

**Nicolas Sternsdorff-Cisterna, *Food Safety after Fukushima: Scientific Citizenship and the Politics of Risk***

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“Even after two years of living in Japan, thinking, studying, and researching radiation, I never closed the gap between *anzen* and *anshin* in my own life. The two terms always existed in a productive tension, never to be fully resolved” (138). Nicolas Sternsdorff-Cisterna’s final observations about his own experience of the fieldwork for this thought-provoking book sum up the key concern of the book: how to make sense of subjective notions of food safety and negotiate the notions of scientific evidence (*anzen*) and the affective idea of safety (*anshin*).

Food is a fascinating arena to explore as it combines multilayered aspects of human life, such as nutrition, sensuality, aesthetics, provenance. The author specifically focuses on the growing sense of insecurity that resulted from the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Drawing on Aihwa Ong’s notion of flexible citizenship (2006), Sternsdorff-Cisterna proposes the concept of scientific citizenship, “a transformation in the relationship between citizens and the state that is catalyzed and mediated by the acquisition of scientific literacy” (3). This multi-sited ethnography portrays the attempts of a broad range of citizens in their daily lives to “amass enough knowledge to critically assess expert advice and deciding, in this case, to circumvent the State’s expertise in order to protect the health and lives of current and future generations” (3). The author contends that the events of March 2011 were “a catalyst that encouraged some people in Japan to acquire scientific literacy they could use to critically evaluate the state’s handling of the crisis” (5).

During twenty-seven months of fieldwork between 2011 and 2013, with follow-up visits during 2014–2016, the sociocultural anthropologist attended over seventy study sessions about radiation and food, and he conducted participant observation at a food co-op, informal interviews, and sixty in-depth interviews with farmers, activists, retailers, radiation experts, and government officials. The author was based in Tokyo and took twelve research trips to affected areas in the northeastern region of Japan known as Tohoku.

This book consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the notion of scientific citizenship and risk, outlining the theoretical concepts underpinning the book and the background of the research. Chapter 2, “Historical Antecedents: Gender and the Environment,” discusses a history of female activism in Japan and gendered perceptions

in individuals' views of radiation in Japan. Chapter 3 dissects the role of experts and the circulation of information after the Fukushima nuclear accident, which spread radiation across the region. In the second part of this chapter, the growing influence of social media is explored as a means of lowering the barriers to participation for a wide range of citizens and challenges to state narratives (73).

Chapter 4 analyzes the production and circulation of radiation data. This chapter ultimately illustrates that despite pervasive attachment of humans to *anzen* (i.e., scientific evidence for claims to safety), readings and results of radiation may vary depending on testing conditions and the technological equipment used. The author compellingly argues that this “indeterminacy has contributed to the sense of uncertainty and some of the conflicting interpretations of the severity of the crisis” (19).

Chapter 5 introduces the perspectives of food producers in Fukushima Prefecture, emphasizing the discrepancy of physical space and its symbolic representations and its devastating implications for local farmers.

The last chapter, “Finding Safe Food: Mothers and Networks of Trust,” conveys the narratives and concerns of mothers in Japan, focusing on the relationship between safety as a technical measurement (*anzen*) and the search for confidence (*anshin*) in the procurement of food. The author describes his participant-observation in a group of seven women who formed a reading group on the themes of food safety and radiation, offering fascinating glimpses into intergenerational change and the growing sense of uncertainty.

Sternsdorff-Cisterna's ethnography constitutes an important contribution to recent research on Tohoku restoration efforts, post-disaster anthropology, and food safety discourses. It combines extensive fieldwork with the compelling theoretical concept of “scientific citizenship” and makes a vivid case that safety is more than scientific evidence but shaped to a large degree by the social context that stakeholders are embedded in.

I have only two critiques: First, drawing on Anne Allinson (2013), the author emphasizes the “precariousness of everyday life” (16) throughout the book; yet, the neoliberal aspect of precarity in the lives of people depicted could have been focused on more in this reviewer's opinion. Numerous organic farmers are discussed throughout the chapters, yet no mention is made of what has persuaded these individuals to opt for organic farming rather than conventional agriculture. More often than not, such decisions tend to be influenced by neoliberal aspects of entrepreneurship rather than grand value judgments. Second, the author's cheerful claim that “middle-class mothers, the affluent, the poor, and those whose livelihoods and homes were destroyed by the accident all coexist in precarity now” (16) contradicts previous findings in disaster studies that have clearly shown the pervasive stratification of victimhood in disaster situations and the higher vulnerability of materially less privileged strata of society (Aldrich 2012, 2019). Numerous researchers in disaster studies have empirically shown that the elderly and the poor are generally worst affected. In Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, one of the places in Tohoku with a high number of victims during the triple disaster, electricity was restored first in the most affluent area located on top of a hill. This brings in the much-loathed issue of social class: it would have widened the scope of the book if the perspectives of single mothers and freeters had been included in addition to the narratives that are pervaded by affluence, privilege, and education. I suspect that individuals need a certain level of material affluence to focus on issues of food safety.

In sum, this ethnography is an important contribution to anthropology, area studies, and food studies and will be a useful teaching resource for both undergraduate and graduate courses.

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