

As If Nothing Had Occurred: Anti-Tokyo Olympics Protests and Concern Over Radiation Exposure

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Abstract: This paper argues the 2020 Tokyo Olympics has raised people’s awareness of concerns over radiation exposure as a form of social movement. One example is the Shinjuku demonstration, organized by the Network to Evacuate People from Radiation, which constantly advocates for protecting children from continuing radiation exposure. The group raised the issue that Olympic torch would pass through municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture where several high-level radiation hot spots are confirmed. Furthermore, concerns over radiation exposure have been also generating a grassroots movement to create the Chernobyl Law in Japan. This paper documents the emerging movement across the country, led by the Citizens’ Action for Fukushima Justice.

The Shinjuku Demonstration

Anti-Olympic sentiment has been embedded in the ongoing anti-nuclear movements, particularly since the announcement that Tokyo won the bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics in September 2013.

Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo touched on the Fukushima problem in Tokyo’s final presentation for the Olympic bid in Buenos Aires, asserting that the government would never put Tokyo in harm’s way, stating, “[s]ome may have concerns about Fukushima. Let me assure you, the situation is under control. It has never done and will never do any damage to Tokyo” (Kantei 2013).

The Japanese government pressed home the message of using the Olympics as a force in its reconstruction efforts from the March 11 disaster.

“The Olympics preparations are proceeding as if nothing had occurred,” said Okada Toshiko, one of the leaders of the Shinjuku Demo. The rally has been organized by the [Network to Evacuate People from Radiation \(Datsu hibaku jitsugen netto\)](#) - a loose citizens’ network calling attention to potential radiation exposure.

Okada told me that “the Friday Demonstrations in Kantei-mae in front of the Prime Minister’s Office are only focused on one issue - objection to restarting nuclear power plants, continuously shouting ‘Don’t re-start nuclear power plants.’ That is important. However, I wanted to get more attention about protecting children from continuing radiation exposure.”

She added, “I am not protesting the Olympics itself. I am objecting to hosting the Olympics while hiding such radiation exposure.”

The Shinjuku Demonstration was initiated by members who supported the Fukushima Collective Evacuation Trial (*Fukushima shūdan sokai saiban*), which sued for the evacuation of children from Koriyama city, which had been deemed safe for habitation. On June 24, 2011, just three months after the March 11 disaster, 14 children at elementary schools and junior-high schools filed a lawsuit against Koriyama city, resorting to a court of law and demanding their right to study in a safe environment. The suit was filed against the city seeking an

injunction against compulsory education activities in a radiation-contaminated environment of over 1 millisieverts (mSv) per year. The Koriyama Branch of the Fukushima District Court, however, dismissed the case on December 16, 2011. As this decision was completely unacceptable, the plaintiffs (the representatives of the 14 children) filed a formal objection at the end of 2011 before the Sendai High Court. On April 24, 2013, the Sendai High Court ruled to reject an appeal. The plaintiffs' lawsuit argued that Koriyama city had the legal responsibility to evacuate the elementary- and junior-high-school students. Meanwhile, the court acknowledged that radiation in Koriyama city exceeded levels deemed safe prior to the disaster, but that the government shouldered no responsibility for evacuating the schools as demanded, in effect, telling people to leave at their own discretion if they were worried. However, voluntary evacuees from outside the evacuation area were not statistically classified as evacuees and were not covered by the victim support system.

The Network to Evacuate People from Radiation organized the first demonstration in February 2013 in Shinjuku and has repeated it twice a year since then. At the 13th rally, on November 9, 2019, demonstrators once again declared their concern regarding radiation exposure. The main message of the demonstration flyer (see Figure 1) is that the demonstrators will not allow the government to act as if no severe nuclear accident had occurred, and that there are ineradicable realities and violations of human rights caused by the Fukushima disaster.



Figure 1: Flyer for Shinjuku Demo on November 9, 2019

© Network to Evacuate People from Radiation (*Datsu hibaku jitsugen netto*) and Tetsuya Chiba

One participant protesting against the upcoming Tokyo Olympics, claimed that it was horrible that according to the current plan, the Olympic torch will pass through municipalities on the national route 6, that were heavily affected by the March 11 disaster. Those are areas in which several high-level radiation hot spots are confirmed and are designated as difficult-to-return zones (*kikan konnan kuiki*) by the national government. When passing through the area, cars are not even allowed to open the windows. She pointed out that despite this, the torch relay will be run by local junior and senior high school students. Furthermore, she objected to an optimistic comment aired by the state-run NHK television that people living near national route 6 wanted the world to know about Fukushima's recovery as the children run the torch relay.

