

A story in Fukushima

The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 still affects people's lives even 12 years after the disaster. Fukushima Prefecture, located in the south of the Tohoku area where the earthquake struck, is the third largest prefecture in Japan and is blessed with a rich nature that includes many national parks. Furthermore, it has the fifth largest population of farmers in Japan, especially in rice production, the staple food of the Japanese people. However, the earthquake and tsunami caused tremendous damage, and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident forced many people to evacuate their hometowns. Today, many fields have been restored, and restrictions on access to radiation-affected land have been lifted. However, many people are not returning to their hometowns, and the stigmatized image of Fukushima crops due to fears of radiation has damaged the economy. Furthermore, the local culture, which had been passed down through human connections, is also hard to carry on in these situations.

Food Sovereignty

Food is a cornerstone of self-determination and cultural heritage, and everyone eats something in their daily lives. However, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed a transformation in how food is produced, distributed, and consumed. One of the factors contributing to this is the industrialization of food. Large-scale agriculture produces and processes vegetables and meat, and although there are many products in supermarkets, consumers rarely have the opportunity to know where and how the food was produced. A key idea in addressing these issues is food sovereignty, which is defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."¹ . The aftermath of the Fukushima Daiichi disaster illustrates the complex power dynamics embedded in our food system, whether it is operating as intended or disrupted by disaster.

The Connection Between Food, Anthropology, and Art

My undergraduate major, anthropology, deeply connect with food because food is related to every culture. Furthermore, one of the characteristics of anthropology is grassroots research that engages with local people to describe their culture and history. Furthermore, what anthropologists emphasize when tackling social problems is to propose solutions that are in harmony with the ideas of local people rather than enforcing solutions based on one-sided decisions from the outside. In fact, since last summer, I have been working on an anthropological project to gain food sovereignty within Argentina, and I am trying to ensure that the project is culturally appropriate and sustainable. This anthropological approach shares a high affinity with problem-solving through art. Some recent art projects have involved collaborations with artists to rediscover and disseminate the charms of local communities. Cooking with local products based on local history and culture can be considered artwork because it reconstructs the region's identity. To summarize, cooking and artwork are forms of collective expression and meaning-making.

Project Description

My proposed Project for Peace addresses the intersection of food sovereignty and artistic production in the context of Fukushima prefecture's cultural and economic rebuilding after the 2011 disaster. The project has three main components: anthropological fieldwork, local cooking workshops, and artwork. My university, ICU, is currently conducting a Peace Research Fieldtrip on the former Fukushima nuclear exclusion zone in 2022, and many professors and students are familiar with Fukushima. Therefore, as a first step of my project, I plan to do a presentation for people in ICU to explain my project and gather people who work with me. In addition, I am keeping in touch with a person in Fukushima who has connections with local farmers and the government, and she connects me with those institutions.

The first activity, anthropological fieldwork, will take place in Minamisoma City, Fukushima Prefecture. Minamisoma City is located 30 km from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, and an emergency evacuation order was issued at the time of the disaster. During our stay in Minamisoma, we will interact with local people to understand how people's lives were affected by the disaster and their demands for us. We will also visit local farmers and supermarkets to survey how much they consume locally-grown products. Then, we will ask them to share their cooking methods that are unique to the region. For example, in Minamisoma, people have traditionally cooked dishes such as "Kenchin-jiru"

¹ La Via Campesina. (2003). Food sovereignty. <https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/> (Accessed on 9 January 2023).

using local vegetables and fish from the nearby sea. Such traditional dishes are based on local production and consumption, which could be a key to achieving food sovereignty in Fukushima.

The second activity is to hold workshops to teach local youth and newcomers to the area how to cook traditional dishes. As mentioned earlier, the disaster has made it difficult to pass on traditional cooking methods in Fukushima. Cooking has the power to pass on culture and connect the people who live there from generation to generation. Therefore, I believe that by having elderly people in Minamisoma City take on the role of teaching how to cook in the workshop, we can rebuild the connections between people that have faded. I have already talked with a principal of an elementary school in Minamisoma, and the event will be held for 6th-grade students using the kitchen in the elementary school. Furthermore, the elementary school already focuses on food education, using 50% local products in school lunches and having traditional dishes on their menus. Therefore, this event will build on this existing initiative by offering students opportunities actually to cook by themselves what they usually eat. In addition, local farmers will talk at the beginning of the workshop about how the ingredients were grown and the characteristics of agriculture in Fukushima.

To conclude the above two activities, I would like to do the artwork. The government in Fukushima already held an activity called the "Newborn Fukushima Project through Art" in 2022, so it can be said that people are already familiar with the artwork to some extent. In collaboration with artists, I will make postcards using photographs or drawings of beautiful landscapes, traditional foods, and the smiling faces of the people I encounter during the activities. The reason for making postcards is that by printing them, I can distribute them to a larger number of people, and because of their small size, they can be put up in familiar places. The food will disappear after eating, but I hope the postcards will remind people of the warm memories of cooking and eating together.

Finally, I would also like to hold workshops for cooking traditional Fukushima dishes on my university campus in Tokyo to share the insights of my project. University students often live away from their parents and have few opportunities to eat with somebody or infrequently cook by eating out or eating processed foods. Also, in Tokyo, vegetable prices are high, and there is little farmland, making it hard for them to feel close to the producers. In other words, university students living in Japanese cities need help gaining food sovereignty. Therefore, in the workshop, everyone will cook together using vegetables from Fukushima, based on information on traditional cooking obtained through activities in Fukushima. I also want to tackle the harmful rumors caused by radiation by discussing the impact of the disaster on people's lives. Finally, I plan to distribute kits for growing vegetables at home so that participants can continue to feel the connection with food in their daily lives.

In closing, the 6th-grade students who will participate in the cooking workshop are the first generation that did not actually experience the disaster. In other words, we are entering the stage of passing down the nearly lost culture due to the disaster to the younger generation. To truly recover from the disaster, grassroots efforts to work with local people are needed. Moreover, I believe such efforts to cherish the community and the connections with the people will be a peacebuilding step.

Date	Location	What to do
Week 1-2	Fukushima	-Anthropological Fieldwork Stay in Minamisoma, research food consumption and the influence of the disaster, and learn the traditional way of cooking
Week 3	Fukushima	-Cooking workshop at elementary school in Fukushima Lecture by local farmers about their job and characteristics of agriculture in Fukushima, Cook traditional dishes with elderly people
Week 4	Fukushima	-Artwork Creating postcards with artists and distribute them
Week 5	Tokyo	-Cooking workshop in Tokyo Cook traditional dishes of Fukushima, discuss the impact of the disaster