THE BATTLE FOR FUKUSHIMA'S REPUTATION

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Abstract – Fukushima Prefecture has a negative reputation. People everywhere continue to believe that Fukushima is unsafe due to high radiation levels and that its locally grown foods should not be eaten. This negative assessment is not based on the prefecture's current status, but from perceptions formed after the March 2011 nuclear accident. Fukushima residents asked me to tell the world the truth about Fukushima and to help them overcome their negative reputation. I agreed, and in 2019 I moved from Hawaii to Fukushima City to accomplish that mission.

1. Introduction

I am a third-generation Japanese American whose grandparents emigrated from Kumamoto, Japan to Hawaii. I went to Fukushima for the first time in June 2011 with Rotarians on a humanitarian mission. Unfortunately, I had to leave after only one day but I promised Rotarians that I would someday return. I went back seven years later and learned the prefecture was still considered unsafe from nuclear radiation. Residents asked me to help dispel the prefecture's negative reputation by telling the public the facts about Fukushima. They said that since I had no family in Fukushima and I came from the United States, I would be considered objective when I spoke to people.

My wife and I moved from Hawaii to Fukushima City in 2019. It was a difficult decision to relocate because Japan is not an easy place for foreigners to live. My mission was unprecedented and I created a unique strategy to solve a difficult and uncommon problem: I became a self-appointed volunteer who did not work for the government or other organization and I would tell the world Fukushima's story. My volunteer status helped me to be seen as objective and that was very important for my mission. I was cautioned by residents, however, that they found it difficult to change negative perceptions of Fukushima and it would also be difficult for me.

2. The Situation

The Government of Japan was criticized for its post-disaster management but it made several decisions that positively affected the health of residents. Residents were evacuated and people were prevented from eating locally grown foods. The government also decided that the nuclear plant would not be entombed like Chernobyl but would be decommissioned, and evacuated areas would be revitalized to create new towns and industries. The large-scale industrial revitalization, if successful, could also become a model and help other regions in Japan to create a better future.

In 2018 I learned that most Fukushima people lived normal lives and except for the evacuated areas, I saw no physical reminders of the 2011 disaster. I was surprised to learn that people globally still believed that Fukushima was unsafe because of radiation, and they did not know that Fukushima had made tremendous progress in its disaster recovery, or revitalization. The lack of knowledge was, in my opinion, the basic reason Fukushima was viewed negatively. Non-stop media coverage of the nuclear disaster in 2011 had badly stigmatized Fukushima as an unsafe place, and seven years of revitalization progress was not transparent so people around the world did not know Fukushima's current condition.

I studied what may have caused Fukushima's negative reputation and the explanations included lack of trust in TEPCO and the government, fear and

misunderstanding of radiation, concern for evacuated residents, uncertainty for the future of evacuated areas, improper management of nuclear waste and “Tritium water,” and the decommissioning of Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. I strongly believed that information related to these topics was the key to overcoming the negative perceptions of Fukushima.

3. My Strategy

I had to explain how Fukushima had improved since the nuclear accident. The government was informing the public about Fukushima’s status by promoting its food products and the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games. However, people wondered how and why Fukushima went from a dangerous place in 2011 to a safe place seven years later. I wanted to help them understand by explaining the facts of revitalization progression. I worked with government offices to obtain current information but I was not a government spokesperson. I was a volunteer observer of conditions in Fukushima who then explained to others what I had learned. I gave speeches to Rotary Clubs and other groups¹⁾, in newspaper columns and articles²⁾, and on interviews on TV, YouTube and radio programs³⁾. This strategy was successful and people told me that my presentation or article helped them to open their minds and to appreciate what Fukushima Prefecture has accomplished.

I assembled an energetic team of volunteers to execute the mission. I started with a few people in Hawaii and Washington D.C. and added Fukushima team members. I am not fluent in Japanese so team members helped me with interpreting and translation. Our team currently has over 30 people.

My research about Fukushima’s revitalization focused on radiation risk, agriculture and marine product radiation safety, evacuated areas, decommissioning, business revitalization, and health monitoring. My sources of information included residents, newspaper articles, online sites, engineers, university professors, doctors, NPOs, civilian associations, national government officials, and prefectural and municipal officials. It is difficult to understand Fukushima’s revitalization because there are many separate and interconnected parts and information about them is located in many different places (*). A great deal of online information about Fukushima is outdated or not believable. All this explains the public’s lack of understanding of revitalization progress such as in

one survey where 47% of respondents “see scant progress in reconstruction after 2011 disaster⁴⁾.”

