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Seven Years after the Triple Disaster in March 2011: A Report of Fieldwork in Northeast Japan

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1. Introduction

From March 11 to 13, 2018, the authors went on a field trip to Ishinomaki (March 11) and Fukushima (March 12-13). On March 11, 2011, just seven years before our fieldwork, the biggest earthquake ever recorded in Japan's history hit northeast Japan, which caused a deadly tsunami, almost completely washing away several cities and towns on the Pacific coast. Ishinomaki, the second largest city in Miyagi prefecture after Sendai, was hit most severely. More than 3,000 people died and about 400 went missing. Moreover, the tsunami also struck Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant. Failing to activate its emergency generators that would allow for continuous cooling of the nuclear reactor, three reactors overheated, causing partial nuclear meltdowns. Fukushima is still suffering from radioactive contamination that resulted from this accident.

In section 2, Zhang Lingxiao reports on the situation in Ishinomaki and Fukushima based on her experience in the fieldwork. In section 3, Zhang Bowen discusses the problem of discrimination in relation to Martha Nussbaum's argument on emotions such as disguise and fear. In section 4, tracing the critical thoughts on atomic bombs and nuclear energy in Japan, Wang Xiaomei takes up the problem of imagination and responsibility.

2. The Situation in Ishinomaki and Fukushima

Ishinomaki was one of the cities most severely damaged by the colossal tsunami 7 years ago. The closer I got to the city, the lonelier I felt. This was not so much because I had depressing images of the damage in the back of my head but rather because our eyes failed to catch sight of human beings where we expected to encounter life, resulting in an uneasy quietness.

Many people had to leave their home after the disaster. A survivor of the tsunami told us that when the earthquake occurred, he desperately ran up to Mt. Hiyori in order to escape from the tsunami. Arriving on the top of the mountain, nothing but a black wall looming over the city could be seen. I had no idea exactly what sort of feeling or emotion he had felt, except for a deep feeling of helplessness and despair. Even after seven years have passed since the tsunami hit Ishinomaki, the scars left behind are still omnipresent.

On March 11, 2018, when we visited the city, a ceremony was held to mark the seventh anniversary. Everyone offered a silent prayer for the souls of the victims in front of the wooden sign which says "Ganbarou! Ishinomaki" (Let's hang in there! Ishinomaki). The memory of the happy days with their families who died must have recurred to their mind, together with a longing for their lost hometown. Not only that; they must have also fostered some hopes. In the end of the ceremony, everyone released a lot of small balloons into the air and saw them flying to the mountains, to the other side of the ocean where their relatives and friends might sleep.

After the stay in Ishinomaki, we visited Fukushima under the guidance of Toyoda Naomi（豊田直巳）, a photo-journalist. The first place that we visited was Namie-machi, a town in northern Fukushima about 8 km away from Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant. Until 2017, this area had been designated as a "Difficult-to-Return Zone", meaning that it is off-limits. Even seven years after the disaster, the degree to which this town had been affected remained palpable. The old houses were left covered with growing weeds, and the abandoned vending machines still contained beverages which had been produced more than seven years before. Along the road, there were

a lot of black vinyl bags filled with contaminated soil. However, it had still not been decided how to deal with them. Staggering along the street were a few old men in a gauze mask, but apart from them, we could not spot anybody. Trains stop at JR Namie station every day, but there is no one who gets off there even now. It seemed to me that this town has lost its basic function.

The next day, we visited the residents of a temporary housing site, who used to live in Iitate-mura, one of the most severely radioactive-contaminated areas. When we arrived there, they were doing calisthenics to the radio. Most of them were old women whose smile was very lovely, but few men were there. Since we knew that many married couples live in these temporary housing site, we expected to see more men, so we inquired about them. Their "wives" frankly told us that many of them are very shy and not so social. As they explained, men's identity tends to depend on their social position or status. However, the nuclear accident changed the social situation, or rather completely destroyed the community itself. Under these circumstances, they have lost their confidence and gradually became reluctant to socialize with others.