In late June 2019, I visited Hamadori, the coastal area in eastern Fukushima Prefecture where the torch relay is planned. I dropped by J-Village, a soccer-training center used as an

emergency response hub for Fukushima plant workers. It was fully reopened on April 20, 2019 for the first time in eight years. This place will be the starting point for the relay on March 26, 2020 that will also pass through Okuma, a host town of the nuclear plant, where the government lifted an evacuation order on April 10, 2019. The lifting of the evacuation order at the stroke of midnight was the first of its kind for a host town of the nuclear plant, which straddles the towns of Okuma and Futaba. Meanwhile, Fukushima city, which is just 50 kms away from the ruins of the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant, will host Olympic baseball and softball competitions.

I had the impression that the area was far from recovery, however. The radiation dosimeter in the parking lot at J-Village read 0.120 microsieverts (μSv) per hour (see Figure 2). This figure was indeed under 0.23 μSv per hour, the official Japanese government's decontamination threshold. However, during my fieldwork, I found that people do not trust the measurement, saying that the official measurements need to be treated with caution since the authorities have a vested interest in downplaying radiation dose levels. In fact, in December 2019, Greenpeace Japan revealed that the radiation levels around J-Village Stadium were as high as 71 μSv per hour at surface level. This is 1,775 times higher than the 0.04 μSv per hour prior to the Fukushima Daiichi triple reactor meltdown in 2011. These facts had never been released by the government (Greenpeace 2019).



Figure 2: Radiation dosimeter at J-Village, a photo taken by the author, June 24, 2019

Greenpeace Japan sent a letter to Japan's Environmental Minister Koizumi Shinjiro, demanding immediate decontamination measures and an assurance that the public will not be exposed to radiation hot spots during the Olympics and Paralympics events at J-Village. At about the same time, the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) Germany (IPPNW Germany 2019), issued a statement on the radiation risk, arguing that the Olympic Games should not be used to distract from the fate of the people affected by the reactor meltdown but rather to make sure their needs, worries, and demands are properly addressed. They are trying to do just that with their campaign "Tokyo 2020 - The Radioactive

Olympics.” Dr. Alex Rosen, chairman of the German IPPNW, explained in the press release: “We are concerned about the health consequences of radioactive contamination, especially for people with increased vulnerability toward radiation, such as pregnant women and children.” ([IPPNW European Affiliates 2019](#))

Toward Creating a “Chernobyl Law” in Japan

Social movements in Japan have entered a new phase since 2011 following the March 11 disaster (Ogawa 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018, forthcoming [2020a]). Social movements are change-orientated political formations, and I have been also observing that people are becoming more strategic in their efforts to drive social change. Instead of just protesting the government’s nuclear policy, or demanding that the government abandon nuclear power plants, ordinary citizens are taking specific actions to change their lives. One example is a grassroots initiative across Japan constructing renewable energy or mostly solar panels as it is relatively easy to set up the panels (see Ogawa forthcoming [2020b]). People have started building self-sufficient, sustainable lives by their own efforts.

I have also observed another initiative to make change, a social movement organized by the [Citizens’ Action for Fukushima Justice](#), in coordination with the Network to Evacuate People from Radiation. Citizens who are concerned about radiation exposure have focused their efforts on the eventual creation of a Japanese version of the “Chernobyl Law.” The Chernobyl Law was promulgated in 1991, five years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, by three republics of the former Soviet Union – Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus – to help the people affected by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. It was aimed at protecting the lives and health of citizens affected by radiation

exposure, and indeed was the first law in the world that explicitly covered the universal human right to life of people affected by a radiation disaster. This law guaranteed the right to evacuation for the residents living in the areas contaminated by radiation, while providing social security to the people living in the areas to which the evacuation orders were issued. Under the Chernobyl Law, areas in which the amount of contamination is more than 1 millisievert per year were designated as areas covered by the right of relocation. It included help with finding a job, accommodation, medical treatment, and securing food supplies. Meanwhile, the Japanese government raised the dose limit for radiation exposure from 1 millisievert to 20 millisievert per year after the Fukushima disaster on April 19, 2011 (MEXT 2011), and the government still maintains the same standard.

Yanagihara Toshio, a lawyer who previously represented the plaintiffs at the Fukushima Collective Evacuation Trial, has been leading this Japanese effort to enact the “Chernobyl Law in Japan.” Yanagihara told me that the Tokyo Olympics would be a great chance to raise awareness of concerns over radiation exposure. He even expects that pressures or criticism over radiation exposure by foreign countries might be effective in Japan. “The Tokyo Olympics would be a stepping-stone where everyone realizes the necessity of the Chernobyl Law in Japan, as the Seoul Olympics paved the way to building democracy in South Korea.”

