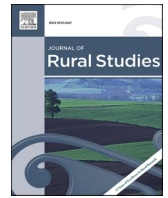


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Embedding food in place and rural development: Insights from the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival in Donggang, Taiwan

Yi-Chieh Jessica Lin^{a,*}, Theodore C. Bestor^b

^a Department of Journalism, College of Communication, National Chengchi University, Communication Building 410, National Chengchi University, No 64 Zhinan Road Sec 2, Taipei 116, Taiwan

^b Reischauer Institute Professor of Social Anthropology and Japanese Studies, Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, Tozzer Anthropology Building 314, Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, 21 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, MA, 02138, USA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the “Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival” in developing and sustaining regional identities within the context of rural regeneration, sustainability, and the creation of closer relationships between production and consumption in the countryside. It focuses on Donggang, Southern Taiwan, an area with rural development issues, increasing tourism impacts, and contested issues of local identity, sustainability, and an aging society. This paper draws on public discourse and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in Donggang to understand the conditions required for substantiating authenticity of the gastronomic products and experiences and the promotion of an appealing gastronomic image. This study traces the process of embedding bluefin tuna in Donggang through marketing, branding and provides a preliminary conceptualization of interrelations between gastronomic tourism and community development in East Asia.

The paper draws attention to these particular issues: the commodification of local heritage and countryside capital, strategies and challenges of hosting culinary festivals and resolving the issue of return migration.

1. Introduction

Bluefin tuna population have declined severely due to a combination of overfishing, climate change and lack of enforcement and control (WFF, 2020). Estimates suggest that 7.4 million tonnes of tuna are caught annually, leading to possible extinction of the species (for example, Wakamatsu and Managi, 2019; Nakatsuka et al., 2017). Bluefin tuna is a highly sought-after delicacy for sushi and sashimi in Asia, therefore, fishermen use increasingly refined techniques to catch tuna driven by high prices. While tuna provides food and livelihood for people, tuna plays an important role to maintain a balance in the ocean environment as a top predator in the marine food chain. Pacific Bluefin tunas stock is of particular concern because it has been designated endangered, despite good science and fisheries management regulations are implemented in order to rebuild the tuna population (Sustainable Fisheries, 2019).

Policy decisions of fisheries have been mostly focusing on the large-scale industrial vessels and do not fully account for the role of inshore fisheries and their sociocultural and economic impacts, and it is argued that fishing should be embedded in place through market branding and

be understood as a “multifunctional” activity in coastal areas by reconnecting fishers with markets, consumers and the environment (Urquhart and Acott, 2013). Given the uncertain situation faced by the inshore tuna fishing industry, this paper explores the potential opportunities and challenges for embedding tuna into local economies through market branding strategies – culinary festival – using examples from the Donggang fisheries.

Running from May through June, the Pingtung Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival in Donggang of Taiwan has been a regular event since 2001 and has raised billions in economic value. By comparing the Pingtung Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival with successful gastronomic festivals and destinations elsewhere, this paper provides a unique opportunity to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for successful rural development of gastronomic tourism via food festival in East Asia. Our research questions are: how is bluefin tuna, a global commodity, represented as cultural heritage and integrated into the local identity of Donggang in the public discourse of Taiwan? What are the strategies and challenges for the festival and branding of Donggang township? Why are the local actors (festival organizers and local government) motivated to pursue the festivals and other local economic development strategies

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: yclin104@nccu.edu.tw (Y.-C.J. Lin), bestor@fas.harvard.edu (T.C. Bestor).

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and how did they acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to pursue the strategy in Pingtung or Donggang? The study investigates the link between the food, place and community in the views of local actors, including the fisheries, local residents, and tourism providers. We also analyze their motivations and the process of acquiring the necessary knowledge/skill to pursue the strategy to promote Donggang.

2. Theoretical framework

It is argued that food is a powerful marker of cultural identity and a symbol of culture (Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2013; Watson and Caldwell, 2005). As Japan remains the world's primary market for fresh tuna for sushi and sashimi, the meaning of tuna is often associated with Japanese identity (Bestor, 2000). Bluefin tuna is a food and a global commodity. In order to understand the process of embedding bluefin tuna into a place, it is necessary to understand how this global food commodity is localized.

The process of globalization and localization of food have often gone hand in hand, as shown in the study on the consumption of McDonald's in East Asia (Watson, 2006). Localization of food is also process that entails domestication and reinvention of cultural content (Caldwell, 2004). Domestication of foreign fast-food chains, in Russian practices of consumption, is associated with ideas about home, intimacy and the nation. McDonald's became an "intrinsically and authentically local space," which is invested with meaning, value, delight, and heightened sociality. This view aligns with the glocalization perspective in which the local and the global are seen as interdependent and co-shaping forces (Ger and Belk, 1996; Wilk, 1995).

While glocalization of consumer culture is associated with the rise of middle-class consumers in emergent economies in the periphery, there are two countervailing features of glocalization: (1) hybridization and creolization of local and global cultures and (2) standardization of form or representations of culture, such as the marketing of local cuisines in global markets (Sharifonnasabi et al., 2019). Jung's (2012) study of the role of Chinese food in post-Socialist Bulgarian urban life suggests that Chinese food is used as a symbol of global citizenship to evaluate their political and economic position within the global hierarchy during intensive social transformation. Similarly, Groszlik and Ram (2013) show that since the 2000s, Chinese food has been redesigned in a way to represent "real" Chinese culinary culture, made possible by the increasing availability of goods and imported food products. Meanwhile, the concurrent trend of "hybridization," combining and distributing Chinese food along with other so-called Asian foods, became popular in Tel Aviv. In this phase, Chinese food regained its associations when it became identified with fine cosmopolitan taste. These cases exemplified how "culinary authenticity," a concept coined by Arjun Appadurai (1986) could be appropriated as status markers in different cultural contexts.

