Radiation in Japanese Culture During and After Fukushima: a Research Proposal

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**Abstract:** The 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami **###**

In March 2011, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactors released large amounts of radioactive isotopes into the environment of eastern Japan, as a consequence of the devastating Tohoku earthquake and tsunami; the amount of radioactive isotopes released was approximately one-tenth of that released by the Chernobyl event in 1986, and the contaminated area is also approximately one-tenth as large (von Hippel 2011). This environmental contamination has caused a cultural climate of fear and anxiety, as well as mistrust and anger directed at the state and the owners of the nuclear reactors, who seem to be viewed as mismanaging the disaster and failing to keep the public informed (###CITE?). In search of information, many people turned to social media websites, such as Twitter and Facebook; in some cases, this provided timely and useful information on the disaster, but in other cases, false rumors were quickly spread and then only later overtaken by truthful and accurate information (Kaigo 2012:32).

One of the economic consequences of the nuclear accident was contamination of produce and livestock in areas downwind of the radioactive isotope release. The state prevented their sale to protect the public, however the farmers were not compensated for their losses until several months later. In April 2011, farmers protested in Tokyo with their cattle present to increase visibility of the protest, demanding compensation from TEPCO, the electric utility company that owned and operated the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactors (###CITE).

Stratification plays a significant role in the cultural effects of the Fukushima accident. For example, radiation cannot be detected with human senses; instead, a Geiger counter is needed to detect radioactive contamination oneself or one's food or water—this is a significant expense for a working class person, such as a farmer. Geiger counters were found to be necessary, and so they were obtained despite the costs (Ikegami 2012:155). Ikegami also notes that bureaucrats in the central and local governments discouraged lay persons from taking measurements with Geiger counters, ostensibly because of the unreliability; he draws comparison between this discouragement and the Soviet ban on personal usage of dosimeters around the Chernobyl accident, speculating that the true reason for this discouragement is to maintain the balance of power between the state and the public by controlling knowledge of contamination (Ikegami 2012:155).

**Research Proposal**

Statement of Purpose

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Methods and Data

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Significance

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Works Cited

von Hippel 2011 ###

Ikegami 2012 ###

Kaigo 2012 ###