracing ethical socialism, Indian religion, anti-vaccination and anti-vivisection. In the late 1920s and the 1930s – with nature cures, the sunshine movement and pacifism, whereas later – as pointed out above – with the countercultures of the late 1960s and the 1970s and with their interest in communal living and support for nuclear disarmament. One of Fiddes’s informants claims in this respect that there are three things that always and necessarily go together: “the bicycle, being a member of CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament], and being vegetarian” (1991:200). Also, since at least the 1880s vegetarianism has had links with feminism (Twigg 1983; cf. Fiddes 1997:259). Other movements, ideologies and activities vegetarianism has over time been linked

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<sup>34</sup> Soy bean paste.



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with are yoga, this-worldly form of mysticism, naturism,<sup>35</sup> sunbathing and walking in the mountains (Twigg 1979:20, 26-7), as well as animal rights and animal liberation movement – a development from the nineteenth century anti-cruelty movement (Fiddes 1991:199).

Other authors perceive a gap between the different generations of vegetarianism.

Already in 1976 for example, Carter observed:

“The New Vegetarianism – an alternative growth industry, a dietary sign system indicating spiritual awareness, expanded consciousness and ecological concern – has very little to do with the old vegetarianism, which was part of a lifestyle embracing socialism, pacifism and shorts.” (In Atkinson 1980:82)

Studies by Twigg (1979, 1983), classic by now, are often referred to in other works on vegetarianism and meat-eating. However, her papers have to be seen as products of their time, both in terms of theoretical approach – structuralism with direct references to Lévi-Strauss – and especially in relation to their empirical material, descriptions, statements and conclusions. They are, I would argue, partly or even largely outdated, as what she studies seems to be the ‘crank-vegetarianism’ of the late 1960s and the 1970s – the kind presented, and successfully poked fun at, in Mike Leigh’s 1976 film *Nuts in May*. The food described by Twigg – “typically chopped up, mixed together, undifferentiated” – the paraphernalia – unstructured clothing, informal restaurants – the way of life – communes and other forms of informal relationships – even the ideology (Twigg 1979:27-9) seem rather outdated. In the words of Franklin:

“Since the 1980s [...] the puritanical, Spartan nature of earlier vegetarianism has given way to a less strict version where occasional lapses are tolerated, if not endemic, and vegetarianism could be incorporated into a healthy, safe and delicious cuisine. [...] By the 1990s vegetarian cuisine was a mainstream dining option in the West and, as Driver admits, ‘the professional vegetarian no longer sounded like the equivalent of wearing sackcloth and ashes.’” (Franklin 1999:162; Driver 1983:106)

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<sup>35</sup> In Germany for example, early vegetarianism was connected to pre-nationalistic nature movements, ‘Jugendbewegung’, and nudism (Freikoerperkultur) (Wenzel Geissler, pers. comm., my translation from Danish).

It might be significant in this context that a well-established – since the early 1960s – vegetarian restaurant chain in Britain, one actually called *Cranks*, closed down most of its outlets a couple of years ago. At the same time, although there still are a few old-style eateries, several new, up-market vegetarian restaurants have opened in the last few years in London for example. “[T]he ‘crank’ has become part of the mainstream through its association with the new middle-class lifestyles”, as Ashley *et al.* (2004:191) put it.

Neither does the essential connection between vegetarianism and wholefoods pointed out by Twigg (1979:24; 1983:28) stand up to scrutiny any longer in the case of today’s ethically inspired vegetarians involved in various forms of animal activism. Maurer (2002:61) mentions “junk food vegetarians”, whose primary motivation often is the notion of animal rights. Furthermore, it is symptomatic of its timing that Twigg’s hierarchy of food does not contain the semi-vegetarian boundary. It was in the 1990s, when yet again, the emphasis was put on human health rather than on animal welfare, that demi-vegetarianism occurred (Franklin 1999:61-2).

### **The hierarchy of foods**

At the top of Twigg’s (1979:18; 1983:21) hierarchy of foods of the dominant, i.e. non-vegetarian, culture stands red meat, the ‘most powerful’ and bloody of meats, then the ‘less powerful’, non-blood poultry, then fish. Then comes the vegetarian boundary under which we find the less strong animal products such as eggs and cheese, followed by the vegan boundary, with ‘too weak’ vegetables, fruit and cereals. Above red meat goes the dominant culture’s boundary; things beyond it – uncastrated animals, carnivorous animals<sup>36</sup> and human beings – are classified as ‘too strong’ and taboo – in the non-strict sense of the word. It is the proximity to taboo which, along with its connection to blood, gives red meat the status of the most

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<sup>36</sup> As Anderson observes, the Bible lists as clean and therefore suitable for human consumption animals that are “clearly vegetarian” (2005:158).

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powerful and prized foodstuff on the one hand, and the most defiling one on the other hand, says Twigg (1983:22).

There is another (Lévi-Straussian) dimension in this hierarchy, one concerning cooking.<sup>37</sup> Things beyond the dominant culture's boundary are uncooked – raw meat representing animality, bestiality and in-humanity. In the case of meat destined for human consumption, some form of cooking is necessary; roasted joints – being closest in their form and blood content to the living animals – enjoy most prestige in this context, whereas stewing, boiling, frying and steaming is suitable for meat types and fish placed further down the hierarchy. The further down one goes, the less need for cooking, thus according to the mainstream food hierarchy cooking increases the status of food (1983:25-6).

Vegetarians eat 'down' the conventional hierarchy of foods, with vegans furthest away from the taboo. Twigg claims in fact that it is common for people in the process of becoming vegetarian, to give up first red meat, then white meat, and lastly fish,<sup>38</sup> perhaps followed by eggs and dairy (1979:19; 1983:26). However, Willetts pointed out that there was no obvious progression along those lines in the case of her research sample in South-East London (1997:117).

Not only the hierarchy of food, but also the hierarchy of cooking is reversed in vegetarianism, posits Twigg, as vegetarians tend to prefer raw foods, with all the symbolism attached – living, vital, natural, uncorrupted food. Foods towards the top of the mainstream hierarchy are perceived as dead and corrupted; in fact, cooking meat is considered necessary in order to conceal its identity and to 'tame' it (1983:25,

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<sup>37</sup> Ashkenazi (1997:215) notes that Japanese cuisine does not fit into Lévi-Strauss's (1969) 'culinary triangle'. Also, like the vegetarian food hierarchy presented here, Japanese cuisine gives preference to the raw and lightly cooked (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:125). However, raw does not mean untouched – some form of manipulation is required (Ashkenazi 1997:215).

<sup>38</sup> Twigg points out that this gradation of strictness is the same one applied by mediaeval Benedictine monks in their fasting practices (1983:19), remnants of which are present to this day in Catholic religious practice.

28-9). However, vegetarianism not only reverses the traditional hierarchy of foods – it also challenges the meanings contained in this hierarchy. Vegetarianism creates its own hierarchy, based on its own way of life and its own values.<sup>39</sup> At the top of the vegetarian hierarchy are fruits, nuts and grains, which are ‘most full of life’ and ‘least killing to the plant’. That is what frutarians eat. Under their boundary there are leaf vegetables and root vegetables, which are ‘least full of life’ and ‘most killing to plant’.

### **The vegetarian social profile**

Fiddes points out that there still exist inequalities in meat consumption based on class/social stratum, but there are also clear gender- and age-based differences, as well as regional variations within Great Britain. These concern both the tendencies as to the types of meat consumed and abstention from meat altogether. Around 1990 vegetarianism was most common amongst the affluent, women, the young and those living in southern England (Fiddes 1991:26-9). In certain sections of the population such as female students, based on self-definition, at least a quarter are vegetarian or avoid red meat (Fiddes 1997:254). The conclusion he draws is that “meat avoidance today is often a matter of choice rather than of necessity and is most prevalent among better off and better informed members of the population” (1991:28-9; 1997:254).

Maurer (2002) observes that in North America, the most likely set of sociological variables as far as vegetarianism is concerned is: white, middle-class and female. She also points out that it is actually socioeconomic status rather than race or ethnicity that facilitates ‘whites’ being overrepresented in this context. The fact that females are in the majority among vegetarians – in fact, close to 70 % – might be following from meat being a symbol of prestige, power, physical strength and virility. By contrast, females – not least through the way they are socialised and expected to behave – tend to be more concerned about their own health and body weight, as well as about compassion for animals. However, they are also likely to be providing their

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. meat-eating as a lifestyle (Fiddes 1991).

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families with food, and through that be to some extent able to decide what they eat. On the other hand, studies show that it is often the males in families, and in their absence the children, who decide over the menu. Some vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian women are known to prepare different food for their families and for themselves (2002:8-14).

However, Maurer points out that vegetarians are actually less likely than the general public to be married. They are also underrepresented among practitioners of conventional religions – in fact, only 10 % of vegetarians are religiously motivated – but more likely to be involved in other spiritual activities, such as yoga or meditation. Being a vegetarian does not strengthen the inclination to political activism, but does predispose to considering oneself liberal, as well as to being better health educated and more health conscious in one's behaviour (not drinking alcohol or smoking). Maurer concludes however that despite these tendencies, vegetarians are more diverse than similar, and that the only thing they have in common is their attitude to meat (2002:13-4). However, as we have seen from the study by Willetts (1997), even that is not necessarily true.

### **Vegetarian motivations**

Four primary types of motivations for vegetarianism emerged from a study by Beardsworth and Keil: moral, health-related, gustatory – related to the taste or texture of meat – and environmental. The moral type motivation, including issues of animal welfare and animal suffering, was stated by 57 per cent of respondents, health by 17 per cent, gustatory concerns by 12 per cent, and ecology by 1 per cent (1992b:269). While the vegetarian respondents in various studies conducted in Britain indicated a central importance of ethical considerations to their food preferences, they also expressed a belief in various health benefits as significant additional advantages of their ethical food choices (Beardsworth and Keil 1991; 1992b).

Another observation made by Beardsworth and Keil is that individual motivations for vegetarianism are dynamic and multi-dimensional: they may change over time, as may the degrees of dietary strictness, including lapses or permanent return to

conventional foodways (1992b:271, 283). The authors also found that in the studied sample the anti-meat sentiments were stronger than the pro-vegetarian ones, which seems to undermine Twigg's analysis of the symbolism contained in the vegetarian foods hierarchy and the presumed importance of the notion of vegetarian food being superior to the mainstream diet (Beardsworth and Keil 1992b:276; Twigg 1983:19, 28).

The most common reasons given in a survey conducted in the US in 1991 and cited by Maurer (1995) were: health (81 per cent of respondents), animal rights (81 per cent), ethics (76 per cent), and environment (75 per cent). Maurer points out that these top categories reflect the main claims contained in vegetarian literature. In addition, taste and economics were each reported by 28 per cent of respondents, along with other, more marginal incentives (1995:144, 159). Put together, animal rights, ethics and environmental concerns appear to weigh more than health issues in America as well. Yet Maurer posits that in the US and Canada "most vegetarians are motivated by a desire for self-improvement – a desire to be healthier and more energetic" (2002:xiii-xiv). This is contrary to what she perceives to be the case in Britain (2002:22).

### **More than a diet**

As discussed above, Twigg (1983) contends that vegetarianism is a rare in the West example of an explicit food ideology. Maurer (2002) asserts that although at first most people approach vegetarianism as a diet, at the same time they use it as a way of expressing themselves and being creative through exploring new foods, buying their food in co-ops and natural food shops, using vegetarian cookbooks and magazines as sources of inspiration in their cooking, discussing their diet with other people and including it in their self-perception. However, vegetarianism is more than just a number of people following the same diet or even the same lifestyle. Maurer too is of the opinion that vegetarianism is a philosophy and an ideology (2002:2, 24).

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The author points out that vegetarianism is a complex set of ideas containing three main principles: “compassion for all living beings, the health and vitality of vegetarian diets, and concern for the environment”:

“Vegetarianism is rooted in basic ideas about the ideal relationship between humans and their social and physical environments; it expresses an ideal state of nature in which health and happiness are linked with caring and compassion for others.” (2002:71)

In fact, from the very beginning, vegetarianism has been more than a group of people characterised by their eating habits. It has had an organisational structure and an ideology which aim at changing society by changing cultural ideas, values and attitudes, and promoting a certain lifestyle – it has been a social movement (Maurer 2002:xi, 146).

### **From challenge to incorporation**

Beardsworth and Keil maintain that vegetarianism, from an ideological and moral challenge to the main-stream foodways, is in fact in the process of becoming incorporated into the conventional food system<sup>40</sup> (1993:232-3). Economic incorporation of vegetarianism is aided by an ideological incorporation evident in what the authors call ‘menu pluralism’, resulting in individuals being much freer to compose their personal diets from elements of different, competing menus – to suit the occasion, their mood, economy, ethical convictions and health considerations (1992a:23; 1997:68). In this kind of pluralistic atmosphere, vegetarianism in its various guises becomes looked upon as yet another alimentary option to choose. At the same time it loses some of its radicalism and deviancy, and the threshold to enter it becomes lowered (1993:233), a point also made by Franklin (1999). Beardsworth and Keil go so far as to claim that “vegetarianism has become a “mass” option in the UK and has stopped being a radical stance for a small “deviant” elite. Vegetarianism is no longer considered to be ‘cranky’ or an expression of ‘health faddism’, but rather

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Belasco (2007).

an example to follow – i.e. eat less meat – or even a “trendy thing to do”<sup>41</sup> (Beardsworth and Keil 1993:230-2).

Also in America the vegetarian diet has become widely accepted and the vegetarian food industry has been flourishing to the extent that many vegetarian products sell better in conventional supermarkets than they do in natural food stores,<sup>42</sup> the former being able to normalise these products, especially the ones that look more similar than different from meat. The fact that large food corporations are buying up small vegetarian companies is, according to Maurer, contributing to this process of “normalisation” (2002:131-6, 140).

In this chapter I have presented developments in modern Western foodways concerning consumption of meat and attitudes to it, and within these developments, the advancement of vegetarianism as a dietary option, a lifestyle and a social movement. The general tendency has been towards an ever greater freedom pertaining to choice of foodways, entailing negative as well as positive consequences. Within that ‘menu pluralism’, vegetarianism – especially the more lax variants of it – has been growing mainly as a dietary option employed in attempts to restore gastronomic order, security and health, as well as moral peace of mind connected to the use of animals for food, the treatment of animals more generally, and environmental issues.

These developments constitute the global context for vegetarianism in Japan, which I will use as an empirical example of transnational vegetarian foodways. Vegetarian foodways in Japan have clear similarities to vegetarian foodways in the West, but they also have certain particularities. They are set in a local historical, social and cultural context which in many ways stands in a strong contrast to the Western one.

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<sup>41</sup> Veganism as a trendy thing to do will be presented in the Japanese material.

<sup>42</sup> Part of the reason might lie in price differences.



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This local Japanese context contains a whole traditional approach to life and the world and encompasses a dietary tradition which in many ways appears to be in line with modern vegetarianism. In fact, elements of this traditional Japanese worldview have contributed to the development of modern vegetarian foodways in the West. As has been pointed out, communication concerning vegetarian foodways has been a two-way stream (cf. Cwiertka 2001:7; 1999:56; Clarke 2000a).

## **VEGETARIAN FOODWAYS IN JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE**

I now turn to my empirical example – vegetarian foodways in Japan. I am using the preposition ‘in’ quite purposefully here, rather than calling it ‘Japanese vegetarianism’. Since modern vegetarianism is a transnational phenomenon – which is part of my argument in this thesis – not just the foodways, but also some of the important actors on the vegetarian stage in Japan have in fact come there from the West.

### **The local context**

I will focus especially on Japanese historical, social and cultural particularities, which together with the traditional Japanese worldview in relation to nature presented in the Introduction, constitute the backdrop for vegetarianism in Japan. I will also point out certain contrasts and parallels to the West.

The main vegetarian foodways identified above – compassion for all living beings, health and vitality of vegetarian diets, and concern for the natural environment – resonate potentially well with the traditional Japanese worldview, which I will discuss in greater detail when describing my ethnographic examples. As has already been pointed out, the transnational vegetarian foodways have evolved from various processes of influence on Western vegetarian foodways, to which Japanese philosophy and practice have contributed (cf. Clarke 2000b). In particular, contribution has come from Zen Buddhism with its emphasis on compassion, condemnation of taking life, and the notion of Buddhahood intrinsic to all being; macrobiotics; and the idea of an inherent connection between health and food – even if these do not necessarily translate into adherence to vegetarianism in Japan.

### **Japanese foodways**

To reiterate, *foodways* are “cultural attitudes and patterns of behaviour toward food” (Simoons 1994:297). They are “profoundly meaningful in all cultures” (Counihan

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1999:2), and in Japan, food “pervades every aspect of life” (Cwiertka 2005:415). Not least, food still has strong practical and mental connections to religion and spirituality in Japan (Cwiertka 2005:416). Food plays a central role in religious rituals, both Shintō and Buddhist, concerning commensality among people and with gods. Buddhist offerings to the deities are sweet and ‘vegetarian’. Shintō ones must be pure, natural, fresh and without meat or blood (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:41-2).

### *Rice as self, meat as the Western other*

It is especially rice that has been the most important ritual food. The Japanese ethnographer Kunio Yanagita pointed out that rice as the only grain type is believed to have a soul and therefore requires ritual performance (in Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:44). Rice occupies a central place in Japanese cuisine and foodways. Not necessarily in terms of the quantities consumed, as those have a lot of the time been meagre – in the past due to the cost and scarcity of rice, in contemporary Japan due to affluence, abundance of food choice and changing eating habits. Admittedly, rice is still a necessary focal point of meals – apart from breakfast with up to half of the population, especially in cities, eating bread in the morning – but its significance is largely symbolic. So much so, that the word for cooked rice, *gohan*, also means a ‘meal’. Meals which do not contain rice are considered snacks (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993 and 1997; Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000; Ishige 2000 and 2001; Cwiertka 2005).