The concept of authenticity is central in present-day research on quality food and the representation of "local food" in gastronomic tourism. The idea of authenticity is hard to define and is open to varying interpretations in different cultural contexts (Richards, 2018). The tourism scholars view that authenticity of gastronomic products and experiences is a subjective evaluation which entails the negotiations and participations of the hosts and guests, and the construction of food authenticity is a present interpretation of the past. For the hosting communities, tourists demand for authentic experiences of living culture could empower local actors and bring opportunities to strengthen social cohesion and integrity (Cole, 2007). In order to substantiate authenticity, a destination's potential rely on its natural and cultural resources, and the local residents' successful communication strategies and messages to present convincing gastronomic evidence of their sense of communities and territorial attachments. The production of authenticity via gastronomic discourse, which refers to both the language and practice surrounds the food at the destination, also relies heavily on profound social processes (Hiller et al. 2013).

Yet, despite this growing literature, existing studies tend to be situated within western countries. The increasing number of applications concerning food heritage submitted to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) by East Asian regimes reflects a government agenda to boost gastrodiplomacy while safeguarding unique local cultural traditions. The trend also reflects a continuous search for national and local identities expressed through the rediscovery and promotion of local foods, often in the form of hosting food festivals, such as the annual kimchi festival in Seoul, Korea, and dumpling festival in Japan, just to name a few. Similar to other countries, Taiwan has experienced the phenomenon of mushrooming rural festivals with a wide range of themes, while food is one of the most common themes in order to revive the rural economy. Also, it remains unclear how to assess and compare the food—place—community affinity in successful and less successful gastronomic destinations in regard to the festivalization of food. We agree with Born and Purcell (2006) that scale is a social construction. Local-scale food systems are equally likely to be just or unjust, sustainable or unsustainable; therefore, it is necessary to understand on what conditions rural revitalization efforts contribute a more just, sustainable and secure food systems.

As noted by Hjalager and Kwiatkowski (2018), there is insufficient understanding of what motivates or demotivates festival entrepreneurs, including insight into the importance of size, trade, development stage, type of network, and the nature of attachment to a local place. Hjalager and Kwiatkowski (2018) also emphasizes the importance of embeddedness in the local "ecosystem" of place (e.g., culture, business, sport, and other local associations) during the process of creating entrepreneurial opportunities in the festivals, and highlight the importance of paying attention to the distinctiveness of local contexts, the value of local knowledge, as well as the membership of local networks of association. In some cases, festivals have become hybrid sites for the negotiations to demonstrate local uniqueness and international position (Zhang et al., 2019).

This paper adopts the ideas of embeddedness and "countryside capital" as a framework for examining the public discourse centered on the culinary festival as resources of rural tourism. Garrod et al. (2006)'s definition of countryside capital includes intangible heritage (e.g., food, festival, customs, knowledge) and physical elements (e.g., water, landscape, housing, historical figures). While there have been a few instances of countryside capital being used in rural tourism, there has been little understanding of the process of inventing rural resources by localizing foreign eating habits and turning export-oriented fisheries into a domestic industry.

Through viewing the resources as "capital assets," this framework allows rural communities to better capture the potential benefits of rural tourism based on sustainable development. Drawing on an analysis of public discourse on the cultural festival, as well as in-depth interviews, this case study expands the existing research on the branding of place-based foods and contributes to the understanding of embedding the rural development paradigm for the offshore tuna fisheries. This paper intends to bridge this gap and advance our understanding of sustainable management of the culinary festival in terms of different forms of countryside capital and festival spinoffs.

3. Case context and method

3.1. Case context

Being the Southernmost county, Pingtung is surrounded by the Taiwan Strait, Bashi Strait, and Pacific Ocean. Pingtung has a population of approximately 820,000 people as of December 2018, and in Donggang township alone, the population is 47,613. The population has been decreasing due to the low fertility rate in Taiwan and the outbound migration of young people. Environmental pollution from sewage in the Donggang River is also a major challenge for Pingtung County.

The main industries of this area are agriculture (including fisheries

and aquaculture) and tourism. Pingtung grows a large amount of rice and fruit, and recently began growing coffee and cocoa for commercial purposes. Experienced-based tourism in Pingtung accounts for 30 percent of domestic tourism. There are at least nine million annual visitors who pass through Donggang and travel to the coast to Kenting National Scenic Park to enjoy the coral, sand beach, hot spring, and hiking.

Based in Donggang, the bluefin tuna fishery is an important part of the fishing industry in Pingtung. Donggang is also home to one of Taiwan’s top religious festival known as the Burning of Wang-Yeh’s Boat. The celebrations take place at Donglong Temple in Donggang, Sanlong Temple on Little Liuchiu Island, and Daitian Temple in Nanzhou. The festival takes places tri-annually and involves inviting gods to earth, feasting with them, and then asking them to carry demons and plagues away on a boat, which is carved and carefully painted by local artisans. At the conclusion of the festival, the boat is torched to the ground on the beach. The festival is sponsored by the resplendent Donglong Temple, established in 1706 as a regional center of folk faith to pray for the safety of seamen in this fishing settlements of southern Taiwan.

