Special Issue
Practicing a Public Anthropology of the East Japan Disaster

Introduction

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On March 11, 2011, a mega-earthquake of 9.0 magnitude struck East Japan, followed by a towering tsunami and the meltdown of several nuclear reactors in Fukushima. This was a huge disaster of unprecedented complexity. The disaster left approximately 20,000 dead, including missing people, and it is said that the damage can be estimated at 17 trillion Japanese yen. The authors of this special issue have been studying the East Japan Disaster since its earliest stages and have already published what David Slater has called "urgent ethnography" (Slater 2013). However, what we should understand is that disaster is a long process. The process of recovery from the disaster proceeds at a snail’s pace. As of November 2014, more than three-and-a-half years after the disaster, there were still about 240,000 evacuees and displaced people, and the local economic situation remained shaky. Particularly in Fukushima, the nuclear plants still remain in critical condition.

In this situation, this special issue raises methodological, theoretical, and practical questions regarding how anthropologists should engage with the disaster over a longer time span, and what anthropologists can do sustainably in collaborative research projects toward the future. Putting anthropology to work in the public sphere, we hope to practice a public anthropology that contributes to the understanding and solution of contemporary public issues beyond the narrow discipline of anthropology, while collaborating with various actors and organizations involved. The East Japan Disaster is exactly the kind of challenge we have to respond to.

Public Anthropology

Within this framework, this paper serves as a brief introduction to the special issue, stressing the necessity to practice a public anthropology in the context of the East Japan Disaster. Recently in Japan, we have often come across various research fields with the term “public.” For instance, “public philosophy,” “public policy science,” “public sociology,” and so on. This is also the case with anthropology. “Public anthropology” has been

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developing particularly in the United States, where several universities have started public anthropology programs. The University of California Press has also been publishing a public anthropology series since 2001.

What is public anthropology? Robert Borofsky (2007), an ardent promoter of public anthropology in the United States, writes, “Public anthropology seeks to address broad critical concerns in ways that others beyond the discipline are able to understand what anthropologists can offer to the re-framing and easing—if not necessarily always resolving—of present-day dilemmas.” In other words, anthropology should contribute to the understanding and solution of contemporary public issues beyond the discipline through engagement in broader public spheres.

Paying attention to the backdrop behind this definition, this paper discusses why we need a public anthropology, by examining the following controversial questions: (1) why and how we should engage in public issues; (2) why and how we should go beyond the borders of the discipline of anthropology; (3) why and how we should collaborate with other sectors and institutions; (4) the utility of public anthropology as a concept, and its relationship with applied anthropology; and (5) public anthropologists as value-positive reformers rather than value-free observers. In so doing, the paper aims to locate public anthropology within the contemporary discourse on the role and purpose of anthropology.

**Why a Public Anthropology?**

(1) **Why and How We Should Engage in Public Issues**

In a session called “Defining a Public Interest Anthropology” organized by Peggy R. Sanday and Elvin Hatch at the 97th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 1998, in Philadelphia, the then President of the Association, James Peacock, stressed the social contribution of anthropology, and asked “public or perish?,” playing on the academic maxim, “publish or perish” (Peacock 1998). Here we can see the consciousness of crisis of the American Anthropological Association: the fear that anthropology may not be able to survive without contributing to the public sphere. In discussing the future of anthropology, Peacock has examined the relations between the academy and society, and stated, “Focus outward. Seek vital ways that anthropology can contribute beyond the discipline and beyond the academy, to society and thought” (Peacock 1997: 14; Emphasis is in original). Then, in the second edition of his book, *The Anthropological Lens*, published in 2001, Peacock added a section on public anthropology, which was missing in the first edition published in 1986. He defined public anthropology as “one way of being actively engaged, contributing, of becoming integral and significant to our culture and society without becoming subservient” (Peacock 2001: 129).

In 2011 Robert Borofsky published the Kindle E-book, *Why a Public Anthropology?* (Borofsky 2011). In its “Introduction,” he says, “Cultural anthropology has the potential to change the world. It can bring institutional accountability, facilitating transparency in
political and social matters. It encourages ‘big picture’ understandings that allow us to appreciate important problems in deeper and broader ways than might otherwise.” But he also notes, “The field's potential still remains to be realized.”

In Japan, too, academics and universities have been increasingly required to contribute to society. *Bunka Jinruigaku* (Japanese Journal of Cultural Anthropology), the flagship journal of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology, carried special features on public issues such as “Anthropology's Role in Cooperation between Universities and Local Inhabitants” (Vol.72, No.2, 2007), and “Multicultural Coexistence and Cultural Anthropology” (Vol.74, No.1, 2009). Research after the 3.11 East Japan Disaster has accelerated this trend, while pushing anthropology towards the public sphere, just as was the case in the US after 9.11 (Checker et al. 2011).

