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Critical Time of Professional Knowledge

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SPECIAL ISSUE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE ON POST-QUAKE RECONSTRUCTION

“What can sociologists do?” Since the 2011 earthquake, this has become a fashionable phrase among Japanese sociologists, indicating that new roles and methods of social analysis are necessary in the wake of the 2011 tsunami and Fukushima accident.¹

The 2011 disaster made it clear that advanced science and technology had become deeply embedded into our daily life, blurring the traditional dichotomy between nature and society. For example, on the Sanriku coast, one of the areas which most seriously damaged by the tsunami, modern scientific knowledge and civil engineering technology for disaster preparedness were most densely mobilized during modernization in Japan. In addition, the disruption of the physical structures of civil engineering systems caused people's trust in modern science and technology to shift decisively. Through the Fukushima accident, it became scandalously clear that mainstream academic discourse about nuclear power plants had been produced within a complex conglomerate of electric power companies, bureaucracy, and professional scholars. At the same time, methods of democratic control of energy systems will not be invented without scientific knowledge. New agents linking society with scientific knowledge have emerged such as various types

of NPO/NGOs, research institutes, social venture businesses, social media, and so on.²

Such situation has posed two challenges to sociologists. First, this situation has activated critical sociological analyses of science and technology. It is necessary to verify the usefulness and feasibility of social scientific analyses of the relationship between science, technology, and society, such as SSK (Sociology of Scientific Knowledge), ANT (Actor Network Theory), STS (Science, Technology, and Society), and “risk society” theory, and to update them, taking into account the situation caused by the 2011 disasters in Japan.³

Second, the blurring of the line between nature and society led to a reflexive questioning of sociological standpoints: How can we overcome a traditional dichotomy between sociological approach that is critical but divorced from reality and natural science and civil engineering that is realistic but oblivious to social processes?

On the other hand, discourse centered upon “what we can do” can lead to another problem, particularly, in the context of neoliberal restructuring of academic institutions. Without thinking about “for whom” and “for what” such discourse is useful, the critical space embedded in academic practices will continue to shrink, and professional knowledge will be increasingly mobilized by standards of authoritarian economism.

It is necessary to reinvent new methods of preserving the “space” that which allows for a deep examination of reality, even in unstable situations.

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Our study group held a seminar at the University of Tokyo, Department of Civil Engineering, on July 29, 2011, to probe about such problems. This special issue, *An Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Post-quake Reconstruction*, is based on the discussions that arose in this seminar. The special issue's editor is Naofumi SUZUKI, a member of our study group at Hitotsubashi University. Please refer to his introductory article for further details.

ARTICLE AND ESSAY

Following the first issue, there is one article and one essay about the post-nuclear power plant movement in Japan after the Fukushima accident. Keiichi SATOH's article focuses on media coverage of the anti-nuclear movement in Tokyo from March 11 to November 30, 2011. During this period, street-based protests, demonstrations, or public gatherings had been largely prevalent; however, there was insufficient coverage by the Japanese mass media. Satoh's article considers the characteristics and foundations of media coverage of the demonstrations.

Alexander Brown's essay is about an epic event held on January 14-15, 2011, in Yokohama: the Global Conference for a Nuclear Power Free World. His report focuses on the multi-layered conditions required to realize such a large-scale conference, including organization, built environment, policing, global networks of activism, and artists' involvement in the emerging contexts of social movements after 2000.

RESEARCH

This issue inaugurates a new section: "Research." It will report on the research developments in our study group.

Tadahito YAMAMOTO describes a research project based on interviews with key persons involved in emergency relief operations in the cities of Ofunato and Tono in the Sanriku region on November 4-5, 2011.

Notes

1 Japanese sociologists had some special projects and meetings after the 2011 disaster. For example, The Japan Sociological Society (JSS) (<http://www.gakkai.ne.jp/jss/>) created a mailing list (The Japan Sociological Society Great East Japan Earthquake Mailing List) on July 31, 2011, to share information about studies and research projects on the Great East Japan Earthquake and to promote cooperation among sociologists. A list of projects is already available on the Society's website and continues to be updated (<http://www.gakkai.ne.jp/jss/2011/09/17111811.php>). The 84th annual meeting, which took place on September 17-18, 2011, had two special thematic sessions on the earthquake (<http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/jss/research/conf-e.html>). The Japan Association of Regional and Community Studies, Japan Association for Urban Studies, and JSS had a joint study meeting about the earthquake in Morioka, Iwate Prefecture, on March 5-6, 2012 (http://soc4symposium.sakura.ne.jp/mt/first_website/symposium/).

2 For example, the Citizen's Nuclear Information Center (CNIC) (<http://cnic.jp/>) is a civilian research institute that has played a powerful role in informing ordinary people about the Fukushima plant since the early stages of Fukushima disaster response. Tetsunari IIDA of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies (ISEP) (<http://www.isep.or.jp/>) has played a key role in advising the central government on energy policies after the Fukushima accident.

3 In Japanese sociology, there is a long tradition of anti-nuclear power plant movement studies. The Institute for Sustainability Research and Education, Hosei University (<http://research.cms.k.hosei.ac.jp/sustainability/>), directed by Harutoshi FUNABASHI, is now compiling archives on the earthquake/nuclear disaster problem. After the incident, Koichi HASEGAWA of Tohoku University published a book (*Toward Post Nuclear Power Society*, 2011) and articles in both Japanese and English (<http://www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/~hasegawa/>). The Japanese Society for Science and Technology Studies (<http://jssts.jp/>), founded in 2001, quite sensitively responded to the disaster and held a symposium "Thinking about STS until today from the Great East Japan Earthquake" on June 18, 2011.