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## New Meanings for Old Vegetables in Kyoto

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### Abstract

*In 1987, chefs, farmers, scholars and government officials collaborated to designate thirty-seven varieties of produce as “traditional Kyoto vegetables.” The definition of traditional Kyoto vegetables provides a case study of how one community capitalized on national interest in nostalgia and gourmet food in the 1980s; however, this example also illustrates what happens when stakeholders subsequently disagree about the future of traditional food. Prefectural farmers, the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives group and specialty greengrocers benefited from new marketing opportunities for traditional Kyoto vegetables and the high prices these foodstuffs garnered, while the same trends troubled many chefs and prompted city officials and urban farmers to coin alternative designations for local produce. At stake in this debate is not only how traditional local vegetables can be defined (and who benefits from that), but also the extent to which local foods reflect real communities of producers and consumers.*

**Keywords:** heirloom vegetables, traditional food, Japan

### Introduction

Kyoto was Japan’s capital from 794 to 1868 and it remains a city synonymous with tradition, old temples, geisha and handicrafts. The most recent addition to Kyoto’s list of traditions are its vegetables as indicated by the expressions “Kyoto vegetables” (*Kyō yasai*), “seasonal Kyoto vegetables” (*Kyō shun yasai*), and “traditional Kyoto vegetables” (*Kyō dentō yasai*) that have found a prominent place in stores and on the labels of produce in the last three decades. So-called Kyoto vegetables have become prized ingredients for haute cuisine and the authentic Kyoto-style dishes (*Kyō ryōri*) served in the city’s finest restaurants. Traditional Kyoto vegetables have received attention for being healthier than conventional varieties of produce due to their high levels of vitamins, minerals and antimutagens

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thought to prevent cancer. Kyoto Brand Name (*Kyō no burando*) vegetables are sold in upscale food retailers throughout Japan. Branding products with the name Kyoto dates to the seventeenth century. “Kyoto ware” (*Kyōyaki*) first appears in 1605 in reference to ceramics from kilns in Awataguchi, Kiyomizu and other locales in the city. Records of tea ceremony gatherings mention “Kyoto sweets” (*Kyōgashi*) as early as 1627 (Akai 2005: 208). However, the term “Kyoto vegetables” is a modern turn of speech as this article describes.

Terms such as “Kyoto vegetables” indicate a geographic location while conjuring up a cultural and historical setting for certain types of produce, but the fit between vegetables and their “Kyoto” context is far from precise. Varieties of vegetables that existed in Japan in the premodern period (before 1868) can be called heirloom or traditional and are usually associated with a particular region where they were historically cultivated. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries from 1970 to 1980 identified 1,214 regional varieties of 65 types of vegetables in Japan (Takii 2002: 1, 355). With forty-seven varieties, Kyoto would appear to have the highest number of traditional vegetables in Japan: more than Tokyo at forty-five, Osaka with twenty-eight and Nagoya with twenty-four (Hayashi 1975: 23).

Beyond just a chronological designation of when they were first cultivated, the phrase “traditional Kyoto vegetables” encompasses geographic and cultural boundaries. The current definition of traditional Kyoto vegetables includes produce raised in Kyoto prefecture (roughly 4,600 km<sup>2</sup>). A stricter interpretation, however, would confine these vegetables to Kyoto city (now 610 km<sup>2</sup>) because that was the locale where the ancestors of the leafy greens, turnips, eggplants, peppers and other plants that comprise traditional Kyoto vegetables today were first cultivated and developed into distinct varieties thanks to the city’s unique terroir and its farmers’ advanced techniques of urban agriculture.

More than simply an academic question, the debate over the boundaries of Kyoto has financial implications for the growers and sellers of Kyoto vegetables as described below. Critics have questioned whether vegetables can still be called traditional if they are cultivated using modern scientific methods, produced year-round without deference to their original growing season, and whether vegetables raised by organic means are more “traditional” than ones grown using conventional methods. This article analyzes traditional Kyoto vegetables as an example of how food becomes associated with a locality, how traditions are deemed authentic or not, and what happens when stakeholders disagree on the meanings of traditional foodstuffs.

Kyoto vegetables are emblematic of the domestic interest in traditional and gourmet food that came to the fore at the height of the 1980s when the country was the world’s second largest economy and one of the most affluent in per capita terms. Postwar gains in household income allowed more people than ever before to enjoy a more varied and sophisticated diet. By 1980, Japan’s global proportion of seafood landings was seven times larger than its share of the world’s population, but in the same year, per capita consumption of meat surpassed fish for the first time in Japan, contributing to the fact that the typical Japanese diet had three times

the amount of fat in 1980 than in 1950 (Smil and Kobayashi 2012: 89, 179, 191; Harada 2009: 56). The parameters of the traditional diet also expanded in the 1980s as part of what historian Jordan Sand has dubbed “nostalgic consumerism,” with the reclassification of the quintessential working man’s meal—ramen noodles—into a gourmet food, a trend that director Itami Jūzō simultaneously celebrated and lampooned in his 1985 film *Tampopo* (Sand 2006). Another prominent example of the gentrification of Japan’s national food culture that occurred in the 1980s was the rebranding of monosodium glutamate from a “chemical seasoning” into “*umami* seasoning,” cloaking modern science with the mantel of tradition and nature (Sand 2005: 46). The domestic tourism industry in the 1980s promised a way for city dwellers, who numbered 60 percent of the population by 1980, to reconnect with tradition and nature by traveling to rural hinterlands depicted in advertisements as romanticized versions of Japan’s agrarian past (Creighton 1997). Food played a central role in the representation of rural culture and its commodification. In the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries published a fifty-volume series, *Collected Writings on Japanese Foodways (Nihon no shokuseikatsu zenshū)*, a countrywide portrait of regional food lore that used oral interviews to reconstruct local diets in the Taishō (1912–26) and early Shōwa periods (1926–89) preceding the Second World War. The timing of the volumes coincided well with the efforts of local business and trade groups, whom historian Barak Kushner describes, “came together in the early 1980s to promote their vibrant local areas through specialty cuisine and national campaigns to promote local tastes” (Kushner 2012: 183). The example of Kyoto vegetables provides a way of understanding how one locale adapted national interest in traditional foods according to local circumstances and needs. Kyoto is also important as it set the pattern for other communities to identify and market traditional produce. Ten years after the designation of traditional Kyoto vegetables, Kanazawa city defined its local heirloom produce as vegetables with a history of cultivation within the city predating 1945, and dubbed them *Kaga yasai*, after Kanazawa’s ancient province (Takii 2002: 1, 142, 355).

