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Food Citizenship: Between Silence and Rupture in Japan

Tamami Matsuoka¹ and Shuji Hisano²

Abstract

Food citizenship has been considered an essential concept for initiating food systems transformations through food democracy and reconfiguring food governance. This paper examines how participants in alternative agri-food initiatives (AAFI) in Japan demonstrate food citizenship, aiming to add a new perspective and context to discussions on food citizenship that have thus far been inherently Western-centric. Synthetic analyses of surveys identified unique characteristics of the Japanese case which include low levels of connection to the community and civic/political engagement and dissatisfaction with the government and market regarding economic sustainability. The politically quiet situation of AAFI participants in the global contexts, while more active than the general population of the case, invites us to expand the idea of food citizenship and investigate into the silent/quiet side to understand the political agency of 'food citizens' as a whole and seek acts of *food* citizenship that rupture and transform dominant food systems.

Keywords: food citizens, food democracy, food systems, alternative food networks, acts of citizenship

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Need for Critical Investigations on Food Citizenship

The current globalised and industrialised food systems have long been criticised for their lack of consideration for the environment and society. Therefore, transforming such systems into more sustainable ones is an urgent necessity. Food democracy is both a crucial means of achieving this and vital for addressing the problems of food governance, as well as reconstructing it in relation to food production, distribution, access, utilisation, and disposal (Hassanein, 2003; Margulis & Duncan, 2016). Food democracy, at its core, involves people exercising their power to rebuild and improve existing food systems (Booth & Coveney, 2015). Much of the literature on the transformation of food systems, in line with food democracy, pays close attention to the role of civil society, highlighting its potential to bring about changes in local governance structures (Renting, Schermer, & Rossi, 2012). For example, practical scenarios for transforming food systems have been developed, emphasising the need for civil society to drive changes (IPES-Food & ETC Group, 2021). Civic networks are expected to play a major role in transforming food systems through food democracy. This underpins the reconfiguration of food governance.

The concept of food citizenship is central to the idea of food democracy (Louvin, 2025) and is indispensable when discussing citizen-led food initiatives. However, the literature on food citizenship presents diverse concepts, with no universal consensus on its definition (Grasseni, 2025). Campisi (2019) outlines two theoretical perspectives on the concept: 1) a liberal view, seeing it as a bearer of rights protected by the state, and 2) a republican view, seeing it as an active participant in local food systems and communities. The latter aligns with the concept of food democracy, carrying various implications such as critical consumption where consumers 'vote with their dollar' and grassroots mobilisation for civic food networks (Grasseni, 2025). Attempts to define food citizenship as a normative framework or moral imperative have also been observed, yet ultimately, it is constantly being redefined (Lozano-Cabedo & Gómez-Benito, 2017; Wilkins, 2005). In line with food democracy, the essence of food citizenship has been understood as the capacity of people to actively shape and reshape food systems responsibly through collective and political means.

Academic discussion of food citizenship has emerged and developed in a Western-centric manner (Booth & Coveney, 2015; El Bilali, 2019). This concept was first introduced as a component of a food policy council in Toronto, Canada. Established in 1990, the Toronto Food Policy Council has functioned as 'a vehicle for "food citizenship"' (Welsh & MacRae, 1998, p. 237). Here, a multi-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional approach was applied to food security, focusing on social justice and environmental sustainability. In addition, Lyson (2005) argues that citizens engaged in 'civic agriculture' can transform themselves from mere consumers into food citizens.

Empirical studies, primarily conducted in Western contexts, also suggest a relationship between alternative agri-food practices and the actors' political and communal engagement (Carolan, 2017; Obach & Tobin, 2014; Pole & Gray, 2013). However, despite the concept's essence being highly context-dependent, literature investigating and developing the concept and its practices across diverse contexts remains limited (Grasseni, 2025).

Indeed, the importance of the food citizenship concept is recognised in many other settings, including Japan (Akitsu, 2021; Nishiyama & Kodama, 2021; Tachikawa, 2018, 2021), but still requires deeper analysis of the concept. This paper sheds light on food citizenship in Japan, which has been focused on through the lens of the *teikei* movement in the related scholarship. Grounded in critical citizenship studies, this paper approaches food citizenship and food governance from a distinct perspective. It aims to deepen the understanding of the concept by introducing a new perspective to academic and practical discussions and examining the relationship between currently articulated food citizenship and participation in alternative agri-food practices.

This paper draws on critical citizenship studies as a theoretical foundation for exploring counter-hegemonic possibilities within neoliberal food governance. Citizenship is understood as something that is enacted by *doing*, rather than as a state of *being*, and is shaped by various elements, including power relations that extend beyond legality. This approach aligns well with the narratives that food citizenship is inherently political (Carolan, 2017; Hassanein, 2003). To put it differently, what matters is whether and to what extent people exercise their food citizenship. Referring to Isin (2009), Carolan (2017) makes a distinction between 'active food citizens' and 'more-than-active' or 'activist' food citizens (pp. 198-200). The latter group, in contrast to the former, who often practice through routine actions, seeks to challenge routine with political agency. Drawing on such scholarship, the premise of this paper is that 'acts of food citizenship' by 'activist food citizens' with political agency can bring 'rupture' to dominant conventional food systems, offering opportunities to reconfigure food governance and systems (Isin, 2024). Some literature calls participants in certain non-conventional food systems 'food citizens' (Ben-Othmen & Kavouras, 2024; Hatanaka, 2020). Through the lens of critical citizenship scholarship, we further examine how these 'food citizens' exercise food citizenship in ways that become revolutionary towards socio-ecological, economic, and political structures.

This paper focuses primarily on participants in alternative agri-food initiatives (AAFIs) as potential actors exercising food citizenship toward a rupture that could lead to the transformation of today's globalised and industrialised food systems. Similar to narratives of alternative food networks, the term 'alternative' serves as an umbrella term indicating what they are not, rather than what they are (Edwards, 2023). While the literature on food citizenship often

treats eaters as the central actors, this paper expands the focus to include not only eaters but also growers and distributors. Furthermore, each initiative has its own distinct objective and sometimes collaborates with others, forming networks within networks. Therefore, this paper employs the term AAFI to describe non-conventional agri-food movements in the case study that is discussed in Section 2.

1.2. Food Governance in Japan

Japanese government policy regarding agriculture and food has been drastically driven by neoliberal globalism and mainstream business interests under the free trade and investment regime. The Japanese agri-food sector cannot be described without its dependency on food imports, which have been historically and structurally constructed (Hisano, Akitsu, & McGreevy, 2018; McMichael, 2009). The country's food self-sufficiency rate is 38% on a calorie basis (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2024), and a significant portion of the country's food intake relies on imported food products. The government even includes food imports within its strategy for food security from the outset, particularly after enacting the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture, and Rural Areas in 1999, which resulted in expanding food imports according to free trade principles. Japanese food security policy has been shaped significantly by the neoliberal food regime (Hiraga & Hisano, 2019).

Motivated by the government's strong encouragement for the industry to increase capacity and secure food both in and outside Japan, a number of large-scale food-related companies expand their business abroad, especially in Southeast Asia, which is often criticised for being profit-oriented. Moreover, a number of large-scale companies have begun to farm in rural areas of the country, where they are sometimes criticised for prioritising profit over reviving rural economies and communities (Sekine & Bonanno, 2016, pp. 176–181). Particularly since 2012, the country's shift toward market-oriented reforms in agriculture has become significant, introducing competitive policies into the domestic agricultural sector while challenging protectionist institutional actors, such as the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives (JA), which were also influential in policy-making. The policy shift has weakened the influence of JA, and the institution has been reframed under neoliberalism, which privileges deregulation (Maclachlan, Shimizu, Hoshi, & Lipsy, 2021). Including this quasi-public institution as well as large-scale food-related companies operating internationally, Japan's entire food governance structure has been entangled in neoliberal governance rationales.

Civil society has also developed its own strategies by forming initiatives; *teikei* in the 1970s being the most significant example. In response to the Japanese government's policy of modernising agriculture, consumers who are concerned about the adverse environmental and

health effects initiated the *teikei* movement as a form of consumer activism that involves buying organic food directly from farmers in partnership (Kondoh, 2015). AAFIs currently exist in many forms, from ‘*teikei*-inspired practices’ by young and new entry organic farmers to international-inspired practices like farmers’ markets (Kondo, Zollet, Kobayashi, & Yamamoto, 2024). Such AAFIs are expected to play a role in problematising and holding other governance actors, such as government and corporations, accountable for their impacts (Hisano, 2023).

1.3. Rethinking Food Citizenship

As stated above, although the concept of food citizenship and its potential role in food governance and food policy contexts have been discussed in Japan, few studies have investigated the current situation. One notable background trend, aside from food governance, is the recent decline in interest and activity among the Japanese population regarding severe problems. For example, international surveys indicate that young people in Japan demonstrate significantly lower interest and proactivity in climate change matters compared to nine other countries (Hickman et al., 2021). Building on this point, the first question to ask is whether and to what extent food citizenship acts and practices are observed and not observed in Japan and whether there is a scope for transformation. Therefore, we set the exploratory research question: how do AAFI participants demonstrate food citizenship in Japan?

This paper contributes to expanding the discourse and concepts surrounding food citizenship in food governance, which has hitherto been Western-centric in both academic and practical terms, by investigating Japanese cases and integrating them into the international debate. Moreover, the enhancement of focus from eaters to include growers and distributors enables the investigation among various actors who play key roles in food systems, which leads to identifying their roles in transforming these systems. Finally, to the authors’ knowledge, this paper is the first to situate the theoretical base of food citizenship within critical citizenship studies. This approach enables analyses of the relatively ‘silent’ situation in Japan, offering a layered understanding of the current situation, as well as the potential and limitations for food systems transformation through ruptures generated by ‘acts of *food* citizenship’.