There are reports of Japanese people expressing that only meals containing rice are filling (e.g. Ohnuki-Tierney 1997:168). Similarly, in the West and in other traditionally meat-eating cultures, what people reportedly crave is meat (Simoons 1994; Harris 1986). Generally speaking, and for reasons that will be explored below, the Japanese have historically consumed relatively small amounts of meat.

Rice – the short-grain domestically grown variety in its polished form – became the basis for Japanese collective identity (Ohnuki-Tierney 1997:166).<sup>43</sup> Other varieties of

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<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, rice accompanying a (Japanised) Western dish is called *raisu*, not *gohan* (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:108).

rice and rice grown in other countries have been considered inferior and unpalatable and used by the Japanese to distance themselves from other rice-consuming nations, notably China (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Ishige 2000:1176), while unpolished rice was the fare of peasants in premodern times.

By contrast and not unjustifiably, Westerners became associated – to begin with largely negatively, but not exclusively – with meat and dairy consumption (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:105-8; 1997:166-7). A popular anti-European descriptive term was *bata-kusai* or ‘stinking of butter’ (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:178; Cwiertka 2006), as milk and dairy have historically on the whole not been used in Japan (Ishige 2001).

### *State agency – from prohibition to prescription of meat consumption*

The state has played an important role in developing Japanese foodways over the centuries. Beginning in the seventh century, Japanese rulers contributed to the developments in the traditional ‘habitus’ of the people, including the relatively low consumption of meat. Shortly after the introduction of Buddhism, according to Ohnuki-Tierney, “the doctrine of mercy for all living beings was translated into a legal prohibition against the consumption of land-dwelling animals” (1997:166). To be precise, in 675 CE emperor Temmu Tennō issued a decree forbidding the consumption of the flesh of cows, horses, dogs, monkeys and barn-door fowl – but not other types of meat. Hunters and fishermen were banned from using traps designed to catch indiscriminately. Offenders were to be punished (Visser 1935:205).

Ishige’s (2001) interpretation of this ban is different. He points out that the consumption restrictions in this decree concerned only the spring and summer months, i.e. the rice cultivation season, and the ban did not mention deer and wild boar which were the most important sources of meat at that time. The species of animals that were included by it were not normally used as food. Ishige concludes that the consumption ban was motivated by the desire to protect the precious horses and cattle, as well as to prevent drought, insect damage to crops and famine believed to result from meat consumption. The additional ban of indiscriminate hunting and fishing “may be interpreted as reflecting the Buddhist principle of preventing

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needless bloodshed” (2001:53-5). In other words, Ishige’s interpretation supports Grivetti’s (2000:1495-6) the definition of taboo in that the ban imposed on the society was of ecological, economic and religious character, with the aim of protecting crops, and regulating social behaviour.

These restrictions with variations were later repeated by various other emperors, most notably Shōmu Tennō, who in 732 c. e. reportedly tried to end a severe drought by prayers and offerings to Shintō (sic) gods of mountains and rivers, as well as by forbidding the use of strong spirits and the slaughter of animals, and by various acts of mercy towards people. In addition, various rulers would order the freeing of all falcons and cormorants in the whole country, in order to both liberate the birds and to prevent them being used for hunting and fishing (Visser 1935:208-9). These nationwide decrees were, according to Ishige, meant as expressions of the benevolence of the emperors in a system of government based on Buddhist ideology (2001:55).

During the 9<sup>th</sup> century, meat was apparently still consumed secretly even in Buddhist monasteries because in 833 a law was introduced threatening with 30 days of hard labour those monks and nuns who ate meat or one of the five types of onion that were forbidden, or drank alcohol. The consumption of mammal flesh was occasionally permitted in order to strengthen the body or cure an illness and even the Buddhist clergy were allowed to consume meat for medicinal reasons – for the period specified by their superiors.<sup>44</sup> By the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Buddhist clergy as well as the nobility and residents of cities considered meat consumption a sin. Under the circumstances, a significant proportion of the population started avoiding the consumption of meat. Nevertheless, decrees prohibiting the killing of animals were regularly issued until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, “underscoring the great difficulty of convincing people to forget the taste of meat” (Ishige 2001:56).

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<sup>44</sup> A similar exemption concerned Benedictine monks in mediaeval Europe, who otherwise were prohibited from eating meat (Goody 1982:144-5; Mennell 1985:27-9).

In 927, for example, it was declared that government officials and other representatives of the nobility who ate meat were unclean and thus excluded from Shintō rituals at the imperial court for three following days. Thus, under the influence of Buddhism and connected to the Shintō avoidance of death and blood, meat-eating had become taboo in the native Shintō religion as well, and grew stronger in later times. Unlike in Buddhism, though, the Shintō ban did not cover fish and shellfish, both deemed worthy of being offered to the deities. Subsequently, when Buddhism reached the rural population around the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the meat-eating taboo and the Buddhist notion of transmigration of souls became combined, so that people started believing that whoever ate the flesh of four-legged animals would become reincarnated as one (Ishige 2000: 1176, 2001:56-7).

Traditionally, Japanese society had relied on game as a source of meat, and as the population grew, more and more land came under cultivation, driving wild animals from the plains into the forested and mountainous areas, so that people became used to consuming small amounts of meat on irregular basis. This, according to Ishige, is a crucial background factor for the disappearance of meat from the diet of the general population. It is doubtful that religious prohibition alone would have achieved that. (Ishige 2000:1176, 2001:56-60).

It was only the Buddhist clergy who were expected not to eat any living creature.<sup>45</sup> The general population did not eat mammals – apart from whale and dolphin, conceptualised as fish,<sup>46</sup> and apart from in times of sickness – but professional hunters ate game, and wild fowl was consumed in small quantities, as well as fish, avoided in principle only on Buddhist holidays as well as on yearly and monthly death days of close relatives. The *samurai*, who rose to power from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, practiced their warrior skills through hunting and regularly consumed game

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<sup>45</sup> Visser (1935) makes a mention of devout Buddhist using water strainers in order not to consume insects living in the water.

<sup>46</sup> This is still used as an explanation for the general Japanese attitude to whaling (Bocking 2003).

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and wild fowl. At the same time, people involved in slaughtering animals and producing leather goods, who also consumed flesh, became shunned and over time the group developed into a separate caste, their occupation and eating habits being condemnable according to both Buddhist and Shintō outlook. Other categories of people who ate meat were sumo wrestlers and country-dwellers. As the Japanese did not raise cattle for meat and milk, milk and dairy were not consumed, though not entirely unknown (Ishige 2001:58, 61-2, 146; Seligman 1994:169; Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:39; Hanley 1997:162).

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish and the Portuguese arrived in Japan and influenced the Japanese foodways in several respects<sup>47</sup> (Ishige 2001:84, 91, 94; Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:44-5). Significantly, Japanese converts to Christianity were exempted from the meat prohibition, so that some of them started eating beef. In port cities such as Nagasaki where the European ships would arrive, the general population started eating meat, and to a lesser extent bread. In 1612 the Tokugawa shogunate – the feudal government which assumed power in 1600 – banned the consumption of beef and bread along with prohibiting Christianity. Pork, chicken and duck, eaten by the Chinese living in Nagasaki, were not covered by the ban (Ishige 2001:84, 91-2).

The British historian Susan Hanley (1997) writes that this decree concerned the killing of cattle as well as the sale of cows that died naturally, and argues that the Tokugawa government issued this land-covering proscription first of all to protect the farming animals and thus sustain agricultural production. Hanley dismisses religious notions suggested by other researchers as motivations behind the bans on meat-eating in Japan, based on the fact that the Chinese were Buddhist as well and did not refrain from meat consumption.<sup>48</sup> However, says Hanley, as the Japanese of the time were

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<sup>47</sup> Not widely known is perhaps that the tea ceremony, which developed at the time, is in fact strongly influenced by the ceremonial of the Catholic mass (Lewis 1993).

<sup>48</sup> This seems a bit simplistic in the light of what Ishige writes about China concerning Buddhism and the consumption of meat and fish. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century an imperial decree threatened Buddhist clergy with execution

resource-conserving, they made use of all available sources of food. People did consume game and wild fowl to the extent those were available. Towards the end of the Tokugawa period, when game had become over-hunted, people turned to chicken and eggs. In coastal areas people ate fish and shellfish, and inland the soy bean through products such as tofu became the main source of both protein and calcium (1997:65-8). Hanley's explanation goes along the same lines as Harris's reasoning (1986:16), in that she proposes rice cultivation as an ecological adaptation and little access to meat as primary motivations for the low consumption of meat.

In the capital city of Edo, meat shops selling a variety of game were reported to exist in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and increased in numbers from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their clientele, according to Hanley, included the samurai even though these establishments were said to emanate a terrible smell. Cwiertka points out in addition the existence of low status 'beast restaurants' in the city, situated in the worst parts of it, selling beef of dubious provenance to the margins of the population (Hanley 1997:66; Cwiertka 2006:27-9). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese scholars started studying the West. Inspired particularly by Dutch Learning, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, occasional consumption of meat started to be promoted as beneficial to the health, books recommended feeding it to sick people and meat began to be sold on a larger scale in Edo. Though the game meat sold there was expensive and not very tasty (Hanley 1997:66,162; Cwiertka 2006:27; Ishige 2001:58).

However, on the whole, meat-eating was socially and culturally marginalised, so that for example use of euphemisms in relation to meat developed. Wild boar was commonly referred to as 'mountain whale' – whale being considered a species of fish. Also, plant and flower names were given to wild boar, deer and horse meat: peony, maple and cherry respectively (Hanley 1997:66; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:147 n.

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if they ate meat. From then onwards the clergy obeyed the prohibition and did not eat meat or fish. Lay people did however eat them on a daily basis (2001:52-3).



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6; Cwiertka 2004:124, 2006:28). Shibusawa observes that “domestic animals were not eaten publicly” (1958:65).

In sum, the premodern Japanese did eat meat to the extent it was available – that is the majority were probably not eating it on a regular basis (Hanley 1997). But a certain amount of individual agency in relation to food was possible even in premodern Japan. In the context of the “official” diet (cf. Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:106) consisting of vegetables and perhaps fish in addition to grain – rice for those who could afford it, with millet and barley mixed in for those who could not (Ishige 2001) – those who had access to meat were consuming it.

With the forced opening of Japan by the Western powers in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the situation was reversed. Propagating meat-eating became part of the ‘Westernisation’ and modernization project of the Meiji government which took over power in 1868.<sup>49</sup> Based on Western scientific publications of the time, which considered meat to be essential to human growth, strength and health,<sup>50</sup> the Japanese government promoted and regulated the production and consumption of meat and milk, e.g. in 1869 the government established The Cattle and Horse Company, in order to produce and sell beef and dairy, as well as to create employment for the samurai (Cwiertka 2004:123-126; 2006:33; Ishige 2001). The promotion of the consumption of meat was most successful in cities, where people did not have as close a relationship to animals as peasants did.<sup>51</sup> Peasants treated their cattle like members of the family, gave them names and buried them when they died. Milk, however, became equally popular in

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<sup>49</sup> A parallel development occurred in Europe, where meat was also in relative scarcity until the second half of the 19th century for economic reasons, despite a long tradition for its consumption by those who could afford it. Here, too, the governments and the health authorities started advocating meat-eating in late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Franklin 1999:40-1).

<sup>50</sup> Note that this was also the time of the establishment of vegetarian societies in the West.

<sup>51</sup> This seems to have been the opposite in modernizing Europe, where it was the urban middle class who first developed feelings of compassion towards animals and of repugnance to eating the types of meat that reminded them of the origin of the foodstuff. Cf. Mennell (1985:310).

cities and in the countryside, though initially it was mostly consumed by babies, children and the sick (Ishige 2001:148-154; Shibusawa 1958:65-71).

Ashkenazi and Jacob (2000:177-8) have an interesting take on the issue of meat consumption in the Meiji era. They call it a food fad.<sup>52</sup> The association of meat with Westerners enhanced its standing, and from the mid 1860s the fashion of eating beef stew flavoured with soy sauce or miso spread in the cities (Cwierka 2006:31). When in 1872 it was announced that emperor Meiji had eaten beef, “meat eating was transformed from a practice which had long been tolerated but kept low-profile into the symbol of Japan’s transformation into a modern nation” (Cwierka 2004:125). Soon the consumption of beef became “something of a Japanese speciality, a niche food in a culture of niche foods” (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:178) – the actual quantities consumed in Meiji Japan being very small. Their symbolic significance, however, in terms of eating in line with the governmental project of ‘civilisation and enlightenment’ was considerable (Cwierka 2006:34).

In the following years eating beef in particular became so high-profile, a sign of modernity, progress and cosmopolitanism, that abstaining from it came to be seen as a sign of backwardness or reactionary ultra-nationalism (Cwierka 2004:125; 2006:31; Ishige 2001:150). By the 1920s the Kansai local version of the stew had become a national dish called *sukiyaki*, which is still one of the favourite dishes of the Japanese (Ishige 2001:152). However, the debates over the new food custom lasted for decades, the arguments against it ranging from religious, national, cultural to aesthetic in character (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:178).

### ***Industrialisation, signs of ‘gastro-anomy’, consumer movements and ‘menu pluralism’***

These changes in attitudes and patterns of consumption initiated in the Meiji era, characterised by culinary eclecticism and domestication of various foreign influences,

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<sup>52</sup> Defined as “a measurable rise in demand for a particular food [...] that has been either unknown or largely ignored until the fad catches on” (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:177).

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led by the urban middle class, continued to develop as Japan was turning first into an industrial and later a post-industrial nation-state. The national Japanese cuisine was created as part of an attempt at constructing a national culture through universal education, mass media, universal conscription of males, based on a combination of state agency, modernisation reforms, urbanisation and industrialisation (Cwierka 2005:417-8; Ishige 2001:144, 149). Like in Europe (cf. Goody 1982), the modernization of food production resulted in the commoditization of food and distancing between food producers and consumers, as well as changes in retailing moving more and more towards the large scale, efficient, industrial and impersonal. These changes have resulted in public fears of its negative consequences (Ishige 2001:146; Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:48, 50, 215-6).

The Japanese have experienced a certain amount of culinary and nutritional confusion necessarily resulting from industrialization and foreign influences (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:44-5, 50). This has perhaps not manifested itself in ‘gastro-anomy’ – bemoaned in Europe by Fischler (1980) – since the Japanese have been good at domesticating foreign influences using e.g. soy sauce as a cultural culinary marker. However, western fast food and ‘junk foods’ are spreading, competing with the long-established native snacks and contributing to a growing rate of obesity, heart disease, as well as changes in etiquette (Ohnuki-Tierney 1997).

Ishige (2001) observes that the quantities of meat consumed started rising at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it was only the elderly who were still opposing it.<sup>53</sup> The main types of meat consumed until mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were beef, pork and chicken. Unlike in Okinawa, on the main islands of Japan, the organs were not eaten even during the Meiji era – until Korean barbecue became popular after WW2. Blood is never used in cooking even today, owing perhaps to the influence of Shintō.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> I shall argue that the vegetarian movement started taking form at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>54</sup> Recall Twigg’s Western food hierarchy with blood being the most powerful food – owing to its proximity to taboo, not least (1983:21-3).

Meat consumption dropped temporarily in the 1930s due to the great depression and 15 years of war. Thanks to the economic growth in the 1960s, by the end of the decade, extreme differences in income had been levelled out. One of the results concerning food was that both fish and meat started to feature more strongly in the diet of most people (Ishige 2001:136, 145-153, 163). Between 1961 and 1991, consumption of meat in Japan doubled (Millstone and Lang 2003:81).

There is clear ‘menu pluralism’ in contemporary Japanese society, as well as scope for exercising agency and finding individual solutions to food anxieties (cf. Cwiertka 2005; Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:45-6, 48; Beardsworth and Keil 1997).

Consumption – within what is appropriate for one’s age, gender and socio-economic status – is also a major vehicle for expressions of individual personality and lifestyle (Clammer 1997:11-2). White (2001:63) points specifically to food as a means employed by young Japanese women in order to participate in consumption, manage relationships and be creative. Japanese consumers are also highly informed and aesthetically sophisticated, they exercise judgement and control over their bodies (Clammer 1997:12, 20; cf. Caplan 1997). Since the 1970s they have been educated about pesticides and additives in food as well as about environmental pollution. After several food safety scandals, including milk adulteration, mercury poisoning and BSE from imported feed, in the 1990s collective solutions in the form of consumer organisations demanding organic farming and reduced imports became popular (Cwiertka 2005:420-5; Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:47, 60-1, 216-7; Clammer 2000:216, 1997:41, 2001:71).

The traditional ‘habitus’ lives on to some extent. A case in point is the attitude of moral condemnation towards hunting on the part of some Japanese, as well as annual rites attended by some hunters. These are aimed at helping the dead animals in attaining Buddha status, as well as protecting the hunters and their families from vengeance of the spirits of the killed animals (Knight 2003:38-40). A middle-aged informant, who is not a practising Buddhist, has told me that she regularly thanks the animals that have offered their lives to become her food. Some readers may also be familiar with a scene in the film *Tampopo* by Juzo Itami (1987), in which an elderly

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master apologises to slices of pork in his soup by saying “See you soon.” before eating them.

### **The traditional worldview and approach to life**

Despite the general lack of interest in active religious practice in modern Japan, and despite the marginalisation of Zen Buddhist practice in particular<sup>55</sup> – to the extent that “the Zen population is extremely small” (Nakamaki 2003:113) – Zen is said to still underlie the Japanese worldview, approach to life and culture. Many intellectual and artistic activities in contemporary Japan – such as the tea ceremony, haiku poetry and garden design – stem from Zen philosophy and practice, which is not necessarily consciously recognised (Bouma, Smith and Vasi 2000:96). This tradition is in modern society largely latent and marginal, familiar mostly at the intellectual level and not part of the collective awareness and practice on a daily basis, but perhaps activated on certain ritual occasions (Arne Røkkum, pers. comm.).