Thus, we could say that this temporary housing site itself is a powerful evidence of the cruelty of the disaster. Therefore, it is not surprising that the residents are supposed to move in 2019 to a new housing built by the government. However, they expressed that they did not want to dislocate as this would amount to their second loss of a community, requiring them to rebuild their social life from scratch once again. Given that most of them are elderly, this should proof to be very difficult; in fact, it is even said that there is a high probability of solitary death in the new public housing.

After this visit, we went on to Iitate-mura, a village with an area as large as that of the city of Osaka, situtated in the middle of mountains 30-45km away from the power plant. When the nuclear disaster occurred, the Japanese government ordered the residents within 20km of the power plant to evacuate, which did not include the village of Iitate. However, radioactive material was carried by the wind and released by the following snowfall,

which heavily contaminated the soil of the area. Therefore, it was designated as a "planned evacuation zone" a month after the accident, an order only lifted as recently as 2017.

During our stay in this village, some of us noticed how it feels like to be exposed to radiation. However, this is obviously a very subtle experience, as we cannot perceive any of the radiation directly. Despite knowing that it is out there, passing through our bodies, our skins and bones all the time, the invisible radiation manifested itself in the decay of this lovely village. When I looked at the beautiful scenery, I could not help but worrying. Unable to calm down, embracing the beauty wholeheartedly was simply impossible.

7 years have passed since the accident, but people are still suffering and struggling. Even though consumers are willing to buy agricultural products from Fukushima again, there remains a large amount of people who are still hesitant. Even though we are usually unaware of it, this aggravates the damage in wake of the disaster. We visited Hasegawa Ken'ichi（長谷川健一）, an ex-dairy farmer in Iitate-mura who also wrote some books about his experience as a victim (e.g. Hasegawa 2012a; 2012b; 2014). One of his dairy farmer friends killed himself with the words: "if only the nuclear power plant had not been there…" He himself was forced to abandon all of his cattle which he had raised over many years. This is exactly why he remains attached to this mountain village, continuing his struggles. Recently, he tries to grow buckwheat in the vast field in front of his house, even if no profit can be expected from it. It is an expression of his pride and a sort of protest, as he told us. Hasegawa, even though business has been hit, will not stop moving forward. And the elderly women in the temporary housing site still take a bright smile every morning to do the broadcast gymnastics. They are incredibly tough and tenacious.

It became more and more clear that the most difficult thing that people cope with is not the harm that resulted from the calamity itself. Rather, it concerns the question of how to live in the future. How should the early warning system, the emergency response or the handling of disasters

generally be improved at a political, economic, educational and social level? Moreover, because of the psychological trauma, the region cannot recover economically. That is to say, regardless of whether the current nuclear radiation has reached a safety baseline, most former residents are reluctant to return to their previous home. The numbers on the nuclear radiation monitor are just cold scientific data and can't soothe the scarred hearts of the victims. This disaster, which can be said to be more a man-made disaster than a natural disaster, constantly reminds us how to use the nuclear power correctly, how to improve the safety level. How can the government promote the reconstruction and win the trust of citizens? This is not only a major issue for Japan, but for the whole world.　　(ZHANG Lingxiao)

3. Emotions and Discrimination

Since the nuclear explosion in Fukushima, people in Japan and even in all over the world have an emotional resistance to Fukushima. In China, emotional repulsion was noticeable arose across the Internet. After the calamity had occurred, emotions gradually changed from the initial fear to a general hatred against Japan. At that time, a large number of Chinese students abandoned the plan of coming to Japan for their education and chose to go to other countries instead. Similarly, almost all tour groups terminated their trips to Japan. My impression at that time was that the whole of China was caught in a deep resistance to Japan.

This can be conceived of as a kind of discrimination. However, even within Japan a similar emotional reaction could be witnessed, eventually leading to social discrimination. For example, many children who transferred from schools in Fukushima to those in other regions were the victims of discrimination and bullying. Fukushima residents who had moved to other areas felt discriminated because of their identity as evacuees. As is apparent in these examples, the emotions that play a part here are collective ones.

