

Emigration from Japan: Environmental Justice of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster

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Introduction

Although this study focuses on environmental ethics *prima facie*, I explore an emigration process due to the environmental displacement. In March of 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster struck Japan. An enormous amount of radioactive substances polluted the land, air, water, and food, and, following this, an estimated millions of people were displaced temporally or permanently. Throughout this unprecedented catastrophe, many victims tried to seek better environmental quality. Parents of infants and schoolchildren, in particular, attempted to protect their children from radiation by escaping to less contaminated places, and some of them moved out Japan. However, that truth still lacks transparency. To understand the nature of the emigration, this study focuses on environmental injustices which were experienced by these emigrating evacuees and seeks to elucidate justice which was achieved by them. I interviewed 32 evacuees and analysed their narratives from the viewpoint of distribution and recognition. The findings indicate that they experienced maldistribution of radioactive substances, health problems, information, and radiological defence policies. Nevertheless, their protests against this maldistribution were not appropriately recognised. On the contrary, they were ignored and criticised by the Japanese authorities and the majority of the society. This misrecognition and the maldistribution aptly testifies environmental injustice in the disaster. To redress these injustices, the evacuees carried out their own countermeasures including independent radioactivity measuring and political movement, and one of the most ultimate means was emigration from Japan. Through this process, the emigrating evacuees achieved environmental justice.

Distribution and Recognition

To explore environmental justice and injustice in the context of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, this study employs two different viewpoints: distribution and recognition. The conception of justice is defined by Rawls (1971) as the distribution of goods in a society, and injustices are provided through the maldistribution of goods. However, when considering the cause and process of the maldistribution, individual and social recognition must be addressed in order to redress the injustices (Fraser 1995). Therefore, to understand the injustices in the disaster, this study investigates what was/was not distributed and recognised. Furthermore, to elucidate the environmental justice, the study also focuses

on what was redistributed and what was recognised to redress the injustices.

Methods

I did snow-ball sampling and semi-structured interview with 32 evacuees in Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Germany, and Indonesia in 2017. Narrative analysis was employed to understand their experience.

Findings

The research uncovered that the environmental injustice in the Fukushima disaster was marked by the maldistribution (radioactive substances, health problem, information, relief supplies and financial support, countermeasures, protective policies) and the misrecognition (risk perception, health problems, claims for countermeasures, political movement). These maldistribution and misrecognition caused the evacuees' emigration from Japan. Particularly, their countermeasures against radioactivity was ignored and criticised by the authorities and the majority of the society, and this misrecognition amplified distrust of the society and determined the emigration. Consequently, the environmental justice was achieved by the evacuees' actions for recognition (self and others) and redistribution (information, other goods, migration). Thus, through the emigration, the evacuees redistributed themselves to other countries and obtained ideal environment. Furthermore, their actions to seek environmental justice were affirmatively recognised by their neighbours and friends in the destination.

Implications for future research

This distribution and recognition approach seems to be applicable to various types of migration; economic or environmental migration is caused by maldistribution of goods (wealth, welfare and environment), and migration itself has redistributive functions. Willekens (2016) argues migration is "a mechanism of population redistribution." Furthermore, some refugees are victims of political misrecognition, and they migrate to gain recognition as a refugee. Thus, migration is a journey to seek justice of distribution and recognition.

Selected References

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