Most people participate in Buddhist rituals, rites and festivals, the observance of which has traditionally involved abstention from meat and fish consumption. These include major festivals such as the mid-August *o-bon* – the ancestor worship festival lasting several days – and the spring and autumn equinox days called *higan*. Ishige reports that for the duration of the Bon festival fishermen still suspend their work, but the custom of eating only vegetarian food undertaken by practising Buddhists has been dying out since the late 1950s. Also funerals as well as yearly or monthly remembrance days – *hōji* – held for relatives, parents in particular, would in the past entail consuming vegetarian food (2001:242). Pilgrimages and ascetic practices of both Buddhism and the folk religion of Shugendō involve purely plant-based meals. Even today, Buddhist vegetarian food, *shōjin ryōri*, is conceived of as the food of ascetic Buddhist monks, rejuvenating short-term diet or funeral fare, i.e. boring and tasteless (Arne Røkkum, pers. comm.).

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<sup>55</sup> Religious Zen practice is in fact more common in the West than in Japan (Bouma *et al.* 2000).

Another relatively obscure concept associated with Zen is *seishin* – ‘inner being’, ‘spiritual strength’ – involving self-discipline and -denial, endurance, courage and loyalty. It is developed by physical and mental training aimed at achieving spiritual growth. This body-mind training, called *seishin kyōiku*, traditionally includes flower arrangement, calligraphy, the tea ceremony, martial arts, music and dance, ascetic practices and meditation, and is still undergone in Buddhist monasteries. Less traditional areas for its occurrence include sports, educational and military institutions<sup>56</sup> and sometimes company training (Spielvogel 2003:23-6; Hendry 2003:194-5; Nakamaki 2003).

Reader (1991:108) points out that the notion of self-reflection, development and cultivation, aimed at both improving one’s individual personality and becoming a better social person, exists in the Japanese religious universe as a whole. Its importance is underscored not least in new religions. In general, religion in Japan creates scope for individuals to exercise volition and express their personality, for example by creating their own religious synthesis (Sugimoto and Mouer 1986 in Reader 1991:107). One of the striking characteristics of Japanese religious life is a long tradition of the emergence of charismatic religious leaders – in spite of, or perhaps because of, strong social pressures to conform. Reader stresses however that becoming a charismatic religious leader or an individual joining a religious group outside of the social group has not been easy in Japanese society (1991:108-9). Choosing a social group to belong to has, reportedly, become easier since, which is what I turn to next.

### **Diversification of values and lifestyles**

According to Möhwald (2000:57), belonging to a reference group in contemporary Japan is a matter of personal choice rather than birth, which is typical of all highly industrialised capitalist societies and results from social change they have

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<sup>56</sup> Arne Røkkum is of the opinion that discipline in schools and the military in Japan is a secular phenomenon stemming from the Meiji era, not religious (pers. comm.).

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experienced since World War II. These changes include modernisation, population movement from countryside to cities, the resultant weakening of traditional social bonds – though less so in Japan, according to Clammer (2000:218) – mass media and mass education. Similar developments have been observed in most of Western Europe; the author compares specifically with Germany.

With increasing affluence and permissiveness in Japanese society during the 1980s, pluralized lifestyles and patterns of consumption became major vehicles for self-expression and self-definition, though there were still relatively high levels of control compared with Western societies. The bursting of the Japanese bubble economy in 1991 created insecurity and anxiety as well as causing further relaxation of control and increase in permissiveness (Möhwald 2000:65). Also Clammer admits that in the last two decades there has been a much bigger scope for expressing individuality (1997:159).

These changes have affected especially young people, who are overrepresented among the ego-centred hedonistic and materialistic value patterns on the one hand and among the individualistic and idealistic ones on the other hand. The hedonistic types are characterised by values of amusement consumption, materialism, social advancement, and instant gratification, coupled with feelings of insecurity, unhappiness, anxiety, low self-esteem and -reliance, tendency towards anomie, non-commitment, mistrust of and hostility towards foreigners. By contrast, the idealistic young individualists display work commitment given right incentives such as an interesting job, responsibility, and fellow employees which they can respect. If the opportunity for self-realisation is missing at work, these young idealistic individualists are likely to search for self-actualisation outside of their jobs. Other qualities they display are openness towards foreigners, strong inclination for social engagement and voluntary activities, as well as an interest in social problems (2000:63–73).

Similarly, Sugimoto (2003) asserts that Japanese society is culturally and socially diverse like other societies of advanced capitalism. He points for example to the

existence of various lifestyle groups and subcultures, often identified by the suffix *zoku*, meaning ‘tribe’. Examples of *zoku* are *shayō-zoku* – employees who can spend company money to entertain customers after work; *madogi-wazoku* – middle-aged employees at the end of their careers, sitting by the window away from the main activities in the open-landscape Japanese office; *bōsō-zoku* – distinctly dressed bikers making noise on their motor-bikes in quiet neighbourhoods (2003:8).

Sugimoto admits that Japan still displays significant differences compared with its counterparts in the West. He seems to be an adherent of the late-developer variant of the multi-convergence theory when he posits: “It would be fair for social scientists to compare Japan’s present features with their counterparts in Western countries several decades ago.” (2003:20) In fact, Japan is about 30 years behind the US when it comes to attitudes towards vegetarianism, according to a Japanese American vegetarian, Miyoko Nishimoto Schinner (2000).

Even if scholars do not agree on the details, one thing is clear: enlarged by globalisation, the scope for agency concerning choice of lifestyle and identity within cultural resources, which is associated with modernity, exists in Japan as well.

## Vegetarianism in Japan

As mentioned above, there was resistance to the wide-ranging promotion of a meat-based diet from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, already then the modern vegetarian movement in Japan started taking form.<sup>57</sup> The Meiji government’s favouritism of Shintō over Buddhism notwithstanding, certain Buddhist influences managed to survive. In addition, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a military doctor<sup>58</sup> introduced a natural, diet-based cure, advocating abstention from meat and only an

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<sup>57</sup> This is parallel to what was the case in the West (cf. Fiddes 1991; Franklin 1999).

<sup>58</sup> The fact that he was a military doctor is rather interesting, since it was the army that was one of the main channels for the implementation of the government’s new, meat-based, diet for the nation (cf. Cwierka 2004, 2005, 2006).



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occasional intake of fish – the beginning of what is called macrobiotics today. Also at that time, Seventh Day Adventism arrived in Japan. These three sets of principles – religions perhaps, as macrobiotics is sometimes classified as one – contribute today to the growth of vegetarianism in Japan and constitute vegetarian influences in Japanese cuisine, according to the president of Japan Vegetarian Society, Dr. Mitsuru Kakimoto (Kakimoto 1998).

Religion is seen by many scholars as very much part of everyday life in Japan (Clammer 1995:57), a diverse “ritual system which pervades all institutions” (Fitzgerald 1993 in Hendry 2003:126), so that one cannot exclude religiously inspired vegetarianism from studies of the modern phenomenon. In the West religion has to some extent been involved as well – recall Seventh Day Adventism, Zen Buddhism, and the foundation of Vegetarian Societies in Britain and America being prompted by the Bible Christian Church.

One possible reason for the relatively low popularity of vegetarianism in Japan can be the fact that sectarianism – which vegetarianism is perceived as an example of – is considered suspicious in Japan. People who live by principle are perceived as egoistic, neurotic or ridiculous, and a need for special treatment in public space as rude (Arne Røkkum, pers. comm.). Another plausible partial explanation can be the presumed fact that, according to Schinner (1999:9), the concept of animal rights is alien to most Japanese. The best way to proselytize vegetarianism in Japan Schinner (1999) found when she demonstrated vegetarian cooking in department stores, was to point out its health benefits. This view is also consistent with the widely reported Japanese interest in this-worldly benefits. On the other hand – a lot of Japanese people consider their diet to be healthful (cf. Coldicott 2007).

Whether or not the health argument seems plausible as an explanation of Japanese motivations for vegetarianism, it appears to be in contradiction with the fact that, according to another informant, Helen, there are many smoking vegetarians in Japan. Similarly, Spielvogel (2003) notes that smoking is the rule among aerobics practitioners and instructors, who excuse themselves by saying that they can afford to

smoke because they are healthier than people who do not work out and, in any case, one does not want to be too healthy (2003:137). Nevertheless, all vegetarian restaurants I visited in Tokyo were smoke-free, which is not standard for restaurants in Japan.

I turn now to presenting vegetarianism in Japan through a series of select contextualised empirical examples consisting of a vegetarian organisation and four vegetarian individuals operating in Japanese society. The individuals are chosen with the aim of collectively representing what has been identified as the main themes of the transnational vegetarian ideology in Western context – compassion for all living beings, human health and vitality of vegetarian food, and concern about the natural environment (cf. Maurer 2002). These themes partly, even largely overlap in the Japanese context as well. All three are, to varying degrees, present in the ideology and activities of the vegetarian organisation, whereas the individual empirical examples represent different combinations of them (cf. Twigg 1983:20).

One of my most important analytical tools is the notion of agency. Despite the local context containing a traditional ‘vegetarian’ practice, modern vegetarianism in Japan, just like in the West, requires a conscious choice on the part of its adherents – or their parents, which is perhaps the case with Seventh Day Adventist children – and stepping outside of the mainstream foodways (cf. Twigg 1983). The concept of agency is appropriate not least because all the individuals I am going to present exercise a considerable amount of influence over their own life chances, those of others – including animals and the rest of the natural environment – and certainly have the capacity to and do play a role in forming social realities in which they participate (cf. *Dictionary of Anthropology* 1997).

## **JAPAN VEGETARIAN SOCIETY**

Despite the presence of Buddhism in Asia, the first secular vegetarian societies in the International Vegetarian Union’s region of East/South-East Asia and Oceania were

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established in Australia and New Zealand. They were modelled on the European ones and set up in 1886 and 1943 respectively (IVU East/SE Asia and Oceania, 2008). The first mention of Japan on the international vegetarian scene seems to be in connection with the 15<sup>th</sup> World Vegetarian Congress held in India in 1957, when Werner Zimmerman from Austria reported on vegetarians in Japan. He said that during his visits to Japan in 1930 and 1949 he did not meet any vegetarians; by contrast, during a more recent visit, he met “many ardent and enthusiastic vegetarians” (Zimmerman 1957, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph). One of the people was George Ohsawa,<sup>59</sup> thanks to whose work for healthy living, thousands of Japanese had become vegetarian. Another was Masakazu Tada, founder of a small “vegetarian school of life” called the Hepatocephalic Medical College/Soto Institute and author of a book published in English as well as Japanese, *The Reorganisation of Man by Food and Sex* (Zimmerman 1957).

According to International Vegetarian Union’s records, in 1960 Dr. Tada was elected an honorary vice-president of IVU and remained in that position until the mid-1980s. In 1973 he headed a strong, 20-person Japanese delegation at the IVU Congress in Sweden. For comparison, there was only one person from Australia present. IVU membership records for 1975-1977 show subscription from Japanese Vegetarian Union, and Dr. Tada is noted to have made a personal donation. Dr. Tada is mentioned as president of the Japanese Vegetarian Union in 1979, when he gave a talk at the IVU Congress in England. In 1982 Japan and Singapore were reported as the main centres of vegetarian activity in Asia. In 1993, Japan Vegetarian Society (JPVS) was founded and paid subscription to IVU and in 1996 its president, Dr. Mitsuru Kakimoto, was elected a member of the IVU Council. Since then he has delivered several speeches and lectures on vegetarianism in Japan on the IVU forum, and Japan Vegetarian Society has been offering to host World Vegetarian Congress – so far unsuccessfully (IVU East/SE Asia and Oceania, 2008). In May 2001 JPVS received the non-profit organisation status (NPO), and is now officially called in

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<sup>59</sup> I will return to Georges Ohsawa in connection with discussing macrobiotics.

English the Non-Profit Organisation Japan Vegetarian Society. 1993 is still in its logo.

The mission statement of JPVS reads as follows:

“Our motto is "to always consider the well-being of our earth and its people" and we aim to teach and promote vegetarian [*sic*] as it is concerned with general well-being, nutrition, ethics, respect for life, preservation of our environment, and stopping starvation in developing countries.” (JPVS Information, 2005)

In other words, it contains the main tenets of vegetarian ideology identified by Maurer – “compassion for all living beings, the health and vitality of vegetarian diets, and concern for the environment” (2002:71). The latter includes preoccupation with food shortages caused by the negative effects that meat production has on the environment (2002:76). JPVS adopts an ecumenical approach combining the three main tenets of the vegetarian ideology, which is characteristic of vegetarian organisations in North America as well, even if they in fact favour a particular one. This approach, says Maurer, “can draw a wide audience and minimize the conflicts that might arise among members who embrace vegetarianism for different reasons” (2002:80).

Furthermore, JPVS state their mode of action:

“We strive to spread necessary education and practical suggestions to anyone who may be interested. We hope our network will help vegetarians to help one another. Please join us if you are interested in living a vegetarian lifestyle.” (JPVS Information, 2005)

The spreading of education is done through the *Vegetarian Journal* and newsletters, lectures, meetings, cooking classes, social gatherings and festivals – organised locally in Osaka and in other cities in Japan. Some of these activities and events are only available to members and are designed to create collective vegetarian identity. Others are a means of public outreach. As Maurer points out, the contents of these activities and events can often vary depending on the intended recipients in mind, with the public outreach ones tending to be more inclusive and less radical. Ecumenical approach is adopted in relation to various motivations and practices of members, but also towards meat-eaters as potential members (2002:119-22).

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Some of these events have started to attract attention from the press. For example, *Kyoto Shimbun* has written an article entitled “Eating with Peace and the Environment in Mind” about an event at JPVS’s Japan Vegetarian Week in 2003. Students and housewives were reported to have gathered at a temple “to encourage thinking about our eating’s impact on the value of life and peace. The event was organised by a female owner of a “purely-vegetarian” restaurant and 15 vegetarian youths. There was vegetarian food to sample and for sale. “In addition, a petition to put a stop to animal experimentation, a discussion panel on world starvation and environmental problems by 6 NPOs, and music centred around themes of peace were abundant.” (*Kyoto Shimbun*, 5<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2003 in JPVS News 2006, 1<sup>st</sup> post) Since then, “Veggie and Peace Festival” has been an annual event, in 2007 changing its name to “Vegetarian Festival”. The philosophy behind it is to provide “a place for people of all ages and nationalities to learn about a healthy lifestyle, while bringing attention to problems like the degrading environment and World Hunger” (Vegetarian Festival 2007).

From the foregoing it appears that JPVS engages mostly in promotion of personal and cultural change. However actions such as petitions have a political aim – involving the government. Furthermore, both peace and global food shortages feature quite prominently in the rhetoric of the vegetarian movement in Japan. In fact, expressions of the importance of peace were mentioned, not surprisingly, by Zimmerman (1957) in his report on vegetarianism in Japan.<sup>60</sup> Concerning world starvation, JPVS’s mission statement makes a point of their being preoccupied with it. At the level of

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<sup>60</sup> For example, the wife of “one of Japan’s outstanding vegetarian leaders” expressed that she and her husband believed that “there will be peace on earth only when the people of the World abstain from “YOTSUASHI””, which was explained in the text as meaning ‘meat-diet’. She also used the word when describing the diet of her great grandparents, who were “life long vegetarians”. In fact, ‘yotsuashi’ means four-legged animals, and abstaining from consuming them would have been consistent with early 19<sup>th</sup> century Japanese *habitus*. As for herself, regrettably, “under the influence of modern medicine”, she had been a meat eater in her childhood, even though she did not like meat. Fortunately, after the war, she heard Mr and Mrs Ohsawa lecture on vegetarianism, and became a vegetarian.

action, JPVS News link reports that during the 2003 Vegetarian Festival, donations to the UN World Hunger Day were raised at a vegetarian French-themed food party “in order to stop hunger in the world” (JPVS News, 2006, 7<sup>th</sup> post). Assuming that Bocking (2003) and Kalland (1995) are right, the issues of world peace, the degradation of the environment and global food shortages are perhaps perceived as being directly relevant to Japan (cf. Bocking 2003; Kalland 1995).

### *Directors and members*

JPVS is situated in Osaka, with a postal address c/o a Christian college that the president of JPVS is professor at. The vice-president of JPVS – in the Japanese spirit of religious and philosophical syncretism perhaps – is the Chief Priest of a Zen Temple, a teacher at a Catholic college and a member of the New York Academy of Science. The board of directors includes also another professor of the catholic college, a manager of Fuji Oil, a certified public accountant, another college professor and two journalists – one of them apparently the only female on the board (JPVS Information, 2005).

The president of JPVS, an example of high-profile social agency, has been influenced in his choice of lifestyle by a visit to the US. He went there in 1988 to attend a congress of the International Federation for Home Economics and visited the Loma Linda University – the Adventist Health Sciences Center in California. A meeting with several SDA researchers resulted in him becoming a vegetarian. Since then, being a dentist and holding a doctorate (Ph.D.), he has pioneered medical and nutritional studies of vegetarians in Japan and published several articles concerning vegetarianism, health and nutrition. In 1996, while president of JPVS, he was elected a member of the IVU Council. In 1999 he was re-elected and held the position until 2002, and later he was appointed ‘Research Co-ordinator’. Between 2004 and 2006 he was IVU Council member again. When Japan Society for Vegetarian Research was established in 1999, he became its chairperson. He is of the opinion that following the vegetarian lifestyle is good for him and his family – wife and two sons – as well as being good for the world they live in, in other words he stresses the health and the environment tenets of the vegetarian ideology. He says: “[I] devote

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myself to promoting vegetarianism in Japan”, but his dream is even bigger – “to work with vegetarians around the world to promote vegetarianism” (IVU Mitsuru Kakimoto 2003/2008, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph). As has been pointed out, often the movement participants “are trying to improve their health, their lives, and sometimes, the world as well” (Kandel and Pelto 1980:332).