This paper consists of five sections. The introduction, which delivers background information and theoretical frameworks, is followed by Section 2, which describes the methods used in investigating food citizenship in Japan. Section 3 explains the findings from the survey among AAFI participants in Kobe, Japan. Section 4 then discusses the findings by synthesising different questions from the survey, national/international survey results, and existing academic literature, aiming to understand and expand the concept of food citizenship from a new perspective. Section 5 follows and concludes the paper.

2. Methods: Case study with mixed methods

To understand the current situation in Japan, we conducted a case study in Kobe City. Now that more of the population lives in urban areas globally, food system concerns, including food production, no longer matter only to rural areas, which makes it inevitable to consider urban sites (Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2015; Tachikawa, 2018). A mixed method approach was employed for this research, with the questionnaire survey serving as the primary source of data on participants' perceptions and behaviours, and participatory observation providing a complementary source to understand case contexts.

2.1. Kobe City and its Food Governance

Kobe City is the capital of Hyogo Prefecture, with a population of 1.5 million. It is one of the metropolises that comprise the Kansai Metropolitan Area, the country's second-largest metropolitan area (Kobe City, 2023). The prefecture as a whole used to be one of the most progressive areas of consumer activism, the *teikei* movement (Hatano & Fujimoto, 2018). The international port city is home to numerous corporations and civic initiatives inspired by foreigners in the area, due to its history of being open to foreign culture and norms, including the food bank and community supported agriculture (CSA) (Asaba, 2024; Tsujimura, 2022). Additionally, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake struck Kobe in 1995, which is often referred to as the 'First Year of Volunteerism' in Japan. Many volunteers gathered in Kobe City after the earthquake, and numerous volunteering activities have been active since then. In such a city, active food citizenship practices that lead to food systems transformation may be found, despite the current general trend of low awareness of social issues in the country, as shown in the previous section. Investigating food citizenship in the city serves as the first step to understanding food citizenship in Japan, which may add a new perspective to the global discussion both academically and practically.

As an ordinance-designated large city, Kobe City enacts its own policies, including those regarding rural villages, the sea, agriculture, and food. The 'Gastropolis Kobe' is one of their core projects launched in 2015, to promote agriculture and food as a city brand and to take advantage of the geographical proximity between the agri-fishery area and the urban area within the city. More recently, Kobe City was selected as a Global Startup Ecosystem Hub City³ by the national government, which led to the creation of the food-related programme 'NEXT KITCHEN'. For this programme, the city invites international food startups (mostly food-tech) companies and tries

³ Global Startup Ecosystem Hub Cities are part of a new scheme established by the Japanese government in 2020 to build a world-class startup ecosystem. The goal is to accelerate innovation and enhance Japan's competitiveness by leveraging regional strengths and supporting startups. Kobe was selected as one of the first metropolises, along with other cities, such as Osaka and Kyoto, in 2020.

to match them with Japanese companies that are willing to collaborate (Innovation Dojo, 2025). In addition, a great number of food-related companies, such as Nestlé Japan Ltd., UCC Japan Co., Ltd., and several confectionery manufacturers and retailers⁴ have their headquarters in Kobe City, indicating that the corporate influence in food governance is also substantial in the city. As one of the JA, a nationwide organisation established to protect the farming and livelihoods of its members, JA Hyogo Rokko covers an area including the city of Kobe and boasts approximately 130,000 members, making it one of Japan's largest JAs in urban areas (JA Hyogo Rokko, 2025; Tsutaya, 2006). Based on the principles of a comprehensive and multi-purpose cooperative, it provides farm guidance, marketing and purchasing operations, credit and mutual insurance services, and also operates its own farmers' markets (direct sales stores).

Thus, Kobe City is characterised by the presence of a relatively large JA, as well as vigorous civic activities. However, as explained earlier, the close relationship between the local government and the food industry reflects the trend of food-tech reliance in recent years under neoliberal policy, and the food governance in Kobe is no exception, being greatly influenced by the neoliberal food regime.

2.2. Data

The participants of 11 AAFIs, comprising members of three CSAs, two organic farmer networks, two community gardens, and a consumer cooperative, as well as trainees of an organic agriculture programme, sellers and buyers at a farmers' market, and volunteers at a food bank, were investigated in Kobe City. Different types of AAFIs are expected to demonstrate multiple aspects of the alternative movements. Participatory observations, including unstructured interviews, were conducted to gain insights into their structure and contexts, and surveys were conducted to understand the tendencies of the current situations of food citizenship in Kobe, which will be the main subject of analysis.

The surveys were conducted from April to December 2024, both online and in paper format, delivering project details and questions to each AAFI, where each participant was given the opportunity to complete the survey. For comparative purposes, the general population in Kobe was also asked to fill out the survey. This data collection from the general population was conducted by ASMARQ Co., Ltd., an online research company. To protect the privacy of respondents, the collected data were treated anonymously⁵. Participatory observation was conducted through an internship (August 2023-July 2024) the first author participated in at an

⁴ Examples of the confectionery manufacturers and retailers in Kobe include Morozoff Limited, Juchheim Co., Ltd, Kobe FUGETSUDO Co., Ltd. and Goncharoff Seika Co., Ltd.

⁵ Participants had the opportunity to provide contact information on a voluntary basis. The omission of this information did not affect participation, response handling, or subsequent data analysis.

organic farm, which was involved in multiple initiatives. Food bank-related observations are derived from the author's previous research project on food distribution (Matsuoka & Miyasaka, 2023), where she volunteered once a month (October 2020-July 2022). During the internship and volunteering, daily conversations and Q&A sessions were held.

2.3. Questionnaire Surveys

From a governance perspective, food citizenship involves engaging with both governments and the market to shape food systems; therefore, it is essential to consider it from multiple dimensions. The survey was formed with three pillars: daily agri-food activities, community engagement, and sustainability. The category of daily agri-food activities investigates respondents' everyday agri-food practices, particularly in relation to the market. Community engagement demonstrates political and civic involvement in one's communities. According to the literature, this category encompasses connections to the community, volunteerism, and civic/political activities (Obach & Tobin, 2014). The investigation into the respondents' perceptions regarding sustainability reveals how they understand their responsibility for current global and national issues, such as climate change and social justice, and how they respond to them. For each pillar, questions were formulated within two to four categories, referencing past survey questions from the literature and international and national surveys.

The main analysis is conducted using comparative approaches. First, the analysis was conducted between the AAFI participants and the general population to determine the presence of statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$), assessing whether AAFI participants demonstrate food citizenship in the first place. After quantification of each question response, a t-test or chi-square test was conducted among the two large groups, according to the question categories. Likert questions were analysed with t-tests, using quantified responses from 1 to 5. In contrast, multiple-choice questions and yes/no questions were converted to binary responses of 0 or 1, which were then analysed with chi-square tests to determine if there was a significant difference. Further analysis was then conducted synthetically using descriptive statistical analysis.

The first comparison is followed by descriptive and synthetic comparative analyses among multiple questions and categories, as well as different AAFIs, existing academic literature, and national/international surveys referenced. When the second analysis was conducted, some AAFI categories were combined into larger group categories: *Recipients I*, *Recipients II*, *Self-providers*, *Providers*, and *Redistributors*, as shown in Table 1. AAFIs in the *Recipients I* category are relatively new, with less than 10 years of history, and were initially influenced by foreign initiatives. In contrast, the AAFI in the *Recipients II* category is *teikei*-derived. The comparative

academic literature investigates AAFI participants and the general population in the U.S. with different focuses. Synthetic analyses are further discussed in Section 4.

Table 1: Group categories of AAFI participants

| Group category | Initiative category | Respondents number | Group category population |
|-----------------------|--|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Recipients I | CSA individuals | 18 | 79 |
| | CSA company | 15 | |
| | CSA prefectural government | 34 | |
| | Farmers' market buyers | 12 | |
| Recipients II | Seikatsu club members | 188 | 188 |
| Self-providers | Organic agriculture programme trainees | 17 | 41 |
| | Community garden A | 10 | |
| | Community garden B | 14 | |
| Providers | Farmers' market sellers | 19 | 34 |
| | Organic farmers | 9 | |
| | <i>Teikei</i> farmers | 6 | |
| Redistributors | Food bank volunteers | 35 | 35 |
| All AAFIs | | | 377 |
| General population | | | 300 |

3. Findings

This section presents findings from the survey through a comparison between AAFI participants and the general population, along with some descriptive statistics that inform the discussion in Section 4. Table 2 shows the list of pillars of the survey: daily agri-food activities, community engagement, and sustainability. To assess the internal coherency of the questionnaire constructs among questions with sequenced numbers from the Likert scale, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each thematic category. The resulting alpha coefficients were 0.8653, 0.8256, and 0.5737, respectively. While daily agri-food activities and community engagement demonstrated acceptable reliability, the sustainability pillar yielded a moderate alpha value, prompting further examination of its internal structure. The questions regarding sustainability are categorised into four main areas: overall perception, social, environmental, and economic aspects. Thus, while the value 0.5737 is lower than 0.60, which is the general acceptance threshold for exploratory assessment (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019, p. 161), we proceeded with descriptive analysis for the sustainability category, as it encompasses diverse and different elements within the category.

Table 2: List of pillars and questionnaire items

| Pillars | Sub pillars | Cronbach's alpha |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Daily agri-food activities | Food | 0.8653 |
| | Agriculture | |
| Community Engagement | Connection to the community | 0.8256 |
| | Volunteerism | |
| | Civic/political activities | |
| Sustainability | Overall perception | 0.5737 |
| | Environment | |
| | Social justice | |
| | Economy | |

3.1. Demographics

Table 3 offers a sample of demographics. It is noteworthy that AAFIs tend to hold higher income and education, with primary actors in their 40s to 60s. They have fewer people without occupation and fewer employed people, compared to the general population. Households of AAFIs tend to consist of two generations with one or two children, whereas households of the general population tend to have more elderly members. While the gender ratio in AAFI leans toward females, it is worth noting that 94% of the 188 *Recipients II* respondents are female. The gender ratio is equally distributed when *Recipients II* are excluded.