Before the seventeenth century, Donggang was notorious for its adverse natural environment and contagious diseases. Dutch colonizers and missionaries had visited the area, attempting to “civilize” the *Pingpu* people (平埔族), a term used to refer to various aboriginal tribes living on the plains. Occasionally, Chinese fishermen who traveled along the Mainland Chinese coastline to catch mullets would stay in Donggang during certain seasons. After three centuries of development under three reigns, Donggang became a regional commercial, fishing and then military ports, but most infrastructure was destroyed at the end of World War II when Taiwan was still a Japanese colony at the time (See Table 1 for an abbreviated history of Donggang).

After WWII, as Donggang slowly recovered from the destructive air raids by the US Army, fishermen lived in hardship during the immediate post-war period. The Nationalist Party (國民黨 *Kuomintang*) government fled to Taiwan, created and executed the “Fish Production Increase Plan” to improve the local economy, and rebuilt the harbor. Between 1950 and 2000, the Japanese tuna industry turned toward global outsourcing, and Taiwan’s tuna fishing industry applied cost-effective practices and rapidly adopted new fishing technology to participate in this market.

Longline fishing was first employed during the Japanese colonial period. By the 1970s, longline fishing gradually became the most

popular fishing method for bluefin tuna and yellowfin tuna. Meanwhile, fisheries for marlins, Ghanaian fish, mahi mahi, white squid, sharks, and the inshore fishing and aquaculture of grouper, whiteleg shrimp, oyster, cobia, and eel around Donggang flourished. From the 1970s until today, longline fishing has become a dominant method for tuna fishing based in Donggang. By contrast, Kaohsiung Harbor is the base for offshore tuna fishing, and there are more boats from Kaohsiung using the purse seine net which requires more technology, capital, and human labor.

Over the past decade, residents in Donggang have witnessed the rise of local food movements in Taiwan. Such movements have resulted from the local policies to promote a series of community movements (modeled on Japan’s *machizukuri* policy, community-building movement) in Taiwan’s democratization process and the increasing rural–urban divide. Urban elites visit the rural areas in search of nostalgia for customs of the past and authentic traditions.

3.2. Method

The study was based on long terms research over more than 10 years (2004–2018). In the summer of 2004, the authors conducted a joint field trip to Donggang and visited the Taiwan Tuna Association, local fish-mongers, and the Donggang tuna museum. Follow-up visits to Donggang were conducted in 2005, 2007, 2013, 2014, March 2018, and August to September 2018, to observe the fish auctions and the social relations around the culinary festival. The study entailed 22 semi-structured interviews with representatives from tuna associations, restaurant owners, fishermen, community development organization members, temple administrators, local cultural and food activists, scholars, photographers and journalists, as well as government officials at the local, county, and national levels. Tourism providers included restaurant owners, small-tour guides, as well as representatives from Pingtung City government’s tourism office and Donggang township’s tourism office. Heritage providers included the local historical society representatives and a former tuna museum curator. An interview protocol, including 10 open-ended is designed based on the research questions to explore themes on local identity and food culture, benefits, challenges and prospects from the festival. Pseudonyms were used for confidentiality reasons (see Table 2).

Most interviews were conducted at their places of business in Donggang. Interviews usually lasted from 45 min to 2 h and were digitally recorded with informed consent. Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions and occasional prompts to expand answers. One of the authors speaks Mandarin Chinese and Hokkien at the native level, which were both fieldwork languages. Both authors speak and read fluent Japanese, which was used to gather information from Japanese merchants, guidebooks, and media reports. Relevant books, newspaper articles, photographs, and other visual materials on seafood culture in Donggang were studied to understand the relevance of the festival in popular culture.

We employed the grounded theory approach to analyze the transcripts from our interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 275) defined grounded theory as “a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data,” emphasizing a close link among data collection, analysis, and theory to

Table 1
Timeline of Donggang history.

17th century	The major population consist of indigenous population, known as <i>Pingpu</i> Dutch colonizers and missionaries visited the area Chinese fishermen who traveled along the Mainland Chinese coastline to catch mullets would stay in Donggang during certain seasons
Koxinga’s reign (1661–1683)	Donggang was a place for exiled prisoners
Qing Dynasty of China (1684–1895)	Donggang was developed into a commercial harbor Donggang downtown took shape in mid-19th century.
Japanese Colonial Period (1895–1945)	The number of fishermen surpassed 1000 and Donggang established the first fishermen’s cooperative in 1904. About a dozen Japanese fishermen moved to Donggang during this period, and the local residents started to engage in tuna fisheries. By 1917, Donggang had a population of 10,858, with one-fourth engaged in the fisheries During WWII, the Japanese rulers turned Donggang into a military base in addition to the harbor for deep-sea fishing vessels. Many harbor facilities were destroyed during American air raids and relentless bombings at the end of WWII.
1945- present	Taiwan’s tuna fishing industry rapidly adopted new technology and became a world major player in the global tuna market

Table 2
Types of study participants.