Members of JPVS are predominantly Japanese, but there are also some foreigners among them and some of JPVS publications are available in English. This information was published on the website after my repeated enquiries into the matter. As of 2008, JPVS has 960 members, but only a third of them are active members, I have been told by a representative of the organisation. There is a slight majority of females among members of the society. 45 % of members reside in Tokyo metropolitan area, 30 % in the Kansai area including the cities of Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe. Judging by occupations, most members are middle class. Their age, based on participants in events organised by JPVS, ranges from teens to 80s (JPVS, e-mail of 22.04.2008).

### *Japanese Society for Vegetarian Research – a scientific approach to vegetarianism*

The affiliated Japanese Society for Vegetarian Research (JSVR) was established in December 1999. Its board of directors includes one woman, a university professor, among eight men, four of whom are members of the board of directors of Japan Vegetarian Society as well. Apart from the director of an Adventist hospital and a doctor of dental science, all members of the board are college or university professors (JSVR Information, 2006).

JSVR is an academic organisation with the aim of promoting “research pertaining to vegetarianism such as health, nutrition, medicine, environment, society, everyday life, and ethics” (JSVR Information, 2006, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph). In fact, a look at the titles and abstracts of research publications, as well as other activities and links to other organisations and institutions, reveals that the main interest of JSVR and the vast majority of research results and articles published between 2000 and 2006 fall under

the umbrella of health, nutrition and medicine (JSVR Vegetarian Research, 2002/2008).

Among other research projects, there is a study of the local, national and global environmental issues connected to meat production and fish harvest, with one of the key words being 'reckless' (K. Matsuo 2001 in JSVR Vegetarian Research, 2002/2008). The very first volume of the *Vegetarian Research* journal published by JSVR contains an article on vegetarianism and animal rights. The author, a social scientist, criticises the "traditional Western thoughts based on the viewpoints of both nature and humans, that is, the destruction of nature and anthropocentrism". He also considers their contribution to the feminist theory, to deep ecology, and to the new human rights movement. "Vegetarianism as a lifestyle for the new century, which the Japanese Society for Vegetarian Research professes, should and must push this revolutionary trend towards a new relation between humans and animals", urges the author (S. Odagiri 2000 in JSVR Vegetarian Research, 2002/2008).

Other research projects concern issues such as scientific and cultural approaches to vegetarianism, mapping out attitudes towards vegetarianism, as well as attempting to assess numbers and profiles of vegetarians in Japan. A questionnaire completed by a sample of Japanese college students and by Westerners living in Japan, revealed significant differences in the levels of knowledge concerning vegetarianism in the two groups. 82.6% of Westerners described vegetarians as those who do not eat meat, whereas 66% of the Japanese students thought that vegetarians eat only fruit and vegetables.<sup>61</sup> In the survey, animal rights as a reason for becoming vegetarian were pointed to by over 60% of the Western females and by less than 20% of the Japanese females. Perhaps most interestingly, when asked to name the religion they thought vegetarianism was connected to, 57,1% of the Westerners chose Buddhism, whereas more than 30% of the Japanese pointed to Islam and the same number again chose

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<sup>61</sup> Recall the introductory discussion of the definition of vegetarianism, of the English term 'vegetarian', as well as the Japanese terms.



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Hinduism (M. Kakimoto, Y. Watabe and M. Sakyu 2001 in JSVR Vegetarian Research, 2002/2008).

The diet surveys (A. Takai, H. Yamanaka, M. Kakimoto 2005; A. Takai, H. Yamanaka, H. Mito and M. Kakimoto 2003 in JSVR Vegetarian Research, 2002/2008) were based on questionnaires, concerned food intakes and were conducted amongst relatively small, non-representative samples – of respectively 114 middle aged women (40-82 years old) in an area north of Kobe, and 533 undergraduate students of both genders, with the ratio of female to male being more than 3:1 (18-28 y. o.) in the Kansai region, one of the main urban areas of Japan. There were no vegans (pure vegetarians) and no lacto-ovo-vegetarians. However, 0.9% of the middle-aged women were non-meat-eaters, whereas “lacto-ovo-vegetarian-like” and “non-meat-eater-like” individuals “including those who rarely eat animal foods” amounted to 3.5% and 10,5% respectively. 70% stated health as the main reason for avoiding the consumption of animal foods. Among the students, again, 0.9% were non-meat-eaters. “Vegan-like, lacto-ovo-vegetarian-like and non-meat-eater-like people, including those who rarely eat animal foods, accounted for 0.2%, 4.3% and 9.2%, respectively.”<sup>62</sup> The reasons given for not eating animal foods were dislike (36%) and health (28%). The survey of students points out that “many of the vegetarian-like people were not aware of being vegetarian and did not actively avoid the intake of animal foods”.

### *Seventh Day Adventism*

There seems to be a non-explicit connection in dietary terms between JPVS and Seventh Day Adventism. SDA is an example of a religion that has an entire food culture of its own (Anderson 2005:128). Anderson identifies Seventh Day Adventists and devout Buddhists respectively as special subsets of the vegetarian food subculture in the USA (2005:129).

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<sup>62</sup> Another article, which seems to be based on the same survey of students, stated in addition that there were 1.7% pescio-vegetarians among the sample (Kakimoto 2004 in JPVS, e-mail of 22.04.2008).

SDA arrived in Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and from the very beginning started establishing various institutions – educational, such as schools, a college and English language schools – retirement homes, health and medical institutions and food companies. The general educational institutions and the food industry companies make a reference in their names to educational philosophy expressed by Ellen G. White, one of the founders of SDA in America who advocated vegetarianism. *San-iku* can be translated as ‘threefold’ and the principle it refers to concerns the harmonious development of the physical, the mental and the spiritual powers (Hiroshima Saniku Gakuin, 2001, 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph). This seems to be very much in agreement with the native concept of *seishin* discussed above.

In addition, White’s idea of the human body as God’s temple which should not be abused by the wrong types of food or by alcohol and tobacco, seems to resonate with the Confucian ideas of the body as a gift from parents, which needs to be cultivated as a means for enlightenment or self-realisation. Self-cultivation is an obligation, though selfishness is condemned (cf. Clammer 1997:20-21, 159).

SDA statistics (SDA Annual Charts and Statistics, 2008) show slightly over 15,000 members in 2006 in Japan, though it is not clear whether that includes foreigners as well, as there are a few international churches in the country. It is also unclear whether all Seventh Day Adventists in Japan are vegetarian. In the USA, about half of the in all ca. 500,000 Seventh Day Adventists follow a vegetarian diet with most of the remaining ones eating relatively little meat (Maurer 2002:27).

SDA vegetarianism has had influence on the Japanese diet mainly since the 1980s as a reaction to the proliferation of diseases resulting from hyper-nutrition following from adopting conventional American nutritional ideas, which had taken place after WW2. SDA lacto-ovo vegetarian cuisine was adapted to Japanese conditions and palates, according to Kakimoto, with brown rice being part of it, in addition to milk and cornflakes (Kakimoto 1998). A noticeable feature of the food produced by the SDA food companies in Japan is however that they offer a large selection of meat substitutes, presented like meat products, such as sausages and burgers, which I think

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could be explained by the human health – as a way of serving God in the case of those who endorse the religion as well as the diet – rather than compassion for animals being the primary motivation behind the diet. SDA combines the *vegetarian idea* and the *spiritual idea*, to use Kandel and Pelto's (1980) terminology.

There have been epidemiological studies conducted on SDA populations in order to assess the diet's health impact, in Japan as in the US (cf. Maurer 2002:27). In 1996, at the 32<sup>nd</sup> IVU Congress, Dr. Kakimoto presented the results of a study which he had co-authored, comparing levels of nutrition and health among Japanese 14-16 year old high school students – 120 Seventh Day Adventist lacto-ovo-vegetarians and 120 non-vegetarians. The diet of the SDA boarding school students contained soy bean and wheat protein products, rice, bread and fruit. Based on the results, the scientists stated that they “would like to recommend the vegetarian diet and spread it all over Japan” (Kakimoto, M, Y. Watabe, A. Takai, K. Matsuo and M. Sakyu 1996)

According to an article in the JSVR journal, studies conducted on Seventh Day Adventist over the last few decades have proved that “vegetarian diets and exercise promote health, and that smoking and diets rich in animal fat contribute to the disease process”. On the basis of that, official guidelines stressing the importance of the consumption of vegetables and fruit have been devised, such as “Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2000” and “Healthy Japanese 21” (Yamagata 2000 in JSVR Vegetarian Research, 2002/2008).

### *Tokyo Vegetarian Week Festival*

In 2005 I participated in a festival which was part of Japan Vegetarian Week organised by JPVS. It was a meeting of the local and the transnational, and of the various aspects of vegetarianism in Japan, present and past, including the traditional Buddhist vegetarian cuisine.

The festival had been advertised on the website of the UK Vegan Society, and on the English version of their website the organisers had invited participants from other countries. They even had an international promotion team. A central item on the programme was a talk by and a meeting with an American holistic health counsellor

who had taught vegetarian foods and macrobiotic cooking at restaurants and cooking schools in the US and Europe and was currently working on a TV programme on Michio Kushi, the macrobiotic ‘guru’ in America, which she was hoping to show in Japan as well. She presented the issue of vegetarian diets in healthy lunch programmes in American schools, which she has been involved in. Another major event was a *shōjin ryōri* lecture and demonstration by a well-fed-looking Zen monk,<sup>63</sup> which was presented as a gaze back at a Japanese food culture. Japanese food featured also in a lecture on vegetarian diet saving the earth, encouraging the Japanese-style diet of unpolished rice and vegetables, which had been preceded by a workshop on how to find vegetables to suit one’s demand – in the context of Japanese consumers being demanding, presumably.

At the exhibition “Alternative Dining – Vegetarian Diet for Health, Environment and Society” organised at the environmental department of the UN University in connection with the festival, a lot of attention was paid to the conditions under which animals are raised for food, as well as to what these should be like.

There was also a lecture on Kenji Miyazawa, an early-20<sup>th</sup> century vegetarian writer, author of a novel featuring a fictitious vegetarian congress and an advocate of vegetarianism. One of the events was a commemoration of his novel *Bejitarian Taisai* – ‘Grand Vegetarian Festival’. A contemporary Japanese writer, who has written several books on vegetarianism together with her American husband, read from and presented Miyazawa’s work.

The ‘organic and natural *begii māketto*’, or vegetarian market, presented what I interpreted as a cross-section of the vegetarian and natural foods as well as more generally alternative scene in Japan (cf. Twigg 1983 on alternative ‘-isms’ accompanying vegetarianism). Various food companies were represented: a macrobiotic restaurateur advertising the lack of meat, milk, egg and sugar in his food, yet admitting that his restaurants do serve “a bit of” meat and fish; another

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<sup>63</sup> Contrary to the idea of Zen monks as ascetic (cf. Nakamaki 2003:113).

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macrobiotic dry food manufacturer who claimed his food was organic, though not certified; representatives of a Seventh Day Adventist soy product manufacturer; Chinese mock meat producers; Taiwanese followers of the Supreme Master Ching Hai selling oolong and green tea, vegetarian sausages and more ‘oriental’-looking foods; people from a LOHAS – Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability – deli offering a “healthy lunch menu: no milk, egg, animal materials and chemical free”; representatives of Be Good Café; a soy ice-cream manufacturer married to an Englishman<sup>64</sup>; a (white) bread and pastry company. There were also people selling a food magazine with its own organic shopping guide, a natural and vegan soap maker – not a vegan herself yet, but getting there, according to her Western companion – natural supplements producers, organic cotton garment makers, representatives of a local animal rights organisation No Fur Network and the American-based PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, whose vegan consciousness extended to footwear which they had for sale, healers, palm-readers, healthy water and special mug sellers, a representative of a vegetarian Esperanto group, as well as non-vegetarian, but environmentally friendly bicycle messengers who also featured very prominently on the festival poster. At other similar events there had in addition been Yoga practitioners present.

Evidently, the bicycle and vegetarianism do, still, go together (cf. Fiddes 1991:200), in Japan at least, for there was also a Tokyo Veggie Ride, doing a round of vegetarian establishments in an area of downtown Tokyo. In addition, ‘bicycle music’ – Live Cycling Live – featured at the Grand Veggie Party which ended the festival. The participants were mostly Japanese, but there were also some foreigners settled in Japan and at least one visiting. The age distribution was wide – from early 20s to 70s.

### *Local variant of transnational phenomenon*

Japan Vegetarian Society is a modern secular vegetarian organisation with goals and types of activity corresponding to the ones observed in similar organisations in

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<sup>64</sup> The latter had a theory that the Japanese cannot digest milk because they are too clean and hygienic.

Western societies, specifically in North America. All three basic tenets of vegetarian foodways are present in the ideology and activities of JPVS. However, after closer scrutiny, it seems that – like its North American counterparts – JPVS is mostly preoccupied with vegetarian foodways concerning human health and nutrition, even though it also includes ethics and the environment in an ecumenical approach. The apparent link with SDA vegetarian diet seems to be strengthening the health tenet. The emphasis is first of all on individual change and only to a lesser extent on cultural and social/political change. However, at least in the case of the North American vegetarian organisations, the belief seems to be that if enough individuals adopt a vegetarian diet and lifestyle, developing their consciousness from individual health benefit to ethical awareness extending to the animate and inanimate world around them, a cultural and social change will follow (Maurer 2002:100, 115-6).

The focus on health seems strategically wise with the view to what Japanese people are said to be preoccupied with. Even the Vegetarian Festival in Kyoto starts its philosophy statement with the following: “In Japan, with 1 out of 2 people becoming victims of cancer, many people are reflecting on their dietary habits.”

I will now present a different vegetarian approach to health and an individual whose motivation has developed from personal to common benefit.

### **KEIKO: Health and Environmental Protection**

It was early evening on a hot late summer day, my first in Tokyo. I was walking along a quiet side street in an apparently fashionable part of town, having discovered three vegetarian cafés. There were virtually no people there but for a couple of neatly looking young women. They were both nicely dressed for the season, with long dark hair falling down on their shoulders. What caught my attention was the paper carrier bag one of them had in her hand. It read: “Natural House – natural food, natural cosmetics”. It rang a bell: I thought I recognised the name of a natural food store chain I had read about on the internet while still in Norway. I gathered my courage

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and asked, in my very basic Japanese, for directions. Luckily for me, Keiko – that was her name – spoke good English. It turned out that the shop was virtually round the corner, but she drew a map for me. Her friend participated eagerly even though she only spoke German. They were both very helpful. Quite extraordinarily, it turned out that Keiko was a vegan. I was excited: “My first Japanese vegan!” – Then again, perhaps it was not coincidental at all, given the area and the bag she was carrying... I explained that I was in Japan to research vegetarianism and we agreed to meet up one day and talk about being vegan in Tokyo. Then they carried on and I went to explore the local branch of Natural House.

### *Macrobiotcs – a folk approach to health*

At the time, Keiko was 25 years old. Two years earlier, when she had just finished getting her university degree, she became ill and the doctors said she had to be operated on. But Keiko did not want that because, as she put, that would be going “against a natural law”.<sup>65</sup> So instead, she went against doctors’ advice and chose “a food diet cure” called macrobiotcs.<sup>66</sup> Her family and friends reacted negatively, but Keiko says that was fine with her – everyone is entitled to have “different thoughts each”. In fact, she did not just start to follow a macrobiotic diet, but a vegan macrobiotic diet. According to Keiko, macrobiotcs is not always vegetarian, as it allows consumption of fish. The way it is practiced in the West today – although the group Kandel and Pelto (1980) had studied were vegetarian – it even permits the consumption of a certain amount of meat. In Japan though, macrobiotcs seems to be conceptualised as a separate variant of vegetarianism. In fact, some people consider it to be an extreme form of vegetarianism in Japan (Marika Ezure, pers. comm.). It appears that it is the final stage of the Zen macrobiotic diet, the ‘brown rice’ fare which stirred up a debate in the US in the 1960s (Belasco 2007), that is thought of as

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<sup>65</sup> Quotations are from Keiko’s e-mails; they were mostly answers to my questions.

<sup>66</sup> Keiko says that the Japanese name is “the same as in English” – macrobiotcs, or macrobi. Normally, the transcription of the katakana is *makurobi*.

a form of “extreme vegetarianism”; its popularity has however declined in the West since the founder’s death (Abrams 2000:1565).

By the time I met her, Keiko had recovered from her illness and was working in a macrobiotic restaurant which was a good place to meet other vegans – she was what Kandel and Pelto (1980) call a ‘joiner’ working in a ‘communication-distribution centre’, combining the *vegetarian idea* with the *mystical motif* of the *natural food idea* – the latter to do with macrobiotics – and the *organic motif* of the *natural food idea* by buying her food at a natural food store.

This kind of agency relating to one’s health might not be unusual in Japan – nor is it cross-culturally unique (cf. Caplan 1997; Anderson 2005). It is not unusual in other areas of life in Japan either, especially within religion, with possible negative social consequences (Reader 1991:109). As for health and medicine, according to Ohnuki-Tierney, in Japan like in most other countries there is “medical pluralism” with several different alternatives to biomedicine (1984:212). Marika Ezure, who specialises in medical anthropology as well as food and healing, has studied macrobiotics as a type of ‘folk medicine’. According to her, macrobiotics is one of indigenous Japanese healing movements which became popular during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and some Japanese social scientists argue that “people were searching for what was missing in biomedical treatment”. Macrobiotics stresses equally mind and food[/body].<sup>67</sup> Ezure says that macrobiotics has “some positive results to health”; she knows several people who were cured of allergies and even of cancer by following macrobiotic principles. However, since macrobiotic foods – like other organic foods – are expensive and sold in health food shops and supermarkets which sell expensive foods, macrobiotics is “for middle and upper class people” (Marika Ezure, pers. comm.).