Table 3: Demographics of survey respondents (1/2)

| | | Recipients I | Recipients II | Self-providers | Providers | Redistributors | AAFI Total | General |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|------------|---------|
| Total number | | 79 | 188 | 41 | 34 | 35 | 377 | 300 |
| Gender (%) | Male | 37 | 3 | 51 | 65 | 51 | 25 | 50 |
| | Female | 61 | 94 | 46 | 35 | 49 | 72 | 50 |
| | Prefer not to answer | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Age (%) | 20s | 3 | 0 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| | 30s | 23 | 4 | 20 | 29 | 0 | 11 | 9 |
| | 40s | 32 | 23 | 37 | 15 | 11 | 25 | 15 |
| | 50s | 33 | 23 | 29 | 38 | 23 | 27 | 32 |
| | 60s | 10 | 23 | 10 | 12 | 46 | 20 | 24 |
| | 70s | 0 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 13 | 15 |
| | 80s or above | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| | No answer | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Occupation (%) | CEO | 1 | 3 | 0 | 18 | 6 | 4 | 1 |
| | Employed | 24 | 13 | 54 | 18 | 17 | 20 | 35 |
| | Self-employed | 10 | 6 | 5 | 50 | 6 | 11 | 7 |
| | Public servant | 43 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 12 | 2 |
| | Education | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Homemaker | 5 | 38 | 5 | 3 | 14 | 22 | 20 |
| | Student | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | None | 3 | 11 | 5 | 3 | 34 | 10 | 18 |
| | Part-time job | 13 | 18 | 15 | 0 | 9 | 14 | 16 |
| | Other | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 0 |
| | No answer | 0 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 |

Table 3: Demographics of survey respondents (2/2)

| | | Recipients I | Recipients II | Self-providers | Providers | Redistributors | AAFI Total | General |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|------------|---------|
| Total number | | 79 | 188 | 41 | 34 | 35 | 377 | 300 |
| Last education (%) | Junior high school | 1 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | High school | 9 | 14 | 5 | 24 | 9 | 12 | 29 |
| | College | 9 | 32 | 22 | 24 | 23 | 24 | 20 |
| | University (bachelor) | 65 | 47 | 46 | 44 | 51 | 51 | 44 |
| | Graduate school | 14 | 2 | 20 | 3 | 17 | 8 | 5 |
| | Prefer not to answer | 1 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| | No answer | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Household structure (%) | Single | 16 | 6 | 15 | 21 | 29 | 13 | 23 |
| | Couple | 27 | 38 | 15 | 18 | 29 | 30 | 32 |
| | 2 generations | 57 | 51 | 68 | 53 | 40 | 53 | 43 |
| | 3 generations | 0 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| | Other | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | No answer | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Number of children (%) | 0 | 53 | 51 | 59 | 65 | 83 | 56 | 84 |
| | 1 | 22 | 9 | 15 | 12 | 9 | 12 | 8 |
| | 2 | 23 | 10 | 24 | 12 | 9 | 14 | 5 |
| | 3 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 4 | 1 |
| | 4 or above | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Unknown | 0 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 0 |
| Number of the elderly (%) | 0 | 89 | 20 | 85 | 65 | 40 | 47 | 55 |
| | 1 | 4 | 8 | 0 | 12 | 43 | 10 | 21 |
| | 2 | 6 | 14 | 15 | 21 | 11 | 13 | 22 |
| | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | 4 or above | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Unknown | 1 | 57 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 30 | 0 |
| Income (million yen (%)) | 0-4.99 | 11 | 30 | 22 | 44 | 37 | 27 | 42 |
| | 5-7.99 | 22 | 20 | 27 | 18 | 9 | 20 | 26 |
| | 8-12.9 | 29 | 16 | 29 | 21 | 14 | 20 | 16 |
| | 13 or above | 18 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 14 | 9 | 6 |
| | Prefer not to answer | 20 | 23 | 10 | 12 | 23 | 20 | 10 |
| | No answer | 0 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 0 |

3.2. Agri-food practices

When choosing vegetables and fruits, AAFI participants put significantly more importance on 'freshness', 'safety', 'seasonality', 'nutrition', 'locality', 'nationality', 'brands', 'environmental friendliness', and 'working environment friendliness' than the general population. The elements of 'taste' and 'convenience' did not show any significant differences. On the other hand, the general population cares significantly more about 'price' and 'looks'. Fig. 1 shows the average value of the importance the respondents assigned, ranging from 1 (extremely important) to 5 (not important at all). Fig. 2 shows that AAFI participants have more means of acquisition, thus,

more options to choose from when selecting food than the general population, implying their consideration of various elements when making food choices. Through this paper, the mark ‘*’ on the figures indicates that no statistically significant difference was found between AAFI participants and the general population for the category. Additionally, when comparing the importance of ‘locality’ and ‘nationality’ for each of the major groups, while the general population showed no significant difference between the two criteria, it was found that AAFI participants placed significantly more importance on food being domestically produced than on food being locally produced. For each initiative, the number of participants who chose 1 (extremely important) for ‘nationality’ is greater than the number of those who chose 1 for ‘locality’.

The interest in agriculture also showed significant differences. AAFI participants showed more interest in agriculture than the general population, as seen in Figs. 3 and 4. When we investigate their responses in ‘agriculture in general’ and ‘local agriculture’, AAFI participants showed more interest in ‘agriculture in general’ than in ‘local agriculture’, whereas the general population showed no significant difference in interest among agriculture of different scales. The trend of favouring non-local levels of agri-food matters over the local level among AAFI participants is discussed further in Section 4.

Their reasons for joining the respective AAFI, as well as their choices of locally grown or organic vegetables and fruits for the general population and food bank volunteers, offer some general insights. Overall, as Fig. 5 shows, the most popular reason for joining or choosing is ‘to access healthier food’, for both the general population and AAFI participants. For the general population, ‘better health’ is chosen as the top reason by 42% of the respondents, while 56% of the AAFI participants chose it as their top reason. Fewer respondents chose ‘better taste’ among AAFI participants than the general population. More AAFI participants chose other options, such as ‘connect with people’, ‘environmental sustainability’ and ‘care for workers’. Moreover, the overall number of respondents who chose the option of supporting ‘environmental sustainability’ was greater than the number who chose ‘care for workers’, with the former being 143 and the latter 75, as shown in Table 4.

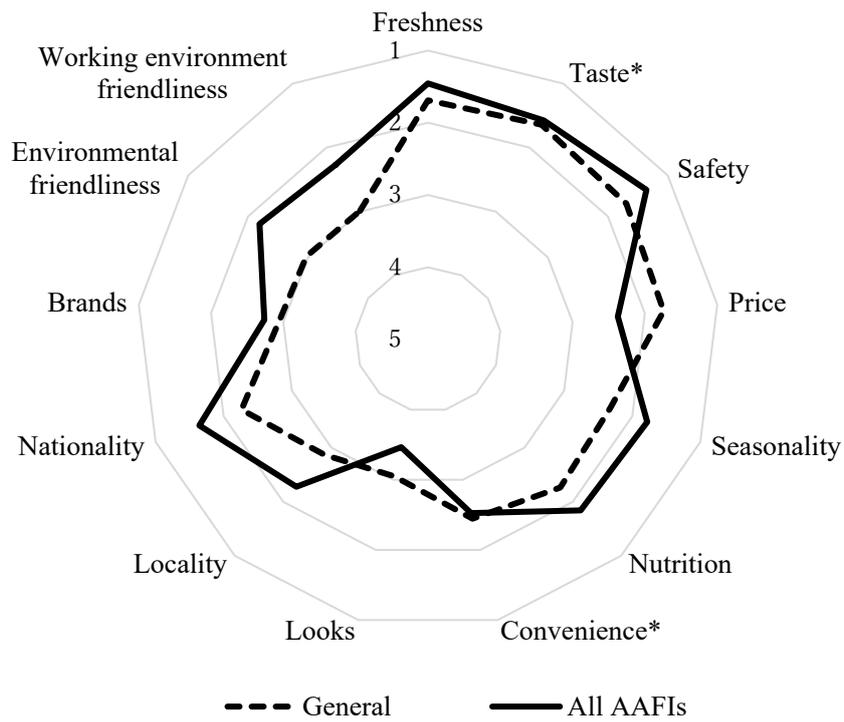


Fig. 1: Degree of importance when choosing vegetables and fruits

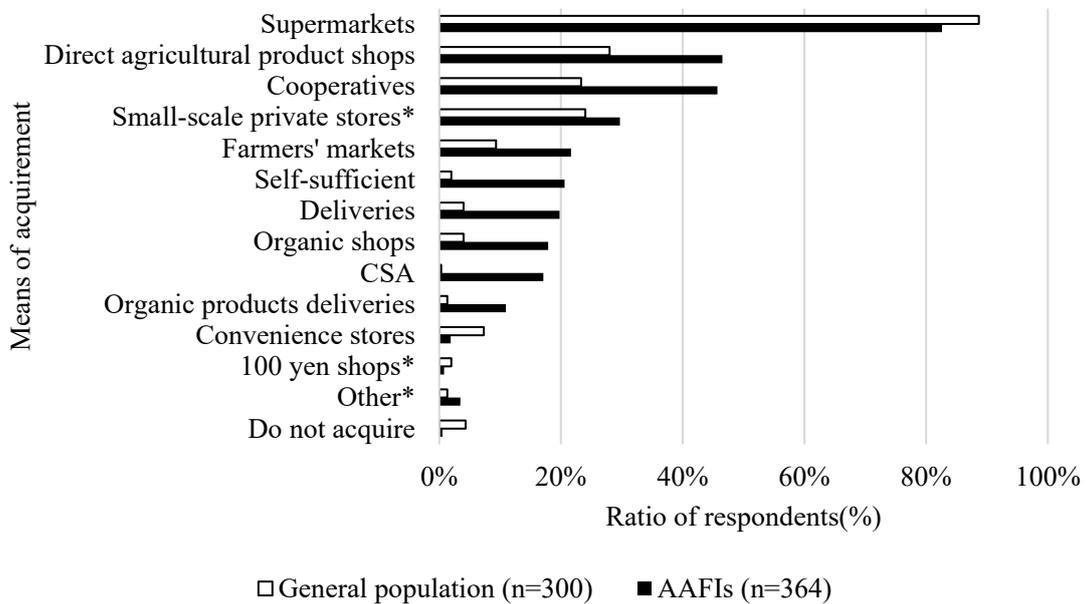


Fig. 2: Means of acquiring vegetables and fruits

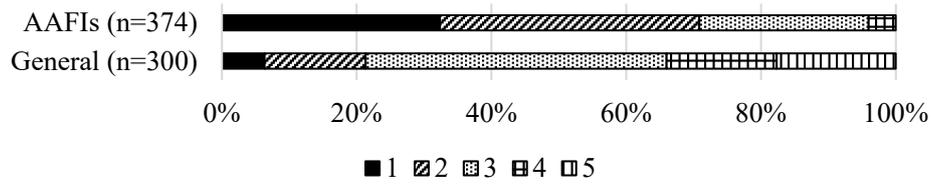


Fig. 3: Interests in agriculture in general
(1: very interested and carefully following the news ~ 5: not interested at all)