The cast of characters in the crystallization of traditional Kyoto vegetables includes officials from the prefectural and city governments, chefs wanting local ingredients to create authentic Kyoto cuisine, the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives group (JA—the national farmers’ union), greengrocers attempting to capitalize on an increasingly profitable niche market of agricultural goods, and farmers within and outside of Kyoto city trying to survive in one of the most challenging of professions. While they initially agreed on the designation of traditional Kyoto vegetables, each of these groups came to uphold a different conception of the future for traditional vegetables. At stake in this debate was not only how Kyoto produce has been designated (and who benefits from that definition) but also whether “Kyoto” has become a product label or whether it reflects an actual community of producers and consumers.



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## The Legacy of Vegetable Cultivation and Consumption in Kyoto City

A core reason for the interest in vegetables in Kyoto is their prominence in Kyoto cuisine (*Kyō ryōri*)—from the delicacies served at the most expensive restaurants to the recipes prepared at home. While chefs in Kyoto can now source their ingredients from around the world, there are several historical reasons why vegetables figured prominently in the Kyoto diet and in the development of the city's cuisine. First, a 129-kilometer trek over mountains separated Kyoto from the ocean, making fresh seafood expensive and largely unavailable until the twentieth century; local produce was a necessary substitute. Second, Kyoto city was well suited for growing vegetables: its soil is generally alluvial though varied and not too acidic, providing appropriate conditions for growing a wide variety of vegetables in a climate that allows for multiple crops of vegetables either after cereal grains have been harvested or by growing varieties of vegetables consecutively by season in the same plot. Third, although few people in Japan's population ate meat before the modern period and even fresh fish was a rarity except in coastal areas, the legacy of hundreds of centuries-old temples in Kyoto contributed to the development of the city's foodways by inculcating the Buddhist prohibition against eating meat and by creating a highly refined Buddhist vegetarian cuisine (*shōjin ryōri*) in its place. Finally, as Japan's premodern capital and its largest city until the late seventeenth century, Kyoto had an urban population that served as both a market for nearby farming communities and a ready source for copious amounts of night soil, an inexpensive and essential fertilizer for urban farmers; both factors facilitated the growth of a commercial vegetable trade in Kyoto in the early modern period (1600–1868), which provided a source of fresh produce for local consumers and a livelihood for farmers in and around the city.

Vegetable growing has a long history in Kyoto. Ninth-century imperial edicts prohibited paddies within Kyoto, but allowed the cultivation of vegetables such as parsley and onions. Other produce grown in Kyoto by that time included soybeans, turnips, ginger, cucumbers and daikon (Takashima 1982: 14). By the year 1600, Kyoto farmers were planting new-world vegetables including peppers and practicing double and triple cropping (Hayashi 1963: 71, 77; Sugiyama 1998: 3–8).

After the Second World War, Kyoto farmers, like their counterparts in the rest of country, gradually stopped growing the local varieties we now refer to in retrospect as heirlooms in favor of conventional vegetables that promised higher yields and improved resistance to diseases and pests. Kato Hideyuki of the Kyoto branch of the JA explained, "Heirloom vegetables are extremely difficult to produce on a large scale ... They are weak and easily damaged regardless of the precautions taken, and they soon spoil. Therefore, they were not grown much, and gradually fell out of production" (interview: June 16, 2000). Although conventional varieties produced higher yields, some criticized their lack of taste and mineral balance compared with heirloom varieties. Takahashi Eiichi, owner-chef of the famous Kyoto restaurant Hyōtei, lamented that throughout Kyoto, heirloom vegetables were replaced by "conventional varieties that even bugs refused to eat" (Takahashi 1991: 5–6).

Another noticeable change in Kyoto farming in the twentieth century, and especially after the Second World War, was urban sprawl and the transformation of the city's farmlands into housing and businesses. Houses replaced fields in Shōgoin village when it became part of Kyoto city in 1888, and Shōgoin no longer grew anything by the second decade of the twentieth century, resulting in the extinction of the local variety of cucumber (Hayashi 1975: 62). The number of farmers in Kyoto decreased in correspondence to the loss of farmlands in Kyoto city. In 1960, there were approximately 3,000 households that derived their income from farming (*sengyō nōka*) within Kyoto city, but in 1995 the number was only 1,000 (Namimatsu 1998a: 23). This two-thirds decline is much more pronounced than the one-third national decline in the same group, whose numbers fell from 6 million in 1960 to 4 million in 1999 (Kashiwa 1998: 37).

Hayashi Yoshio, one of the foremost experts on Kyoto agriculture, placed these gloomy trends in Kyoto farming in poetic perspective, writing in 1975:

Ten years ago if one looked west from the road to Kurama [in the North of Kyoto], there were red dragonflies darting around the broad fields of *suguki* turnips, which extended all the way to the woods of Kamigamo. In the fullness of autumn, the haze-covered hamlets at the base of Mount Hiei looked like a scene from a Heian-period [794–1185] painting. In the middle of summer, singing frogs cried in the flowing Kamo River where sweet-fish could be caught. In June, the Genji fireflies lit up the fields north of the city. Today, all of this remains only in the memories of people who recall the past (Hayashi 1975: 166).

Hayashi grieved the loss of the farms that were also the habitats of wild creatures—dragonflies, sweet-fish and fireflies aptly named after a distinguished samurai lineage. Such nostalgia, coupled with an imminent sense of the threat to the existence of the remaining urban farms in Kyoto due to rising land prices, contributed to the revival of traditional Kyoto produce in the 1980s.