Participant type	Number of interviews
Fish processor	3
Fisherman’s organization	2
Fish buyer	2
Heritage provider	5
Tourism provider	8
Artist	1
Scholar	1
Total	22

identify patterns. After data collection, coding is an important step to label, differentiate, conclude, and organize the collected data. There are three coders who had visited the field-site, cross-checked the transcripts, had a discussion and agreed on the interpretations of the findings. Data was coded based on the major research themes, and some of the sub-headings in the finding section reflect emergent categories during the fieldwork. The researcher returned to the field to discuss the analyses with the local residents, to double-check the interpretation of their voices, and to fill in gaps. Furthermore, with the advent of social media, there has been regular contact with several key informants who run their own Facebook pages. Fig. 1 shows the location of case study site in Taiwan.

The following sections begin with a discussion of the food festival as a manifestation of the idea of multifunctionality as a rural development tool. In the first part of the findings, we study the process of reinventing countryside capital through the festival, and how the food festival contributes to the development of the inshore fishing community and viewing tuna fishing as a multifunctional activity. Through an analysis of the views of entrepreneurs and governments, the case study investigates the advantages and constraints of inshore fishing of bluefin tuna as a local cultural resource to facilitate economic and cultural benefits for the local community. We also study the spin-offs from festival environments that endow Donggang with a refreshed sense of place, social identity, and a renewed interest in historical memory and reconfiguration of rural resources. Fig. 2 shows the major landmarks in Donggang, among which some appeared in the findings. Fig. 3 shows the trend in bluefin tuna catch in Donggang from 1998 to 2017.

4. Findings

While the main focus of this study was to understand the contribution of the culinary festival to sense of place in coastal communities and sustainability of tuna fisheries, it became apparent during the analysis that some of the main emergent themes from the data was related to product, place, and regional identity. In the first section, we incorporate the concept of countryside to capital to discuss those issues. We also discuss the glocalization of sushi and sashimi in terms of hybridity and creativity. Last, we analyze the strategies used by festival organizers in dealing with environmental crises and discuss the implications for returning youth in this local food movement.

4.1. The countryside capital of Donggang

Seafood is the most important form of countryside capital for Donggang. First, bluefin tuna is a famous delicacy appreciated for its delicious flavor. The buttery, melt-in-the-mouth fat from the belly is

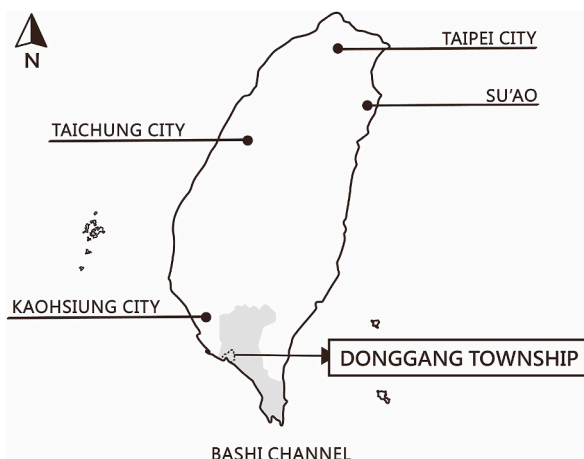


Fig. 1. Case Study site in southern Taiwan.

particularly sought after. Taiwanese fishermen have adopted the Japanese phrase, “*toro*,” to refer to this part, and serve it as *sashimi* (a raw fish dish) or *nigiri sushi*, which is the name commonly used for the raw fish slices that are added on top of rice in Tokyo-style cooking. Before the culinary festival, inshore tuna fishing was an export business and very few people in Donggang knew exactly how to taste bluefin tuna, or how to design the experience of culinary tourism around bluefin tuna, as stated by a former fishing boat captain and now a restaurant owner:

Donggang’s tuna used to go to Japan and the intermediary wholesalers made most of the profits. Donggang fishermen did not know how to distinguish good- and bad-quality tuna, and all we knew was how to catch them. We sold tuna at about USD 10–20 per pound to the wholesaler, and they sold it for 20 or 30 times more in Japan because Japanese people possessed the culinary knowledge, which Taiwanese consumers did not possess before the tuna cultural festival.

(Former captain, interviewed in August 2018).

The Pingtung Government persuaded the local residents to join the bluefin tuna festival by saying that the festival presents an opportunity to attract domestic and foreign visitors to visit the producers and taste bluefin tuna delicacies in local restaurants and to participate in other events. This way, the festival can maximize the potential of seafood as countryside capital for Donggang.

The Blufin Tuna Cultural Festival soon resulted in a boom in domestic consumption. As a fish vendor in Huaqiao Market, said, tuna was considered “trash” in the local market before 2001. After 2001, only a small amount of premium sushi-grade tuna still sells to the Japanese market, while most of the bluefin tuna catch is locally consumed during the cultural festival. The Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival is estimated to bring in revenues of NTD 3 billion annually (USD 100 million). Huaqiao Market developed into a retail market of 400 stalls that cater to visitors. Sometimes, if the tuna supply is not sufficient, Donggang restaurants also purchase tuna from the deep-sea vessels in Kaohsiung.

While seafood is the most important form of countryside capital in Donggang township, the culinary festival serves as a catalyst to turn different rural elements and functions into sustainable tourism. The festival organizer highlights the seascape using theme lighting during the evening, and uses walking maps to direct tourists to visit historical buildings in the township, mostly built during the Japanese colonial period. Many of the buildings continue to be occupied by residents as shops or homes. An export economy dependent upon Japan took shape at the beginning of the twentieth century, and social relations continued into the post-war era with constant transformation and adaptation. In Table 3, we summarize the constituent countryside capital in this case study.

