

UCL TAKES TOHOKU



RESILIENCE

UCL & Tohoku University Summer Internship
2011 Great East Japan Earthquake

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Over the past few years, University College London and Tohoku University have consistently reaffirmed their institutional commitment to collaborate in addressing global challenges. This dedication has paved the way for the acceleration of joint research efforts in areas of mutual interest.

As a significant part of this partnership, a distinctive summer internship program was meticulously organised with the goal of fortifying these alliances and offering students a unique opportunity to engage in fieldwork within a disaster-prone region often studied during their undergraduate program.



This immersive month-long internship proved to be a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience, presenting students with extensive opportunities for primary data collection. This was achieved through formal and informal interactions with community leaders and the local residents of the towns situated along the Sanriku coastline.

“I have witnessed incredible feats of engineering during my time in the field!

- 20m sea gates in Fudai
- Entire towns such as Otsuchi and Rikuzentakata completely rebuilt”

“Travelling the Sanriku coastline has been incredible... I have enjoyed every minute of it...I believe it is imperative for local communities to be listened to and understood during reconstruction and hazard mitigation, ensuring their specific needs are met and that their cultural practices remain intact”

We want to express our deepest appreciation and heartfelt thanks to all those who generously spared their valuable time to meet and engage in conversations with us. We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have met and learned from these exceptionally resilient individuals.

Resilience in the Tohoku Region

2011 GREAT EAST JAPAN
EARTHQUAKE AND
TSUNAMI

Best summer internship ever!



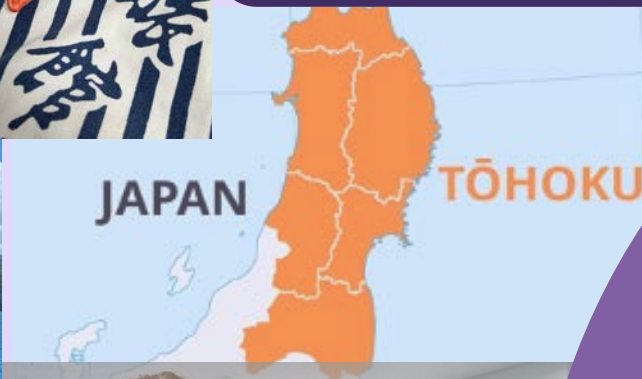
Never having been to Japan, the four of us eagerly travelled to Sendai on the 4th of August 2023 to begin our research journey of the Tohoku region.

Tokyo - Otsuchi, Kamaishi - Rikuzentakata - Tanohata, Miyako, Taro - Fudai - Fukushima - Kuji - Futaba - Okuma Town

Exploring these areas exposed us to a wealth of knowledge, particularly given Japan's profound and distinct culture, as well as their substantial commitment to enhancing disaster preparedness and recovery capabilities.



Travelling along the Sanriku coastline, we indulged in the most delicious and traditional Japanese dishes, taking in idyllic sceneries and meeting the most incredible and resilient people



During our time on the coast, we spent our days hearing from the local people about their experiences during the 2011 tsunami, learning about

the decision making processes of mayors and community leaders as well as being shown all the local Japanese treasures, be that of secret coves, shrines, traditional dances, Tanjiro and Nezuko's village or centuries old Obori Pottery!

We spent our free time either raiding the convinis or on the beautiful beaches either soaking in the sun, attempting to surf or more regularly playing in the waves.



Class is in session

My experience with the Shishi Odori Deer Dance

Class Information

Subject or Course Title	Shishi Odori Deer Dance
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Date and Time	11/08/2023
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Teacher /Professor/ Lecturer	Miwako Kitamura
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Finding My Feet

During our trip to Otsuchi I was fortunate enough to take part in the Shishi Odori Deer Dance, a local traditional dance famous around the world. This is my recount of the lovely day where I learnt to dance like a Deer! On the morning of the 11th I was told that in the evening I would participate in the Shishi Odori dance. This was to my surprise (and horror as I am terribly uncoordinated), but I was very excited as this was a completely new experience for me. I was also very honoured to be taking part because as an outsider I was invited by the dance troop leader to join him and his group in the tradition.