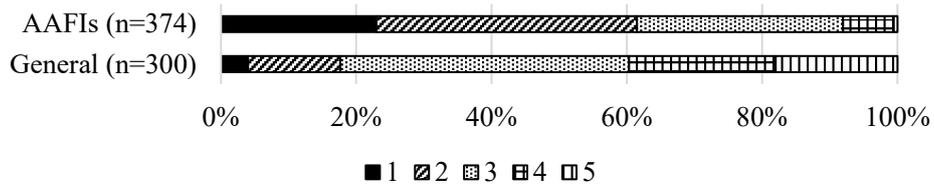


Fig. 4: Interests in local agriculture
(1: very interested and carefully following the news ~ 5: not interested at all)

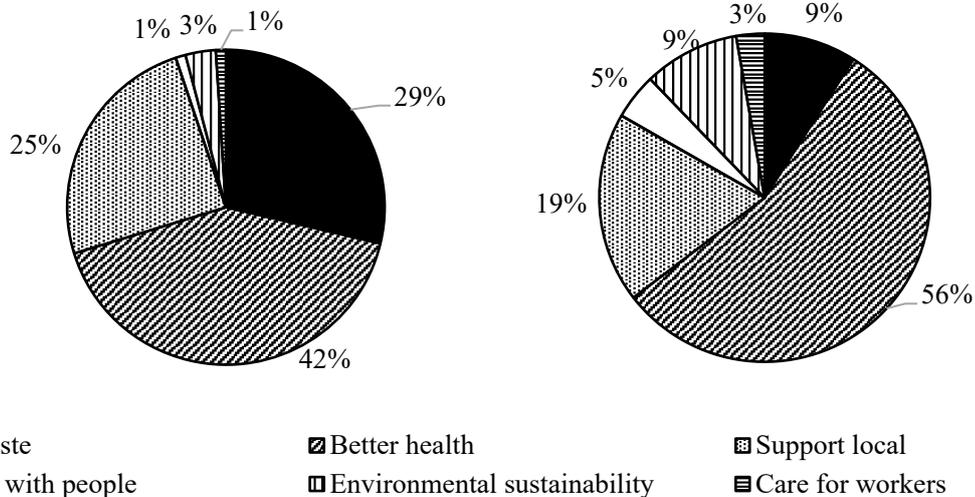


Fig. 5: The top reason of AAFI participation or choosing organic/local food among AAFI participants (right) and the general population (left)

Table 4: Number of respondents regarding reasons for AAFI participation (n=288)

| | Better taste | Better health | Support local | Connect with people | Environmental sustainability | Care for workers |
|--------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| First | 26 | 160 | 54 | 13 | 27 | 8 |
| Second | 80 | 55 | 76 | 15 | 43 | 19 |
| Third | 29 | 29 | 84 | 25 | 73 | 48 |

Note: Food bank volunteers were asked to answer their reasons for choosing organic/local food.

3.3. Community Engagement

The data showed significant differences between AAFI participants and the general population for all elements of community engagement, including connection to the community, volunteerism, and civic/political activities, with AAFI participants demonstrating higher levels. Fig. 6 shows the average value of the Likert questions of the pillar of community engagement. Within the category of connection to the community, 'belongingness to the community' and perception of 'one's impact in the community' are particularly low. However, *Providers* and *Self-providers* demonstrated relatively higher connection. Additionally, the respondents demonstrated little 'interest in local politics', including 'sharing their opinions with the government', while they tend to 'vote' more often. When asked about their experience in volunteering and civic/political activities over the past year, Fig. 7 displays that 78% of the general population reported no volunteering experiences, and Fig. 8 illustrates that 49% of them were inactive in civic/political sectors. On one hand, 44% of the AAFI participants had no experience volunteering in the past year, and 22% had no experience with civic/political practices. When compared, AAFI participants have a greater interest in and more experience with community engagement than the general population, despite the presence of many with no experience in the past year. Table 5 presents the respondent ratio for community engagement questions across different group categories. More discussion on these topics is presented in Section 4.

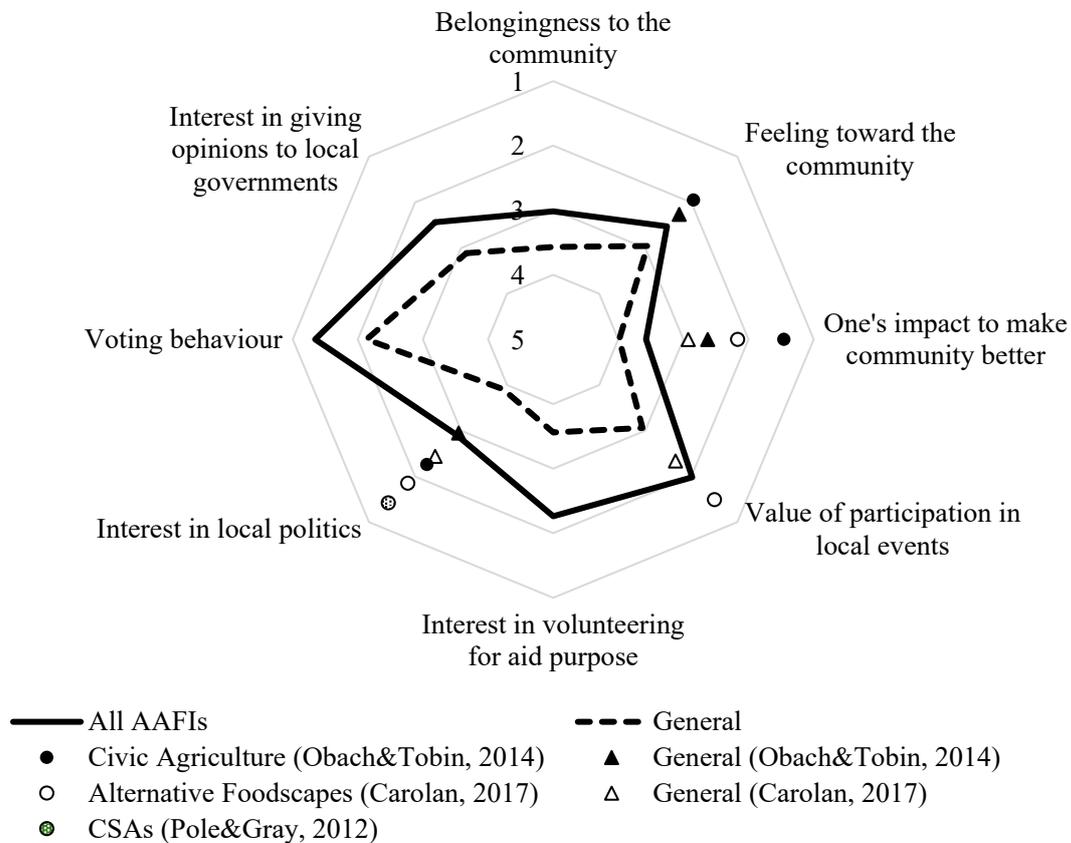


Fig. 6: Levels of community engagement
 (Note: According to observation and nature of the initiative, the interest in volunteering for the food bank volunteers are 1: very interested.)

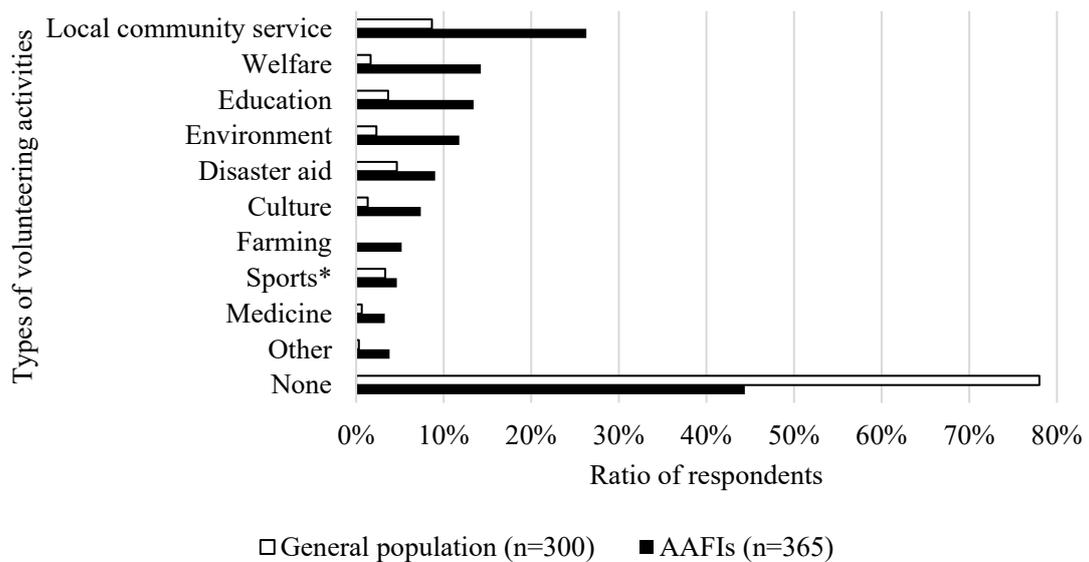


Fig. 7: Volunteering experience in the past year
 (Note: Food bank volunteers were asked to indicate activities other than food bank volunteering.)

