

THE ROLE OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE DISASTER RECOVERY IN FUKUSHIMA

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Introduction

Does culture contribute to disaster recovery, and if it does, how would this occur? This is a core question of the present paper. As reported in both domestic and international mass-media after the 3.11 Great East Japan Disaster (March 11, 2011), society in post-disaster Japan regards intangible cultural heritage (ICH) such as local performing arts and rituals as a key element of disaster recovery. The survivors have an opportunity to commemorate the victims and to reflect on the future through these heritage activities in local settings. Correspondingly, in the context of disaster recovery the government and private companies also financially support these events. The sudden increase in focus on the role of ICH in the post-disaster recovery is a distinguished feature of the 3.11 Japan Disaster (Kimura 2016; Hashimoto 2015; Lahournat 2016; Takakura 2016, 2018; Takizawa 2019).

On a related note, the sociologist Kyoko Ueda posed an insightful question. ‘Why do those affected by the Great Earthquake conduct traditional events under the emergent conditions?’ She argues the reason for this is that the ritual provides a concept of repetitive time to people who have to deal with practicalities in an irreversible timeline provided by the reconstruction policy. These rituals encourage the people to return their everyday lives (Ueda 2013). In addition, I would like to point out the integrative function of ritual, which serves to bond individuals to society (Michell 1996). The rituals that are part of ICH have two functions: the evocation of a sense of routine and the function of social integration, both of which contribute to the recovery of post-disaster society.

The present paper starts to rephrase this issue in the context of Fukushima disaster and to examine the role of rituals or ICH in the post-disaster context. The type of ICH focused on here is more or less the local religious rituals of Shintoism, which include the local performing arts like *kagura* or *shishimai* and some related festivals. My argument focuses on the role of ritual in cultural heritage in the post disaster setting, and to this end I ask the following questions. How does ritual serve the disaster reconstruction following the Fukushima nuclear accident? Why do people conduct local performing arts and festivals? From this standpoint how do anthropologists contribute the cultural policy of the disaster reconstruction? And, can we propose to policy makers the idea of better management for this type of ICH?

The Difficulties in Fukushima Disaster

There has been much anthropological research on the effects of the disaster following the explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. These studies argue there is a social influence of radioactivity and examine how it damages social reliance and local identity (Gill 2013; Ikeda 2013; Iwagaki et al 2017; McNeil 2013; Uchiyamada 2017; Yamaguchi 2016). One distinct feature of this research is the study of mother-children evacuation (Horikawa 2018; Morioka 2013; Oikawa 2018; Tatsumi 2014). This is the issue of distrust of government and science, which in turn damages the cohesion of family, kin, and local community. While the government decides levels of safety in terms of radiation based on what they consider 'scientific' knowledge, members of a family often cannot agree to accept this information in the same manner. Mothers who have infants or young children in particular would be sensitive to the effect of nuclear radiation on their children.

Yoriko Tatsumi (2014) described how mother-child evacuees risk isolation from their families and local communities. Due to the differentiated risk evaluation of radiation among husbands and wives and the conditions of employment among family members, mothers and children often are evacuated separately from their husbands in areas further from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. This behavior sometimes provokes the criticism of the evacuated mother from those who already accept (believes) the governmental judgements on safety. The explosion at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant therefore has injured the social reliance in family and local community.

How can we explain this phenomenon theoretically? The main reason is the health risk perception of nuclear radiation: this could be called biological citizenship, which is a key idea of Adriana Petryna as related to Chernobyl anthropological studies. The biological citizenship is 'a massive demand for, but selective access to, a form of social welfare based on scientific and legal criteria that both acknowledges injury and compensates for it' (Petryna 2002). While Petryna describes the predicament of those affected by the Chernobyl disaster, she also argues that biological citizenship is a key for building process of civil society in opposition to the socialist regime (Petryna 1995). On the other hand, in the Fukushima disaster we can identify that biological citizenship rather brings the destruction of social tie for family and kin through disabling social consent in anticipation of future events. Sociologist Ulrich Beck states that 'poverty is hierarchic, while smog is democratic' in the contemporary risk society (Beck 1998: 50). The poverty has been distributed to/formed social classes and therefore class struggle would be an important element of the solution. Democratic smog or radiation nullifies the 'traditional' type of solidarity against risk.