Especially two questions seem to be pressing here: First, what caused the discrimination against Fukushima and its residents? And second, what

exactly is the target of discrimination? In this section, I would like to discuss these questions, focusing on the emotional aspect of discrimination. In his book, *The Philosophy of Discriminative Emotions* (2009), the Japanese philosopher Nakajima Yoshimichi（中島義道）mentions four kinds of emotions that are directly related to discrimination: discomfort（不快）, disgust（嫌悪）, contempt（軽蔑）, and fear（恐怖）. Noticeably, they all share a negative attitude towards the other. He proposes that disgust is a kind of active（能動的）emotion that is projected onto others, and that disgust is a social emotion that can be transmitted within the social group to which one belongs. According to Nakajima, the central emotion at work in school bullying is disgust, and the root of all discriminative emotions is fear. This can, I think, be used as a clue to analyze the case of Fukushima. What relation does discrimination have with disgust and fear?

In order to explore this question in the following sections, I will rely on the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum's theory of disgust, for it is arguably the most sophisticated one. Before trying to give an answer to the above question, let me first introduce the central psychological concepts that Nussbaum provides. They are "primary object" on the one hand, and "projective disgust" on the other (Nussbaum 2013). The "primary object" that causes our disgust directly is, in the case of Fukushima, radioactive materials such as the soil or the invisible radiation that were mentioned in section 2 above. These "contaminated" materials make us feel uneasy, as though the safety of our lives was threatened. In an attempt to eliminate or isolate the causes of this feeling, we use disgust. Now, to ensure not to get "contaminated" ourselves, we do not only feel disgust against the proper objects themselves, but project them onto related things, which Nussbaum calls "projective disgust", which is thus a project of our imagination.

As she points out, projective disgust is extremely misleading for our value judgments. In the case of Fukushima for example, we extend the sense of disgust from radioactively contaminated materials onto the areas where contaminants appear, and even onto the people living in the area, eventually

onto the whole of Japan. However, what is it that we disgust in this case? Imagine that nuclear radiation would not cause any harm to our bodies and would not threaten our lives. There would be no relation of death and nuclear radiation – so would we fear it all the same? Would we still feel resistance against Fukushima? Would we treat the residents of Fukushima in a discriminative way like we are doing now? The answer seems obvious: arguably not. But if this is so, then what causes our disgust and our discrimination is actually our own weakness. We fear the decay of life, we disgust the fragility and vulnerability of our own body. This gives us a clue of how fear and discriminative emotions are related, thus elucidating Nakajima's presuppositions mentioned above.

So how may we reduce or even eliminate discrimination? Nakajima proposes two ideas in the final chapter of his *The Philosophy of Discriminative Emotions*. The first idea is that in order to suppress discriminative feelings, we must get rid of our own preconceptions and communicate with as many people as possible, listening to their thoughts and opinions in order to get a deep grasp of their stance, so that prejudice is replaced by delicate thinking. The second idea is to seriously listen to our discriminative feelings that have already emerged, scooping out the emotions they are triggered by, thus opening up ourselves.

The fieldwork in northeast Japan provided an opportunity to concretize these ideas and to reflect on my own various negative emotions, particularly the discriminative feelings towards Fukushima. In fact, rather than having discriminative feelings, I felt some kind of fear in my heart, a sort of mixed and complicated feeling of anxiety and calmness. However, this sort of personal introspection as proposed by Nakajima does not seem to lead much further. My suggestion here is with Nussbaum that this is because of the essential social dimensions that are involved in discrimination. Nussbaum (2004) clearly divides disgust into a personal emotion and a sense of disgust as a public social emotion (projective disgust). As we cannot and do not want to eliminate the fear of decay and death, she claims that we cannot

completely remove the disgust as a personal emotion. However, she points out the harmfulness of projective disgust to society.

This leads to the questions: How can we control or stop projective disgust? Nussbaum (2004) believes that one of the key reasons for projective disgust is a lack detailed information, which leads us into making emotional judgments before knowing how the situation actually is like. Following this line, to eliminate discrimination against Fukushima and its residents, one of the things we should do is to get to know the issue of nuclear radiation more specifically. For example, through this fieldwork we learnt that even in places very close to the nuclear power plant there is a possibility that the radioactivity is actually low. For example, although a place called Namie Fishing Port is only a few kilometers away from the nuclear power plant, it remained largely unspoiled by radioactive materials due to the wind at the time of the disaster blowing in the opposite direction.