Kandel and Pelto (1980) write that folk medicine is not new in North America either and is not restricted to rural areas or ethnic minority groups. The health food

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<sup>67</sup> Along those lines, Keiko says that she sometimes worries about her “body and soul”.



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movement, including vegetarianism and macrobiotics, has recently joined the ranks of these ‘alternative medical systems’ or ‘alternative health maintenance systems’ – even though the idea of food as medicine is not new. What the health food movement offers, is a ‘system of preventive medicine’, a holistic approach to nutrition, physical and mental health, in which there is scope for individual agency through something as accessible as food (1980:357-9). Atkinson puts forward that the emphasis in such systems is on self-help and on individualistic solutions to health problems (1983:17). He also points out that many of these ‘folk’ approaches to health go beyond the traditional – in the Western science context at least – boundaries between mind and body on the one hand, and between human and non-human, even inanimate, on the other hand (Atkinson 1980:83). This is the equivalent of Clammer’s concept of agency, which according to him transcends precisely these boundaries and instead expresses mind/body and human/nature unity (2001:12-15). Both of these are present in Keiko’s case, evidenced by her adherence to veganism, macrobiotics and her preoccupation with the natural environment which will be discussed below, after I have presented macrobiotics in a transnational perspective.

### *Macrobiotic foodways in transnational perspective*

Herman Aihara (2008) writes that in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sagen Ishizuka, a Japanese army doctor, published his theory of nutrition and medicine devised on the basis of traditional Oriental approach to diet combined with the Western sciences of biochemistry and physiology. In 1907 his followers, members of the Japanese establishment, founded in Tokyo an association called Shoku-Yō-Kai.<sup>68</sup> The association, with Ishizuka as its chairman, went against the prevalent mood of the day and the strong Western influence in the realm of nutrition and medicine. Ishizuka advocated a return to the traditional Japanese diet of unrefined foods and very little or

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<sup>68</sup> *Shokuyō* (‘food cure’) was the original name of the movement. According to one of my informants, who followed the macrobiotic diet for a year while living in Japan in the early 1980s, but has now lived in Europe for over 20 years, that is the Japanese name of it. She also says that true macrobiotic diet is vegetarian on a daily basis, with a little bit of fish – carp – in times of sickness. Milk and meat are not allowed, though.

no milk and other animal products. He cured many patients with his diet based on brown rice, as well as land and sea vegetables. Ishizuka's practice, based on five principles, became very popular. The principles concerned food as the foundation of all aspects of life; sodium and potassium as the main antagonistic and complementary constituents of food, influencing its yin/yang balance; grain being the main staple for humans; the desirable food being unrefined and natural; the best foods being locally grown and in season<sup>69</sup> (Aihara 2008).

Shortly after Ishizuka's death, George Ohsawa,<sup>70</sup> who at the age of 18 had been told that he was incurably ill, learned the macrobiotic principles from Ishizuka's followers and, after recovery, joined Shoku-Yō-Kai. With time, he was elected president of the association and published a lot of articles and books on related topics. Having become excluded from the association he studied in depth the yin/yang theory rather than cure patients, and devoted himself to spreading the principles of what he later called 'Zen Macrobiotics'. Macrobiotics, from Greek, translates as a 'big view of life' and, according to Aihara (2008), refers to the unity of nature underlying the teachings. The word itself had been used by the German scholar and physician Christoph Wilhelm von Hufeland in a book published in 1796.<sup>71</sup> After WW2, Ohsawa added world peace to his teachings on philosophy and diet, and established a school where he educated many young Japanese, some of whom in turn went abroad and started macrobiotic centres in the US, Europe and Brazil. Michio Kushi was the

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<sup>69</sup> Seasonality, or *shun*, is an important quality of food in Japanese cuisine in general.

<sup>70</sup> Ohsawa's real name was Yoshikazu Sakurazawa. He was among the Japanese vegetarians mentioned by Zimmerman at the World Vegetarian Congress in 1957.

<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, Ohsawa is also said to have read Pythagoras and/or his disciples (Kerr 2008). As will be recalled, Pythagoras was an early advocate of 'vegetarianism' based on an idea of the unity of nature, and he was referred to by the founder of the Bible Christian Church in Britain. Macrobiotics is a lot more complicated than there is scope for in this paper to explain. One thing to take note of is that it contains a concept of 'natural law' (Kushi 1977), which was Keiko's reason for not wanting to undergo an operation and choosing macrobiotics instead.

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first one out in 1949 (Aihara 2008). Ohsawa himself had travelled to France in 1929 to teach macrobiotics there. In Japan, the movement became most popular at university campuses, but during WW2 it came under attack on account of its emphasis on world peace (Melton and Jones 1994:41).

Clarke (2000b:276) stresses that Ishizuka's teachings were a "synthesis of Chinese wisdom teachings in a Japanese Zen Buddhist context and western ideas". Based on the importance of the Taoist principles underlying it – which a lot of people either are not aware of or ignore, and focus on the dietary teachings – Clarke classifies macrobiotics as a religion – one of the so-called Japanese new religions.<sup>72</sup> That makes Sagen Ishizuka and George Ohsawa two of many examples of charismatic religious leaders – dynamic, miracle-working and challenging social norms – mentioned by Reader<sup>73</sup> (1991:108). Although Ohsawa had brought macrobiotics to the US as well as to France in 1929, it had not gained any followers in America until 1949 when Michio Kushi arrived there. Clarke says that macrobiotics began to experience success in the US in the 1950s, first in New York, as the Ohsawa<sup>74</sup> Foundation, under Aveline and Michio Kushi as well as Cornelia and Herman Aihara. In Boston it was named the East-West Foundation, and in California it kept the Ohsawa name. Since its popularisation in the 1960s, macrobiotics has in fact achieved mass appeal in the US (Clarke 2000b:276-7). It has been involved in "natural organic farming" and the manufacture, imports and distribution of natural foods, as well as healing and educational and spiritual activities (Kushi 1977:171).

In Britain, according to Kotzsch (1985), it was first introduced in the late 1960s under the influence from the US and in the counterculture circles mainly. In 1974 a food company was established, importing macrobiotic foods from Japan as well as

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<sup>72</sup> My informant who used to follow the macrobiotic lifestyle, and who is now a member of an international new religion originating in Japan, strongly objected to calling macrobiotics a new religion.

<sup>73</sup> There is perhaps a parallel here with the Christian Bible Church in Britain and America.

<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, Clarke consistently misspells the name as Oshawa.

producing peanut butter and granola.<sup>75</sup> In 1976 the Self Health Centre followed to promote macrobiotics and holistic teachings. That grew into the Community Health Foundation containing a bookshop, a restaurant and the first Kushi Institute, teaching macrobiotic philosophy, medicine and cooking, as well as Oriental diagnosis and massage. The Foundation was a model for macrobiotic centres in other European countries and in other places in Britain (Kotzsch 1985).

There is a certain amount of controversy concerning what macrobiotics is and what kind of diet it recommends. There are several stages of the macrobiotic diet, with different percentages of the various food groups, the main staple – principal food – being grain. Brown rice has a special status and is considered the most balanced foodstuff.<sup>76</sup> As Kandel and Pelto point out, it is ascribed symbolic properties, which those who “subscribe to the *mystical motif* appear to believe [...] may be transferred from the food to the eater by a combination of sympathetic and contagious magic. Thus [...] eating balanced foods results in a balanced soul and psyche” (1980:335-6). Otherwise, natural foods are recommended, that is unrefined, preferably organically grown, as well as local foods appropriate for the climate and season. A bit of a contradiction is perhaps that macrobiotics promotes the use of various Japanese condiments such as miso and soy sauce, which in contexts other than Japanese, are not local. Fish, shellfish, eggs, fowl and fruit can be eaten from time to time, whereas dairy and honey as pleasure foods. The yin/yang balance of food must be retained, though (Ohsawa 1971:15).

The main principles underlying the macrobiotic diet, expressed in the traditional terms originating in Oriental medicine, the idea of *shokuyō* – food cure – as well as

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<sup>75</sup> These were two important foods within the early natural food movement in America. Anderson (2005:151) writes that peanut butter “is a case of a successful health food”, dating back to John Harvey Kellogg and Ellen White.

<sup>76</sup> Rice, as will be recalled, has always had a special status in Japan. Also, as Anderson (2005:143) points out, looking cross-culturally, the local staple is always considered to be balanced food.

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*ishoku dogen*<sup>77</sup> – the latter meaning that food and medicine have the same origin – are part of the Japanese cognitive background. The Director-General of the National Institute of Health and Nutrition has even said that he would like to establish scientific evidence for them (Watanabe 2005:2).

### ***The latest fad***

Aihara (2008) posits that macrobiotics is not a fad, but a way of life; also Kushi (1977) discusses about ‘the macrobiotic way of life’. That might be true for people like Keiko. However, a new café trend reported to have been on the rise for the last couple of years in Japanese cities, is contributing to the revival of macrobiotics there, but in a light version (Shoji 2006; Coldicott 2007). Before, macrobiotics used to be more popular in the West than in Japan (Kato 2002).

Already in the late summer of 2005, I was amazed at how many vegan cafés there were in Tokyo – having been warned that Japan was so vegan-unfriendly. Two years on, the fad was still “booming”, with vegan restaurants “mushrooming across the capital” (Coldicott 2007, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph). As the author points out though, because the term is rather obscure in Japan, it is “free of religious or moral dogmas” and thus “just another healthy<sup>78</sup> eating option”<sup>79</sup> (Coldicott 2007, 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph). The author argues however that macrobiotics has been preparing the ground for this vegan boom, and in fact most of these new establishments are macrobiotic in addition to being vegan. Both articles point out that the key words in this new trend are health, nutrition and dieting, rather than consideration for animals or the environment. The health-conscious city-dwellers embrace natural foods as a reaction to the highly industrialised mainstream foods and the health risks consuming those poses. “Actresses and models profess that the best way to beautification and self-maintenance is a vegan lifestyle.” (Shoji 2006, last paragraph) Also, the trend is ‘hip’

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<sup>77</sup> *Ishoku dogen* is the motto of the main Japanese exporter of macrobiotic foods, Mitoku.

<sup>78</sup> *Herushī* in Japanese.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. ‘menu pluralism’ (Beardsworth and Keil 1997)

rather than ‘hippie’ (Shoji 2006; Coldicott 2007). However, it is a diet, not a lifestyle, for the estimated 80 % of customers who do not subscribe to the vegan diet on principle (Coldicott 2007). The reported lack of consistency and, in many cases, even lack of awareness, testify to this: “People aren’t serious about making a big change – they’re just trying healthy eating once a week or so. Most of my customers don’t even know they’re eating vegan food until I tell them”, says the owner of a vegan café in Tokyo (Itoh in Coldicott 2007, last paragraph). It is the latest generation within vegetarian foodways, cf. Franklin (1999) and Ashley *et al.* (2004).

This fad is perhaps one in the meaning used by Ashkenazi and Jacob (2000:177) – a considerable rise in demand for a particular type of food which previously has been unknown or mostly ignored – mentioned above in connection with the meat fad of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are some interesting parallels between the two ‘fads’. They both involve eating in restaurants, not home-cooking. Both appeal mostly to the middle class – especially young females in the case of the latest one, and they are both promoted by celebrities – the emperor in the case of the meat-fad. Lastly, the promotion is based on the presumed health-giving properties of meat and vegan food respectively.<sup>80</sup> However, the foods these two fads concern are in effect the opposite of each other.

### *Nature and the environment*

Two and a half years on, still unmarried,<sup>81</sup> but in a new job, Keiko still follows the macrobiotic diet, but her “base is vegan” – “an idea called the complete vegetarian”. So when she eats in macrobiotic restaurants, she has to make sure she is not served fish. In a culture of set menus (Arne Røkkum, pers. comm.), that is probably quite an achievement. In fact, Keiko says that eating out is problematic for her, as there are so many people in Japan who are not familiar with veganism. For example, she likes

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<sup>80</sup> In fact, Ashkenazi and Jacob note that the success of imported foods is to a large extent dependant on their health-promoting qualities or other virtues being widely advertised (2000:180-1).

<sup>81</sup> As Maurer (2002) points out, single females are most likely to be vegetarian in America.

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pizza, but can only eat it when she makes it herself, without cheese. She would like to travel abroad, to Italy and other places, and maybe even settle in a European country which is vegan-friendly.

With the new office job, Keiko has become an independent member of the vegetarian movement and does not have contact with others. In fact, she was not familiar with the many kinds of vegetarian activities in Tokyo that I knew of – and appreciated the information. She thinks it must be good for vegetarians to participate in these activities.

As is often the case with vegetarian motivations,<sup>82</sup> Keiko's motivation for being a vegan has developed from her own health to "saving the planet, the animals<sup>83</sup> and also us". In her opinion, becoming a vegan, "leads to environmental protection" and "if we can save the environment, it will become [*sic*] for children". She still buys her vegetables in Natural<sup>84</sup> House. In her spare time, she "takes a walk" because she likes nature, she says.

The main environmental issue commonly associated with meat is the inefficiency of its production (Maurer 2002:76; Fiddes 1991:210-1). From my presentation of state politics in premodern Japan it emerged that this issue was understood already then. At present, it is linked to uneven distribution of food globally, and addressed by advocates of vegetarianism in the West as well as in Japan – recall the rhetoric and activities of Japan Vegetarian Society. Other ecological problems modern industrial meat production is associated with are: global deforestation, loss of soil, water

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<sup>82</sup> Beardsworth and Keil (1992b) report a motivation development among their informants in Britain. Also Maurer (2002) observed that to some extent in the case of North American vegetarians.

<sup>83</sup> Consideration for animals as a motivation for vegetarianism will be discussed below in another example; Keiko stressed environmental protection as a particularly important motivation for her. Most vegetarians are not primarily motivated by environmental concerns (Maurer 2002:62).

<sup>84</sup> It can be interesting to note here the symbolic importance to people within "many 'alternatives'" of the concept of 'naturalness', pointed out by Atkinson (1980:83).

pollution, contribution to climate change, depletion of water supply and fossil fuels (Maurer 2002:76; Fiddes 1991:212-6). As Fiddes (1991:223) points out, apart from the real issues, there is also the symbolic dimension:

Where meat was once an almost universally esteemed proof of human domination over a savage and uncivilised environment, it has increasingly been represented in terms of abuse of our position of responsibility for a finite and fragile planet.

A comparative study of attitudes to wildlife in Germany, the US and Japan has shown that – contrary to popular belief – the desire to control and dominate nature was greatest in Japan and that the Japanese appreciation of nature and animals was idealised and restricted by aesthetics, whereas ethically and ecologically motivated desire for nature and wildlife conservation was very underdeveloped (Kellert 1991, 1993 in Kalland and Asquith 1997:6-7). Also, as Bocking (2003) has observed, the Japanese worldview does not imply a human responsibility for the planet, which in any case is not heading for a disaster. However, the Japanese seem to finally have learned from the many environmental crises they have experienced in modern times – starting even before the introduction of the Meiji project of modernisation and industrialisation – for they have introduced environmental studies to school curricula. Japanese students are taught about the need to preserve nature and the environment, the best use of natural resources and the close relationship between nature, industry and humans (Tucker 2003:173-7).

The idea of preserving the environment for future generations in the Japanese context goes back to Neo-Confucianism of the Tokugawa period. One of the notions of Neo-Confucianism was the fundamental unity of humans and nature – forming one body – as both were created by the same forces and elements: the universal psycho-physical energy *ki* and the principal *ri*, the fusion of the two resulting in both diversity and unity of the natural world it constantly (re-)created; the complementary forces of *yin* and *yang*; as well as the five elements of earth, wood, fire, water and metal. The original nature of both humans and the universe was believed to be good and the human project was to preserve this goodness by self-cultivation and by moral action in the world. Aided by the ideas of Buddhism and Shintō, Neo-Confucians advocated



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and came up with solutions to the emerging environmental problem of deforestation which was effecting the state of rivers, mountains and fields (Tucker 2003:169-171).

Kalland and Asquith (1997) make a point of Japanese attitudes to nature being diverse, complex, ambivalent, fleeting and contextual. In most cases, depending on the context, human beings are perceived either as part of nature or as superior to and in a position to exploit it (1997:30). Identification with nature can occur on an emotional level or based on the recognition of the transience of both nature and human life (Saito Yuriko 1985 in Kalland and Asquith 1997:3). Both of these notions of identification seem to be present in Keiko's statement: the former in the declaration of liking nature, the latter in the desire to protect it – in the context of worrying about her own body and soul as well.

### *Local with transnational meanings and implications*

Keiko is involved locally in affairs with transnational connections – macrobiotics, veganism and environmental protection. Macrobiotics is a movement which has originated locally and has in turn influenced both vegetarianism and the natural food movement in the West. By following a macrobiotic diet and by purchasing her food in a natural food store, Keiko is also participating in the natural food movement in Japan.

I now turn to an example of someone who – although not Japanese – is deeply involved in the transnational and Japanese natural food movement as well as being a vegetarian and doing her share of environmental protection. I will also discuss the natural food movement itself.