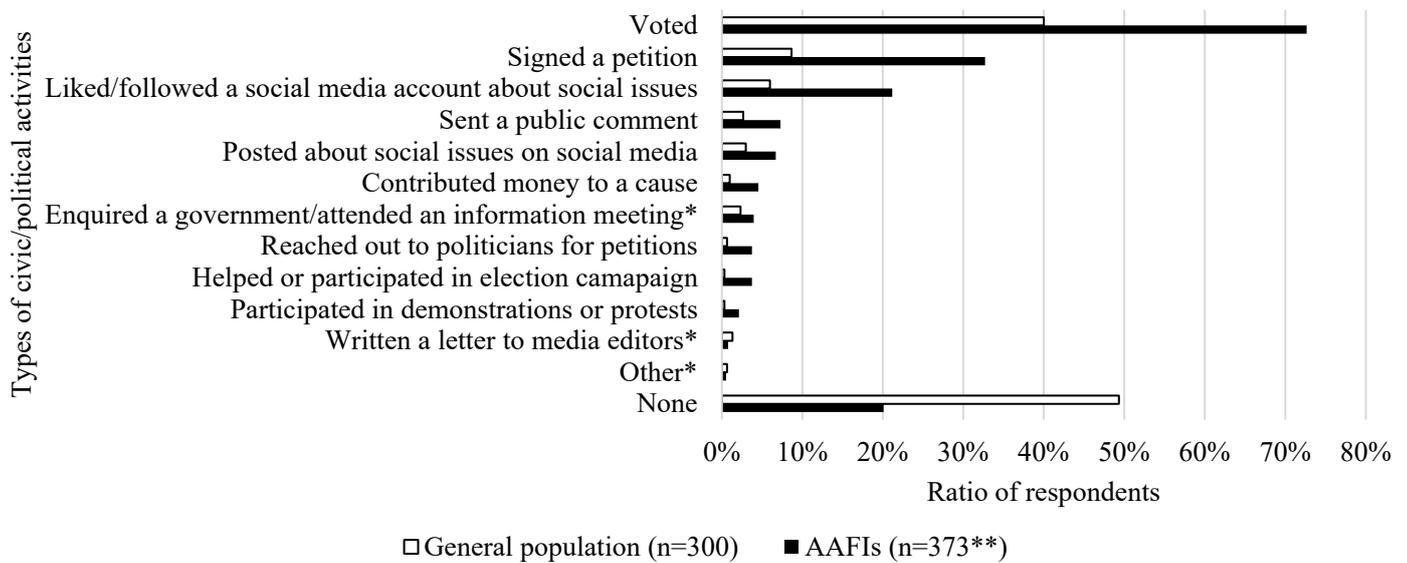


Fig. 8: Civic/political experience in the past year
 (**: n=151 for government enquiry and a public comment. Due to a technical issue, the online version of the survey did not include the items of 'Enquired a government/attended an information meeting' and 'Sent a public comment' when asking about civic/political participation in the past year.)

Table 5: Survey results (%)

| | Recipien -ts I | Recipien -ts II | Self-provider s | Provider s | Redistri-butors | All AAFIs | General |
|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| Belongingness in community [strong] or [somewhat strong] | 26 | 24 | 43 | 53 | 20 | 29 | 8 |
| Feeling toward the community [very comfortable] or [somewhat comfortable] | 47 | 33 | 59 | 38 | 34 | 39 | 16 |
| Impacts in community [big impact] or [somewhat big impact] | 8 | 12 | 27 | 21 | 9 | 13 | 5 |
| Value of regular participation in local activities [extremely important] | 28 | 29 | 54 | 59 | 18 | 33 | 3 |
| Frequency of voting [always] | 77 | 84 | 60 | 71 | 89 | 79 | 49 |
| Interest in local politics [very interested and watch events closely] or [somewhat interested in particular subjects] | 38 | 20 | 39 | 47 | 31 | 29 | 10 |
| Interest in giving opinions to local governments [very interested] or [somewhat interested] | 50 | 45 | 63 | 68 | 43 | 50 | 25 |

3.4. Sustainability

The sustainability pillar also showed significant differences between the general population and AAFI participants. However, this time, there is a different trend among economic sustainability and other elements. As Fig. 9 shows, more AAFI participants reported their understanding of the

term 'sustainability', 'interest in social justice', and 'concern for climate change' than the general population. On the one hand, the general population showed a higher level of belief in the role of other governance elements, the state and the market, in economic sustainability, as is illustrated in Fig. 10. The general population agreed more with statements such as 'Private enterprise is the best way to solve Japanese economic problems', 'It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes', and 'the GDP of a country must keep growing' than AAFI participants. In response to the question about what they associate with the term 'sustainability', as shown in Fig. 11, 'food issues' and 'climate change' were the top two answers for both general and AAFI respondents, whereas three of the four least chosen answers were related to inequality, such as in 'education', 'gender', 'national and international', which are profoundly social. Fig. 12 shows the respondents' practices for environmental and ethical consumption. It also displays the overall significance of AAFI participants' proactivity, compared to the general population. More discussion on this consumption pattern is held in Section 4.

Overall, findings show that AAFI participants in Kobe demonstrate higher levels of food citizenship than the general population. The following section is dedicated to synthesising the findings, integrating questions, literature, observations, and theories to better understand how AAFI participants demonstrate food citizenship.

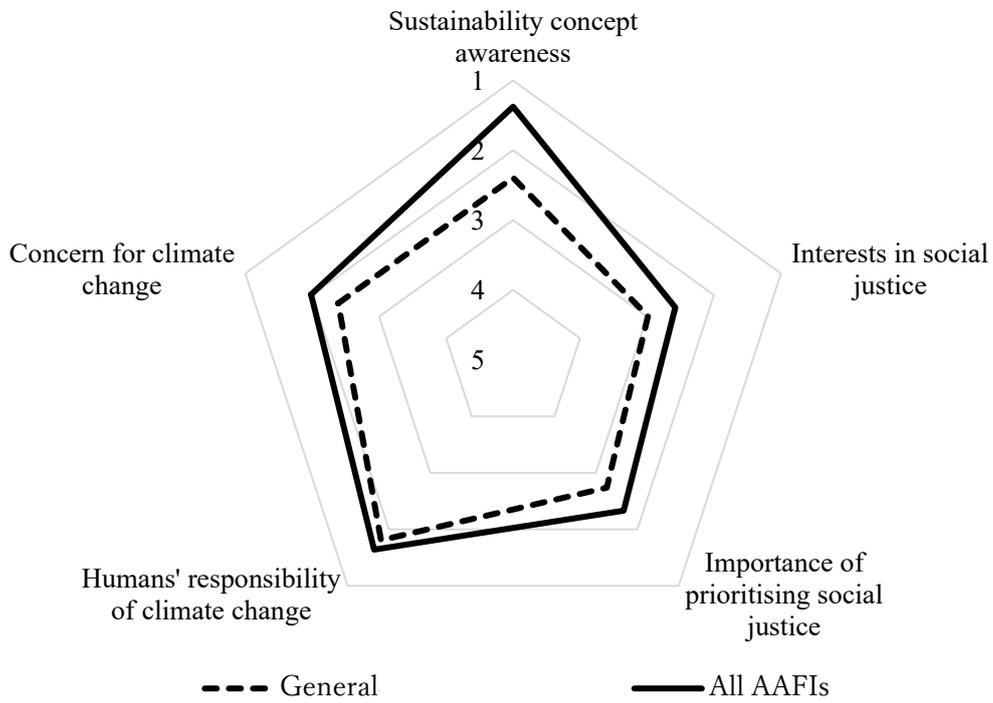


Fig. 9: Levels of perception on the overall concept, environmental, and social sustainability