Another point concerns our attitude towards the residents of Fukushima. Nussbaum (2013) suggests that the best way to eliminate projective disgust is to cultivate public feelings of sympathy or compassion. However, in the case of Fukushima, I do not agree. Toyoda Naomi, a journalist who accompanied us during our fieldtrip in Fukushima said that if he felt sympathy during the interview, he would stop the interview temporarily, as in his opinion, this is not a positive feeling for the victims. Let me explain: When we were at the memorial service of Ishinomaki on March 11th, we could feel the sorrow in the survivors' tears. We could feel the sad atmosphere. However, unlike the victims, we did not experience the disaster ourselves – we can sympathize, but not fully empathize with them. Therefore, if we simply embrace the pain of the others, it results in an unequal relation. The sympathizers unconsciously treat the sympathized ones with a lofty stance so that the sympathized ones often feel violated in their dignity.

So, what should we do? Let me recall the visiting to the temporary shelters, where we did radio exercises with the elderly people, listening to stories from their lives, while the warming sun shone on our bodies. I did not

feel disgust, but neither did I feel a special sympathy. We just spent some very short time with them. (ZHANG Bowen)

4. Imagination in the Post-Fukushima Era and Human Actions

4.1 The Unforeseeable Future

"Whether destruction or salvation, (we are) heading towards an unknowable future…" (Hara 1973; 281). The poet and writer Hara Tamiki（原民喜）, who was a victim of the Hiroshima atomic bomb in 1945, left his despair and sorrow in literary works before he committed suicide. Hara's writing has had a particularly significant impact for the so-called "Japanese Literature on the Atomic bomb." But at that time, the social movement and debate centered on the abolition of nuclear weapons. The opponents considered nuclear power as a military threat but viewed the nuclear power industry from a rather positive perspective, affirming its desirability. The general atmosphere in the Japanese society was that nuclear power is a cheap and effective alternative option for energy generation. This is exemplified in the distinct change of opinion that Ōe Kenzaburō（大江健三郎）went through. In *Imagination in the Nuclear Age* (2007), he implies that there can be hope for a humanitarian nuclear development if we stop imagining about this topic from the perspective of nuclear weapons and the tragedies that resulted from them.

Ōe emphasizes that imagination is necessary for recognizing the unknown danger. Despite this, another significant aspect is overlooked in his account: In nuclear technology, absolutely no mistakes are permittable. If something occurs, it may bring about ruinous disasters on an unforeseen scale. Exactly this point was emphasized by Takagi Jinzaburō（高木仁三郎）twenty years before the nuclear accident in Fukushima occurred. Takagi was a nuclear chemist who followed his passion, thus started researching in a nuclear enterprise. After being engaged in nuclear technology for many years, Takagi realized that despite all security measurements, a potentially catastrophic failure was eventually unavoidable for us human beings.

"Engaging in nuclear radiation work, although there hasn't been a catastrophic accident so far, small accidents and contamination occur quite frequently in the laboratory." (Takagi 2012; 70). Coming to realize that a huge catastrophe was always about to happen, he gradually became involved in anti-nuclear movements. Takagi was aware of the danger and risk of nuclear technology altogether. He warned that we are living in a world where mistake is not permitted in terms of nuclear issues.

In 2011, about twenty years after Takagi's lecture, northeast Japan was hit by a destructive earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant fell into an emergency situation, which shocked the whole world. Fukushima became widely known as the third city of nuclear accidents (the other two cities are Three Mile Island in the USA in 1979 and Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union in 1986). The nuclear dream turned into a nightmare.

When we went to Fukushima during our fieldwork, what we saw in Iitate-mura was a normal scenery of a mountain village with fields and trees. The life cycle operated as usual. The nuclear radiation is invisible and cannot be sensed by our body directly. However, according to various medical analyses, the increased nuclear radiation raises relative health risks considerably. People are exposed to radiation health hazards. Therefore, decontamination procedures were performed in Fukushima. Nevertheless, the radiation still remains at a high level. Radioactive waste disposal and polluted soil will not fade away automatically, nor can we get rid of it technically. In reality, it turned out to be intricate and unlimited, thus making the reconstruction work in Fukushima an endless process.