### **Cultural Capital—The Revival of Traditional Kyoto Vegetables**

Besides agricultural researchers like Hayashi Yoshio, the earliest advocates for heirloom vegetables were Kyoto chefs, particularly among the Society for the Fostering of Kyoto Cuisine (*Kyō ryōri mebokai*) founded in 1955 by young, restaurant chef-proprietors. This association is now a national organization, but its core leaders were chef-proprietors of a few of Kyoto's most prestigious restaurants serving Kyoto cuisine (Takahashi 1991: 5–7). Chef Takahashi Eiichi described how the society first became interested in heirloom vegetables. On a train ride to Tokyo, Takahashi and other Kyoto chefs criticized the poor quality of the conventional vegetables available to them. "Their shape and color are extremely beautiful, and their size is standard at the market, but all of them taste bad" (interview: June 6, 2000). Later, he and his peers became acquainted with a group of young farmers who continued to grow heirloom produce. Takahashi recounted the virtues of these heirloom varieties:



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The conventional vegetables that everyone is buying and eating now are strong, shiny, beautiful in shape and color and standardized in size; and so that's what farmers have been producing. Nevertheless, there are still farmers who have preserved the same [heirloom] seeds grown since before the Meiji period [1868–1912], and they won't even give these seeds to farmers next door! They preserve their own seeds even to that extent! The quality of these [heirloom] vegetables and the mass-produced ones is completely different in terms of both their appearance and vitamin content. The heirloom varieties have a wonderful complement of vitamins and minerals. Modern vegetables are just terrible. Heirloom varieties simply taste better. Their only fault is that they are difficult to grow (interview: June 6, 2000).

Takahashi and his peers viewed the preservation of heirloom vegetables as crucial to the creation of authentic Kyoto cuisine. Consequently, the Society for the Fostering of Kyoto Cuisine decided to switch to what Takahashi termed “authentic” vegetables and to form a research group with, by Takahashi's definition, “conscientious farmers” in areas within and adjacent to Kyoto city to foster the preservation of heirloom varieties. This organization, dubbed the Research Group for Traditional Kyoto Vegetables (*Kyōto dentō yasai kenkyūkai*), sought to popularize heirloom vegetables and encourage their cultivation.

In their quest to preserve and promote local heirloom varieties, Kyoto chefs and farmers gained the assistance of city and prefectural officials. Government organizations had already conducted research on local vegetables for several decades. In 1962, the Kyoto city government identified ten local vegetables that were threatened with extinction and took steps to encourage more farmers to grow them. In 1974, the Kyoto Prefectural Agricultural Experiment Station began targeting local varieties for preservation that included Katsura Oriental Melon (*uri*), Yamashina Eggplant, Shrimp Taro (*ebi imo* — so named because its appearance resembles jumbo shrimp), and Spicy (*karami*) Daikon (Namimatsu 1998a: 29). In December 1986, the Society for the Fostering of Kyoto Cuisine, in collaboration with city and prefectural officials, sponsored the first “Revive Kyoto Vegetables” symposium. The event featured a panel discussion with scholars, leaders in the restaurant trade, farmers, greengrocers and members of the JA. In October the following year, the group formulated a definition of traditional Kyoto vegetables. Before this date, the term “traditional Kyoto vegetables” was vague and used synonymously with “Kyoto vegetables” to refer to varieties of vegetables cultivated in Kyoto city before 1868, the date of the Meiji Restoration and the traditional endpoint of the premodern period. These ambiguities ended in 1987 when the definition of “traditional Kyoto vegetables” was established according to the following five standards (Kyōtofu Nōrin Suisanbu 1987: 2):

- introduced before 1868;
- appears throughout the prefecture, not just within Kyoto city;
- includes bamboo shoots;

- excludes mushrooms and edible ferns;<sup>1</sup> and
- includes varieties of vegetables that are now extinct.

Thirty-seven vegetables were perceived to meet all five characteristics, including three extinct varieties: Kōri Daikon, Tōji Turnip and Shōgoin Cucumber. Three additional vegetables—rapeseed flowers (*hanana*), Shishigatani Peppers and Manganji Peppers—are listed in a separate category as they have similar characteristics to traditional Kyoto vegetables, but were not included in the official roster as they were not cultivated in Kyoto before 1868 (Takii 2002: 187). The list of traditional Kyoto vegetables was thus finalized as follows (extinct species marked with an asterisk):

- Daikon
  - Spicy Daikon
  - Aomi Daikon
  - Kōri Daikon\*
  - Tokinashi Daikon
  - Momoyama Daikon
  - Kuki Daikon
  - Sagaba Daikon
  - Shōgoin Daikon
- Turnip
  - Matsugasaki Ukina Turnip
  - Uguisuna
  - Sagaba Turnip
  - Ōuchi Turnip
  - Sugukina
  - Maizuru Turnip
  - Shōgoin Turnip
  - Tōji Turnip\*
- Leafy Vegetables (*tsukena*)
  - Mizuna
  - Mibuna
  - Hatakana
- Eggplant
  - Plucking Eggplant (*mogi nasu*)
  - Kamo Eggplant
  - Yamashina Eggplant
- Shishigatani Pumpkin
- Sweet Pepper (*tōgarashi*)
  - Fushimi Pepper
  - Tanaka Pepper
- Katsura Oriental Melon (*uri*)
- Shrimp Taro (*ebi imo*)
- Horikawa Burdock (*gobō*)



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- Hiiragino Yard-long Bean (*sasage*)
- Kyoto (*Kyō*) Udo (a plant reminiscent of asparagus)
- Kyoto Mioga (*Kyō myōga*)
- Kujō Green Onion (*negi*)
- Kyoto Japanese Parsley (*Kyō zeri*)
- Arrowhead (*kuwai*)
- Kyoto Bamboo Shoot (*Kyō takenoko*)
- Water Shield (*junsai*)
- Shōgoin Cucumber\*

Promotional forums for traditional vegetables continued in Kyoto for a third and fourth year. In 1988, Kyoto chefs held cooking classes featuring traditional vegetables. Takahashi reported that the print and television media helped to popularize the events, sparking a boom in Kyoto traditional vegetables from that year (interview: June 6, 2000). The conference in September of the following year entitled “Cuisine Talk ’89” included chefs trained in Chinese and French cuisine, Buddhist priests, famous Kabuki actors, and the author of a widely-read manga comic book about food. With the addition of geisha and apprentice geisha (*maiko*), the conference took on a “quintessential Kyoto flair,” according to Takahashi (1991: 6–7).