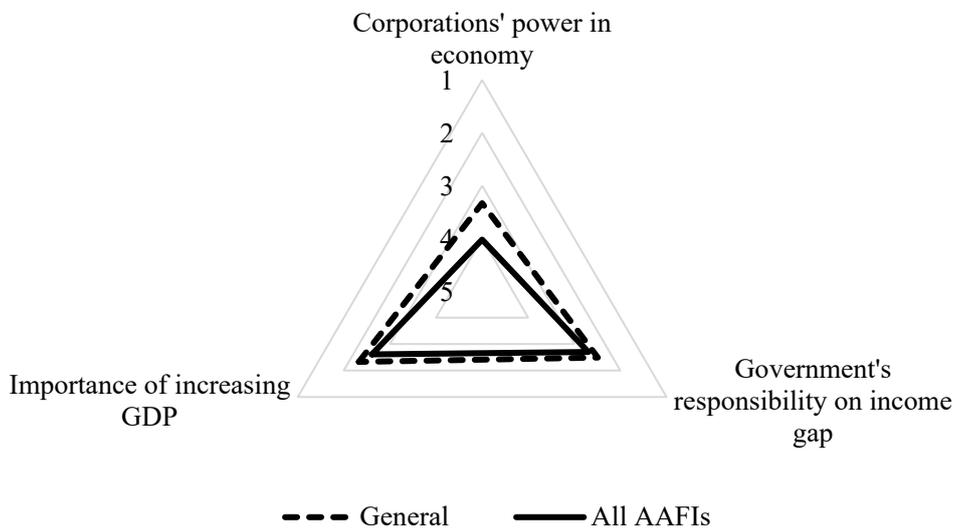


Fig. 10: Expectation of other governance sectors on economic sustainability

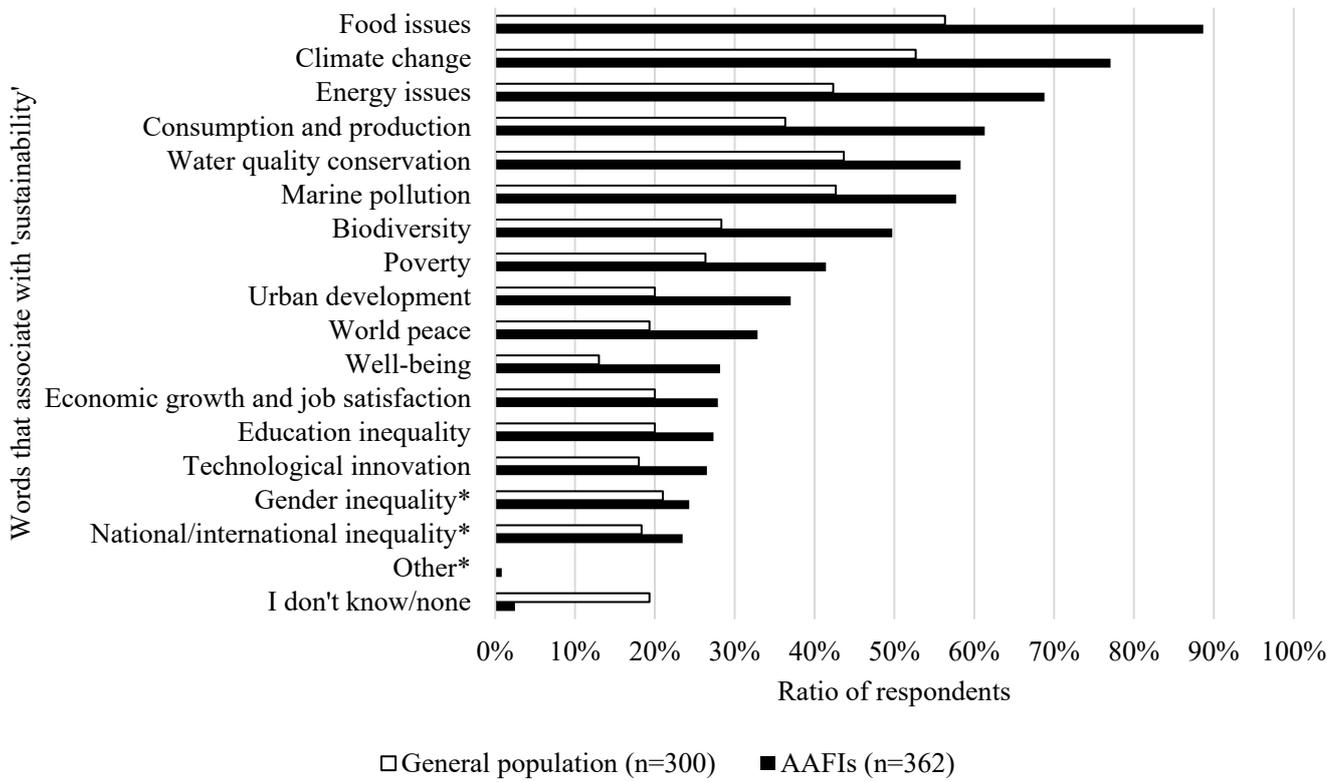


Fig. 11: Words respondents associate with the term 'sustainability'

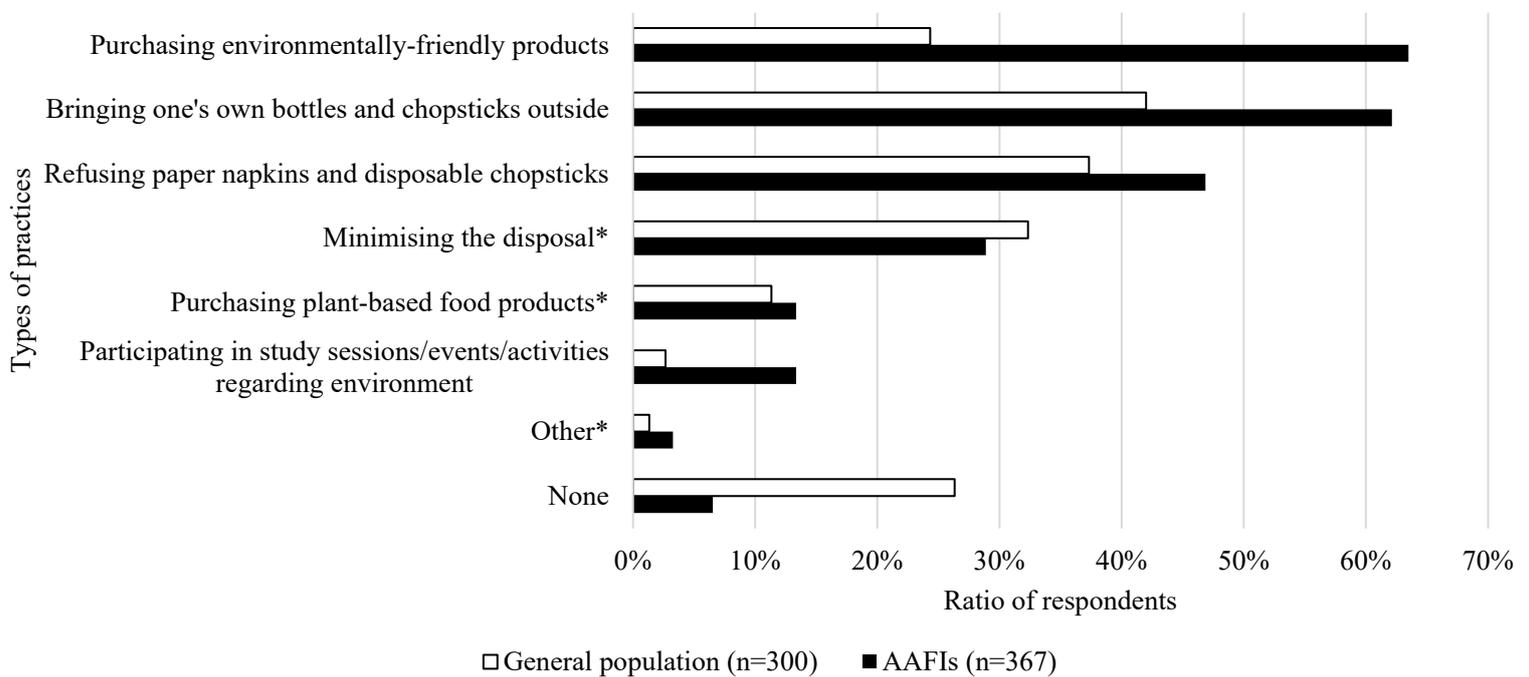


Fig. 12: Practices for environmental and ethical consumption

4. Discussion

4.1. National over Local Agri-Food

One characteristic of AAFI participants' styles of showing food citizenship that became clear is that they prioritise the national level over the local level when it comes to matters regarding agriculture and food. As shown in the previous section, in terms of interest in agriculture and the choice of vegetables and fruits, AAFI participants focus more on the national level than the local level. AAFI participants prioritising national levels over the local may seem contradictory to the normative idea of alternative food movements being active in local food systems. However, it is sensible when the historical backgrounds of AAFIs in Japan and people's mindsets when choosing food are taken into consideration. *Teikei* movements, which many AAFIs pay respects and derive their characteristics from, were developed by 'housewives' fighting for safe and healthy food for their family (Kondoh, 2015). National surveys indicate that people in Japan tend to associate food safety with domestically produced food, particularly in comparison to imported food (Japanese Government, 2008; Murata, Masaki, & Hagiwara, 2016). While AAFI participants persist in caring whether the food is domestically grown, in comparison to imported food, this research also showed that the focus on national-level food production is significantly greater than on locally grown food. Considering that the general population showed no significant differences for them at both local and national levels, both in food and agriculture, the focus on

the national level by the AAFI participants is relatively significant.

These explain the strong tendency of AAFIs to be persistent in prioritising domestically produced food with a special focus. Additionally, the reasons to join their AAFIs indicate that acquiring 'healthy' food is most popular, which was a vital factor in *teikei* movements, followed by 'supporting the local producers and organisations'. These findings also align with the national surveys conducted in 2008 and 2016, which may explain their concentration at the national level of agri-food matters (Japanese Government, 2008; Murata et al., 2016). This trend of AAFI participants focusing more on the national level than the local is one characteristic that this case in Kobe offers about the Japanese situation.

There is, however, room to question how the respondents understood the word 'local'. In the survey, we did not specifically define the term and put it next to the national and general level, hoping that they practice their own thoughts; thus, there is a possibility that the respondents thought about very narrow areas, such as their neighbourhood of ten houses, which leads to the situation that it is almost impossible to expect to acquire locally grown vegetables and fruits. Finding and discussing the thoughts behind them is beyond the scope of this paper, which can be a further investigation in the future. Despite this point, the survey revealed a strong discourse among AAFI participants that domestically grown vegetables and fruits are safe, thus healthy, which offers a new perspective to the alternative agri-food literature.

4.2. Practice in Community

AAFI participants exhibit a unique trend in their community engagement, characterised by low connection to the community, limited civic/political engagement and relatively high volunteerism. Low connection to the community may reflect a broader condition of ambient disconnection in contemporary Japan, where individuals navigate social life through affective withdrawal rather than institutional belonging (Allison, 2013). Interestingly, except for *Providers*, more respondents reported they are comfortable in their community than they feel they belong there. The affective comfort that some people experience in local communities, despite lacking a strong sense of belonging, may suggest their comfort is from a quiet distancing from the traditional and normative scripts of community (Bader, 1995). Simultaneously, the relative discomfort experienced by the *Providers* may be explained by the more traditional and close-knit community of rural areas, where they need to share numerous incidents and responsibilities, such as water management, meetings, and emergency responses (Matsuoka, 2007; Torigoe, 2007). When we investigated the group categories, *Providers* and *Self-providers* have relatively higher senses of belonging to their community and value participation in local events. Indeed, the most popular answer for the question regarding the importance of joining local events by

the two group categories was 'extremely important'. The outcome may be explained by their practices of joining seasonal and local festivals to gather, especially for *Providers*, which leads to internalising the importance of these events by practising them regularly. Additionally, these *Providers* often serve other AAFIs as lecturers, such as for *Self-providers*, where they emphasise the necessity of blending in and working together with the community in rural areas.

