

ATOMIC *DILEMMA*



In 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing around 200,000 people, mostly civilians. Just a few years later, the Japanese government, utilities companies, and the media began to promote the use of what they called “good nuclear energy.” And, from the 1970s to 1990s, Japan became the third-largest nuclear power in the world.

Then, in 2011, an accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant forced 160,000 residents to evacuate, and more than 2,000 died from exhaustion, disorientation, and suicides. UNCG Associate Professor Etsuko Kinefuchi, whose hometown is just an hour and a half from Fukushima, watched the devastation from afar.

“I started to ask myself, ‘How did we get here? How is there so much nuclear power in Japan, and what are the Japanese people doing about it?’”

It was the beginning of Dr. Kinefuchi’s shift in scholarly focus from intercultural communication to environmental communication. Her work has culminated in a book, set to publish later this year as part of Routledge’s Environmental Studies Series. It explores pro-nuclear discourse and the anti-nuclear movement in Japan, from the 1950s through today.

Japan faced an economic crisis after World War II, and new technology, specifically nuclear power, was part of the plan to reemerge on a global scale. Kinefuchi found that soon after World War II, the “nuclear power industrial complex” began to broadly disseminate communications that strategically presented nuclear power as green, economical, dependable, and safe.

Nuclear power plants targeted rural, economically disadvantaged areas by emphasizing the economic benefits a plant could bring to a community – jobs, subsidies, and infrastructure.

“But some local groups have been successful in rejecting plants in their communities,” Kinefuchi says. They’ve presented counter narratives that focus on community wellness and impact on future generations. For many, the health and safety



A SUSTAINABLE PEACE

of the community prove more important than financial benefits.

In large cities, there were massive demonstrations and Occupy-style activism after Fukushima. With funding from a UNCG internal grant, Kinefuchi conducted fieldwork at some of their camps in 2012 and 2013. She found these were key spaces for dialogue about Fukushima, nuclear power, and other political issues. Camps facilitated networking and learning for urban activists, many of whom were unaware of the challenges facing rural communities.

In many countries including Japan, nuclear power is hailed as the key to a carbon-free future. Kinefuchi questions that narrative. While nuclear power does not produce CO₂, uranium mining is toxic, she says. Nuclear power plants require massive amounts of water, and nuclear waste must be managed for tens of thousands of years. It's not, she says, the green energy source it is often presented to be.

For alternatives, she points to countries like Denmark, where wind energy has become a reliable, affordable, and renewable energy source.

More broadly, she is focused on challenging the dominant narrative that normalizes infinite economic growth.

"This mentality of continuous growth is problematic. It's incompatible with environmental protection, and it doesn't improve our well-being," Kinefuchi says.

"We have to maintain a certain level of economic stability, but I think a lot of happiness reports and indexes show that health, education, good governance, culture – not continuous economic growth – are the answer."

by Alyssa Bedrosian
learn more at go.uncg.edu/kinefuchi

Imagine for a moment Sweden declaring war on and violently annexing Norway. The idea is close to unthinkable, in much the same way war between Greensboro and Raleigh would be. The Nordic countries have not warred amongst themselves for over 200 years.

They're part of what Dr. Douglas P. Fry and Dr. Geneviève Souillac – and their collaborators – call a peace system. "These clusters of neighboring societies do not war on each other, and in some cases don't make war at all," explains Fry.

The married researchers in UNCG's Department of Peace and Conflict Studies – Fry an anthropologist, Souillac a philosopher – push back against the narrative that war is tragic but inevitable, through their studies of sustainable peace and the factors that underlie it.

Nature is in some ways less "red in tooth and claw," Fry says in his 2012 Science review of the subject, than their fields have historically acknowledged. When scholars invoke human or animal nature, the evolutionary basis for cooperation and helping gets little airtime. But they exist, Fry says, as do peaceful societies.

Examples of peace systems range from small bands of hunter-gatherers to the 300-year Iroquois Confederacy and the European Union. One of the EU's explicit missions was to prevent warfare between member states, and it has succeeded for over 70 years. "The Mardu Aborigines of Australia," says Fry, "even lack words in their language for feud or war." But what allows some societies to remain peaceful, while others struggle with violence?

That's the question Fry, Souillac, and their collaborators at Columbia University and the City University of New York seek to answer through the Sustaining Peace Project. The interdisciplinary group, with specialties ranging from psychology to astrophysics, develops complex mathematical models to capture the dynamics of sustainably peaceful societies.

Their latest study, published this year in the Nature journal Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, employed machine learning to identify the most important factors distinguishing peace systems from more warlike societies.

What are the most important peace-promoting factors? "Non-warring values and norms," says Souillac, "such as the Upper Xingu view that aggression is immoral or the Nordic valuing of consensus decision-making." Overarching identities, such as American or European citizenship over loyalty to an individual state or nation, also ranked highly.

The 2021 article has already received over 4,800 visitors and coverage in popular media including Scientific American.

"The work frees us from old, confining narratives about an aggressive, conflict-driven human nature," says Souillac. "People are excited by our findings about an inherent human capacity for cooperation, particularly as we face issues – climate change, migration, pandemics – related to global survival and justice."

by Randall Hayes
learn more at hhs.uncg.edu/pcs