By the fourth conference in 1989, however, the sponsoring members began to disagree about the future of Kyoto’s heirloom produce, as Takahashi explained:

In the fourth year, gradually, the chefs’ ideas began to part ways with the people seeking to popularize [traditional Kyoto vegetables]. We wanted farmers to provide their delicious vegetables at more affordable prices so that ordinary people could purchase and appreciate them. We had worked for that, but greengrocers and others created what they called “Kyoto Brand” vegetables, which consisted of the most marketable varieties. They put these vegetables in boxes bearing the Kyoto Brand name and sent them off for sale in department stores in big cities like Tokyo and Wakayama. They sold them at very high prices, which they continued to raise, in effect changing these vegetables into expensive showpieces. That was completely at odds with our idea. We wondered why we had put so much hard work to popularize these vegetables! So we decided to quit. (interview: June 6, 2000)

As Takahashi commented, the 1989 decision of the Society for the Fostering of Kyoto Cuisine to stop participating in the promotion of Kyoto vegetables was sparked by moves by the prefectural government and JA to market “Kyoto Brand” vegetables that year.

In 1989, the central office of the Kyoto bureau of the JA opened a department called the Cooperative to Support the Price and Distribution of Local Goods from Kyoto (*Kyō no furusato sanpin kakaku ryūtsu antei kyōkai*). Under the name “Kyoto Brand Goods” (*Kyō no burando sanpin*), the office began marketing twenty agricultural products, to include fourteen traditional vegetables and six other agricultural items (marked by an asterisk, below).<sup>2</sup> The fourteen “traditional”



vegetables are those that can be grown in the largest volume, in other words, the most profitable. The twenty items marketed under the “Kyoto Brand” in 1989 were as follows:

- Mizuna
- Mibuna
- Kujō Green Onion
- Fushimi Pepper
- Manganji Pepper
- Shishigatani Pumpkin
- Murasaki Zukin Edamame\*
- Kyoto Bamboo Shoots
- Rapeseed Flower
- Kamo Eggplant
- Kyoto Yamashina Eggplant
- Yam\*
- Shrimp Taro
- Shōgoin Daikon
- Konji Carrot\*
- Horikawa Burdock
- Arrowhead
- Tanba Chestnuts\*
- New Tanba Black Soybeans (*shin Tanba kuro daizu*)\*
- Kyoto Azuki Beans (*Kyōto dainagon azuki*)\*

Regarding the inclusion of other agricultural products, Kato Hideyuki, then section chief in charge of planning at this office, explained that some “products may not fall under the definition of traditional Kyoto vegetables, yet they are still famous goods from Kyoto that were produced here a long time ago.” Kato elaborated on the purpose of his office: “Our organization endeavors to have the produce grown by farmers bought, or rather, sold at a high price ... This is not just to popularize [traditional vegetables] for one business alone; rather we work so that all of the farmers can sell their goods at the highest prices” (interview: June 16, 2000).

The JA began test marketing traditional vegetables in other parts of Japan in 1990, opening so-called “antenna shops” in fashionable department stores in Tokyo and other cities. By 2001, over 130 stores in Tokyo sold “Kyoto Brand Goods” (Kato Hideyuki interview: June 16, 2000). By 1996, purchases by Tokyo-area stores totaled more than 30 percent of the traditional vegetables sold under the Kyoto Brand name (Namimatsu 1998b: 112). Kyoto Brand vegetables are also sold in Hokkaido, Sendai and Hiroshima. The marketing campaign of the Kyoto Brand Goods was highly effective. From 1990 to 1995, the amount of vegetables sold under the Kyoto Brand name increased ten-fold (Kashiwa 1998: 34). In 1996, sales of Kyoto Brand vegetables reached ¥567 (\$4.73) million (Namimatsu 1998b: 112).



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## Debating the Boundaries of Kyoto

Kyoto chefs disliked the marketing of traditional Kyoto vegetables under the Kyoto Brand name; others decried the inclusion of the entire prefecture of Kyoto rather than just Kyoto city as the place where authentic Kyoto vegetables would be cultivated. Ueda Kōji, owner of the upscale vegetable market Kanematsu, which specializes in Kyoto vegetables, explained that the Kyoto prefectural government seized the initiative in 1987 to set the geographical parameters of “traditional Kyoto vegetables” to include the entire prefecture (interview: June 18, 2001). On the one hand, the 1987 definition of traditional Kyoto vegetables to include the prefecture allowed farmers within the prefecture to find a new market for their produce under the Kyoto Brand name. On the other hand, the inclusion of Kyoto prefecture ignores the geographic and historical circumstances that gave rise to traditional Kyoto vegetables for two reasons. First, modern Kyoto prefecture was established in 1871, three years after the cut-off date of 1868 that is the end point to define traditional Kyoto vegetables. Before 1871, Kyoto prefecture consisted of three separate provinces: Tango, Yamashiro and part of Tanba. Each province had under its own administration and distinct geographical features. Tanba, for example, is on the coast of the Japan Sea. Tango, Tanba and Yamashiro remain more rural in contrast to Kyoto city, and once preserved their own distinct varieties of foodways and local methods of preparation in contrast to Kyoto city.<sup>3</sup> Second, what are now termed “traditional Kyoto vegetables” resulted from the distinct type of agriculture of Kyoto city, which was different from that of the hinterland provinces now part of Kyoto prefecture. Farming in Kyoto city from at least the seventeenth century was urban agriculture, characterized by a close interdependence both physically and economically of farmers and their urban customers. Until the advent of modern transportation, urban areas like Kyoto had to rely upon adjacent farmlands to supply perishable produce, and commercial vegetable production was restricted to farmlands near cities. Urban farmers not only enjoyed access to city markets but also to large amounts of inexpensive, if not free, fertilizer, in the form of night soil. Whereas farmers in rural provinces relied on leaves, ash, pond mud as well as limited amounts of cow and horse manure, sardines and fish waste for fertilizer, Kyoto city farmers from the early 1600s to the early 1960s used night soil, which provided an excellent fertilizer for growing large amounts of vegetables. Night soil enabled Kyoto’s farmers to raise enough vegetables on small plots of land for commercial sale, something their rural counterparts could not emulate. For example, in growing the leafy vegetable Mibuna in a 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> area, it was not uncommon to use 11,250 kilos of urine for one planting (Hayashi and Iwaki 1998: 114).<sup>4</sup> Kyoto farmers obtained night soil for free from Kyoto residents or in exchange for fresh vegetables. Farmers went from house to house pulling carts with buckets and dippers to collect it. The trade-off in using night soil was the labor required to obtain it. One farmer’s records, dated to 1871, indicate that he frequently walked four km to obtain night soil (Hayashi 1963: 3–5, 93).