By contrast, as few as 13% of the AAFI participants think they have a 'big impact' or 'somewhat big impact' on their community, which is still significantly more than the general population, which has only 4.7% of respondents who think the same way. The perception of the respondents' impact on the community differs greatly from empirical studies in the U.S. (Carolan, 2017; Obach & Tobin, 2014). As Table 6 shows, the AAFI participants in Kobe claimed they had less impact than the general population in the existing literature, who had even less confidence than the participants in civic agriculture in the U.S context. This finding aligns with international comparative survey analyses, which indicate that Japanese people tend to perceive themselves as having less power to change their societies compared to people in other Western and Asian countries (Children and Families Agency, 2024; The Nippon Foundation, 2024). While AAFI participants are not convinced about the impact of their work on their communities, nor are they intentionally active in the community, the survey reveals limited yet some cherishment of connections to communities.

Table 6: Ratio of people who perceive they have a big impact on the community (%)

| | Alternative | General |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|
| Kobe 2024 | 13 | 4.7 |
| Carolan 2017 | 45 | 21 |
| Obach & Tobin 2014 | 76 | 32 |

One notable aspect of the AAFI participants is how voting behaviour is embedded in their practices. It is interesting because respondents' limited interest in local politics, as shown in Table 7, is significant in contrast to the existing literature. A significant lack of interest is observed among *Recipients II* and *Redistributors*, as shown in Table 5. As seen in Fig. 8, 'voting' is by far the most popular civic/political experience in the past year for both AAFI and the general groups, followed by 'signing petitions'; however, the two groups exhibit different levels of practice. This resonates with another question about how often they vote, where 'always' was the most popular answer (see Table 5). Both groups, AAFI participants and the general population in Kobe, although their levels of interest and practice differ, exhibit a similar trend in their experiences, which contrasts with the literature based on U.S. cases, where more respondents reported a greater variety of practices. Fig. 8 illustrates that nearly half of the general population and 20% of the AAFI participants in Kobe reported no civic/political activity, indicating their quiet withdrawal from these matters. Simultaneously, the situation may also

reflect the tendency to prioritise the national level over the local one, as the topic here is their interest in *local* politics. Then, the question would be whether the outcome would be different if they were asked about their interests in national politics or politics in general. An international comparative survey result suggests that this is not the case, as people in Japan generally show less interest in politics compared to populations in other countries (Tainaka, 2024). The findings of their active voting behaviour and absence from local politics suggest that people do not necessarily perceive voting as a means of expressing their opinions, but rather as a pragmatic practice.

Table 7: Ratio of people who are very interested in local politics (%)

| | Alternative | General |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|
| Kobe 2024 | 9.9 | 2.0 |
| Carolan 2017 | 39 | 19 |
| Obach & Tobin 2014 | 36 | 21 |

(Note: While Table 5 shows the ratio of those who are ‘very interested’ or ‘somewhat interested’ for cross-comparisons among other questions, Table 7 focuses solely on ‘very interested’ to make it comparable with other studies.)

Unlike other elements of community engagement, volunteerism is a relatively active feature of AAFI participants. Despite their limited connection to the community, AAFI participants engage in volunteer activities, particularly in ‘community service’, as shown in Fig. 7. When compared to existing literature, the ratio of people with volunteering experience in this case study was somewhat similar, as shown in Table 8. Considering the low connection to the community, interest and involvement in local politics, the relatively high level of volunteerism makes it a unique feature of food citizenship in Japan. Research in Japanese contexts suggests that participating in local activities may even lead to increased voting (Park, Inagaki, & Tsuchiya, 2017), which aligns with the relatively widespread practice of voting. Moreover, volunteering in Japan has traditionally been viewed as a form of duty, particularly within local communities and schools (Kojima, 2024). With such characteristics, volunteerism as a Japanese characteristic may encourage other practices within elements of food citizenship.

Table 8: Ratio of people with volunteer experience in the past year (%)

| | Alternative | General |
|--------------------------|-------------|---------|
| Kobe 2024 | 59 | 22 |
| Japanese Government 2023 | - | 17 |
| Carolan 2017 | 56 | 26 |
| Obach & Tobin 2014 | 71 | 29 |
| Pole & Gray 2013 | 73 | - |

4.3. Sustainability

Overall, the synthetic analyses reveal several characteristics of AAFI participants that are both

unique and in alignment with discussion in an international context. First, AAFI participants have a greater focus on environmental sustainability than on social sustainability. This trend resonates with some critiques of alternative movements for not being aware of or identifying social issues, such as class and racial differences (Guthman, 2011). The importance they put on environmental and social friendliness when choosing fresh foods did not show statistically significant differences. However, the reasons for joining their practices offer different perspectives. The overall number of respondents who chose the option of supporting 'environmental sustainability' was greater than the number who chose 'care for workers', which attributes to social sustainability. Another question about sustainability perception adds to this trend of social sustainability being less focused on than other elements. For example, when respondents were asked to choose words they associate with their idea of sustainability from 16 various words, three out of the four least popular words were related to inequality, which is a deeply social issue. On the other hand, the most popular chosen word was 'food issues', followed by 'climate change' and 'energy issues'. While the popular words do entail social aspects, the unpopularity of addressing inequality in 'gender', 'education', and 'national and international' settings, as sustainability matters, indicates that social sustainability is relatively neglected compared to environmental sustainability.

Social justice is a vital part of what constitutes social sustainability (Ketschau, 2015). When respondents were asked about their 'interest in learning about social justice' and 'to what extent they think society should make it a priority', the AAFI participants showed significantly more interest in learning and a greater willingness to make it a priority as a society than the general population. When the respondents of the two questions with higher levels of interest in social justice are compared, those who are 'very interested' in learning about social justice were 17%, and those who 'strongly agree' or 'somewhat agree' that making social justice a priority as a society is important were 54% of the AAFI respondents. Tables 9 and 10 show that for all four categories, including AAFIs and the general population in Kobe, as well as alternative eaters and the general population in Colorado (Carolan 2017), this trend of a ratio increase from strong interest in learning to making it a society's priority is observed. This suggests that people may be interested in society making progress in social justice for them, but they are less interested in learning about social justice themselves. This gap may be attributed to the so-called value-action gap in sustainability. According to the scoping review on the 'gap between possessing social justice values and engaging in social justice action', an iterative process formed by the reciprocal influence of internal and structural factors may improve practices in society (Hagar, Thomas, & Reisch, 2025), which, in this case, involves learning about social justice themselves. In relation to the value-action gap of sustainability, Fig. 12 provides further insight into respondents less willing to try to learn about environmental sustainability. The longitudinal investigation

regarding the process of nurturing social justice engagement in relation to sustainability, a pillar of food citizenship, remains to be explored.

Table 9: Ratio of 'very interested' people in learning/reading about social justice (%)

| | Alternative | General |
|--------------|-------------|---------|
| Kobe 2024 | 17 | 7.3 |
| Carolan 2017 | 53 | 20 |

Table 10: Ratio of people who agree with putting social justice as a priority to spread (%)

| | Alternative | General |
|--------------|-------------|---------|
| Kobe 2024 | 54 | 33 |
| Carolan 2017 | 61 | 39 |

Another characteristic of AAFI participants is their environmentally friendly purchasing practices, which also have synergies with the contexts of existing literature. As Fig. 12 shows, for AAFI participants, the most popular practices they adopted for environmental friendliness and ethical consumption were 'purchasing environmentally-friendly products', 'bringing their own bottles and chopsticks outside', and 'refusing paper napkins and disposable chopsticks'. On the other hand, for the general population, the three most popular practices are related to consuming less: 'bringing their own bottles and chopsticks outside', 'refusing paper napkins and disposable chopsticks', and 'minimising the disposal'. The AAFI participants engage more in these conscious practices than the general population overall and *buy* more environmentally friendly products, whereas the general population tends to conserve resources by consuming or using fewer materials. The capacity of AAFI participants to exercise their purchasing power aligns with critiques of the alternative food networks literature, which argues that ethical consumption is only possible for economically and socially privileged consumers, and that it reproduces the neoliberal social structure that the initiative initially opposed (Guthman, 2008). The ethical consumption patterns align with the literature because products promoted as environmentally friendly are often more expensive than those that are not. The demographics of this case study indicate that the AAFI participants are relatively well-off and possess higher social capital, particularly in terms of education, compared to the general population. Therefore, the AAFI participants tend to have the capacity to purchase environmentally friendly products, not only saving energy and resources.

When considering economic sustainability and its related issues, AAFI participants demonstrate uniqueness, showing their expectations differ from those of the general population and from international survey results with comparable questions in other countries. They do not expect much from other governance institutions, governments and markets. Among respondents from other countries and the general population, the AAFI participants agreed the least with statements, such as ‘Private enterprise is the best way to solve [COUNTRY’S] economic problems’ and ‘It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes’ (ISSP Research Group, 2023). Interestingly, Japanese respondents in the international survey are among the least who expect corporate actors and government to play strong roles. Figs. 13 and 14 illustrate that Japanese people tend not to rely on other governance actors, in contrast to the international average. It is also notable that when asked about the necessity of growing GDPs, the general population is more optimistic about the current scheme of trying to increase the GDPs, while more respondents of AAFIs claimed that they disagree. These findings regarding the respondents’ opinions on economic problems and sustainability suggest that AAFI participants have limited expectations of governments and markets, which are also governance bodies, along with civil society. A possible explanation for this trend can be that AAFI participants tend to have a higher income, making this topic less of a personal issue, and/or they are less reliant on or have lost hope in the government. Some comments made by AAFI participants during participatory observation suggests the latter, which tended to disfavour working with or for the government.

