

The Lost Original Landscape of Japan

The village of litate is a treasure trove to the camera shutter. Located on a plateau some 400~600 meters above sea level, and with the many rows of houses, it is said to be a trademark landscape of Japan. It has given a sense of tranquility to visitors throughout the four seasons.

Village locals are friendly to outside visitors, and I can't remember a time when someone has denied me permission to take their photo. If anything, they have given me many of their crops, and I have been moved by their generosity and the deliciousness of these foods. Although the village is part of the national association of scenic villages, I've come to feel that a beautiful village is not just about scenery; it is the result of the efforts of the people who live there. The spirit of village Madei (*) also sounds an alarm to our contemporary society that is flooded with material goods.

In the summer, children play in the river, and it is as if we can hear their cries of joy. Although I'm almost 70 years old, I remember catching river fish in the rice paddies in my childhood. This is now a rare sight in today's Japan.

Goats, wild boars, cattle, and horses are raised by using a healthy environment. An elderly woman in the photos bought a goat with some pocket money and said it is as cute as her grandchild. The goat eventually gave birth itself, but during evacuation from the nuclear accident, she had to let it go full of tears.

In the winter, due to its location above sea level, litate becomes a pure white snowscape, but the village still produces dried radish and distributes it throughout the region, despite the severe cold. For those who love home cooking, this is an indispensable food item. The image of hanging radish on a vast plot of land really matches litate. Due to the cold high land, it wasn't possible to farm in the past, and the fact that the area is now cultivated speaks to the great effort it must have taken. Just when agriculture became possible and there was a hope for the future, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster took place, and, not only was the area blocked off for 30 kilometers, but the region became polluted by radiation due to the prevailing winds. The entire village became a no man's land.

Each and every smiling face in the photos is now sad. Being suddenly removed from village life has brought feelings of resentment, anger, frustration, regret, insecurity, and sadness. Evacuated families have been separated, and my chest shakes with anger when I wonder where they are and how they are doing. The nuclear accident has taken away everything at once.

Should the right to snatch away the beauty of the village's nature and the lives of residents be given to the country and corporations? The responsibility of eliminating the Japan's nature, the foundation of the country's spirit, is immense.

Despite its small size, there are nuclear power plants in every region of Japan. We don't know if another Fukushima will happen again. We as adults have a responsibility to leave to the next generation a safe and beautiful nature. We must never let children around the country to feel the same pain.

Chiyoko Kanno (Photographer)

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* Madei: "Madei" comes from "mate" ("both hands") and refers to fulfilling all your tasks with a pure, sincere heart. This term is used in the Tohoku region.