As the first step to institutionalize the Chernobyl Law in Japan, Yanagihara and other members proposed the creation of a series of local ordinances on the rights to evacuation across the country. He refers to the previous experience of grassroots support for the national Information Disclosure Law. This law was a product of the cumulative efforts made by the citizens across the country – they

requested their municipal and prefectural governments to create a local ordinance on information disclosure, members of the councils discussed the request, and then enacted the local ordinances promoting freedom of information. Originally, this started in 1982 in Kanayama-machi, a small rural town in Yamagata Prefecture, and then spread in 1983 to Saitama and Kanagawa Prefectures. Other prefectures and municipalities soon followed suit. This citizens' movement eventually led to the promulgation of the Information Disclosure Law at the national level in 1999 that was enacted in April 2001.

The Citizens' Action for Fukushima Justice prepared the template for a draft proposal of a local ordinance, which people can use as a model.

Chernobyl Law in Japan (excerpt)

Preamble: The State cannot escape liability unconditionally for a radiological disaster.

The State assumes responsibility not only for compensating for the damage suffered by the radiation disaster but also for fulfilling people's right to relocation. As a result, due to the enforcement of this ordinance, we claim that the expenses expended by the municipality of [subject to insert the name here] should originally be borne by the government, and the government has a duty to amend the law.

Article 1 (Purpose): The purpose is to protect the lives, health, and livelihood of citizens from nuclear accidents and radiation disasters.

Article 2 (Principal): The municipality of [subject to insert the name here] guarantees the right of relocation, the right to evacuation, and the right to sound health of the victims of the nuclear accident.

Article 5 (Consideration for vulnerable people): Care must be taken to protect the lives and health of radiologically sensitive fetuses and children.

Article 8 (Classification of radioactively contaminated areas): Areas with an annual additional exposure of 0.5 msv/year or more are defined as areas with enhanced radiation management. Areas with an annual additional exposure of 1 msv/year or more are designated as relocation-rights areas.

Article 11 (Right to choose relocation): If people in a contaminated area chose to relocate or evacuate, the rights guaranteed these residents by the municipality include payment of moving expenses, housing compensation, and employment support at the relocation destination; loss compensation for real estate, household goods, and products (including marine products) from the original relocation source; free medical supplies, 70% coverage of medical examination and recuperation expenses, issuance of a victim's notebook, and pension benefits.

Article 12 (Right to choose to remain): If people choose to remain and not evacuate, the municipality guarantees free medical treatment, free medical supplies, 70% coverage of medical examinations and recuperation expenses, compensation for loss of contaminated products (including seafood), issuance of a victim's notebook, and pension benefits. The article also requires the municipality to establish a radioactive food control section to inspect radioactive food and tap water for contamination in order to prevent unnecessary radiation exposure.

Some local initiatives calling for the creation of a Japanese Chernobyl Law have actually started. Ise city, Mie Prefecture in central

Japan, was the first city to take such a step. Ueno Masami, director of the Fukushima-Iseshima Association (<https://fukushima-iseshima.jimdofree.com/>), an NPO group supporting recuperation for children from Fukushima, put out a call for cooperation on July 8, 2017 on the group's website to enact a Japanese Chernobyl Law. The call was originally in Japanese, and an English version is available [here](#) on their website.

Ueno and her group campaigned for a local ordinance that protects the health and safety of people from radiation exposure. In August 2019, the group started taking action and they got approval from the mayor of Ise city to bring the issue to the council. However, in order to make it actually happen, the group needed to increase the number of municipal council members who agree or collect a certain number of signatures (or 1/50th of the municipal population of 18+ years) in a designated period (one month) to bring the agenda to the municipal assembly to formally discuss. The group chose the latter method, but only collected 64 percent of the required numbers during the one-month period and their bid was not successful. This seemed primarily due to insufficient preparation, and the group did not get enough attention. Undeterred, they will begin collecting signatures again in March 2020.

As of January 2020, discussions have also started in some local municipalities such as Chofu (Tokyo), Koriyama (Fukushima), and Kiyose (Tokyo). As we come closer to the date of the Tokyo Olympics, we need to keep an eye on the developments in these municipalities regarding local campaigns for a Japanese Chernobyl Law. Updates will be available at the [Citizens' Action for Fukushima Justice website](#).

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