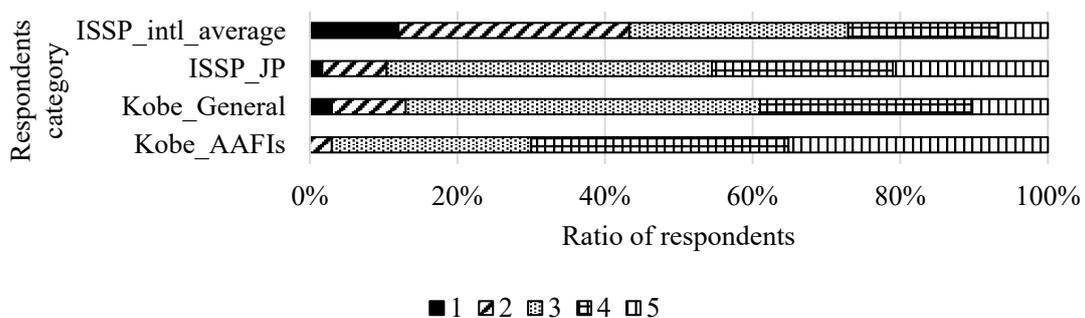


Fig. 13: Responses to ‘Private enterprise is the best way to solve [COUNTRY’S] economic problems.’ (1: strongly agree ~ 5: strongly disagree)

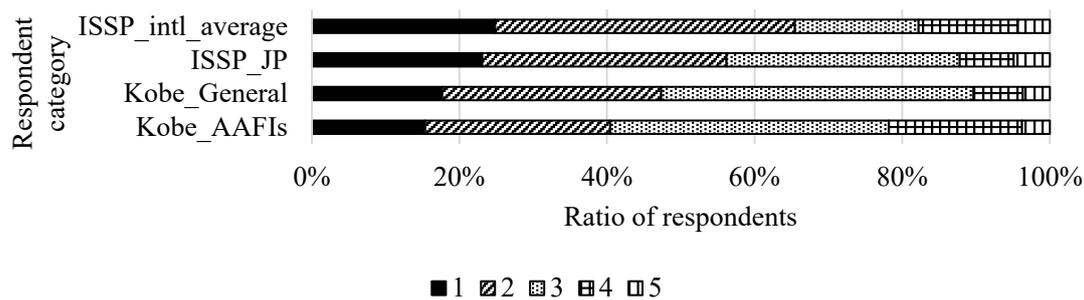


Fig. 14: Responses to ‘It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.’
(1: strongly agree ~ 5: strongly disagree)

4.4. Quiet Food Citizenship

Based on the findings and discussions presented in this paper, the characteristics of AAFI participants, who experience relatively low connection to the community and low engagement with local politics, make it challenging to identify acts of *food* citizenship that lead to ruptures in the dominant food systems in the current context of Kobe, Japan. What is observed instead, is that civic and political presence is relatively quiet, rather than highly visible and disruptive to rupture the status quo.

The concept of ‘silent citizenship’ (Gray 2015) provides us with a tool to consider the situation. While acts of citizenship and other scholarly discussions on food citizenship focus on ‘vocal’ and visible engagement, including directly addressing opinions to local governments, silent citizenship tries to focus what happens on the silent side, seeing the traditional way of perceiving it as personal withdrawal from politics only captures part of the domain of silent citizenship, which has also a spectrum of reasons for being silent (Gray, 2015). When we situate silent citizenship engagement in the extended spectrum with vocal citizenship engagement, it becomes an accumulative site of tension, rather than a passive endpoint. Over time, such quiet engagement may reach a threshold and shift toward more vocal expressions, giving rise to acts of citizenship that challenge and disrupt the dominant systems. In other words, silent citizenship may be a soil for acts that potentially lead to rupture.

The synthetic discussion in the previous sections suggests that the case of AAFI participants in Kobe demonstrates *quiet* food citizenship, albeit not silent, given its relatively vocal nature compared to the general population. Fig. 15 illustrates the current level of *vocal* food citizenship engagement among AAFI participants in Kobe, Japan, in food governance. This engagement involves integrating their participation in markets through various means of

acquiring food and engaging in alternative initiatives, rather than direct engagement with the local government. From the *quiet* food citizenship perspective, inactiveness and indifference in politics, as well as low connection to the community, reported by the respondents, can be interpreted as their quiet resistance against following the existing scripts of current politics and community norms. To put it differently, what they demonstrate may be a practice of objection. Then, AAFI participants with higher levels of engagement with various practices and interest in community and politics than the general population may be perceived as being in the process of becoming vocal, but still relatively quiet when viewed in the global context.

Furthermore, another soil for rupture within the scope of *quiet* food citizenship is observed in the case study. The dissatisfaction of both AAFI participants and the general population toward the other governance actors, the government and the market, in terms of economic sustainability, can be interpreted as their dissatisfaction with the current neoliberal regime. While the dissatisfaction is silent, it displays their active disagreements. What is noteworthy is that not only AAFI participants but also the general population experience this ‘struggle’, which is significant in global comparison. The reason the shared struggle by both AAFI participants and the general population, i.e. ‘food citizens’ and ‘non-food citizens’, is important is that both ‘citizens’ and ‘noncitizens’ need to be involved in the enactment of citizenship that leads to rupture and transformation (Isin, 2024, pp. 72–74). For ‘food citizens’ to reach ‘non-food citizens’, *Providers* and *Self-providers* may play a significant role in Kobe because of their capacity with relatively high connection to the community, regardless of their comfort level there.

However, as Gest (2015) warns about silent citizenship, what is observable in the *quiet* food citizenship is a signal, which means that further investigation on the basis and nature of the respondents’ choices and intentions is necessary. Moreover, the process of nurturing food citizenship and emerging from silence for some AAFI participants remains to be assessed through more in-depth and longitudinal qualitative research, including both looking back on and forward to their lives, which can provide clues for ruptures in the dominant food systems.

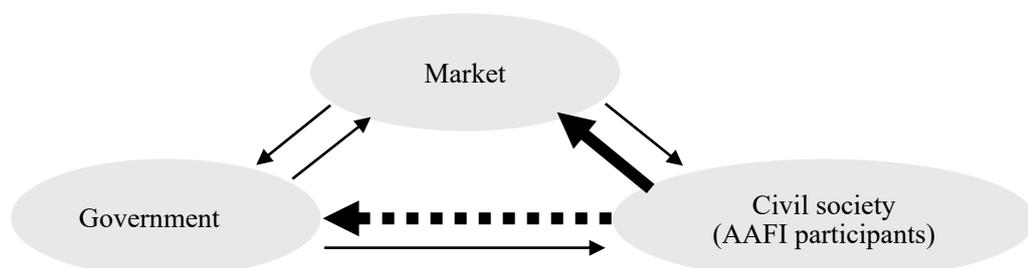


Fig. 15: *Vocal* food citizenship engagement in Kobe in food governance
(Note: modified Figure 2 from Renting et al., 2012)

5. Conclusion

The study has revealed previously unexplored aspects regarding the concept of food citizenship, allowing for the expansion of the idea and theory. To understand the current situation of food citizenship in Japan under neoliberal food governance, this paper examined the daily agri-food activities, community engagement, and sustainability perceptions and behaviours of AAFI participants in Kobe. Through synthetic analyses of the general population, literature, international surveys, and theoretical engagement with critical citizenship studies, certain characteristics of food citizenship among AAFI participants were revealed, some of which align with international discussions, while others do not.

The characteristics of food citizenship among AAFI participants in Kobe that align with Western scholarship and the practical situation are as follows: volunteerism, concerns about environmental sustainability over social sustainability, a value-action gap in sustainability, and their demographics with economic and social capitals. On the other hand, low levels of connection to the community and *vocal* civic/political engagement, care for agri-food at the national level more than the local level, and dissatisfaction with government and market in economic sustainability, are the characteristics of AAFI participants found in this study that are unique to the case in Kobe.

As a city with a rich civic history and a tradition of volunteerism, active engagement was initially expected in Kobe, and indeed, it was observed at a higher rate compared to the general population. However, when viewed in the global context, the relative quietness of AAFI participants in political scenes suggests that *quiet* food citizenship is a trend in the country. Since *quiet* citizenship is on a spectrum, whether and to what extent individuals are consciously practising their *quiet* food citizenship needs further investigation. Our findings show that AAFI participants demonstrate higher levels in each pillar, indicating that they do have the potential to be drivers in enacting food citizenship in *vocal* ways in the future. Currently, what they demonstrate is rather quiet, but they engage *vocally* much more than the general population, which we see as a potential.

From conceptual and theoretical perspectives, we suggest an expansion of understanding political agency among participants of AAFIs. While *vocal* food citizenship has traditionally been a focus in the literature on food citizenship and food democracy, which connects to acts of *food* citizenship that rupture and transform dominant systems, *silent/quiet* food citizenship should not be ignored. To put it differently, we suggest expanding the idea of *doing* to include *being quiet* as a form of practice, in addition to the status quo in agri-food studies. Without a careful investigation into quietness and its spectrum, it is difficult to understand the

political agency of ‘food citizens’ as a whole. The concept of silent/quiet citizenship will be an important lens for making sense of quiet democratic societies, such as Japan, where people tend not to speak up and demonstrate low interest in politics (Tainaka, 2024). While this study aims to understand food citizenship within the Japanese context and expand the global discussion, it remains grounded in conceptual frameworks shaped by the democratic environment of the Global North. This limitation invites further investigation to reflect diverse situations in other contexts. Furthermore, given the uncertainty about what constitutes quietness and the intentions behind it, in-depth qualitative research with longitudinal analyses of surveys and interviews should be a necessary step toward a deeper understanding.

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