Japan's 3.11 Triple Disaster: Introduction to a Special Issue 特集　3. 11 日本のトリップル惨事　端書き

David McNeill, Paul Jobin

Three years ago Japan's northeast was pummeled by the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami, triggering a meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The plant spewed much of its payload into the surrounding air, countryside and sea, leaving damage that will be with us for decades. Much of what we know about the disaster is still shrouded in mystery. Did Japan's huge civil engineering projects alleviate the impact of the disaster, or magnify it? How has the impact been inflected by class, urban-rural, and wealth disparities? How dangerous was the Daiichi meltdown to Tokyo during the worst week of the crisis from March 11-18th? What was the interaction between Tokyo and Washington and how important was the US Military role in diagnosing the crisis and bringing it under control? Have the authorities and the media fairly represented the nuclear crisis and conveyed its dangers to the Japanese public?

Four writers take up these issues in articles to mark the third anniversary of 3.11. In the first, **Philip C Brown** looks at the long-term, unintended or unimagined consequences of modernizing projects to control sea or river floods. Analyzing primary sources on the emblematic cases of river flood in Niigata from the Meiji period forward, Brown develops insights that can be transposed in the case of 3.11. As in Niigata decades before, in Tohoku the tsunami was magnified by the widespread use of concrete dams, dikes and other structures, which increased the velocity and force of water, he says. Walls designed to keep water out held it in, with particularly devastating consequences for the Daiichi power plant. Confidence in those walls undermined secondary defenses. The disaster exposed the flaws of an overreliance on bureaucratically planned "hard" engineering solutions on local areas, he notes. These solutions often focused on immediate problems, ignoring "social or environmental contexts" in which they function and within which they must operate. "We find broad evidence for the triumph of the interests of the few or the benefit to the national economy at the expense of ordinary folk, especially in the rural and poorer areas of Japan," he says.

Kyle Cleveland peers behind the scenes at the key institutional actors in the nuclear crisis, focusing on the decisions made by the Japanese and US governments as they wrestled to bring it under control. As the crisis recedes in popular memory, he says, much of the standard narrative of what took place has been undermined. His alternative narrative, supported by interviews with diplomats and nuclear scientists, suggests deep confusion and disagreement both within the machinery of the Japanese state, and between Tokyo and Washington.

The confusion was enough to trigger an emergency action plan by American officials in Japan in which thousands of documents dating back a decade were shredded at the US Embassy and military bases. The fact that the plan was implemented suggests US officials believed that departure from Japan was imminent and "that the situation was so volatile that they thought it prudent to take immediate action to protect their assets." Cleveland is critical of the Japanese government's decision to withhold information on the meltdown at Daiichi and the initially supine role of the Japanese mass media in

conveying TEPCO announcements. Despite the post-Fukushima breakdown in public trust and the exposure of official mendacity, he anticipates that much of the old system will remain substantially intact. "But social activism is on the rise, bringing previously disengaged citizens into political movements that were previously the domain of activists, who are now being vindicated by recent events."

The next two papers deal with this civic dimension of 3.11, looking at the specific role played by the Internet. **Shineha Ryuma and Tanaka Mikihito** explore a neglected aspect of the disaster - access to information. Natural disasters often disproportionately affect the poor, the elderly and the disadvantaged. The authors note that the destruction of downtown Kobe city in 1995 led to the collapse of local communities and the alienation of much of its population, accelerated by centralized urban planning that excluded them. The March 11, 2011 disaster struck the comparatively impoverished northeast. The people who live there, including large numbers of senor citizens, were more poorly equipped to understand what was happening than residents of cities outside of the nuclear danger zone. These people were not only left behind during the first weeks of the catastrophe, but also thereafter, in the agenda for reconstruction. The authors call these double victims "the information vulnerable." They remain ostracized from social agenda setting/building, they note.