Our interviews with the locals confirmed the increased economic prosperity and strengthened community ties of the last two decades. Many local commercial businesses have formed alliances and even volunteer in the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival as tour guides for the visitors.

Some people think that bluefin tuna fishing is cruel. However, I personally think that bluefin tuna is a symbol of the hospitality and openness of Donggang. I hoped that the focus of the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival would include different facets of Donggang culture. The Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival provided me with a chance to devote myself to the community, and so I began to get more involved. I think it is important to build a strong community. By improving the local economy, we will attract young people to return to their hometown.

(Owner of a food processing company, interviewed in August 2018).

In a Japanese tour brochure, Donggang is introduced as “the hometown of tuna” and as a friendly place for tourists because they can watch the auctions freely in the market. It reads, “Huaqiao Market is one



Fig. 2. Map of Donggang township. Source: author's own artwork.

of the largest retail markets for seafood in Taiwan, and free tuna tasting is even available at some of the stalls” (Taipei Navi, 2016). The Hankyu Travel Guide states, “Donggang is a world-renowned bluefin tuna fishery base, and the summer Tuna Cultural Festival is a must-attend event” (Hankyu Travel, 2018). In the guided tours, Donggang’s heritage tourism is driven by the desire on the part of Japanese tourists to relive a glorified and misremembered version of the past. Donggang is described as a place where Japanese tourists can taste “authentic” tuna sashimi at an affordable price, while touring relics from the colonial period, such as old sugarcane factories and Japanese-style architecture. After almost two decades since the first Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival, Pingtung County is aiming to incorporate the festival into a larger, region-based plan of slow tourism. The township is planning to work with local businesses to turn the relics of a WWII air force base of the Japanese

Imperial Army into a new tourist attraction.

A symbolic economy around tuna has been constructed through a commodity chain, reconfiguration of spatial relations, and enhancement of visitors’ experiences in the past two decades. The culinary festival has endowed Donggang with a refreshed sense of place, social identity, and a renewed interest in historical memory and economic purpose. In the following section, we intend to analyze the strategies and challenges of the culinary festival.

4.2. Strategies and challenges of the festival

Since 2001, the Pingtung County Government has actively promoted culinary tourism in Donggang, originally as a strategy to develop the economy of poor communities. As a former fishing boat captain

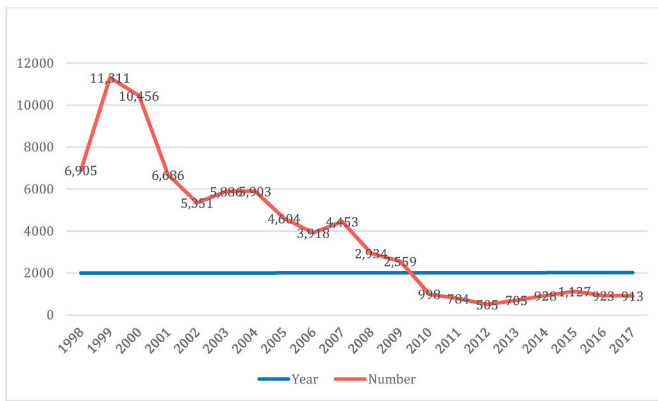


Fig. 3. Trend in the bluefin tuna catch in Donggang (1998–2017). Source of data: Donggang Fishery Association.

Table 3
Countryside capital of Donggang.

foods, festivals, distinctive local customs
Seascape
Rural elements, from isolated dwellings to market towns
Historical features such as historical building
Tracks, trails, bridleways, lanes and roads

explained during an interview, the fishermen in Donggang did not make much profitable gains from exporting to Japan because of a knowledge gap and the financial crisis in 1997. Even among the captains, before the cultural festival, few knew exactly how Japanese dealers cashed in on the cultural capital and sold to their customers at higher prices. Under the slogan “making Donggang the hometown for bluefin tuna culture,” the Pingtung County Government and the Donggang Fishermen’s Association attempted to transform traditional fisheries into a tourism business in the past two decades.

Each year, the Pingtung County Government incorporates new elements into the existing festival to attract visitors and encourage them to visit local attractions around Pingtung County by train, bike, scooter, or car. A dragon boat racing event has always been part of the Bluefin Tuna Festival celebrations in Pingtung County. Besides fish auctions, an outdoor movie theater (screening Donggang-related movies), pop concerts, and light shows with themes related to tuna and ocean sunfish are displayed in the evenings along the pier to enhance the seascape. A bluefin tuna sculpture is displayed at the vista point near the fish market, and a second one (a replica) has been installed at the entrance of the visitor center of the Dapeng Bay National Scenic Area adjacent to Donggang. Designed by renowned Japanese designer Fukuda Shigeo, the bluefin tuna sculpture has a unique design. From one side, the sculpture resembles the shape of a tuna, while on the other, the sculpture bears the Chinese character for “tuna.” Other than this sculpture, many local businesses have spontaneously produced tuna-themed art projects for public display. In 2018, the festival organizer, Pingtung County Government, installed a 3-m-high tuna-themed capsule toy machine filled with 1000 capsules of gifts and coupons in front of the waiting room for the ferry line from Donggang to Xiaoliuqi (小琉球). Part of the proceeds from the festival are donated to local charities that benefit childhood education and food for the poor in the region.