Let us combine the predicaments of Fukushima disaster with the role of ritual in disaster recovery. The question to be addressed is how ritual, with its evocation of sense of routine, and the function of social integration work to restore the damaged social ties and community reliance in Fukushima. In other words, should anthropologists propose policy recommendations for disaster recovery emphasizing

the role of rituals that are part of ICH, and detail how these activities work to restore damaged solidarity in the affected communities? My concern is whether my research on ritual activities in ICH may discourage mothers seeking to evacuate from areas affected by Fukushima Disaster, because the emphasis of these ICH rituals in disaster recovery may act as pressure for social integration for those who may be hesitant to evacuate. In the following, I will ethnographically describe two types of ICH ritual activities and examine their effects in the disaster recovery process. Lastly, I also consider the possibility of policy recommendations in terms of ICH ritual activities in post disaster condition.

Two Cases of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Case 1: The first case involves local performing arts, the *shishimai* dance in the mid of August. It is a part of a ritual, which is conducted every four years at Suwajinja Shinto Shrine at Shimoniida village in Iwaki city (Figure 1). The origin of this ritual backs to 17th century (1634). Dancers in three different types of deer-styled masks perform the dance for the local Shinto gods on behalf of rich harvest and off-spring prosperity. It is impressive that approximately twenty men perform the opening dance with wooden miniature phalluses before the deer mask dance. The dance groups and a band with Japanese flute first dedicate the dances to the Shinto shrine and parade through the village streets during the daytime¹.

The youth-men association (*seinenkai*), and the executive member of the *ujiko* – parishioner of the local shrine undertake the leading roles in organization and



Figure 1 Group picture of the Shimoniida *shishimai* dance (August 2015). (Source: Takakura Photo Studio)

1 The ethnographic film of this *shishimai* edited by the author is available at the following website: <http://hdl.handle.net/10097/63692>

management. The *ujiko* is deeply related to the village history. The officers are elected from each street association (*tonarigumi*) every four years. The street association is a neighborhood organization for mutual collaboration of funeral and landscaping which dates back to the era of the Tokugawa Shogunate. The members of the youth-men association come from these street associations. Two weeks before the ritual, they begin to prepare the necessary prepare tools and training. These men gather for preparation at the youth-men association house every evening after the work even in weekdays.

Shimoniida village, where this ritual is held, is located 35 km from Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant; here the condition for residence is categorized as 'safe zone' by the Japanese government. Therefore, there are some people who have evacuated to Iwaki city from regions close to Fukushima Daiichi, which are now classified as 'restricted residence zones' or 'difficult to return to zones'. On the other hand, some people might even evacuate from Iwaki city and relocate to further regions. The year 2011 is an event year. Despite the disaster that occurred in March the local communities decided to organize their festivals, because they wanted to conduct them as usual, although there was some disagreement on this point. Most of the local residents believe that the implementation of the festival somehow contributes to commemoration and recovery.

During my fieldwork I was very surprised at the level of activity of the local social organizations. The youth-men association has an extraordinary role in the integration of community members. The association also implemented a well-organized collaboration with the senior citizen executives who were Shinto parishioners. Above all, the phallus representation or the extraordinary open expression of sexual behavior was quite notable. I believe that this *shishimai* dance is a typical of ritual – providing to people the sense of *communitas* or the liminal phase in the rites of passage. It certainly innovates life and activates/renews the way of communication inside local community.

Case 2: The second case concerns the Nagareyama dance in the town of Futaba (Figure 2). This is dance where women wear samurai costumes and sing local ballads in the annual summer festival in Futaba, which is organized by the Futaba women's association. According to local history, the dance was originally male performance; however, women participated in the performance even in 1960s (Fukushima ken 1964: 1001–1005). The community is located at 5 km from the nuclear power plant. The territory of Futaba is categorized as a 'difficult to return to zone'; thus, even now in 2018 the level of danger is high. The residents of Futaba are now spread across different locations in Japan.