Historical circumstances helped to define the urban farming in Kyoto city and provided the environmental context for the cultivation of vegetables as cash crops, but these same traits are anachronistic today given that chemical and organic

fertilizers have replaced night soil and that Kyoto prefecture grows more traditional Kyoto vegetables than Kyoto city. Tsuchiaki Yasuyuki, owner of Kaneshō, a store that specializes in Kyoto vegetables, noted this contradiction:

The “Kyoto vegetables” grown within Kyoto [city] are the true Kyoto vegetables. However, these same vegetables cannot be grown in Kyoto city anymore, and so they are grown in Kyoto prefecture. This became true from about 1989, the year when farmers began producing the Kyoto Brand. (interview: June 16, 2000)

Kyoto prefecture contains more than three times the amount of farmland dedicated to raising vegetables than Kyoto city, and farmers within Kyoto city cannot meet the JA’s production quotas (Namimatsu 1998a: 23). As such, all fourteen traditional Kyoto vegetables marketed under the Kyoto Brand name are grown outside of Kyoto city (Kyōtofu Nōrin Suisanbu 1987: 4–10). One result of this is that farmers in Kyoto prefecture profited from the Kyoto Brand, while their counterparts in Kyoto city did not. After 1989, farmers in Kyoto city, for instance, faced new difficulties borrowing money to expand their operations as banks took a pessimistic view of the future of urban agriculture (Kashiwa 1998: 52). Indeed, from the 1980s, urban farmers like those in Kyoto faced intense pressure to sell their farmland as real estate speculation led to land prices doubling and then redoubling in that decade. Critics called for an end to tax reductions for farm lands in and near urban areas that they claimed kept land prices high and forced the population to live in small apartments the size of “rabbit hutches” (Nakajima 1987; Nakai 1988).<sup>5</sup> Farmers countered such criticism in the 1980s and 1990s by contending that urban farms offered a source for fresh vegetables, protected the environment, served as areas for cultural and educational use, and provided a refuge in case of natural disasters (Namimatsu 1998a: 22).

Kyoto prefecture may be a modern invention, but so is Kyoto city, whose modern boundaries encompass once independent villages. Kyoto subsumed these villages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and these former-farming areas became increasingly urbanized around that time. The villages of Awataguchi, Shōgoin, Yoshida and Shishigatani became part of Kyoto city in 1888, and none of these areas produces vegetables commercially today, even though they provide their names to varieties of traditional Kyoto vegetables. The names of the vegetables alone—Shishigatani Pumpkin, Shōgoin Daikon and Tanaka Pepper—may speak to the traditions of Kyoto city, but they also recall a historical loss of local identity, agricultural livelihoods and farmlands.<sup>6</sup>



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### New Ways of Selling Old Vegetables

Farmers once walked around Kyoto city pulling round Kyoto carts to sell their produce, customarily leaving the hawking of vegetables (*furiuri*) to the women. A few noted examples include the Women of Ōhara (*Ōharame*) and the Women of Shirakawa (*Shirakawame*) who wore the traditional dress of their respective villages and walked into Kyoto to sell produce. *Ōharame* transversed the steep northern pass into Kyoto pulling long carts laden with produce. *Shirakawame* walked as much as

10 km daily, carting vegetables for sale throughout the city. Today, many farmers in Kyoto city preserve the tradition of hawking vegetables, although they transport their wares by truck. One farmer with whom I spoke in 2003 reported selling 70 percent of his produce directly to customers in such a manner. According to Kashiwa Hisashi of Kyoto University, some farmers were making as much as ¥4 million (\$34,000) in a summer (Kashiwa 1998: 50).

The advent of the Kyoto Brand changed the marketing of Kyoto's heirloom produce, both nationally as outlined above, and locally with the opening of specialty greengrocers in Kyoto. Kaneshō, a store that specializes in traditional Kyoto vegetables, opened in 1987, the same year that traditional Kyoto vegetables were defined. In the words of Kato Hideyuki of the JA, "Kaneshō is a type of boutique that specializes in vegetables, not as something to be sold just to be eaten but also as things to be appreciated as objects of beauty. It seeks to introduce costumers to the notion of buying vegetables with the idea of fashion in mind, that is, vegetables as [brand] goods" (interview: June 16, 2000). The owner of Kaneshō, Tsuchiaki Yasuyuki, explained that his idea for the store was to sell traditional vegetables as gift items in the same way that \$80 muskmelons and expensive fruit baskets are marketed in Japan. "When our business began, we were some what of a rarity. Most vegetable sellers try to entice customers [to buy] with their loud voices. Many questioned whether we could do this ... Now, most of our business is in gift sets" (interview: June 16, 2000). In 2000, it was possible to buy a "summer Kyoto vegetable" gift pack from Kaneshō for ¥8,000 (\$67), with a cheaper option available for ¥5,000 (\$42). In June of the same year, a rival greengrocer Kanematsu, offered a dozen Kamo eggplants for ¥3,800 (\$32) or a single one for ¥680 (\$5.67), roughly the same price as 2.5 kg of conventional eggplants wholesale (Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries 1999). Kanematsu also sells scarves, cups and plates decorated with pictures of Kyoto vegetables, while Kaneshō markets its own brand of boil-in-bag "Kyoto Vegetable Curry" and "Kyoto Vegetable Soup."

The greengrocers Kanematsu and Kaneshō also introduced new ways to eat traditional vegetables. In 2001, Kanematsu opened a restaurant above its store in the famous Nishiki shopping arcade, serving a lunch prepared in the Kyoto home-style (*obanzai*) manner featuring traditional local vegetables. Tsuchiaki Yasuyuki of Kaneshō owns a French restaurant that serves heirloom vegetables, and he explained his reason for offering Western cuisine as opposed to traditional Japanese cooking:

we create dishes that appeal to everyone like curry and spaghetti and pilaf as they are easy to eat. This is necessary for the future of Kyoto vegetables because if people don't enjoy them, then there will be no future for Kyoto vegetables. Also, young people just don't know what's good for them. (interview: June 16, 2000)

Attempts by the JA and greengrocers to market vegetables as brand-name goods have drawn criticism. As noted earlier, the association of Kyoto chefs stopped holding yearly conferences with the JA because of a conflict over their policy of

marketing Kyoto vegetables outside of the prefecture. Kato Hideyuki of the Kyoto branch office of the JA responded to concerns over the high price of some Kyoto vegetables, stating his organization's desire for "ordinary people to buy these delicious traditional Kyoto vegetables at normal prices." "Nevertheless," he continued, "farmers have to make a profit, and that's the most important thing" (interview: June 16, 2000).