Lesson Overview

Notes	Remarks
The Deer Dance <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="120 470 378 499">• A local tradition	The Deer Dance or Shishi Odori Dance is a local tradition in the town of Otsuchi. it is preformed as a ritual at local shrines and on culutrally important days through the year. The dance troop in Otusuchi are renowned world wide for their powerful and captivating dance. They have been invited by goverments and organsiations all around the world to preform the Shishi Odori dance. The resillience of the Shishi Odori dance troop has been vital in preseerving this local traditon and ensuring that its meaning stays intact.
The role of the Shishi Odori Dance Troop in the aftermath of 3/11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="120 926 402 993">• Evacuation and recovery support	The Shishi Odori dance troop played a huge role in the evacuation and recovery efforts in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake. In their local community they helped save lives by converting their dance hall into a evacuation shelter for locals to flee to. During recovery efforts they allowed local responders to use their dance hall as a base of operation, as well as helping in recovery themselves. On top of this they also used the dance hall as a means to deliver and distribute vital aid, such as food, water, and warm clothes to locally affected people.
The Shishi Odori Dance on the Global Stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="120 1299 367 1367">• Local tradition, gone global	The Shishi Odori Dance Troop have been invited by governments and organsiations all around the world to preform their Deer Dance. The global performances have been quintessential in spreading Otsuchi's culture globally. In the aftermath of 3/11, the fruits of this labour are visible through the global support that Otuschi, and the Sanriku Coast, received from organisations around the world.
My experiance with the Shishi Odori	During our travels along the Sanriku Coast I was fortunate enough to experience some truly amazing cultures and their practices. However, the Shishi Odori dance, for me, stood above the rest in its impact and beauty. From the intricate drumming patterns, to the meticulously choreographed dances and the beautifully crafted outfits, this dance was unlike anything I have ever experienced or will ever again. Due to the kindness of the leader of the Shishi Odori Dance Troop, I was able to partake in the the traditional dance. It was a very enjoyable experience and I had such a great time learning the footwork of the mesmerising dances that are known throughout the world. Credit where credit is due though, the headdresses are very heavy and I think my head may of been a bit too big to fit properly. It is a experience I will never forget and I would love to join the dance troop again for some more practice later in my life.

Practice makes perfect



Finding Our Feet - Image of me and Pippi Nilsson taking part in the Shishi Odori Dance.

A Haiku for the Deer Dance

The deer dance away

The breeze plays a song for them

Can you hear the waves?

THE SANRIKU RAILWAY

When I first saw this internship advertised to me, what stood out was the flexibility within our research. Throughout my time in Japan, I got to narrow that down to something that interested me: the connections between the different entities in disaster recovery. For me, Sanriku encompasses what my research was all about. A physical link between all these places. A glimmer of hope within the disaster.

The Sanriku Railway, stretching from Sakari to Kuji, traces the coast of the Iwate prefecture. This extraordinary journey offers an unrivalled perspective of Japan's natural beauty, showcasing the dramatic mountains and the bright blue ocean. I must say that the views I saw during my many train rides with Sanriku were undoubtedly one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. The trains that operate along this route are often just single carriages being used to transport local residents to school and work. These services are vital among the different communities in the region, as driving in and around the vast mountains is simply not a very practical or sustainable practice.

The importance of the railway was best highlighted during the 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. After the earthquake, even when electricity was not yet up and running, just 5 days after the disaster, sections of the railway continued to operate, providing vital support and resources to communities.



Large sections of the track were washed away, meaning that the company had to rebuild not just a lot of its infrastructure but also a lot of new systems. In 2014, the first full section of the track was completed, resulting in great celebrations when sections were opened. These celebrations alone show how vital the company is to the community.

The company has not only restored vital transportation infrastructure but also fostered innovation and collaboration. One of the most exciting aspects of my time with Sanriku was witnessing their partnerships with various companies to create themed trains with companies. There are even 6 carriages donated by the Qatar Embassy. Each time I encountered one of these thematic trains, it was very exciting, with not only us but also locals taking lots of photos. These collaborations breathed new life into the communities along the route and created a sense of rejuvenation within the area.

