

History of environmental philosophy in Japan

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Outline of Research Area

In this seminar, we research on the Japanese experiences of severe environmental damage and grass-roots anti-pollution movements from a historical viewpoint. Generally, "environmental philosophy" means Western thinker's products, but we think it is important that many untitled citizens have also produced their own grass-roots environmental philosophy.

Japan achieved rapid industrialization and economic growth from the 1950s to 70s with enormous cost to human life. Not only famous cases such as the Minamata disease, but widespread environmental disasters occurred in other local areas too. Against this situation, some general citizens metamorphosed into thinkers: a "Normal housewife" produced a superior writing, and a "Normal high school teacher" organized a highly scientific investigation. They struggled to avoid local environmental crisis, seeking alternative ways of changing our society to be eco-friendly and people-friendly. Those efforts give us valuable hints for sustainable society, even now.

Methods for Research

The key method for our research is case study: doing sociological fieldwork based on historical documents. We have a particular focus on citizen's narrative (related to the method of life-history research). Local knowledge integrated with their own individual experiences will teach us universal ideas for a sustainable future.

Themes

- Anti-pollution movement by victims of the Ashio copper-mine incident after World War II
- Residents' movement to prevent environmental damage in Rikuzentakata city, Iwate prefecture
- The interaction between anti-pollution movements around the country in the 1970s

Publications

Yuuki TOMOZAWA, 2014, *Philosophy of Japanese Environmental Sociology: An Exploration of the Thoughts of Nobuko Iijima, 1938-2001* (「問い」としての公害：環境社会学者・飯島伸子の思索) . Tokyo: Keisoshobo. (Japanese version only)