### Varieties, Seasonality and Authenticity

Not all "traditional Kyoto vegetables" appear on the official lists even though they may conform to the definitions established in 1987. By some counts, Kyoto has forty-seven varieties of traditional vegetables, but the prefectural list of "traditional Kyoto vegetables" defined in 1987 includes just thirty-seven (Hayashi 1975: 23). Vegetables from the southern part of Kyoto prefecture such as Field (*hatake*) Wasabi and Yawata Taro are both omitted from the official roster of traditional vegetables (Hayashi and Iwaki 1998: 40–2; Takashima 1982: 114–16). The reason for this omission may be tied to the perceived low economic value of these vegetables. Field Wasabi, for instance, is not readily available in stores as gourmards prefer the more expensive wasabi root (a different plant cultivated in water), while ordinary consumers opt for the less-expensive but convenient powdered wasabi sold in a can.

Nearly all of the vegetables defined as traditional Kyoto vegetables—especially those marketed under the Kyoto Brand name—are hybrids, which raises a different question of authenticity. Kyoto farmers once saved their own seeds, even to the point of refusing to share them with their neighbors as Chef Takahashi Eiichi noted. For example, farmers who lived near Kamigamo shrine in the northern part of Kyoto once monopolized the growing of Suguki turnips by controlling the dissemination of Suguki seeds until losses after a fire in 1893 forced them to sell their seeds to other farmers (Hayashi 1975: 48). The varieties defined as traditional Kyoto vegetables in 1987 originated in these practices of seed-saving. Some varieties may well have disappeared had urban farmers not continued to save seeds for generations.

The practice of seed-saving by Kyoto farmers is no longer the norm as most farmers buy their seeds from seed companies. Farmers only practice seed-saving for a few select vegetables for which seeds are not yet available commercially. Only two families grow the Spicy Daikon, and they guard their monopoly over its cultivation by maintaining tight control over their seeds. Other farmers jealously guard the seeds to the varieties of Kujō Green Onion they raise, noted Mimura Yutaka of the Kyoto Prefectural Institute of Agricultural Biotechnology (interview: June 19, 2001). But these are only a few exceptions. Seeds for traditional Kyoto vegetables are available for sale in Japanese and even American seed catalogs.

As farmers now purchase hybrid seeds—even for so-called heirloom and traditional varieties—they are unable to practice seed-saving even if they wanted to because seeds from hybrids do not carry all of the same traits to the next generation. Consequently, the use of hybrids necessitates that Kyoto farmers buy their seeds every year. Heirloom Kyoto vegetables have become standardized as



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everyone is using the same hybrid seeds. Consequently, variations adapted to the specifics of local conditions or tastes have given way to homogenized “traditional” vegetables. The loss of private control over seeding and the subsequent distinct character of a particular farmer’s heirloom vegetables is rationalized by the higher yields, resistance to disease, and compatibility with chemical pesticides and fertilizers that hybrids promise. The Kyoto Prefectural Agricultural Experiment Station has been conducting research on traditional Kyoto vegetables in these areas since it began preserving these varieties in the 1960s.

The seeds for all of the most profitable traditional Kyoto vegetables are available from seed companies, so it is not surprising that their production has spread outside of Kyoto prefecture. Most of the leafy Mizuna grown in Japan is not from Kyoto but from neighboring Shiga prefecture. By 1996, Shiga produced ¥280 million (\$2.3 million) of Mizuna while the amount raised in Kyoto city amounted to only ¥82 million (\$683,000). Some scholars believe that traditional Kyoto vegetables will retain their value in the marketplace and local identity even if they are raised in places as far away from Kyoto as Shikoku and Kyushu (Namimatsu 1998: 28, 30). Others, however, question how the authenticity of Kyoto vegetables will be preserved if this happens. The latter group has raised concerns for the economic wellbeing of Kyoto city farmers if the levels of demand for traditional vegetables fall off as the market becomes saturated with cheaper “Kyoto” produce grown outside of Kyoto (Kashiwa 1998: 33–35).

Besides developing hardier and more productive hybrids of traditional vegetables, the Kyoto Prefectural Institute of Agricultural Biotechnology has also been experimenting with techniques to modify the growing period of vegetables, allowing them to be harvested early or year-round. The leafy vegetables Mizuna and Mibuna, which were originally grown in the fall and winter in Kyoto, are already grown year-round. These changes in growing habits have necessitated innovations in harvesting and consumption. When Mizuna and Mibuna are grown year-round, the entire plant is harvested rather than just a few leaves as was once customary. Today, these greens are eaten raw in salads, whereas in the past they were prepared by boiling or pickling in salt.

Growing vegetables year-round is a modern innovation, but Japanese farmers have for centuries attempted to grow and harvest vegetables earlier in the growing season. Economic concerns were the primary incentive for farmers of the early modern period to harvest their vegetables as soon as possible because early produce—called *hashiri* or *hashirimono*—commanded a higher price than the same product later in the growing season as the former were thought to promote longevity.<sup>7</sup> Many of the innovations in agricultural technology in Kyoto, such as the invention of hot beds in Shōgoin village in the nineteenth century, began as attempts to create *hashiri*. Farmers in Shōgoin were able to sow cucumber seeds in the cold of the first lunar month of the year (February) by germinating sprouts indoors and then planting them in hotbeds. As it was too cold to handle the seedlings, farmers put them in their mouths and spat them into the hotbeds. The hotbeds consisted of wood frames with lids that could be opened or closed depending on the temperature. Heat produced by decaying compost kept the seedlings warm until

they could be transplanted in the fourth lunar month (May) to beds protected by straw. These techniques allowed Shōgoin village to pioneer the sale of seedlings to farmers from the 1840s (Hayashi 1975: 136–7).