By exploring the role of the Sanriku Company in the aftermath of the 3/11 disaster, we gained profound insights into disaster recovery and resilience. The usage of their trains was not only a means of transportation but a conduit for further research. It connected us to the physical landscape and the heart and spirit of the communities along the Sanriku Railway line. The Sanriku Railway is a testament to the strength and resilience of the Japanese people in the face of adversity. This experience has left an indelible mark on my perspective, and I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to be a part of it.



Fukushima

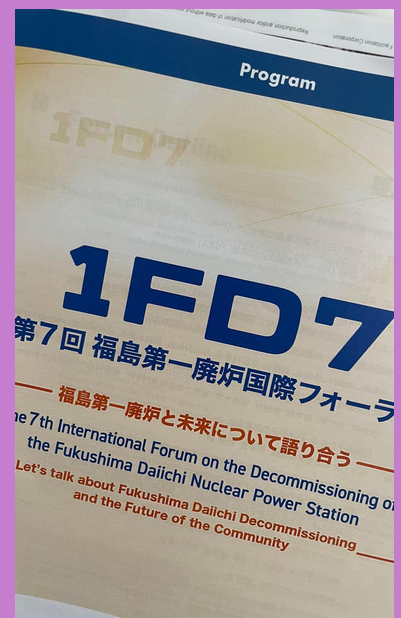
By Sophia Barry

In the final week of our internship in Japan, we had the exciting opportunity to visit Fukushima Prefecture. Fukushima is unique in that it was not only affected by the Tsunami and earthquake but also experienced a meltdown of the Daiichi Powerplant's nuclear reactors.

During our visit, we had an action-packed itinerary, we began our visit to the area with a cultural experience. We visited the Ohbori Ceramic Forest where we explored the rich and vibrant history of pottery in the area and learnt how the tsunami and nuclear meltdown affected the ties that the different communities in Fukushima have with their cultural backgrounds.

Later in the same day, we also had the amazing opportunity to have a go at making our own pottery (with mixed results!). The rest of our first day in Fukushima was spent visiting the site of the Namie-cho Kakedo Elementary School, which had been completely devastated by the tsunami. I found this site extremely impactful and sombering as it served as an extremely powerful reminder of the level of destruction and damage that the tsunami caused. Our second day in Fukushima was spent at a very informative (and serious!) international forum discussing the decommissioning of the Daiichi Power Plant- a topic that was in the news at the time!

Our second day in Fukushima was spent at a very informative (and serious!) international forum discussing the decommissioning of the Daiichi Power Plant- a topic that was in the news at the time! We also had the chance to meet and interview a VIP of the forum, the mayor of Futaba who told us about his experiences of trying to support the redevelopment of his town and encourage residents to return! The mayor ended up enjoying our company so much that he later invited us to dinner with him, taking us to a restaurant where he had given them his top secret, super healthy ramen recipe! Before our delicious and nutritious dinner, we managed to squeeze in a visit to the Museum of Legacy of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster which helped to reinforce the levels of destruction in the Fukushima region and inform us of the redevelopment processes and how numerous stakeholders were working to make Fukushima a safe place to live in again.



We woke up bright and early (and vaguely sleepy) on our third day in Fukushima to visit the Daiichi Power Plant itself. On our journey to the meeting point, we were informed by Miwako that she had pulled numerous strings to get us an invite inside and that it was a very important and busy day there as they had just begun to release the decontaminated water back into the ocean.

When we arrived, we were issued with face masks, lead vests (with very handy ice packs built in) and our own personal geiger counters, which reached levels of 500 mR/hr, causing a slight bit of panic! Although most of the scientific information went over our heads, our tour of the plant was highly engaging and gave us further understanding of the extent to which the nuclear meltdown was a humanitarian crisis in its own right.

We spent the afternoon visiting the Okuma Incubation Centre which was set up to encourage businesses to base their operations in Okuma and is based in an old elementary school. In the Okuma business centre I had the exciting opportunity to test out one of the mobility scooters that were being developed and sold by a small business, however, I promptly crashed into a car. We then spent the night in a lovely hotel in Okuma which had a lovely Onsen (hot spring) and massage chairs!