When the nuclear accident happened, Futaba residents evacuated from their homes; one of the places residents went was Tsukuba city, 160 km south from Fukushima Daiichi. Here, Tomiko Nakamura, a leader of the local women's association initiated the ballad dance activity because the association wanted to give a show of thanks for the hospitality of Tsukuba's citizens. The community members had settled in various places, so Ms Nakamura needed to reorganize the dance group. First she needed to



Figure 2
Snap shot of Nagareyama
dance (January 2016).
(Source: H. Takakura)

organize a class to teach the dance and to prepare the special costumes. Due to a shortage of participants some men also joined the dance group after the disaster. Ms Nakamura's activity functions as a node of meeting for those living in different places.

Did this activity help members of the dance group restore the ordinary sense of everyday life they had before the nuclear accident? When the dance was performed, former residents must have imagined life before the disaster and associated this with the tragedy of evacuation and the fact that it is almost impossible to return home. On the other hand, when I continued the interview with Ms Nakamura, I discovered some interesting historical background. According to her, this ballad dance is originally a special program of the annual summer festival of *Soma-Nomaoi*, which is a nationally well-known Shinto festival which includes samurai costume horse racing and the competition of flag-scramble. The main organizer of the festival is the *ujiko* – the parishioner of the local shrine for the citizens of the Soma city. The members of Futaba women's association participated in performing the Nagareyama dance at *Soma-Nomaoi* festival as well as in six other neighboring local communities. The approximate 80 women from Futaba town participated to the *Soma-Nomaoi* festival. The dance group in each community has a chance to participate in *Soma-Nomaoi* every six years due to the rotation of these six locations. Besides the six years opportunity, the local group performs their dance in the annual summer festival in each community. The reason for this participation of six local communities in the *Soma-Nomaoi* festival lies in regional history. These rural communities administratively belonged to Soma city during the Tokugawa Shogunate period (17–19th centuries). The maintenance of the Nagareyama dance affords the recognition of the regional historical legacy from the samurai period and the structured space division once governed by the Soma clan domain (Figure 3).