I went to the first planning meeting of the festival and I told the officials in Pingtung County that it made no sense to invite a group of people who have never caught Bluefin tuna at the opening ceremony. The officials asked if I had any suggestion. I said: to host a tuna auction with the fishermen. I also suggested hosting a Bluefin tuna parade, which became a popular event during the festival.

(heritage provider, interviewed in August 2018).

The example shows that in order to embed food into the community, it is important to involve local community members in the planning process. The tuna auctions became a mediated spectacle. When the fishing boat “Fishery Full Harvest No. 6” approached the harbor on April 12, 2018, and carefully unloaded onto the dock the first catch of Bluefin tuna for the year, it was greeted by a series of exploding firecrackers (a custom to celebrate a joyous event, and the watchful crowds cheered and applauded the crew. The auction of the first catch of bluefin tuna is broadcasted on national television channels and reported in national newspapers showing photos of the catch and its highest bidder every year.

The 10-time successful bidder for the first catch of the season, Shoufa Xiao, runs a seafood restaurant in Donggang. Hardly any of Xiao’s customers can tell from his clean-shaven face that he used to work in a fishing tanker 20 years ago. When a typhoon wrecked Xiao’s ship near Hawaii in the 1990s, he returned to his hometown and opened his seafood restaurant. Not long after, in 2001, Xiao’s restaurant made a fortune when domestic culinary tourism was boosted by the installation of the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival. Xiao showed up to the auction every year trying his best to outbid others to show his support for the fishing community. The bidding is one of the highlights of the annual culinary festival of Donggang. In 2018, the first tuna was sold at NTD 8600 per kilogram (an equivalent of USD 631/pound) to Xiao’s restaurant, and the total amount for all the tuna auctioned was NTD 1,771,600 (USD 59,053). The price of first bid sends an important signal of the potential value of all bluefin tuna to be caught in the following months. Xiao donated all of his earnings from the first catch of tuna to a fund for the children of Donggang’s fishermen affected by natural disasters.

The plaza of Donglong Temple has served as the venue for the opening ceremony of the annual Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival for several years. Established in 1706, the temple enshrines the Marshal Wen deity (*Wen wang ye*), who is believed to protect the fishermen and keep them safe from harm. Important events that take place at the temple plaza usually feature Taiwanese pop singers, a feast of local seafood delicacies, and the medal award ceremony, when the Pingtung County Magistrate distributes medals to the captain of the “first tuna” of the year and the highest bidder.

In conjunction with the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival, since 2017, two types of mini-tours have been hosted by cultural activists every weekend from May to June. The first tour type is about bluefin tuna and other varieties of fish, while the second type introduces local religions. Usually, the participants range from 5 to 20 people per tour. One tour guide, who is a bed and breakfast owner, shared the fish tour routine with us. It starts with a morning visit to the markets where auctions for bluefin tuna and Sakura shrimp take place. Next, visitors are taken to sample and taste snacks, such as tofu pudding (*douhua*), a variation of the soft, slippery soybean concoction found around Asia, and “double rice cakes” (*shuang gao run*), another local dessert with several taro-bean or red-bean-flavored layers. The tourists also join the long lines of local gourmets and wait for the tasty marlin cakes. Finally, the tour introduces the new bluefin tuna sculpture created by Fukuda Shigeo. The second type of mini-tour takes visitors to the seven major Daoist temples in Donggang and includes a face-painting experience.

As Cheng (2016) showed in his research on other coastal towns in Taiwan, “mini-tours” are burgeoning in the rural areas of Taiwan as a new marketing platform. To build a successful regional brand, environmental, cultural, and social factors need to be considered (Cheng, 2016). Through government subsidies, local cultural NGOs ran mini-tours as pilot projects during the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival to test market response.

The seafood delicacies attract tourists from Singapore, Malaysia, and other countries. According to a survey of 728 tourists conducted by the township office in 2018, the festival appeals mostly to young people. Visitors under the age of 30 comprise more than 70% of all tourists. More than half of the visitors are students who visit Donggang Township

on scooters with friends in small groups.

As Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival has established Donggang as a place-brand associated with Bluefin tuna delicacies, local stakeholders are also actively employing social network sites and mobile phone applications to maintain contact with visitors. In the following section, we further discuss the challenges and response strategies of the festival participants.

4.3. Challenges

The heritagization of the tuna fishery in Donggang has its challenges. In the domestic tourism market, Donggang is facing competition from other fishing towns, such as Suou of Yilan County in Taiwan. The pressing issue of climate change is also pushing the township administration to include more ecological and cultural diversity in the heritage tourism agenda. Many of our informants mentioned the importance to increase awareness of maritime sustainability and cultural diversity of transforming the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival. Threats, such as global warming and bluefin tuna overfishing, have rendered the tuna festival a controversial site for sustainability. Figures from the Donggang market over the past 20 years show that the total bluefin tuna catch peaked in 1999 at 11,311, declined to 4604 in 2005, 998 in 2010, and 505 in 2012, and slightly rebounded to 913 in 2017 (Donggang Fishery Association, 2018), owing to the declining fish population and the imposition of catch limits in Taiwan.

The Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival has become a target of attack from the media about sustainability issues surrounding bluefin tuna in recent years. Therefore, the government of Pingtung County has downplayed the role of bluefin tuna consumption, and instead, has promoted other types of food heritage. As a local saying goes, “There are three treasures of Donggang: bluefin tuna, sergestid shrimp, and oil fish roe.” A majority of local cuisines predominantly consist of seafood delicacies. The local government recognized that including more ecological and cultural diversity into the bluefin tuna festival is important to increase the countryside capital (Garrod et al., 2006). A government official stated that the focus of the Bluefin tuna festival might shift to the celebration of ocean culture to increase more awareness of sustainability.

For instance, once an endangered species, the Sakura shrimp population has recovered in recent years through government efforts. Sales flourished under an effective management system of fishery production and marketing schemes. The commodity chain employs various e-commerce techniques and business strategies from Japan to diversify the sales of Sakura shrimp. The emergence of e-commerce provided rural communities, including women, with new entrepreneurship opportunities to support themselves and their families.

Since 1991, the fishermen have organized the Donggang *Sergia Lucens* (Sakura shrimp) Cooperative. The natural habitat of the sergestid shrimp (also known as Sakura shrimp) is located near inshore Donggang. When Japanese wholesalers came to Donggang to buy sergestid shrimp in bulk, the fishermen realized that this product had huge potential in terms of both economic and nutritional value. Through market promotion, consumer attitudes toward sergestid shrimp consumption have changed positively and attention has increased toward the development, sustainability, and cultural recognition of the sergestid shrimp industry as an important symbolic food for Donggang identity (Tsai, 2015).

Sakura shrimp auctions always take place during the daytime, while evenings are reserved for the auctions of other aquatic products when intermediary wholesalers, small-scale retailers, or restaurant chefs show up as bidders (Lo, 2002). Until the end of the twentieth century, the outcomes of auctions in Donggang were still largely dependent on the daily prices at the Tokyo fish market (Lin, 2011).

For local fishermen, the promotion of Sakura shrimp during the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival is welcome. They see the two products as complementary, because Sakura shrimp is good for cooked dishes (e.g., fried rice), whereas bluefin tuna is often served as raw slices. The harvest season of Sakura shrimp begins in November and ends in May. During

the hatching season from June to October, the harvest of Sakura shrimp is prohibited to maintain sustainability.

The tuna industry is also facing a shortage of local young people who are willing to devote in the fishing industry. A local even estimates that at least two-thirds of tankers will simply be sold to foreigners once the owner retires. Most crew members come from Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia or Vietnam, and labor complaints are not a new phenomenon. The industry relies on third-party recruitment agencies that may charge exorbitant recruitment fees and thus leave foreign employees vulnerable to forced labor conditions and render them unable to leave.

The tourists threw away trash on the street. It was quite troublesome for the locals. (a heritage provider, interviewed in August 2018)

Some of the food vendors cheated on the tourists about the food quality. It's risky the reputation of the whole town and these negative things usually catches media attention. (a restaurant owner, interviewed in August 2018)

One of our informants, Hua-Sheng, lamented the closing of the Tuna Cultural Museum in 2017 due to a shortage of government subsidies (the museum admission is free of charge), while food museums are flourishing in other areas of Taiwan. The Tuna Cultural Museum was one of the oldest food museums in Taiwan and attracted considerable media attention during the first few years of its operation. The local fishing association would like to re-open it, but Hua-Sheng is still worried about how long the operation of the Tuna Cultural Museum could be sustained should it re-open to the public. Hua-Sheng also produced a picture book about Donggang's culture with the help of an artist in Taipei (originally from Donggang) and distributed copies to school children in the area as a way to improve education about local identity.

Donggang, like many other rural areas, is short of people with management skills specific to handling cultural businesses, such as long-term operation plans, public relations, and funding schemes. Overall, locals are concerned about the challenges that the cultural life of Donggang is facing, including the lack of cultural resources, fewer young people willing to endure the hardship of fishing, and the occasional cheating of customers by a few restaurants.

The future success of the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival is affected by the vicissitudes of the domestic economy of Taiwan. Other local businesses expressed their concerns that the profits made during the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival might have gone to a few major businesses, leaving the small-sized businesses at a disadvantage.

4.4. Glocalization of sushi and sashimi

Around the time when the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival kicked off in 2001, the arrival of the Internet age made Japanese culinary knowledge more accessible to the local fish vendors. Some of the younger generation of vendors who took over the businesses in the Huaqiao market have been trying to create a different image of market food in Donggang, as exemplified in the following case of Shi-Chung. Shi-Chung was one of the first vendors to start serving *nigiri* sushi in the Huaqiao Market in a style similar to the that in the Tokyo markets. He spent ten years working as a factory operator in Kaohsiung and discovered that his passion is making sushi. Shi-Chung took lessons in Kaohsiung on how to cut raw fish slices and make *nigiri* sushi and became a second-generation fish vendor.

Amidst the hustle and bustle in the Huaqiao Market, Shi-Chung tries to recreate a casual dining experience by focusing on presentation and neatness. He re-designed his billboard in white with the shop name written in small Chinese calligraphy. He prepares *nigiri* sushi based on his customers' orders, and serves the dishes on large, square, white china platters. Shi-Chung made the change to usher in a different and niche group of customers by improving quality and adhering to the sanitary standards mandated by law in the retail market.

Initially, many other vendors in Huaqiao Market mocked my endeavors and thought I was squandering money upgrading the stall's furnishing. They thought that customers would not appreciate the stylish presentation of sushi. But customers welcomed the changes. There are fewer second-generation vendors for personal and family reasons. I hope that the market would change for the better and make a good impact on the surrounding environment.