On our final day in Fukushima, we spent the day visiting the newly built and opened Okuma Town Learning Centre Yume no Mori: Nango City School. In the school we learnt and witnessed the different ways the school was coping with a small pupil body and using it to their advantage instead of seeing it as detrimental. We also met some of the pupils and Pippi and I even played a very intense (and exhausting) game of hide and seek tag!

Overall, our time in Fukushima was extremely rewarding and educational and gave us an insight into the different ways that tsunamis can harm populations, from both their initial and secondary effects.





Symposium at Tohoku University



THE IMPACT OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ON POST-DISASTER RECOVERY:

The role of community following the 3/11 Great East Japanese Earthquake and Tsunami

My research focus:

- 'Kizuna', Disaster Utopia, a brotherhood of pain
- Community leaders
- Collaborations across different entities
- International connections



Akiko Iwasaki



Usuzawa Shika Odori Dance team



Otsuchi local people

Presented at Tohoku University by Libby Kay

The aftermath of the 3/11 disaster underlined that effective and collaborative communication, transcending traditional boundaries and harnessing the collective strength of different entities can not only diffuse the impact of a crisis but also lead to a more resilient, interconnected, and united society.



'Concrete Coast'

An Exploration of the Use of Sea Walls in Japan's Tohoku Region

Sea walls are the most common technological response to tsunamis all over the world

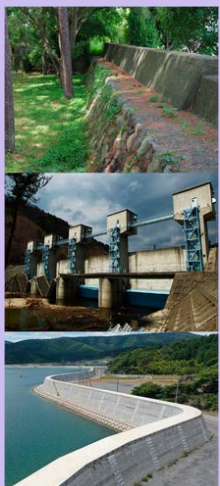
Within the Tohoku region of Japan, almost every coastal town has a sea wall or flood gate, separating the towns from not only the threat of tsunamis but from the ocean and coast they rely on.

Sea Walls are an important measure in tsunami mitigation and serve as a tangible layer of protection and reminder of the risk of tsunamis.

A holistic approach, combining tangible measures such as seawalls and intangible measures such as evacuation drills should be utilised to maximise disaster mitigation and preparedness.

My research focus:

- Seawalls
 - the aims
 - the negatives
 - the social costs
- Rikuzentakata City



Presented at Tohoku University by Sophia Barry



Symposium at Tohoku University



KUYŌ-HI: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF DISASTER MEMORIALS 12 YEARS AFTER THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

My research focus:

- Rikuzentakata's memorial park for Tsunami Disaster
- Memorials Saving Lives – The Fudai Water Gate
- Immortalized Digitally
- The Dangers of Memorialising

Disaster memorials play an integral part of the grieving process for affected communities



Presented at Tohoku University by Harry Hudson

- As witnessed in Rikuzentakata, memorials aid communities in processing their past, mourning their loved ones, and progressing as a society, demonstrating resilience in the face of trauma.
- In Fudai, we've seen how memorials preserve memories and prepare society for future disasters. Mayor Wamura's story highlights the importance of resilience in the face of adversity, be it from people or natural disasters.
- However, it is also important to listen to communities needs as seen in Otsuchi, who have had the difficult task of deciding when it is right to mourn and when it may be time to move on.

Community Belonging

The Evolution of Community Belonging and its role in the revitalisation of the Tohoku Region

KAMAISHI RECOVERY MEMORIAL STADIUM

My research focus:

- Human Relationships
- Response of the affected community
- 'Kizuna' - Human Bonds
- Community cohesion
- Sense of belonging
- Revilaisation



"The World Cup is said to have brought the community together and brought hope for a better future for the people and town who had suffered so intensely after the 3/11 disaster"



Since 2011, the affected areas have dedicated immense efforts towards not only rebuilding their physical structures but also rejuvenating their sense of home and spirit and while each town has required varying spans of time to regain its footing and although the losses have been profound, with many irreplaceable aspects, the Tohoku region affected by the 3/11 disaster has witnessed remarkable progress and strides in its journey towards recovery.

The collective efforts poured into preparing the town for this global event not only showcased the community's resilience but also laid the foundation for a deeper sense of unity and shared purpose.

Presented at Tohoku University by Pippi Nilsson

Highlights