As Takagi warned, technological risks and hazards are inevitable. In this respect, the disaster in Fukushima was an accident waiting to happen. As Takagi is convinced, human cannot help but make mistakes. Even worse, nuclear power and its influence cannot be confirmed by experiment, as the consequences are always real. The horrible and fatal damages that human beings have experienced prove that the safety of nuclear technology is but a promotional myth.

4.2. Responsibility in the Post-Fukushima Era

If this is so, the question of who is responsible for a nuclear accident arises.

One answer can be: everyone involved. The Japanese philosopher Takahashi Tetsuya（高橋哲哉）, born in Fukushima, talks about the problem of responsibility in his book entitled *the System of Sacrifice: Fukushima and Okinawa* (2012). According to Takahashi, from intellectuals to ordinary people and even further to evacuees in the affected areas, everybody is responsible for Fukushima nuclear accident. One example why Takahashi thinks this so is the responsibility of ignorance. He argues that it is irresponsible of ordinary people who did not try to know the information about nuclear influence: "If they would have wanted to know, they could have known" (Takahashi 2012; 100). The post-Fukushima era requires active participation of every individual. As Takahashi suggests, every social member is responsible to actively make her or his voice heard.

After the nuclear accident, Ōe Kenzaburō called for an anti-nuclear movement in Tokyo, manifesting his firm attitude and will against nuclear power as an influential public intellectual. Thousands of people in Japan corresponded to Ōe's appeal and took part in the demonstration. Ōe once mentioned the problem of "privatized knowledge "（知識の私物化）in a radio interview. Like the I-novel (a type of novel based on the author's own life) in Japanese literature history, Ōe criticizes that we have paid too much attention to the problem of the "self". For a very long time, philosophy has been a knowledgeable field of pursuing the real essence of the world. Literature, on the other hand, is considered to be a kind of work which tends to create fictional worlds through imagination. However, what humanity is confronted with today is a world where the crisis is much more real and concrete than the problem of essence or imagination.

Another expert on radioactive substances, Koide Hiroaki（小出裕章）, belonged to KURN (Kyoto University Institute for Integrated Radiation and Nuclear Science) as an engineer in the past, but very similar to Takagi, Koide

changed his mind and now keeps giving talks about the impossibility and irresponsibility of nuclear energy. His appealing to the public has received lots of attention. As Koide (2014) points out, nuclear power is not only dangerous but also unsustainable because the sources of natural uranium are running out.

Despite all this, nuclear proponents including experts and politicians contend that a sustainable development framework for nuclear energy will be available in the future. However, this is most ironic – at best, it can be seen as trying to solve one problem by creating another. Japan was the first country to be hit by an atomic bomb. This event is considered a decisive factor of Japan's defeat, whereupon the whole nation entered into the postwar period. It must seem incredulous that Japan would also experience the second nuclear catastrophe. Thus seen, the disastrous accident in Fukushima prefecture marks the beginning of another epoch in postwar Japan. We can be said to be no longer in an immediate postwar period but an entirely new era of nuclear crisis.

4.3. Where we are heading to

The accident in Fukushima is an unprecedented crisis in human history. Even now, we are exposed to the environmental crisis of unpredictable technological hazards and risk. Similar to a human's life-span, our living environment seems to be reaching its old age. Our survival hangs on constant challenges. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 11th March 2011 with the following man-made misfortunes draws our attention to the vulnerability of our daily life. The main concern of humanity in the twenty-first Century ought to be the question of how to be an ethical human and our coexistence with future generations. In this post-disaster era, a comprehensive and initial perspective is needed for scientific studies. It is a human world with enormous sacrifice, suffering and deaths. We are responsible not only for future generations but also the silent victims who lost their lives during the disaster.

When speaking of technology, we tend to add another expression, "development", which has sucked us into a false sense of expectations and promises. Technological advancement is said to move at an ever-faster pace. However, despite plenty of sacrifices and horrible catastrophes in the past, our situation remains the same or gets even much worse. What kind of world will wait for us? Could humans survive the next crisis? (WANG Xiaomei)

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