## HELEN: The Natural Food Movement<sup>85</sup>

I had to take the train out of town and change. When I got off at the village station, I asked for directions at the ticket office and set off to find Helen's place. It was raining slightly, but given the late summer season, it was still rather sultry. I walked through the village looking for landmarks – past the tofu maker's, the book shop, the *tatami* maker's, then past the cemetery, cutting across a field. I could see the mountains in the background, covered with foliage. Everything was green and lush. There was a lot of unfamiliar vegetation. Finally, I got out on a busy road and walked along for a while till I got to the river. Then I saw it. Hidden behind the large keyaki trees was the “organic and vegetarian oasis” by the riverside. A rural, rustic and relaxed “sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of daily life” – right off that busy road. The sound of cicadas in the trees dampened the traffic noise.

### *Vegetarian organic foodways, lifestyle and business*

My estimate is that Helen is in her early 50s. She comes from the US, but is married to a Japanese man and has lived in Japan since the mid-1980s. She is a veterinarian by profession and a vegetarian, the two being connected. A former hippie, relaxed, easy-going, unpretentious and open-minded. Together with her husband, she has been running a vegetarian organic business in the village for a couple of decades. Initially the goal was to import organic granola and peanut butter<sup>86</sup> for their own consumption. It turned out that other people were interested as well. Gradually the business has grown to include a major import company, a shop, a café, a plot of land for growing organic vegetables, herbs and millet. Helen says that there is a rising interest in Japan in eating millet again. As for organic imports, their family business

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<sup>85</sup> The natural food movement in Japan is quite a complex affair (cf. Clammer 2001:71), and as such is a matter for a different paper. I am addressing here only a fragment of it.

<sup>86</sup> These two health foods are a recurring feature of the movement scene, starting in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century America, revived by the hippie counterculture in the 1960s and 1970s, popping up in Britain in the late 1970s.

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has been important for “getting it off the ground”,<sup>87</sup> she says, but now they are mostly in Japanese hands. They sell and serve mostly international vegetarian food, but also some Japanese.

According to Kandel and Pelto’s terminology, Helen is a ‘joiner’ for whom participation in the health food movement is a major part of life and of both social and financial support. Her business is a “communication-distribution centre”, providing food, information and a meeting ground for members of the movement (1980:337-9). By means of their imports business they have links with the transnational natural foods and vegetarian movement. In addition, they have a sister organisation in the US, and they are considering having voluntary workers, WWOOF<sup>88</sup>-ers, from abroad. At the same time, they are locally grounded – both in the land and in the community: they farm the land, support a reforestation project in the area, organise clean-ups of the river bank which is a popular tourist visiting spot, sell local produce as well as imported, organise organic farmers markets. Not least, they provide a “community minded space” to enjoy “organic thought” and well as food. What that means in practice is that they rent out a room in their complex for talks, seminars and exhibitions, in addition to organising events themselves. The latter include vegetarian wholefoods classes – covering topics such as making healthy sweets without sugar, fusion cuisine, growing and using own herbs and sprouts – various alternative courses and workshops – e.g. yoga, Thai massage, Ayurvedic medicine, chiropractics – and lectures on natural, organic and biodynamic agriculture, permaculture, composting, as well as local history. Recall in this context Twigg’s (1983) observation of a link between vegetarianism and other alternative ‘-isms’.

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<sup>87</sup> Western expatriates have also started the local vegetarian and vegan meet-up websites, now with many Japanese participants. Quotations are from my talks with Helen, unstructured and semi-structured interviews by e-mail, as well as from her own written presentations of her business.

<sup>88</sup> Stands for: World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms.

As noted above, Kandel and Pelto (1980:332) put forward that health food users attempt to improve not only their health, but also their lives, and sometimes – the world as well. That is the key to their agency. Helen chose an organic line of business because organic food production is least harmful to the producers, the consumers and the environment they share with “the rest of the living”. She believes that by eating organic, she is helping “everyone in the food chain and Mother Earth” because organic agriculture protects the health of the people involved, the soil and the water supply, as well as ensuring biodiversity – through the use of different seeds and techniques and crop rotation. Last, but not least, it supports small farming communities rather than big business. However, as Clammer (2000:216) points out, as this alternative to capitalist ideology grows and becomes more popular, it may become seduced by this ideology or included in the capitalist system,<sup>89</sup> which in fact has happened to some of Helen’s business partners over the years.

As for vegetarianism, as an organisation, again, at Helen’s they support it as a “healthy, tasty lifestyle choice that benefits the individual consumer and society as a whole”. It is also an animal-friendly lifestyle, especially in big-money economies where the meat industry is “violence on a mass scale, but hidden from the consumer”,<sup>90</sup> which Helen, who has a degree in Animal and Veterinary Sciences, knows all too well. “And that wretchedness inevitably transmits to those who eat the result, in the form of dangerous chemicals and hormones at the very least”, states Helen, unaware that – especially in combination with her promotion of the consumption of sprouted seeds as “living food” – she is putting herself at risk of being characterised as a subscriber to the *mystical motif* of the *natural food idea* of the health food movement’s belief system, and believing in certain properties of foods being transferred to their consumers “by a combination of sympathetic and

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<sup>89</sup> Recall a mention of this issue in the Western context above.

<sup>90</sup> As will be recalled, that has been observed by authors such as Fiddes (1991) and Franklin (1999). In subsequent presentations of her business, Helen has toned down a little the ethical dimension to do with animals.

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contagious magic” (cf. Kandel and Pelto 1980:335-6). That would be in addition to the *vegetarian idea* and the *organic motif* of the *natural food idea*.

My assessment of Helen’s business is that it represents a holistic approach to vegetarianism and organics. It is both ethics- and health-oriented, both on an individual, community and environmental (local and global) level, they are interested both in theory (lectures and other seminars) and practice (cooking classes, composting, clean-up of the river bank) and there seems to be a fair amount of idealism in addition to business involved. As for their motives, in Helen’s words privately, they are doing what they are doing “without any big agenda to convert anyone”. However, their goal as stated in an issue of their regular newsletter, is “to contribute to the strengthening of organic and natural food networks within Japan and internationally” and their hope is “to spread the benefit of the most valuable resource of all, the knowledge and experience of those around us pursuing healthier, more natural work and lives”, as well as to “help all those with a commitment to a healthy, ethical diet to maintain their choice of living in Japan”. They also support various ‘good causes’ for example by donating food and by encouraging their customers to do the same. They represent holistic ‘green consumption’ and awareness including vegetarian and organic diet, organic cotton textiles, recycled paper, environmentally friendly cosmetics and detergents, rubbish sorting and recycling, composting, ecological materials being used in the construction of the centre, as well as choice of career and political tendencies (cf. Clammer 1997:132).

One of the workshops at Helen’s was devoted to the natural farming philosophy developed by a Japanese man, Masanobu Fukuoka, and the practical skills of making his clay seed balls. Fukuoka’s method is used in many areas of the world, often utilised in reforestation projects, and three books containing his natural farming philosophy have been translated into English. A natural farmer from Greece came to another seminar and talked about the use of these clay balls in a reforestation project there. Helen herself has been involved in a reforestation project in the neighbourhood having acquired a devastated patch of forest.

### *A religious dimension to the natural food movement?*

Jill Dubisch (1996) puts forward that the health food movement in America has certain religious aspects. Her analysis of these aspects – described by her editors as “provocative and entertaining” – is based on Geertz’s (1965:4 in Dubisch 1996:63) definition of religion as a system of symbols which induces in people powerful and lasting moods and motivations experienced as realistic. Benson Saler (1993) is of the opinion that by ascribing certain characteristics normally associated with religion to the health food movement, Dubisch helps us on the one hand to understand the movement better and on the other hand to appreciate it as something more than just a fad. Personally, I find Dubisch’s line of thought a bit far-fetched. However, I was told a few years ago that this is exactly how the health food movement is received in Japan – as sectarianism (Arne Røkkum, pers. comm.), but perhaps the more recent developments in popularity of the movement in Japan have changed that perception.

If I was to apply Dubisch’s line of analysis to look at Helen’s business, her beliefs concerning organics and vegetarianism would be considered the ‘belief’ system or doctrine. Helen’s organic and vegetarian business would be the equivalent not just of a ‘temple’, but a whole ‘temple complex’. The books they sell and the newsletter would in Dubisch’s terms be called the ‘scriptures’ and the activities at the centre – ‘proselytising’ – process of conversion being another concept borrowed by Dubisch from religion and applied in her analysis of the health food movement. The ‘salvation’ Helen & Co. might be offering concerns the individual human bodies, their peace of mind, the welfare of animals, the society and the environment, the planet or “Mother Earth” in Helen’s own words. Helen herself would be called a ‘rabbi’, however I consider her to be more of a charismatic leader, one that has a vision she believes in and practices, but at the same time is not too dogmatic about it. A case in point being for example that – despite her vegetarian and natural food convictions – Helen believes in eating what one is served, for example while travelling in developing countries. Helen’s philosophy of life, though profound, is presented in such an easy-going and playful manner that the terms *mana*, denoting health foods, and *taboo*, meaning junk foods, as used by Dubisch, do not seem applicable in her case either. Perhaps granola and peanut butter which motivated the

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business all those years ago would qualify to be considered *mana*, as well as the sprouts and natural sweeteners such as honey, whereas white sugar in addition to meat would be *taboo*. However, as has been pointed out, Helen is not dogmatic, and at least on one occasion the *mana* of an herbal remedy product outweighed in her eyes its *taboo* quality connected to it being packed in gelatine capsules. In the case of a similar vegan business the notions of *mana* and *taboo* are more pronounced: the business offers “traditional natural whole foods” that have been grown “organically and locally”, processed “as little as need be” and contain “absolutely no artificial additives, colourings or flavourings”, use “only naturally occurring sweeteners”, as well as *all* their products being “sugar, dairy, egg, fish and meat free”.

The natural food movement in Japan does, in fact, have a religious dimension. I have already discussed macrobiotics which – it can be argued – falls under this category. In terms of natural food production, religious aspects are even more pronounced in the case of *shizen nōhō*, Nature Farming, of MOA or Mokichi Okada Association, established as the cultural division of the new religion *Sekai Kyūsei Kyō* – known in English as the Church of World Messianity. As a matter of fact, MOA started the organic/natural food movement in Japan (Hirochika Nakamaki, pers. comm.).

*Sekai Kyūsei Kyō* was established in 1935 as a compilation of Shintō, Buddhism and Christianity by Mokichi Okada – another example of a charismatic religious leader (cf. Reader 1991) – who had received the divine healing light *jōrei* from the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, Kannon, and subsequently a revelation from God. The healing and purification is today done by Okada’s followers to minds and bodies of ill people, and it can also bring other this-worldly benefits such as good fortune and problem solving. In addition, *jōrei* can be applied to the soil in order to both purify it and nourish the plants. In fact, in parallel with rejecting modern (Western) medicine and its use of drugs, Okada rejected the use of chemical as well as animal fertilisers in agriculture. He considered both medicines and fertilisers to be poisons to the human body, and to plants and the earth respectively. His farming method is based on the idea that nature is best able to produce healthy crops and wholesome food. He developed it after his own failed attempt to improve Japanese food production by

means of chemical fertilizers and other modern techniques in the 1930s. Many of the followers of *Sekai Kyūsei Kyō* are in fact farmers. When the religion spread to Europe after WW2, it abandoned the magical practices and focused instead on promoting Japanese culture, language and art, as well as natural farming. It also has some followers in the US and other places. In Brazil it seems to function as a religion, co-existing with Christianity. The goal of this messianic religion is to create ‘paradise on earth’ with no disease, poverty or strife (MacNaughtan 1999:225-8; Kasahara 2001:564-6; Somers 1994:62-4; Clarke 2000c:150-4).

MOA International’s Food and Eating Programme stresses both the unity between humans and nature and between mind and body, identified by Clammer (2001) as underlying human agency in Japan. The former is expressed in the stress on the traditional relationship between eating, health and nature – expressed for example by the aforementioned saying *ishoku dōgen*, as well as in *shindo fuji* meaning ‘man and the earth are not separate’ – and the traditional values being in accordance with the laws of nature. The latter goes back to Okada’s concept of human nature as a union of body and spirit, and aims at both physical and mental health. Eating foods with dense ‘spiritual energy’ nurtures the spirit of the human body, which in turn gives strength to the physical body – which sounds very much like the *mystical motif of the natural food idea* identified by Kandel and Pelto (1980).

The practical recommendations of the program seem largely to be in agreement with those of macrobiotics: to eat seasonal and fresh food grown locally by Nature Farming, to make sure that staple foods, preferably semi-refined or brown rice, constitutes most of the meal, to eat more vegetables than meat or fish, to use home-made foods and to avoid excessive amounts of seasoning, especially salt.<sup>91</sup> In

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<sup>91</sup> Japanese consumers are very conscious when it comes to consumption of salt, which is ubiquitous in Japanese condiments, and widely known to contribute to stomach cancer and hypertension (Arne Røkkum, pers. comm.).



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addition, stress is put on the social dimension of eating<sup>92</sup> – expressing gratitude to those who have prepared the meal, dining together with other members of the family, observing table manners – as well as on aesthetics and food presentation (MOA International Food and Eating Program, 2007-8). In other words, this is an attempt of providing guidelines pertaining to food and foodways, perhaps in the context of perceived ‘gastro-anomy’ existing in the society at large.

In effect, MOA advocates a return to the traditional Japanese diet perceived as healthy: “a way of eating embedded in traditional values – the principles of respecting and adapting to Nature” (MOA International Food and Eating Program, 2007-8, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph). Rollinson points out in that respect that “common to all [Japanese] is the correlation between what you eat, the natural world, the seasons and good health” and “[t]he relationship between food, good health and remedy is woven into many cultural and philosophical aspects of Japanese life, so much so that healthy eating habits are simply a way of life” (2001:13-4). As Ashkenazi and Jacob (2000:61-64, 219) point out, sometimes the rhetoric of the natural food movement can smack of nationalism and of *nihonjinron*,<sup>93</sup> adhered to by some Japanese and foreigners.<sup>94</sup> It contains a more or less explicit criticism of modern (Western) civilisation, which in the realm of food has resulted in lifestyle diseases and in contamination of food. Already Okada had concluded that sickness, poverty and crime resulted from the fact that people had strayed from the ‘utter simplicity of nature’ (Clarke 2000c:154).

An off-shoot of MOA, Shinji Shumeikai – Shumei for short – promotes Natural Agriculture both in Japan and abroad – in the US, Canada, Germany and the Philippines, and has 300,000 followers globally (Jeffs 2002; Shumei Natural

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<sup>92</sup> Recall Caplan’s (1997) notion of seeing food consumers as social beings, using food to express relationships – in addition to being agents.

<sup>93</sup> The discourse of Japanese uniqueness.

<sup>94</sup> Anderson (2005) has made a parallel characterization of the pre-hippie health food movement in America.

Agriculture: Contact Information, 2008). The main principle of Natural Agriculture is – in the words of Mokichi Okada – “an over-riding respect and concern for Nature”; it is a “philosophy of harmony with the Earth” (Shumei Natural Agriculture: A Philosophy of Harmony with the Earth, 2008), acting to promote the well-being of whole ecosystems and entire individuals – their mentality, spirituality and physicality (Shumei Natural Agriculture: The Relationship between Organic and Natural Agriculture, 2008). It is based on the notion of interrelatedness of all life as well as the idea of plants being conscious living entities (Shumei Natural Agriculture: Strengthening the Natural Processes, 2008). NA stresses the connection between the farmers, the food they grow and the consumers (Shumei Natural Agriculture: Moving Beyond Agricultural Techniques, 2008). In fact, farmers are among the groups of people that – having a vested economic interest in nature – are most likely to care about the natural environment (Kalland 1995:255). So are Shumei consumers, apparently.

Interestingly, there does not seem to be any mention of animals and animal food production in either MOA or Shumei philosophy. Ohnuki-Tierney points out that nature in Japanese context involves rice paddies, which denote agriculture, the countryside and the, romanticised, past. In contrast with the West, Japanese image of nature is seldom ‘wild’, and – owing to the historical lack of pastoralism – it lacks animals. Conversely, it is inhabited by soul-possessing plants. Plant food is the only type of ‘natural food’, which means that it is good for the health and appropriate for commensality (1993:120-6).

### *Transnational, but locally rooted*

Helen is mediating between East and West. She is a Westerner settled in Japan, with a foreign business branch and international visitors, importing Western foods to Japan and running a largely Western-style business. At the same time, she is very rooted in the local community, both in terms of her private life and her business. In addition to being involved in the natural food movement, contributing to the welfare of the local people and their environment, Helen is also participating in the village revitalisation movement (cf. Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:218-21; Kalland and Asquith 1997:27-8).

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Her family business has for many years been giving employment to many locals, the market days she has been organising regularly have been giving local organic farmers the opportunity to sell their produce to other more or less local people, as well as to ‘green’ week-end tourists visiting Helen’s ‘organic and vegetarian oasis’. Helen has also organised a seminar on local history, as well as clean-ups of the river-bank and reforestation of a clear-cut patch of forest in the neighbourhood. All of these activities are Helen’s way of “giving back to the community”.

Next I will present vegetarian foodways centred on compassion for animals, which Keiko had already been a more marginal example of, and Helen has slightly toned down in her business presentation.

### **NATSUME: Animal Rights and Lay Buddhism**

Natsume is a Japanese male in his early 20s whom I met at a vegetarian event in Tokyo. He looks a bit like a Buddhist monk with his crew-cut, photo-chrome glasses and beads around his neck. He is kind and concerned with whether other people are kind – or, as he puts it – “heart-warming”.<sup>95</sup> He comes across as open and easy to talk to, which is helped by his relatively good command of English. He has travelled in Europe with his parents and he wants to go to North America. At the moment he frequents a North American restaurant catering to vegetarians, and in general eats Western food such as bread. Natsume does not have university education, and he works in a convenience store. He is a vegan and an animal rights activist, as well as a practising Buddhist, neither of which are mainstream lifestyle options in contemporary Japanese society.

