

Of Walking in Unknown
by Koki Tanaka

Our lives are uncertain, but we simply ignore the reality of that uncertainty as long as nothing happens. Is there a way to comprehend the realities that we overlook?

I had the idea of walking from my home in Kyoto to the nearest nuclear power plant. It would take about 20 hours according to Google Maps. In reality it took four days, as I could only walk between six and 10 hours a day before getting exhausted. A thousand years ago, the same route I followed had brought Korean culture to the then-capital of Kyoto, as well as the fish, caught in the Sea of Japan, which earned it the name Sabakaido, or Mackerel Highway.

Maybe you feel a psychological distance reading this. What do events in a far-off country have to do with you? But what happens if you just focus on the part about the nearest nuclear power plant? There might be a nuclear power plant near you, too. For example, after the nuclear accident on March 11, 2011, the area within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant was designated an exclusion zone, which is still enforced today, six years on.

The nearest nuclear power plant to me is 60 kilometers away on a straight line; some 100 kilometers walking along roads. You could get there by car in about two hours. Some might differ on whether this is near or far, but an accident would probably have an immediate effect on one's life.

Described more abstractly this way, does the situation in Japan feel closer now? That's why I had to physically experience the distance to the nearest nuclear power plant through the ordinary act of walking - not in "Fukushima", but in the place where I live.