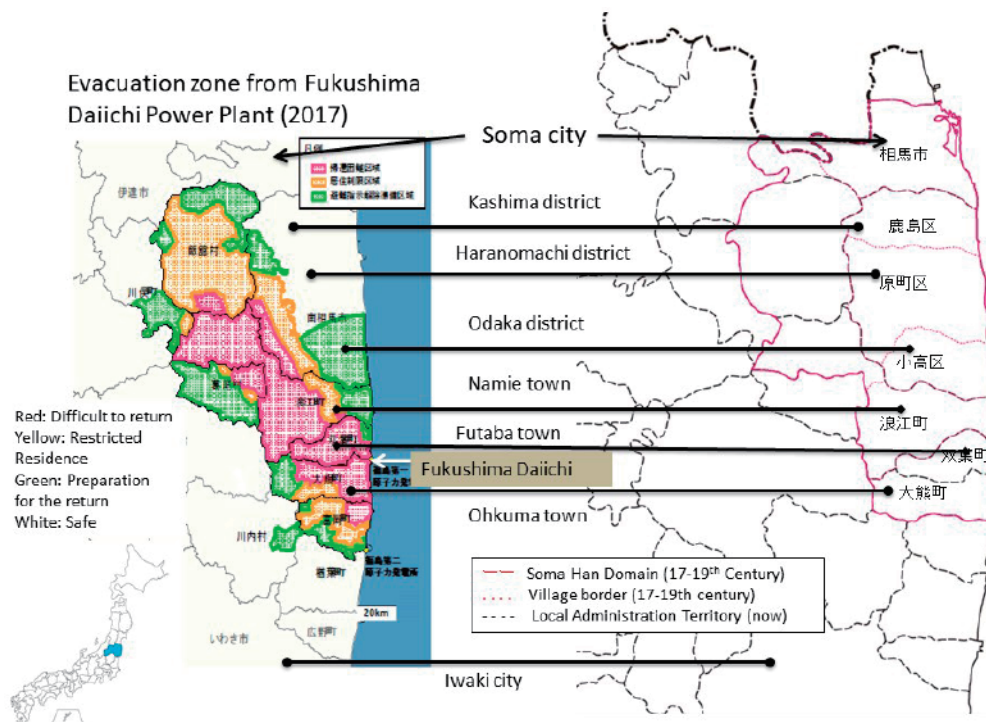


Figure 3 Historical-Cultural Legacy of Social Organization in Fukushima Coast

The Nuer and Fukushima: Two Time Concepts in Intangible Cultural Heritage

I would like to consider the role of ritual in disaster recovery and to further explore the interpretation of the cases to pose the familiar anthropological concept of time stated in the canonical African ethnography of the Nuer by E. E. Evans-Prichard. He describes two different time concepts. The first is ecological time – a reflection of the Nuer’s relations to their environment: ‘it appears to be, and is, cyclical ... the daily timepiece is based on the round of pastoral tasks ... such as milking, driving of the adult herd to pasture’. The second one is structural time – a reflection of the interaction of social groups: ‘(t)he Nuer has another way to stating roughly when events took place ... by reference to the age-set system. Distance between events is reckoned in terms of structural distance, being the relation between groups of peoples. It is therefore entirely relative to the social structure’ (Evans-Pritchard 1969: 95, 105).

How can we consider the theoretical implication of the Nuer’s conception of time to understand the Fukushima case? First we can easily identify the concept of ecological time in both cases. In the case of Fukushima, the cyclical nature that is a feature of ecological time can be seen in the way it may afford people a rhythm of life similar to that before the nuclear disaster, the same argument as in the previous studies on the role of ritual in post disaster setting. On the other hand, I would like to emphasize the elements of structural time seen in the two cases in Fukushima. The collaboration among the young men’s association and the street association, and *ujiko*-Shinto parishioners in *shishimai* dance every four years and that the collaboration of six local

communities participating in Nagareyama dance groups in six-year rotation should be noted. Both rituals are considered in terms of structural distance, being the relation between the groups participating in the events on different years. The participants are able to realize the historical-geographical relations between communities, which have now become difficult to discern. The ritual provides the participants with a sense of structured historical-cultural depth embedded in everyday life. It establishes a sense of 'here and now' among people and, on the other hand, awakens the possibility of alternative multifaceted relationships between people.

The structural time in ritual provides a new way of social integration that goes beyond 'here and now', which may be critical in repairing damaged solidarity or supporting mothers and children who have evacuated due to radiation risk. I would like to consider the political implication of the ritual type of ICH for the evacuees. Both the *shishimai* and Nagareyama dances provide a perception of routine livelihood and social relationships yet also simultaneously demonstrate alternative time-space concepts and potential for new ways of communication. The ritual does not always force people to affirm the context of a given community. Rather it can renew the social structure with some degree of time and space for future. In particular, the practice of Nagareyama dance is a trial both for recovering the once existing historical structure represented by the livelihood of the residents of Futaba and for renewing the social relations of the evacuees from homes in the radioactive areas.

In a post-disaster society, rituals highlight the structured legacy of human life, which are a historical-geographical basis of current everyday life. If one considers the power of rituals that are part of ICH in terms of their contribution to innovations in social structure, it is important to place them at the forefront of future development in a revised form of social organization.

Conclusion

The core question of this paper is how do cultural traditions afford the people a sense of recovery? While I describe the features of the disaster surrounding the Fukushima nuclear accident, I examine a way that rituals as part of ICH work in the post-disaster society. One of my conclusions is that there is a new role of culture or ICH rituals in disaster recovery. Previous studies point to the evocation of sense of routine and social integration as a key for recovery, a phenomenon that is almost identical to the ecological time concept of the Nuer. This paper uncovers the structural time concept in the Nuer and the historical-geographical depth in ritual which may renew previous ways of social integration.

Another conclusion of this study relates to the policy recommendation from anthropologists concerning the advantage of structural time in rituals that are part of ICH. If we consider the role of culture in post-disaster settings, culture should contain not only traditional activities but also modern festival such as pop concerts. I don't deny the effects of the latter. However, anthropologists could advocate for the rituals in ICH because the structural time concept changes ways of social integration. In addition, voluntary leadership based on traditions in rituals is a key for local initiatives

in disaster recovery. The rituals in ICH may be an unparalleled social instrument in certain conditions.

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