As early produce could garner higher prices, it became a form of conspicuous consumption, which the Tokugawa warrior government (*bakufu*) attempted to curb by sumptuary legislation banning the production and sale of *hashiri*. The *bakufu* issued decrees in 1685, 1693, 1742 and 1844, which dictated when certain vegetables could be sold. Eggplant, for example, could only be sold from the fifth lunar month (June) (Sugiyama 1988: 21–22). The *bakufu* prohibited *hashiri* a number of times, indicating that its prohibitions were ignored or else that simply issuing decrees had political value as they demonstrated that the warrior government stood for morality and frugality even if they did not always enforce these principles.

Though no longer illegal, criticism of early produce continued in the modern period as agricultural historian Hayashi Yoshio has documented (1963: 90). One Kyoto city farmer, Morita Yoshio, stated that even though it was more profitable to sell vegetables as soon as possible, it was healthiest to eat them when they were in season because they had a better mineral balance and were generally free from insect problems allowing less use of pesticide (interview: June 23, 2001). Although they occasionally use early products in their cooking, Kyoto chefs generally do not subscribe to innovations to raise once seasonal vegetables year-round because this deprives their dishes of seasonality, which is an integral part of Japanese cuisine (Takahashi 1991: 6). Morimoto Ryūzō, owner of the famous restaurant Harisei in Kyoto, explained: “Eggplants and cucumbers though traditionally summer dishes are now available year-round. But, of course, I limit the use of these to the appropriate season” (interview: June 2, 2000).

While some may criticize attempts to hasten or extend the growing season of produce, there is a more heated debate over raising vegetables year-round. Kono Buhei, who advises several prefectural governments on agricultural issues, has declared that both traditional and conventional varieties of vegetables grown year-round are “fake” as they are grown inappropriately in line with market demands not nature. Not only do these vegetables taste bad according to Kono, they are potentially dangerous (interview: June 23, 2001). Kono has written that the hot houses, used since the mid-1960s to extend the growing season of vegetables, produce vegetables that are contaminated with the nitrate by-products of chemical fertilizers. In his book, *Do Vegetables Cause Diabetes!?* Kono estimates that as many as 80 percent of the green vegetables grown in hot houses in Japan have dangerous levels of nitrates (Kono 2000: 4–11).



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### Are Organic Vegetables More Authentic?

Concerns over seasonality and health issues in the 1990s prompted greater national interest in Japan in organic methods and attempts to grow “healthier” produce by reducing pesticide and chemical fertilizer use. Touting “organic” farming and “seasonal” produce became ways for the farmers and the government of Kyoto city to reclaim the initiative in the marketing of traditional local produce. In 1998, the

Kyoto city government began marketing a brand of produce called “Kyoto Seasonal Vegetables” (*Kyō shun yasai*), some of which are grown organically. Groups of Kyoto city farmers, meanwhile, formed their own cooperatives to research and implement organic growing methods and sell their produce directly to consumers.

Before 2000, the words *organikku* and *yūki* were problematic terms in Japan, referring to organic produce but lacking legal definition. When agricultural scholar Hayashi Yoshio wrote about “organic” farming in 1963, he used the term to refer to selective breeding, use of chemical fertilizers, and cultivation methods that he contrasted with “inorganic methods” (*muyūteki seisan gijutsu*) that used technology, such as the use of hot beds to raise seedlings (Hayashi 1963: 89, 95). More recent definitions contradict these characterizations and designate “organic” produce by the absence of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

By the definitions of current Japanese and US law, the techniques employed by Kyoto city farmers before the Second World War could be called “organic” as farmers did not rely on chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Unlike modern monoculture farming, Kyoto city farmers grew vegetables alongside one another, for instance, raising two rows of cucumber between two rows of taro, planted next to two rows of wheat. The wheat protected both the taro and the cucumbers from wind. After the wheat was harvested in the summer, the straw was scattered as mulch around the vegetables. As the vegetables grew, the cucumber vines protected the taro from the sun; and when the taro matured, its leaves protected the cucumbers from rain damage (Hayashi and Iwaki 1988: 111). In place of chemical fertilizers, insects were killed by hand or fended off by applications of ash or sardine oil to the leaves, or were repelled by nearby rows of flowers such as chrysanthemums (Hayashi 1975: 124, 131). Kyoto farmers also used a range of organic fertilizers, relying on potash as early as the Heian period until the mid-seventeenth century, when night soil became widely used, as noted above.

When Kyoto farming modernized in the second half of the twentieth century, it lost its “organic” features, as chemical fertilizers gradually replaced human waste. In the late 1920s, Kyoto residents stopped separating their waste by liquid and solid, requiring farmers to ferment waste over longer periods, from three to four months or up to a year, before the night soil could be rendered into a usable form. In 1959, Kyoto city prohibited the use of human waste as a fertilizer, and farmers switched to chemical fertilizers. With the availability of inexpensive plastic sheeting after the Second World War, farmers no longer spread wheat chaff as mulch, and simply covered their vegetable beds with plastic, poking holes for seedlings. The introduction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides had environmental repercussions: both, for example, contributed to the extinction of a small fish called the Togeō, which once lived in the parsley fields near Ninth Avenue (*Kujō dōri*), south of the modern Kyoto train station in the city (Hayashi 1975: 72).

In the 1990s, no one suggested returning to the techniques that predate modern agriculture, but organic methods became a new way for Kyoto city and its farmers to reclaim the initiative in the market for heirloom local produce. In 1999, Kyoto city government created the “Project to Promote Seasonal Kyoto Vegetables” (*Kyō no shun yasai suishō jigyō*), which drew up a list of thirty-one items of produce and



advocated that they be grown seasonally and with a limited amount of pesticide if not completely organically. The city helped to market these vegetables under the name “Kyoto Seasonal Vegetables” (*Kyō no shun yasai*) and enlisted growers to the program. Kyoto Seasonal Vegetables bear a special purple label with the grower’s name, the location where they were grown, and sometimes the farmer’s telephone number and e-mail address. Participation in the Kyoto Seasonal Vegetable marketing program requires certification from the city and adherence to the following rules: yearly cultivation of at least ten acres of vegetables, five years of experience in vegetable growing, and adherence to the city’s rules governing organic farming and reduced pesticide use. At the beginning of the program, 260 farmers registered with the city (Namimatsu 1998b: 120); by 2003, the number grew to 504 farmers and seventy greengrocers who carry their produce, according to Shukuin Megumi of the city office in charge of this project (interview: May 20, 2003). The explicit aim of the project is:

to develop agriculture that is environmentally friendly, and to promote eating habits that recognize the importance of seasonality by bringing city residents fresh, local vegetables. An additional goal is to gain wider recognition for the importance of urban farming and to support the production of local Kyoto vegetables. (Nōrin Gogyō Genchi Jōhō 2000)

In effect, Kyoto city has responded to the criticism over the loss of seasonality and potential health risks of conventional growing techniques, prompted by consumer demands. According to a contemporaneous national government white paper on food and agriculture, consumers desired more information on product labels and shorter distances from the place of production to sale (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries 2000: 5).