I highly recommend four places where residents and foreigners can learn about Fukushima’s revitalization: Environmental Regeneration Plaza in Fukushima City, Commutan Fukushima in Miharu, TEPCO Decommissioning Archive Center in Tomioka, and the Fukushima Innovation Coast Framework – Fukushima Innovation Promotion Office in Fukushima City. The Fukushima International Association has a multi-language site with extensive online resources.

4. Conclusions

The world does not know Fukushima Prefecture’s current situation. Fukushima is not well known because foreign people historically and today do not come to the prefecture. Its post-disaster revitalization program is complex and hard to understand. Accurate media coverage is lacking. All of these together create a difficult barrier for people to understand Fukushima today, but the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games present a large and timely media platform for updating global perceptions about Fukushima. Recent, highly publicized, multi-country objections to serving Fukushima-grown food to Olympic athletes is a painful reminder of the extensive misunderstanding about Fukushima’s level of danger. I have been successful in informing people about Fukushima’s current status but much more is needed. A major information campaign by the world media is needed before the Olympics arrive, and if this does not happen there is a great possibility that past negative media messages about Fukushima will be recycled in 2020.

(*) Useful Information Sites/Sources

Environmental Regeneration Plaza, Commutan Miharu, TEPCO Decommissioning Center, Fukushima Innovation Coast Promotion Organization, Fukushima Medical University, Nagasaki University, Fukushima International Association, International Affairs Division – Fukushima Prefectural Gov’t, Fukushima River & National Highway Office – Ministry of Land Infrastructure, Transport & Tourism, NPO Global Mission Japan, Rotary International, and Radio Fukushima.

References

- 1) Rotary Club of Fukushima, May 7, 2019.
Rotary Club of Mililani Sunrise, Sep 25, 2019.

Hiroshima/Yamaguchi Heritage Club, Sep 28, 2019.
Global Seminar at JICA Nov 24, 2019.

- 2) Hawaii Nikkan San, Aug 20, 2019, Sep 24, 2019, Oct 23, 2019, Nov 27, 2019.
Hawaii Pacific Press, Nov 1, 2018, May 1, 2019.
Hawaii Star Advertiser OP-ED, Jul 22, 2019.
- 3) TUF TV, May 16, 2019.
Radio Fukushima, Aug 31, 2019.
ThinkTech Hawaii Law Across the Sea, Sep 30, 2019.
- 4) The Japan News(online), March 11, 2019.

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新刊紹介 「原子力発電世論の力学」

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世論調査とは乱暴な代物だ。原発をテーマにした調査にしても、一般人はこの問題にそれほど関心をもっているわけではない。けれどもあえて「原発の再稼働についてどう思うか」などと聞かれれば、回答者は意識をいやおうなしに顕在化させなければならない。しかも回答は、そこで示されたわずかな選択肢から選ばせられるのだ。社会学者ブルデューの言葉を一部借りるならば、それは対象者に対する皮相的で強制性をもった介入にはかならない。

世論調査にはもともと、そんな制約や限界や暴力性がある。しかし、それをふまえた上で、長年の調査結果を集大成した書籍が出た。標記の書籍がそれである。

この書籍では、データが表す対象者の意識の変化の推移を賛否といった二分法的ではとらえない。回答として示される表面的な意識ではなく、その意識の根底にある価値観の相違や変化に焦点をあてる。その際に筆者が注目したのは、「リスク」「効率性」「脱物質主義」という三つの要因だ。

一つ目のここで言う「リスク」とは、「被害の重大性×確率」の積で表される「客観リスク」とは別物で、対象がもつリスクの種類や社会状況などで左右される「主観リスク」である。なお、これまでの原発事故では事故直後に原発への不安感が増

したが、その後の経過とともに不安感は低下した。しかし、福島原発事故では事故前より高い水準で下げ止まったままで、戻る気配がない。原発への「リスク認知」は高止まりしたままだ。

二つ目の効率性の要因は、原発がもつ利点や有用性を重視する視点である。原発推進派の人はこれを過大に、そして反対派はこれを過少に評価する傾向がある。

三つ目の脱物質主義は、どのような社会の実現をめざすかという、個人の価値観に関わるものである。

この書籍では、これらの三つの要因が原発世論に影響を与えるとみる。このうち「リスク認知」と「脱物質主義」が高ければ、原発世論は原発に対して否定的な方向へ向かい、「効率性」の意識が強ければ肯定的な方向へ作用すると分析する。さらにそれらの要素は原発をめぐる事故や不祥事のあるなし、さらには社会状況の変化を受けて、さまざまに変わると同書は言う。

本書の著者は市民のうつろいやすい意識と、その根底にある信念や価値観にもとづく変わりにくい意識とを見事に切り分けて、見据えようとしている。

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