(Shi-Chung, sashimi vendor, interviewed in August 2018).

However, Shi-Chung's stall became extremely popular, necessitating the rental of a second stall space in the market to serve more sit-down customers. Other vendors began to change their attitudes toward Shi-Chung and even imitated his style, leading to a gradual transformation of the Huaqiao market toward higher standards in sanitary conditions, taste, quality, and presentation.

4.5. Return migration

In the following two cases, we elaborate on two groups of return migrants to Donggang who, following widespread concerns about rural revivals and cultural sustainability issues, initiated new projects with partial funds from government subsidies. One group runs local tours to introduce urban consumers to high-quality local food. The other group operates a bookstore/hotel partnership. These examples illuminate how local food producers and program organizers have encountered various challenges and dilemmas.

Since the early 1990s, Donggang has undergone two waves of return migration. During the first wave, cultural elites returned to Donggang from Taipei to become elementary school teachers and history workers, and to establish cultural non-governmental organizations (NGO). For instance, Hua-Sheng was born in Donggang and studied in Taipei, where he met scholars from Academia Sinica who were interested in the local history of Taiwan. When Hua-Sheng returned to Donggang, he continued to work with scholars from Academia Sinica and conducted fieldwork on local religions and cultures in his hometown. Now, he has branched out to study the religions and customs in other towns in Pingtung County. The cultural NGO that Hua-Sheng helped to found is responsible for hosting mini-tours of Donggang in recent years.

Around 2015, a large bookstore in Donggang closed its doors. However, five young people from Donggang opened a new bookstore in the summer of 2018. Two of the founders were studying overseas in New York, and they purposely chose books related to oceanic heritage or books that could help locals deal with their challenges, such as caring for older adults with depression. They wrote book reviews and posted them on a page for the Donggang community on a social media site to spread knowledge while attracting potential book buyers. These young people represent a different generation of returning youth, specifically those with higher education that are accompanied by cultural capital and different ideas to serve the local community and rural tourists at the same time.

The two waves of returning youth indicate that Donggang's civil society still thrives amidst challenges, and that bluefin tuna has become a very important cultural symbol in consolidating a sense of identity with oceanic heritage.

5. Conclusion

By addressing bottom-up cultural actions and community-based tourism initiatives, the study aims to achieve a nuanced and sensitive perception of the complex processes of reformulation of local identity and rural development of the inshore fishing communities of Bluefin tuna, a global commodity.

As a cultural symbol, the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival has created a strong image of Donggang as a place for seafood gastronomy in southern Taiwan. The case study of the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival exemplifies that a locally produced postcolonial food possesses the potential to enhance the visitor experience by connecting consumers to the region

and its perceived culture and heritage through the festival (Sims, 2009). In less than two decades, bluefin tuna has transformed from an economic commodity into an important cultural symbol of the local community reflecting its openness and hospitality. Donggang cuisine has experienced a process of domestication of sliced raw fish and the refinement of old fashioned local specialties to restore the glory and prestige of its past. Donggang cuisine was also staged as an "authentic" culinary experience, but it is in fact bound to a variety of other sources and thus became hybrid and cosmopolitan. This identity demonstrates a politically correct marker of openness and a balance between fine dining and sustainability. In this stage, local cuisine expresses connections with Japanese influences and represents a new Donggang identity, which includes hybrid elements. This evolution exemplifies what Ulf Hannerz (2002) argued, in that cultural trans-national fluidity is part of a broad process of "maturation" of a new merging of globalism and localism.

In the case study on Donggang, we also examined globalization and localization processes through the many different facets in which they are involved. These facets include the hybridization of Donggang cuisine, movements of domestic and international tourists, two waves of returning youth. This case provides insights into the complex local cultural worlds and processes of rural revivals (e.g., returning migrants) through the intermediary of seafood as a cultural symbol of local identity.

Taiwan's seafood production systems involve social relationships with food that are at odds with the ecosystem's health and longevity. Climate change, nevertheless, has brought many challenges for the future of the Bluefin Tuna Cultural Festival. The government and various actors in the communities of Donggang will need to continue investing countryside capital through collaborations with local non-government organizations in promoting awareness on maritime heritage and ecological sustainability in more creative ways. Furthermore, for the revival and social sustainability of rural societies in Taiwan where the population is aging, the local government also needs to consider additional incentives and strategies in helping the returning youth to engage in rural entrepreneurship. Despite the ecological controversies surrounding the culinary festival, the local actors respond with strategies to support ecological and social sustainability, such as promoting different types of seafoods, educating on the youth and tourists and planning cultural tours.

This study traces the process of embedding bluefin tuna in Donggang through marketing, branding and provides a preliminary conceptualization of interrelations between gastronomic tourism and community development in East Asia. The opportunities and challenges faced by Donggang means new agenda for policy makers to realize a wider range of benefits afforded by marine fishing than productivist policies alone. The experiences of Donggang is helpful for the development of reliable and acceptable measurement tools to isolate, assess and compare "the food—place—community affinity" in successful and less successful gastronomic destinations (Hiller et al., 2013). Extended research into the role of new media linking local residents and consumers in the context of gastronomic tourist is also recommended.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Yi-Chieh Jessica Lin: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Visualization, Investigation, Writing - review & editing, Funding acquisition. **Theodore C. Bestor:** Conceptualization, Funding acquisition.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

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