Finally, **Yasuhito ABE** explores the development of DIY (do-it-yourself) networks of information exchange among Japanese people trying to determine post-Fukushima risks from radiation. Abe points out that confusion over the impact of the Daiichi accident has been compounded by often clumsy government attempts to relieve public anxieties, leaving many citizens struggling to determine the most reliable information on radiation and how to protect themselves. Drawing on Pierre Levy's formulation of universally distributed intelligence and its goal of "mutual recognition and enrichment of individuals" (rather than the "cult of fetishized or hypostatized communities"), Abe looks at the Safecast phenomenon, a grassroots attempt to independently aggregate radiation data from multiple sources. Abe notes that Safecast has now collated more than ten million measurement data points in Japan and beyond. Could this vast network become a valuable source of information for people at risk but also further scientific enquiry into the impact of Fukushima?Are the data put online as "neutral" as Safecast organizers contend? How could these data be provided to those segments of the population, described by Shineha and Tanaka, who have little access to Internet?

This special issue of The Asia-Pacific Journal presents revised versions of papers that were presented at U.C. Berkeley in May 2013 as part of a forum which gathered scholars from Asia, Europe and the U.S. trained in the sociology or the history of science and technology, some experts on Japan, others on Chernobyl or Katrina among other disasters.[1] (file:///D:/Stuff/Japan%20Focus/Articles/2.16.14/intro.m+p.docx#_edn1)

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See the articles in the Special Issue:

Philip C. Brown, Call it A 'Wash'? Historical Perspectives on Conundrums of Technological Modernization, Flood Amelioration and Disasters in Modern Japan (/-Philip_C_-Brown/4074)

Shineha Ryuma and Tanaka Mikihito, Mind the Gap: 3.11 and the Information Vulnerable (/-Tanaka-Mikihito/4076)

Kyle Cleveland, Mobilizing Nuclear Bias: The Fukushima Nuclear Crisis and the Politics of Uncertainty (/-Kyle-Cleveland/4075)

Yasuhito ABE, Safecast or the Production of Collective Intelligence on Radiation Risks after 3.11 (/-Yasuhito-_Abe_/4077)

Notes

[1] Other papers and online discussion can be seen on the website of the forum: The STS Forum on the 2011 Fukushima / East Japan Disaster, Inaugural Meeting @ UC Berkeley 11-14 May 2013 (http://fukushimaforum.wordpress.com/workshops/sts-forum-on-the-2011-fukushima-east-japan-disaster/manuscripts/).

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David McNeill is the Japan correspondent for The Independent (http://www.independent.co.uk/) and other publications, including The Irish Times (http://www.irishtimes.com/), The Economist (http://www.economist.com/) and The Chronicle of Higher Education (http://chronicle.com/section/Home/5). He covered the nuclear disaster for all three publications, has been to Fukushima ten times since 11 March 2011, and has written the book Strong in the Rain (http://amzn.com/0230341861/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20) (with Lucy Birmingham) about the disasters. He is an Asia-Pacific Journal editor.

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Biographical Statement:

Since coming to Japan in 2000, I've switched career emphasis from academia to journalism, though I continue to teach part-time. In addition to my Sophia work, I'm currently the

Japan/Korea correspondent for the Chronicle of Higher Education and a regular contributor to the Irish Times, Independent and Japan Times newspapers. My work has also appeared in Newsweek, New Scientist, The Face, New Statesman, South China Morning Post and the International Herald Tribune, The Chicago Tribune, on the BBC, RTE and CBC and in many other outlets. I'm a board member of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan and chair of The Foreign Press in Japan.

Career highlights:

I taught full-time at the Department of Media, Critical and Creative Arts in Liverpool John Moores University (http://www.linkedin.com/companies/liverpool-john-moores-university?trk=ppro_cprof&lnk=vw_cprofile) from July 1995 - August 1999. I've since taught at the Guangdong University of Technology in southern China, and the University of Tokyo, Takushoku University and the Tokyo Institute of Technology in Japan. My reporting has taken me to most parts of Japan as well as Thailand, South Korea, The Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Alaska, and the Caribbean.

Honors:

Walter Allen Prize for Creative Writing, University of Ulster 1991; Daiwa Japanese scholarship 1993; Monbusho Japanese 2-year scholarship, 1993-5; Japanese Proficiency Certificate from University of Tokyo 1994; Japan Foundation bursary for study in Japan 1999; Best Technology Writing, University of Michigan 2006; Education Writers Association, best article in 'series' category (for Chronicle of Higher Education) 2009.

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