Before the efforts of the Kyoto city government, organic farming became a rallying point for some of the farmers of Kyoto city in the early 1990s. Urban farmer Morita Yoshio of the Kyoto Organic Association (*Kyō yūki no kai*), explained, “I founded the Kyoto Organic Association [in 1992] because at that time, the guidelines of the Ministry of Agriculture did not distinguish between organic and conventional vegetables.” In that year, the Association opened a vegetable stand called *Oideyasu*, which means “welcome” in the Kyoto dialect but is also a pun on the word for vegetable (*yasai*). “We opened this shop because we were trying to sell vegetables at a low price that we ourselves would eat.” The association also began selling to neighborhood restaurants, a Kyoto department store, a local hotel, and a nearby upscale supermarket. Not all of the produce that the association raised was organic, although it had to meet the conditions of a three-tier ranking system. Rank “A” vegetables used only organic fertilizers and were raised without pesticides. Rank “B” used both organic and chemical fertilizers but no pesticides. Rank “C” vegetables were the same as “B” but with limited pesticide use. Morita explained that summer eggplant were ranked “C” because they were difficult to raise without pesticides. However, he grew winter and fall produce completely organically, and they were “A” rank (interview: June 16, 2000 and June 23, 2001).



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The Organic Association's combination of "organic" methods with chemical fertilizers and pesticide applications was typical for Japan where until 2000 vegetables could be labeled both "organic" and "low in pesticide." After April 1, 2000, farmers had to stop using pesticide if they wanted to call their produce organic in accordance with national law. The Japanese Agricultural Standard of Organic Agricultural Products stated that farmers who wanted to label their produce "organic" had to comply with national guidelines administered by the Japan Agricultural Standards Association (JAS) and pass inspection by certified agencies. If farmers adhere to these guidelines, which stipulate no use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers for two years, they are allowed to call their produce "organic" and label it with the "JAS Organic Certification Seal."

### **Building Communities or Simply Marketing Them?**

Although the definition of traditional Kyoto vegetables has been fixed since 1987, defining the relationship between "Kyoto" and its vegetables was an ongoing process as this article has attempted to describe. One of the positive developments of this continuing debate has been the greater prominence given to Kyoto's farmers in the media. A representative publication is the colorful book *Four Seasons of Kyoto Vegetables and Home Cooking (Shiki no Kyō yasai to obanzai)*, which features interviews and photos of smiling farmers from both Kyoto city and prefecture with discussions of the varieties of vegetables they grow and suggested recipes (Momohara 2000). The marketing efforts of Kyoto city are also noteworthy for labeling Kyoto produce with the grower's name and contact information. Greengrocers such as Tsuchiaki Yasuyuki of Kaneshō likewise take pride in identifying the location and growers of their vegetables: "We know the makers of our produce. Whose Kamo Eggplant is this you ask? This is Mr. Fujibayashi Masaki's Kamo Eggplant" (interview: June 16, 2000). The disclosure of the name of the grower, and the presumption of responsibility on the part of the grower and seller that that entails, may facilitate healthier growing techniques irrespective of whether the produce meets standards imposed by national and local laws. If that is true, these are important steps to fostering a sense of a local community of producers and growers. When asked about the future of Kyoto vegetables, Kyoto city farmer Morita Yoshio spoke of his own future as part of such a community: "In my future I want to be proud of being a Kyotoite and happy that people eat my vegetables and are healthy. Food, after all, is the industry of life" (interview: June 16, 2000). For Morita at least, who sells his produce from the stand adjacent to his field, the shared sense of community with his customers is less a marketing ploy than a fact of life.

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### Notes

- 1 Bamboo shoots are included on the list of traditional Kyoto vegetables because they are cultivated. Edible ferns (*shida*) such as Osmund Fern (*zenmai*) and bracken (*warabi*)—examples of so-called "mountain vegetables" (*sansai*)—are gathered foods like mushrooms (*kinoko*), and therefore excluded from traditional Kyoto vegetables.
- 2 Since 1989, the cooperative has added six more items of produce to its list of Kyoto Brand goods. See <http://kyo-furusato.jp/details/index.html> (accessed April 4, 2013).
- 3 The distinct traditional diets of these regions of modern Kyoto prefecture are detailed in Hata (1985).
- 4 Farmers did not poison their soils by applying human waste directly. Instead, they composted solid waste for at least ten days and up to six months according to Kyoto city farmer Tsuji Teruo (interview: June 27, 2001). Urine was diluted in five to ten parts water before application (Hayashi 1975: 57). The prevalence of pebbles in Kyoto's topsoil aided drainage and inhibited soil pollution from excess night soil use (Hayashi and Iwaki 1988: 105).
- 5 In the 1980s, urban farmers living in so-called Urban Promotion Areas (UPA, *shigaikakuiki*), which were slated for development eventually, typically paid just 1 or 2 percent of the property tax compared with residential land nearby according to the 1968 New City Planning Law (*Shin toshi keikaku hō*). Most farmers wanted their lands classified as UPA due to this tax break (Sorensen 2002: 213, 216, 234–5). In 1991, the national government amended the tax system, requiring farmers with lands in the UPA to pledge to maintain their farms for thirty years or else they would have to pay property tax in full (Ishihara: 2002: 71–3).
- 6 The place names associated with Kyoto vegetables were somewhat arbitrary as the same varieties had different names within Kyoto city, and sometimes, as in case of Kamo eggplant, the names of the vegetables were not standardized until after 1868 (Hayashi 1975: 103).
- 7 Speaking to the belief that vegetables early in the season fostered longevity, a popular saying indicated, "eat the season's first produce, live 75 days longer" (Ishige 2001: 113).



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