#### *Natsume is to me an example of a young idealistic individual and member of a ‘tribe’*

Natsume is to me an example of a young idealistic individual described by Möhwald (2000). Possibly in connection with the relatively low-skilled nature of his job, he

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<sup>95</sup> Quotations are from my field-notes based on an unstructured interview.

seems to be seeking self-actualisation outside of work – through voluntary activities aimed at changing the society he lives in. He is also planning to contribute to changing other societies by going abroad to work for the international voluntary organisation he is a member of.

Sugimoto's (2003:8) definition of *zoku*<sup>96</sup> mentioned above could be applied to the kind of vegan activism Natsume is involved in. *Zoku* in turn seems to be very much like what the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1996) identifies in European urban societies as *tribus* resulting from the break-up of mass culture. Unlike the classic anthropological tribes, *tribus* lack longevity and fixity – which is relative, of course, as Natsume had already been a member of his *tribus* or *zoku* for two years when I met him, and given his enthusiasm, zeal and genuine involvement, I expect he still is two and a half years on. *Tribus* are 'postmodern tribes' or 'pseudo-tribes' without exclusive membership. Contemporary social life involves belonging to multiple overlapping groups, and playing different roles – or rather 'having different statuses'<sup>97</sup> – all of which become sources of identity. *Tribus* have weak possibilities of disciplining their members other than exclusion, but they have strong integrating powers of group solidarity as they create informal yet emotional communities. Their members share values, ethical orientations and patterns of behaviour which challenge traditional morals. They make use of various 'masks' and 'costumes' as means of distinction and display of (temporary) identity. They typically have initiation rites and stages of membership. Examples of *tribus* include fashion faddists, youth subcultures, hobbyists, sports enthusiasts, environmental movements, consumer lobbies and political groups (Maffesoli 1996:x-xii, 15-76).

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<sup>96</sup> Incidentally, *zoku* as an analytical term was not comprehensible to my informants, although they obviously are familiar with examples of *zoku*.

<sup>97</sup> Sociological 'role' is the equivalent of the anthropological 'status' (Eriksen 1998:60).

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### *Vegan and animal rights activist*

Natsume is a vegan “for compassionate reasons”, which broadly speaking means that he is driven by concern about ethical treatment of animals. At the same time, it has been suggested that the concept of animal rights is alien to the Japanese: “Animal rights is a concept that is unheard of in Japan.” (Schinner 1999:9) This is at the very least a gross generalisation. There are animal welfare and animal rights organisations in Japan, two of which had applied for membership in the International Vegetarian Union before Schinner’s book was published (Martín 1998).

The concept of animal rights is distinct from animal welfare. While the latter relates to the treatment animals receive in human care, adherents of the former oppose all forms of use of animals by humans asserting that all creatures have a fundamental right to live. The notion of rights in this context goes back to Henry Salt at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and more recently – the 1970s – and famously to the philosopher Tom Regan, while his contemporary Peter Singer has put forward the concept of animal liberation (Maurer 2002:58-60, 71; Whorton 2000:1562). As Maurer points out, a significant number of animal rights activists are not vegetarian and most vegetarians in America are not primarily preoccupied with animal welfare or rights, especially at the beginning of their vegetarian careers. There are also differences in methods employed by the animal rights movement and the vegetarian movement respectively. While the former is prone to shocking people with images of suffering animals and dramatic forms of activism like breaking into laboratories, the latter prefers proliferating by personal example and making use of social networks (2002:58-60, 71).

Natsume is, then, a relatively rare even in the transnational perspective example of a vegan animal rights activist. In addition to having a regular job, Natsume is an intern in the local branch of an international animal rights organisation – an activity which, he says passionately, has “changed his life”. Being an intern involves a lot of volunteer work for the local activist group. With time Natsume intends to go abroad to work for the organisation, which among other things actively promotes veganism.

This makes Natsume a ‘joiner’ in a related and overlapping social movement (cf. Kandel and Pelto 1980 and Maurer 2002).

In her study of veganism in a small town in northern Sweden, which I am going to use to analyse Natsume’s lifestyle, Veronica Abnersson (2000) gives an account of veganism as a new social movement, an ethical kind of lifestyle, as well as a means for creating individual and collective identity. Vegans in Umeå are typically young, up to 30 years old, they come from various backgrounds and are often members of animal rights organisations, national or international, even though there is no organised network within the movement itself. According to the author, although historically veganism was at core a health movement,<sup>98</sup> nowadays its main motivation is solidarity and empathy with animals, based on the assumption that animals and humans have equal value. Vegans oppose not only the consumption of meat – which becomes their main political symbol – but also the consumption of other animal foodstuffs, and the use of non-food animal-derived products such as leather, wool and silk, as well as other products and activities involving exploitation of or cruelty to animals<sup>99</sup> (2000:91-93).

In their understanding and representation of the world, vegans create a liminal space with blurred boundaries between nature and culture, posits Abnersson (2000:91-2, 96). This statement acquires an additional meaning in the Japanese context, where nature and culture are not distinct, and which is permeated with the ideas of Shintō and Buddhism. Shintō is characterised by the notion of dissolved boundaries between human, nature and the divine (Clammer 2001:13), whereas in Japanese Buddhism, not only animals, but even plants have Buddha-nature (Chapple 1993:39, 65).

In practical terms, the struggle for what Abnersson calls the utopian vegan world, takes place both in the media and on the streets in Sweden as well as in other

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<sup>98</sup> That is not the way the founder of the Vegan Society has been presented (Elliot 2006).

<sup>99</sup> Recall the discussion of the term ‘vegan’ in the Introduction.

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European countries (Abnersson 2000:94-5). According to the web-site of the international organisation Natsume is a member of, being an intern for them entails researching information on animal rights and distributing it in schools and media, as well as participating in various outreach activities, including stunts and demonstrations. When I met him, Natsume was together with a young female vegan manning a stand with leaflets on vegetarianism published by the organisation, selling non-leather shoes, as well as privately promoting a web-site selling vegan shoes and accessories.<sup>100</sup> Natsume does not use leather, and he has very strong opinions about wool, especially that which has been produced in ways perceived as involving the sheep suffering. He has participated in demonstrations organised by his organisation against companies selling clothing allegedly produced in such unethical ways.

Australian wool especially seems to attract a lot of attention in this respect. Recently the issue has even been highlighted in main-stream media in Norway and Sweden. First of all, the sheep are said to be bred to produce excessive quantity of wool, which – not least given Australia’s climate – is considered cruel, and leads to further complications. Due to the artificially induced excess of skin and wool, as well as wrong feed which causes diarrhoea, the sheep are more likely to develop infections involving bluefly maggots nesting under their skin especially around the anus. To prevent that problem, the lambs reportedly have parts of their rear ends sliced off – without anaesthetic – in order to keep the wool clean.<sup>101</sup> Natsume asked what I thought about the issue. He clearly approved of my being familiar with it and appreciated my view.

I have seen a photograph from one of the demonstrations organised by Natsume’s animal rights organisation. It depicts Natsume together with two other young male

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<sup>100</sup> They were also standing in for the owner of one of Tokyo’s vegan cafés and a spokesman for an anti-fur organisation, who is a vegan himself and happens to be a racing-car driver.

<sup>101</sup> For a presentation of this and related issues, see e.g.

[http://www.animalsvoice.com/PAGES/writes/editorial/investigations/misc/wrong\\_wool.html](http://www.animalsvoice.com/PAGES/writes/editorial/investigations/misc/wrong_wool.html).

Japanese, a young female Italian and a young female Australian demonstrating outside a sale-poster-covered Tokyo outlet of an Italian clothes retailer which sells garments made of Australian wool. They are all naked, with their bodies painted in the colours of the clothing company. Around the five of them there is a Japanese- and Italian-language banner – covering up their private parts – carrying a pun involving the name of the retailer, stating that the company is cruel towards animals. There is also the logo of the animal rights organisation and the address of a web-site devoted to the company's alleged cruelty. The picture shows the demonstration attracting attention from passers-by, people are stopping up, turning around with curious looks on their faces. One of the Japanese demonstrators is talking to what appears to be a gesticulating female passer-by.

Though Abnersson (2002) does not refer to Maffesoli (1996), the latter's description of *tribus* who gather occasionally in the streets to put on their costumes and play their roles (1996:76), is not only what one can argue I have just described, but also exactly what she writes about her informants (2000:95). Unfortunately, Swedish vegans have a bit of a reputation for being militant in their sabotage actions directed against meat and fur industries or laboratories conducting experiments on animals – to the extent that Abnersson equals animal rights activism with militant veganism (cf. Abnersson 2000:95). Others, like Natsume, restrict themselves to peaceful demonstrations. Abnersson interprets local vegan actions of protest as part of a global critique of civilisation (2000:95). Certainly, demonstrations like the one staged by the international animal rights organisation in Tokyo, involving representatives of other nations, protesting against a big international clothes retailer involved in what is perceived as animal abuse on a large scale,<sup>102</sup> could be perceived as an example and proof of that. Lobbying and boycotting of the retailer in question has in fact been encouraged throughout the West, not least by the animal rights organisation Natsume is a member of. Even without the activism, “[v]egetarianism and veganism remain

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<sup>102</sup> Given the size of their retail business and of Australian wool exports, as well as the alleged commonality within the Australian wool industry of the practices described above.



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powerful protests against modern society's disregard for the interests of other animals" (Stuart 2006).

Abnersson reports two sides of the vegans' struggle. On the one hand, there is the struggle in the public arena. Being a political and a moral conviction, the vegan lifestyle gives both a stronger individual identity and a sense of being in control over one's life. It also creates a collective identity, a sense of belonging together with other, like-minded people, and a sense of security (cf. *tribus*). On the other hand, the lifestyle can cause a lot of friction and even a schism between family members or friends, and a recurring need to explain and defend it in private life (2000:97-9). This is parallel to what most individuals choosing a religious path cutting across their social bonds experience (Reader 1991:109). In fact, *tribus* often are if not directly religious, then at least moral communities (Maffesoli 1996).

Also in Japan, according to Clammer, social movements constitute moral communities, and provide stable structures for identity construction (2001:161). As an individual, Natsume did give a strong impression of identifying with being a vegan and an animal rights activist. What he wanted was to live as a vegan and to work for the sake of the animals. That created the basis for a collective identity within the organisation to which he and his female friend belong, and for which he has demonstrated together with other Japanese and foreign activists. Concerning the vegan struggle in the private sphere, unfortunately, I do not have relevant information concerning Natsume. However, Keiko, the young female (dietary) vegan presented above, did experience resistance and scepticism from her family and friends when she chose to become vegan.

Even though Umeå is said to be the vegan capital of Sweden, the vegan network in it is loose and not formally organised. The members learn about activities via such channels as the Internet (Abnersson 2000:91-2). Tokyo is a much bigger arena than Umeå, and consequently, Natsume and his vegan friend and co-activist were not in regular contact with other vegans. They would meet at events like the one I met them at. Being activists in a related movement, they were still in a better position than

Keiko to receive information on upcoming events. Incidentally, I found information about the event in a wholefood shop where I later learned Natsume does his shopping. It is also the same wholefood shop that Keiko frequents. This fits with Kandel and Pelto's (1980) idea of communication-distribution centres existing within the health food movement, in which they include vegetarianism.

Since my visit in Tokyo, the local vegans have also started a meet-up website and they meet every month around vegan food. The website was created by an American and includes a great variety of members, both Japanese and foreign, not necessarily vegan or vegetarian, but its centre-point is vegan food.

### *Practising Buddhist*

As well as being a vegan, and “amid a dramatic decline in interest in Buddhism among young Japanese” (*Guardian Weekly*, 18.01.2008), Natsume is a practising Zen Buddhist of the Sōtō sect. Here is another aspect of his agency, in this case especially connected to the idea of the unity of body and mind (cf. Clammer 2001). Even though Zen Buddhist ideas are said to pervade Japanese culture and society, identifying oneself as a ‘practising’ Buddhist is not common, and few people participate in Buddhist practices beyond the rituals connected to certain days of the year and to the death of relatives (Bouma *et al.* 2000:95-6; Hendry 2003).

Natsume became a practising Buddhist at the same time as becoming a vegan, but defines himself as “first of all a vegan”. In other words, he identifies strongest with veganism, even though he makes a point of being a practising Buddhist as well. A case in point is the fact that he eats onions, even though that is proscribed in Buddhism. In fact, his favourite dish in the restaurant he frequents contains onions. He does not eat garlic, however, but again – not for religious reasons, only because he does not like it. He does abstain from drinking alcohol on religious grounds. This also points to his agency, this time to him being selective. Still, he seems to be combining the *vegetarian idea* with the *spiritual idea* inasmuch as the vegan food he eats and the spiritual practices he undertakes go hand in hand, with the food being supportive of his religious beliefs and practices – and vice versa.

Devout Zen Buddhists practice sitting meditation (*zazen*) once or twice a day, which is meant to help them develop *seishin* or the right spirit – endurance, physical and mental strength. In addition, lay practitioners can meet regularly at a Zen temple for group meditation (*zazenkai*) led by a priest and to listen to a talk about Buddhism. This is said to be most common among young urban college attendants or graduates (Reader 1991:103), which makes Natsume an even less typical Zen practitioner. The prayer beads around Natsume’s neck are normally used for prayer, but – given the placement – they might just be part of his *tribus* ‘costume’, emphasising his spiritual interests perhaps.

When Buddhism arrived in Japan from India via China, its first precept of harmlessness to all living beings – *ahimsā* in Sanskrit, *fu-sesshō* in Japanese – was not opposed by the indigenous religion. Shintō can in fact be said to support it (Chapple 1993:39; Kapleau 1986:19). Buddhism has an extensive tradition of emphasizing a connection between humans and animals. In the Māhayāna school of Buddhism present in Japan, it is especially common to refer to the text of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, linked specifically with Zen Buddhism, for a very expressive advocacy of respect for and compassion towards animals and abstention from flesh consumption (Chapple 1993:27, 41; Kapleau 1986). The *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, or *Ryōgakyō* in Japanese, explains the notion of transmigration of souls, connected to the cycle of death and rebirth, resulting in interconnectedness of all sentient life. Eating animal flesh is, then, like eating one’s own flesh, and is absolutely forbidden. In addition, eating flesh is considered to be polluting to the body and the spirit, and it makes impossible spiritual progress. Moreover, it pollutes not only the life of the eater, but also the lives of the descendants (Suzuki 1975:369-71; Yoneda 1998:34).

Zen Buddhism is in practice the only sect of Buddhism in contemporary Japan that requires its members, specifically the ordained ones, to abstain from animal flesh. On the whole, in modern world, the strategies adopted by Buddhists that have to do with respect for animal life, largely overlap ideologically with those of vegans, based on the fact that both Buddhists and vegans regard animals as sentient beings. As for animal experimentation and other instances of human exploitation of animals – which

animal rights groups also fight against – belief in the interrelatedness of life and in its sanctity as well as respect for the desires and needs of other living beings have prompted Buddhist organisations in the West at least to speak up in favour of animal rights (Chapple 1993:442-7; Kapleau 1986). Thus the fact that Natsume is a practising Buddhist is supportive of his being a vegan and an animal rights activist. However, in the traditional Japanese worldview, humans do not have a particular stewardship obligation towards other beings, including animals (Bocking 2003). This is perhaps why most Japanese are said not to care about and even be proud of not caring about, animal welfare. A woman confronted with the moral inappropriateness of wearing a fur coat, replied: “I don’t care – I’m Japanese.” (Edwards 2003, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph).

Natsume does not stop at being a (selectively) practising Buddhist. He wants to become a Christian as well, based on the fact that he “loves Jesus”, which supports the notion of individual religious syncretism existing in Japanese society (cf. Hendry 2003:127; Sugimoto and Mouer 1986 in Reader 1991:107). As represented by his approach to religion and spirituality, Natsume displays an entrepreneurial approach to life in general.

### *Local context, transnational connections*

Through his agency, Natsume is an example of vegetarianism in Japan being both transnational and local. He has actively chosen both. I have presented his veganism and animal rights activism as manifestations of his being involved in a transnational phenomenon, to which he is emotionally motivated and through which he seeks to both improve the world around him, to maintain his identity, and to establish relationships with other vegans and animal rights activists – members of the same *zoku* or *tribus* – within Japan and internationally.

At the same time, Natsume explicitly combines his transnational involvements with a domestic – Buddhist – set of practices and meanings, which in turn are part of a more general local context, involving a long and extensive religious and ontological tradition. Additionally, Zen Buddhism has exercised significant influence on

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vegetarianism in the West.<sup>103</sup> For example, Philip Kapleau referred to above is an American Zen Buddhist monk, the director of the Zen Center in Rochester, New York, and an ardent advocate of vegetarianism, not least through his publications (e.g. 1986).

As a final empirical example I will present another Japanese religious agent and entrepreneur, but of a slightly different kind. He is also a Buddhist, even a monk. His agency and entrepreneurship concern his dietary preference as well as his line of business.

### **TENKAI MIKI: Monastic Buddhist Vegetarian Foodways**

Tenkai Miki is a middle-aged Buddhist monk of the Jōdo Shinshū sect, also known as Shin Buddhism or the True Pure Land Sect. Jōdo Shinshū originated in Japan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a radical sect which permitted its monks to marry and eat fish (Ishige 2001:57, 242). Today, vegetarianism is not common in monastic Japan but for most Zen monks who are strictly vegetarian – like most Buddhist monasteries in China and Korea (Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel 2003:362). The Zen sects, which had just begun to take root in Japan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, were the ones that sustained contact with China for several centuries and were influenced by it not least in the realm of vegetarian food. Many vegetarian foods such as tofu and other soy bean products were first introduced to Zen temples from China and then spread to other Buddhist sects and to the general population. Also wheat gluten was first used in Buddhist cuisine as a source of protein (Ishige 2001:242-3).

