

Division of International Education and Exchange,  
Graduate School of Economics and Management  
Tohoku University

## **Fukushima Study Tour : Responses from Tohoku University & Harvard University students**

**Aug. 2014**

Since March 2011, Fukushima has attracted world attention and will continue to do so in the years to come. In such reality, Japanese students, especially, those who plan to go study or work abroad in the future will be asked to provide their own account of this global incident and explain its impacts on regional society as well as the nation. So, we believed that a field trip to study various social issues in post-disaster Fukushima could serve as a good educational opportunity and help students realize that knowing Fukushima (going local) is a meaningful step toward going global (knowing the world) as well. At the same time, we thought that the educational significance of the tour would be even greater if the students could go with some international students and learn together on site. Fortunately, several Harvard students who were attending Harvard Summer School in Tokyo positively responded to our call and joined the tour. We spent two days in Fukushima in August 2014, visiting various sites in Iitate, Kawauchi, and Iwaki, and meeting many people. Among them, the members of Fukushima Saiseino Kai and their committed efforts to revitalize Iitate left the most profound impression on our students. With our deep respect to their hard work and many thanks to their kindness, we would like to introduce some of our student responses.

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Followings were the students' responses to the Questions A, B, and C.  
Students were identified by their initials.

**A.** Any comment/ feedback on the talks by Mr. Kanno and Mr. Tao (representing their

NGO, “Association for Resurrecting Fukushima) in Iitate, and their activities.

**B.** State freely your overall impressions on the tour.

**C.** What kind of study tour would you like to attend in the future? If you have any specific places you want to visit in Fukushima or in other prefectures to better understand the current state of Tohoku region, please suggest.

Name: K.

Affiliation/ Year: Harvard University/2017

Country :USA

■A

I was deeply impressed by the dedication of both Mr. Kanno and Mr. Tao to the cause of resurrecting Iitate. Mr. Kanno especially led me to reflect on many things. Seeing his dedication to his community, his passion for farming, made me question if there is anything in my life I would fight so hard for. I was also struck by their emphasis on the role of the upcoming generation. The experience instilled within me a stronger sense of responsibility to build upon the work of previous generations and contribute.

■B

Fukushima was one of my earliest experiences in Japan. Since then, I have been here for three weeks and stayed in nine different cities across the country. However, the tour remains my most significant memory. I will never forget the stories I heard, or the people who have, still and will continue to fight for their homes. The Tohoku students and faculty were among the most wonderful groups I have had the chance to meet, and I sincerely hope we will be able to stay in touch and create more exchanges like this tour.

■C.

I would definitely like to return to the places we visited to see the progress of recovery. Also, I think that of the many great experiences, I found the visit to Iwaki to be the most striking. I think on future tours, it may be to have more opportunities to spend more time in such places.

Name: **S**

Affiliation/ Year: Harvard University, PhD program in History and East Asian Languages/Science and Technology Studies

Country: Singapore

■A

I was very moved to listen to both Mr. Kanno and Mr. Tao speak. I had not known there were such dedicated people working to rehabilitate their communities. I now follow the activities of this NGO on social media.

■B.

This was definitely one of the most meaningful and powerful experiences I have had in Japan. I am so glad I had the opportunity to participate in it and that it received funding and permission to be carried out from a number of sources. Hearing first-hand testimonies from affected people and from the scientists and social activists who support them was really important in helping me to understand the actual complexity and diversity of Fukushima's affected communities. I think many people usually conceive of Fukushima as some kind of homogenous disaster zone that is contaminated or damaged in the same way as Tomioka Town (a ghost town that is devastated). To have direct contact with a few different places and communities, some of which are taking their own steps to recover and regenerate, was thus a really valuable experience.

■C

This is not so much about what other places to visit, but I think it would be really good to have part of the orientation be a short presentation or explanation by local students about Fukushima Prefecture or Tohoku as a region. This would be especially helpful for the foreign students who know little to nothing about Tohoku and Fukushima as a prefecture other than the 3.11 disaster.

Name: **M.**

Affiliation/ Year: Harvard University /2017

Country: Japan , Kanagawa

■A

I was impressed with their bravery and mental strength. If I were them, I may not be strong enough to try to improve the situation of Fukushima. I understood how much they loved their hometown and how much effort they put on to get back to it even though more than three years passed since that disaster.

■B

It was a priceless opportunity to meet people in Fukushima and know more about the current situation. I would love to help those people if I have enough free time in Japan.

Tohoku University students spoke English very well and it was easier for Harvard students to communicate with them. Also they were always willing to translate and communicate.

■C

I would love to participate in tours like this. It is extremely difficult, but it could be better if we visited Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Plant. Fukushima Daichi's reconstruction is still underway.

However, this tour was very interesting. I could meet people and students in Tohoku and everything was priceless. Thank you for organizing this event. Also I would like to express utmost gratitude to Professor Matsutani who translated all tow days.

Name: G.

Affiliation/ Year: Harvard University / 2017

Country: USA

■A

I found Mr Kanno's talk particularly moving, because it was clear how personal and painful the disaster was for him. I wish I could have understood all the nuances and details of what he was saying a bit better. There were moments when I got lost amid the decisions of different governmental bodies or international agencies. Though, amazingly, I think even without translation Mr. Kanno's message would have come across through the emotion he shared with us.

■B

Besides the parts of the tour above, there were two other aspects I really appreciated. The first was actually seeing one of the areas in ruins, a ghost town. I had never, ever seen anything like that, and even though it was just a place, and not a living person, couple with the talks we heard it ended up being the most emotional part of the tour for me.

The second aspect I appreciated was getting to know everyone else on the tour. It was valuable to be able to talk to many people actually from Fukushima. But way more than that I just found everyone really lovely and enjoyed talking on the bus and at the farm house. That alone would have been worth the price of admission I think.

Also: I am really impressed and inspired by how much student involvement there was in organizing the tour

■C

I wish I knew enough about the situation to have suggestions. Pretty much everything I know I learned on this tour so it is difficult to imagine a different one. I suppose, though, that it could be interesting to hear what people outside of the most affected areas believe about the situation there.

Name : S.

Affiliation/ Year : Harvard University/post-doc

Country : Chile

■A

This was a fantastic chance to hear from people trying to imagine what the future of Fukushima will be like. It seems like an uphill struggle in a place like Itate where there's higher radioactive contamination than in other places. The question of 'hope' that came out in the talks seemed really important. How to keep people motivated to rebuild Fukushima.

■B

This was a great opportunity to visit hard-to-reach places in Fukushima prefecture. The tohoku uni. students were absolutely wonderful in guiding us through the place and sharing their stories (several of them were from Fukushima). Professor Matsutani also was fantastic in setting this up and translating. My heartfelt gratitude to everybody at Tohoku-dai.

■C

In the future it could be interesting to add a stop at a radiation testing center.