#### *'The civilising of appetite' and seishin*

Tenkai Miki chose to become a strict vegetarian even though his sect does not proscribe eating meat. His agency follows along the line of the development from 'external constraints' to 'self-restraints' (cf. Elias 1939 in Mennell 1985), in the sense

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<sup>103</sup> More significant than the brief mention which the scope of this paper allows.

that he has imposed self-restraints where there used to be external constraints which have long been lifted. This ‘civilising of appetite’ (Mennell 1985:29) seems to be related in this case to the native Japanese concept of *seishin* mentioned above.

Given the agency involved and in a sense the going against the grain of the majority’s practice – as pointed out by Twigg (1983) – Tenkai Miki’s vegetarianism is perhaps, nevertheless, largely a modern practice, despite the traditional paraphernalia. It certainly stands in opposition to the agency of the Japanese Zen Buddhist monks described by Kapleau, who consume meat and fish whenever possible, especially when the abbot is out of town (1986:27).

### ***Business entrepreneur***

Tenkai Miki is a business entrepreneur. His entrepreneurship is connected to his diet-related agency: he runs a Buddhist-style vegan organic *bentō* – lunch box – business in Tokyo, which in Kandel and Pelto’s (1980) terminology makes him a ‘joiner’. He himself considers his business to be part of his monastic training (Kamiya 2003). He transports his business on a scooter and sets it up every weekday at lunchtime in front of a metro station in a trendy and posh part of Tokyo, targeting young designers and boutique staff with his exquisite and scarce – 15 box a day – offering. He has been running the business for several years and his aim is to make *shōjin ryōri* “accessible and relevant to today’s young Japanese” (Coldicott 2007, 3<sup>rd</sup> last paragraph). He also runs vegetarian cooking classes and meditation courses (Miki 2008). In 2002, he held a lecture on vegetarian cooking at a meeting organised by Japan Vegetarian Society in Tokyo (JPVS Activities, 2006).

Tenkai Miki describes his food as organic and healthy Japanese vegetarian food or *bejitarian fūdo*, as brown rice *shōjin ryōri*, without MSG and sugar. On account of the vegetables being grown without the use of chemicals and only with the help of composted leaves, his food is “extremely vegetarian”, he says. In addition, in the process of preparation he only uses natural seasoning to enhance the taste of the vegetables, and “love”. He also follows the impulses he gets from the vegetables as to how they want to be prepared (Kamiya 2003). He claims that his food gives health,

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purification and the feeling of freedom for body and heart (Miki 2003). He has himself experienced a considerable improvement to his health since he became a vegan many years ago. Now he wants other people to let the vegetables do wonders to their health from the inside, to awaken the power of their bodies (Kamiya 2003). It sounds like his food might just be doing that. A Yoga teacher describes his food as “natural powerful very sattvic”, emanating “white energy” and letting “the energy, prana or Chi flow” (Yuko M. 2007).

### *Shōjin ryōri - Japanese Buddhist vegetarian foodways*

Tenkai Miki’s food is based on a long Japanese Buddhist culinary tradition called *shōjin ryōri*. In the Zen Buddhist tradition – based on the notion that it is wrong to kill animals – a simple, all-vegetable diet, shunning meat and fish, as well as egg and dairy is part of the temple regimen, which also includes abstention from alcohol.<sup>104</sup> “Such a lifestyle, together with physical training, clears the mind of confusion and leads to understanding” and is a way of “maintaining a sound mind and body”, says a Zen priest who in the course of over 50 years of following the regimen has never even had a cold because he has “the power of seasonal vegetables” on his side (Fujii 2002, 1<sup>st</sup> and last paragraphs). Koei Hoshino, the abbess of a Rinzai Zen nunnery and one of the most famous *shōjin* cooks in Japan, also says that the vegetables she prepares meals with are beautiful and full of energy which reinvigorates the eater: “I feel Buddha in each plate, and appreciate the vegetables’ offerings all the time” (Kato 2002, 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph). Destroying the mood somewhat, one could argue that these statements – including the ones by Tenkai Miki cited above – express a combination of the *vegetarian idea*, the *mystical motif* of the *natural food idea* – in that they express a belief in symbolic qualities of food, such as strength, vitality and healthfulness, which can be transferred to the eater – and the *spiritual idea*, the last connected to food being a vital part of spiritual training and a means for achieving spiritual goals.

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<sup>104</sup> Reader (1991:79) posits that Japanese Buddhist priests, including ones belonging to Zen sects, are allowed to drink alcohol.

Learning food preparation is in fact part of the monastic training. In her descriptions of life in a Sōtō Buddhist nunnery, anthropologist Paula Arai (1993, 1999) stresses that learning to cook *shōjin ryōri*, along with sewing religious garments and cleaning, is part of the traditional monastic Zen training also involving the seated meditation *zazen*, chanting *sūtras*, studying Buddhist texts and performing rituals and ceremonies. Another integral part of the nuns' training are the traditional Zen arts of flower arrangement (*kadō*), calligraphy (*shodō*) and the tea ceremony (*chadō*). The nuns learn both the practice and the philosophy – *kokoro*, meaning heart-mind – of these arts which train the body, the mind and the heart at the same time. The philosophy is based on the notion of the unity of body, mind and heart. By learning to perform the skills, the nuns develop wisdom and compassion (Arai 1993:208, 211; 1999:112-3).

The word *shōjin* is composed of characters for 'spirit' and 'to progress' and refers to 'zealously approaching truth and salvation through the right conduct', part of which is a simple, strictly vegetable-based diet (Yoneda 1998:33; Ishige 2001:242).

Although this 'vegetarian' cuisine, or *ryōri*, came to Japan together with Buddhism already in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, it was the Zen sects which, beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, contributed most to its development and spread (Hosking 1996:231; Ishige 2001:242). The founder of the Sōtō sect, Dōgen, compiled instructions for the Zen cook, the *tenzo*. Dōgen's book of instructions, *Tenzo Kyōkun*, is still used today. According to Arai, working in the *tenzo* division of the monastery requires fidelity, purity and creativity; the objection is to prepare nutritious food in a respectful manner, without wasting even a grain of rice, because each vegetable is a Buddha.<sup>105</sup> Therefore eating vegetables nourishes the Buddha within the eater with Buddhahood (Arai 1999:99). The job of *tenzo* is "the very core of Buddhist practice" in Dōgen's view: "There is no better way for one to practice Buddhism than to perform the job of *tenzo*" (Niwa 2001:45). According to this worldview, Tenkai Miki performs a very important job.

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<sup>105</sup> As was pointed out above, in Japanese Buddhism, also plants possess Buddhahood.



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The *tenzo* pays attention to balancing six tastes – bitter, sour, sweet, spicy, salty and ‘delicate’; five methods – boiling, steaming, grilling, deep-frying and serving raw; five colours – green, yellow, red, white and black/purple;<sup>106</sup> seasonality of ingredients and of the preparation style; as well as three virtues: lightness and softness, cleanliness and freshness, and precision and care (Yoneda 1998:37). The entire personality of the cook is reflected in the food (Kato 2002). A meal will reflect the nature and heart of the cook (Yoneda 1998:43). That is why Tenkai Miki uses ‘love’ as an ingredient in his cooking. Again, there is a notion of transfer of symbolic qualities – this time from the cook to the food and then to the eater. Also important is the presentation of food, including its arrangement on carefully chosen dishes, adding floral decorations to the table, making sure that the room is neat and tidy. Not least, the “spirit of gratitude” is essential – gratitude towards the food, those who have provided the ingredients and prepared the food and those who will be eating it (Yoneda 1998:43).<sup>107</sup>

Even though *shōjin ryōri* can be boring and meagre, as in rice gruel, pickles and green tea which are the staple of Zen monks (Reader 1991:79), it can also be elaborate, exquisite and very tasty. It has, after all, been the basis for the development of *kaiseki ryōri*, the food served during the tea ceremony (Ishige 2001; Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:42).

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<sup>106</sup> The five colours are a recurring feature of Japanese food. I have, for example, been told by an elderly housewife that she always made sure that the lunch boxes she prepared for her husband and children contained food in five colours.

<sup>107</sup> One cannot help but notice that MOA’s Food and Eating Programme, mentioned above, relies on much the same principles. Also Shumei ideas concerning the relationship between farmers and their crop, as well as between farmers and consumers, echo these notions.

### *Fucha ryōri*

There is another type of Zen Buddhist vegetarian cuisine called *fucha ryōri*.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps owing to the fact that it arrived in Japan relatively late, when the Ōbaku Zen sect was established in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it has stronger links with Chinese cuisine. That is reflected in the relatively heavy use of vegetable oil and the centrality of frying technique, as well as gravy-like consistency of certain dishes. Soup and green tea are important components of *fucha ryōri* meals. Unlike *shōjin ryōri*, *fucha ryōri* sometimes attempts to create foods which look like the forbidden meats, fish and fowl. The names of the dishes are adapted from Chinese and the serving is usually also Chinese-style – each dish is served in a common large bowl (Ishige 2001:243-4; Hosking 1996:231-2).

### *A fucha ryōri 'food event'*

It was a charming, old part of town, with a fair number of old wooden houses still standing – most of them rather run down – many with plants standing outside in pots. When I finally found the restaurant, it struck me as a very elegant and traditional-looking, mud-plastered little building with a wooden gate, squeezed between modern non-entities. The proprietor welcomed me and I was guided to my room by a kimono-clad woman after they made sure I realised that this was going to be an expensive lunch. I left my shoes on the stone floor outside the sliding doors of the *tatami*-carpeted room. The room was chilly – which to begin with was a relief after the oppressive heat outside – pleasantly lit, decorated with a calligraphy scroll and a flower arrangement. Its only window overlooked a small garden with a stone lantern among the greenery.

I was sitting on a cushion at a large wooden table, equipped with an English-language menu giving the Chinese names, transcription of them and descriptions of the dishes that were to follow. The procession began with the tea ceremony: thick whipped

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<sup>108</sup> *Fucha ryōri* is variously described as a separate style of Zen Buddhist cuisine and as a type of *shōjin ryōri*. Both Ishige (2001) and Hosking (1996) treat it as the former. Eric Rath says that it is another form of *shōjin ryōri* (pers. comm.).

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green tea and *shao ping*, a small sweet appetiser. Next was *shan tsu*, clear soup with pieces of vegetables floating on the surface. Then, *shun kan*, nicely shaped, colourful pieces of cooked vegetables carefully arranged on a plate – most of them not familiar to me, but supposed to be in season. Next followed *un pen*, thick, traditional 17<sup>th</sup> century-style Chinese soup, the menu said. Then a bowl of *on sai*, seasonal vegetables cooked in stock. A chunk of chilled sesame tofu, *ma fu*, in a bit of water served in a bowl arrived together with delicate, mixed vegetable tempura, *yu ji*, in a paper-lined “classical basket”, which made me wonder if I was running out of time. Those were followed by *so ju*, a hearty miso soup with tofu and vegetables, an assortment of traditional vegetable pickles, *en sai*, and a bowl of *han tsu*, white rice garnished with green tea. Finally, I was served a glass dish filled with *sui go*, or fresh fruit. It was obvious that the porcelain dishes and the utensils – most of the time I was getting an opportunity to polish my skills at handling chopsticks – were carefully selected for each dish. Three different women took turns serving the dishes, all dressed in kimono and behaving in a dignified yet friendly manner, none of them speaking English. They explained each dish in Japanese. It was a ‘total’ experience: a carefully arranged ‘food event’<sup>109</sup> – extending to the traditional-looking, elegant and pristine bathroom.

### *Very local*

Tenkai Miki represents a local niche vegetarian tradition, but one which is part of a religious and philosophical system which has significantly influenced modern vegetarianism transnationally. In Japan this traditional vegetarian cuisine seems to exist alongside the modern one, influencing it further and giving it ‘local flavour’. Although it has not become a fad, *shōjin ryōri* is being rediscovered and is increasing in popularity like macrobiotics is.

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<sup>109</sup> Looking at a meal as a ‘food event’ involves paying attention to the qualities of food itself and to the presentation, utensils, social circumstances and behaviour etc. (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:7, 24-5).

The traditional Buddhist cuisine is reportedly “newly popular” in Japan, in fact it is described as “Japan’s new veggie cuisine” (Iida 2005:70).<sup>110</sup> In addition to being “fresh and contemporary” due to scope for individual styles, although quintessentially local, it can be “truly international”, should we trust a magazine journalist (Iida 2005:74). Already abbess Koei Yoneda exercised agency in both respects, introducing new vegetables arriving from the West after WW2 into her *shōjin* cooking, as well as starting a *shōjin* restaurant at the nunnery, which make the cuisine available to both Japanese people and tourists (Yoneda, 1998: 38-40). As Ashkenazi and Jacob have pointed out, also in this case the Japanese combine reviving and adapting their own tradition with modified borrowed foodways (2000:220-1).

In this chapter I have traced in the Japanese context the main vegetarian foodways which had been identified in the Western context in the previous chapter. I have elaborated on these transnational tenets of vegetarianism – health and vitality of vegetarian food, compassion for all living beings, and concern for the environment – simultaneously pointing out certain culture-specific articulations of them in the Japanese example. In addition, I have pointed to Japanese contribution to the international vegetarian foodways, in the form of Zen Buddhism, macrobiotics and influence on the natural food movement. Finally, I have presented the traditional indigenous vegetarian foodways, which still exist alongside and both influence and are influenced by the modern transnational vegetarian foodways in Japan.

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<sup>110</sup> Clammer (1997:80) contends that in Japan “[n]ew is good”, which is possibly related to Shintō ideas of purity.

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## **CONCLUSION: Vegetarianism - Transnational and Local**

As a modern phenomenon, vegetarianism in Japan does seem to be a variation on the transnational theme of vegetarianism. This is reflected among other things in the common notions of agency and stepping outside the mainstream foodways, and in connections of both individual agents and organisations with the vegetarian and related network abroad. Examples of links are Japan Vegetarian Society being a member of the International Vegetarian Union; JPVS advertising their events on the website of the Vegan Society in the UK; an international animal rights organisation being represented locally by Japanese people as well as cooperating with members from abroad (cf. Natsume). In addition, several agents within the vegetarian movement in Japan are in fact foreign (e.g. Helen). Another transnational connection is JPVS's preoccupation with world hunger and peace.

The three main tenets of the transnational vegetarian ideology identified in the West – health and vitality, compassion for all living beings, and concern for the environment – all exist in the Japanese context. Their ranking seems to be closest to what is the case in North America rather than the UK, with health at the top of the list. However the local meanings and articulations are partly distinct. The health tenet is the most prominent one in the rhetoric of Japan Vegetarian Society, but it is not just claimed – it is also attempted scientifically backed up. In addition, the health tenet appeals to individuals as either an alternative medical or health-maintenance system (cf. Keiko and the vegan macrobiotic fad respectively), also connected to the natural food movement, based on a long East Asian tradition of holistic approach to health and medicine, pertaining to both body and mind, including associating particular foods with health and longevity (cf. Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000:61).

The compassion tenet of vegetarian ideology resonates with the ideas of Japanese Buddhism, especially Zen, which has in fact influenced the development of the transnational vegetarianism in the West. However, on the whole, in contemporary Japan it does not translate into vegetarianism, in spite of the historically

comparatively small presence of meat and fish in the diet of most Japanese, commonly ascribed to the Buddhist influence. This historical ‘habitus’ was in fact the result of a combination of state regulation inspired by various practical considerations and both Buddhist and – later also Shintō – influence.

Neither does the alleged close relationship in Japanese cosmology between humans and nature, and despite the influence Zen has had on the Western environmental movement, result in mass adherence to vegetarianism in Japan. The traditional Japanese worldview, in fact, contains neither a notion of human responsibility for other animals and the rest of the living – animate or inanimate – nor a vision of an environmental catastrophe in the face of mismanagement. Both the compassion and the environment tenets are, however, present in the local variant of the transnational vegetarian ideology and have been represented among my informants.

At the same time, the vegetarian tradition stemming from Buddhism, especially Zen, does live on especially in monastic practice (cf. Tenkai Miki), but also partly in secular practice (cf. Natsume), enriching the local transnational vegetarianism and giving it a special flavour, both literally and figuratively speaking.

In the West, vegetarianism has become a fairly common, healthy and/or ethical dietary option, though it still is a minority lifestyle, one which requires making a conscious choice. As a social movement, vegetarianism in the West has been through various ups and downs, but the recent food scares and moral debates including environmental concerns have strengthened it. In Japan, as an organised social movement, modern vegetarianism seems not as well established as its counter-parts in those Western countries which have been its strongholds for over a century and a half, Britain and the USA. The vegetarian lifestyle however, as my ethnographic examples have shown, can be pursued in various ways in Japan. As a dietary option within the mainstream food system, vegetarianism still faces the challenges of the ubiquitous fish stock and the ignorance of the society at large. However, as a *niche* dietary option, vegetarianism in Japan exemplified by Tokyo is undoubtedly viable given the existence of a whole vegetarian food system including numerous cafés and

restaurants. The vegetarian food system and foodways are an example of what Ashkenazi and Jacob (2000:178) refer to as “a niche food in a culture of niche foods”.

In this paper I have traced the development of vegetarian foodways in the West, identified the main tenets of transnational vegetarianism resulting from the encounter of ‘East’ and ‘West’, located these in Japan while pointing to certain idiosyncrasies stemming from the local context. Parallel to what Beardsworth and Keil (1997:240-1) call for in Britain, there is a similar need for more research concerning vegetarianism in Japan: in-depth qualitative studies – detailed fieldwork, recording life histories – and quantitative research mapping out the numbers and types of vegetarians as well as their motivations.

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