(2) Why and How We Should Go beyond the Borders of the Discipline of Anthropology

Anthropology is characterized by its holistic approach. In other words, anthropology is interdisciplinary even within its own borders. Therefore, it is natural for anthropologists to go beyond the borders of the discipline, depending on the object of research. For instance, if one practices medical anthropology, one has to study medical sciences as well. The public issues in which public anthropologists are involved need to be analyzed and solved by cooperation between different disciplines, because the issues are usually complex phenomena beyond one particular discipline. In so doing, we can enlarge the boundaries of anthropology. Also, as Peacock stated, we should “focus outward” to demonstrate anthropology’s contribution to the wider society.

(3) Why and How We Should Collaborate with Other Sectors and Institutions

Public anthropology is an anthropology that is engaged in the public sphere. There are many levels of public-ness, from local communities to the nation-state, and further to international communities with various historical depths. There are also a variety of public-nesses, from the state-oriented to the civil society-oriented. In establishing public anthropology, special attention should be paid to the local community and the civil society where anthropologists usually carry out their research. In public spheres, we should collaborate with other sectors and institutions, because various stakeholders are involved. Therefore, in practicing public anthropology, we should do what Luke Eric Lassiter has called “collaborative research” and make a “collaborative ethnography” (Lassiter 2005, 2008). Theoretically, it is a developmental form of dialogical or reciprocal ethnography in post-modern anthropology. Lassiter’s book, *The Power of Kiowa Song*, is an example of such a collaborative ethnography, in which he writes, “Ideally, academic conversations about culture on the one hand and community conversations about culture on the other meet in the forum of the written text” (Lassiter 1998: 10-11). “Collaboration” beyond the academic discipline is thus a keyword for public anthropology.
(4) The Utility of Public Anthropology as a Concept, and Its Relationship with Applied Anthropology

In his paper “Defining Public Anthropology,” Borofsky (2007) discussed “the tension with applied anthropology.” Applied anthropology has a long history, dating back to 1906, of addressing concrete, practical problems of the world (van Willigen, 1997: 21). In his article “Why I Am Not a Public Anthropologist,” Merrill Singer (2001) criticized public anthropology by saying that Borofsky ignored the work and tradition of applied anthropology. Applied anthropology stresses the practical side of the dichotomy of theory and practice. However, theory and practice are actually inseparable. There are no anthropological practices without theory. Public anthropology seeks to integrate theory and practice. In so doing, we can expect what Peacock has called synergy between theory and practice. Practice is the catalyst for theory (Peacock 1997: 13-14). Louise Lamphere (2004) sees that the interests of applied anthropologists and those engaged in public anthropology are converging. In this sense, we may not necessarily need to stick to the distinction between applied anthropology and public anthropology.

(5) Public Anthropologists as Value-positive Reformers rather than Value-free Observers

In traditional social sciences, as Max Weber has claimed, scientists are considered as value-free observers/analysts. However, public anthropologists engage in public issues so that they can do work to improve society and help people live a better life, while doing collaborative research, and also writing a collaborative ethnography. As to the collaborative ethnography, Lassiter states that “collaborative ethnography as a result of collaborative research is first and foremost an ethical and moral enterprise, and subsequently a political one; it is not an enterprise in search of knowledge” (Lassiter 2005: 79). Public anthropologists thus are not value-free interpreters of the world but value-positive reformers of the world.

Establishing Public Anthropology in Japan

For the past ten years or so, in which public anthropology was developing in the United States, there were various attempts made in Japan as well to put anthropology to work in the contemporary world, emphasizing anthropologists’ social engagement. I used the term kōkyō jinruigaku (public anthropology) for the first time when I published an anthropology textbook in 2005, referring to James Peacock’s words, “public or perish” (Yamashita 2005: 10). This may be one of the earliest uses of the term “public anthropology” in Japan. Then in 2008 I organized an international symposium entitled “Transnational Migration, Human Rights Business, and Public Anthropology” at the University of Tokyo, Komaba, inviting Robert Borofsky as a keynote speaker. Further, in my 2010 Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology Award Lecture at the 47th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society
of Cultural Anthropology held at Rikkyo University, I gave one section on public anthropology in relation to human rights of transnational migrants in Japan (Yamashita 2011). In September 2011, I organized an urgent panel discussion on the public anthropology of the East Japan Earthquake at the East Asian Anthropological Association Meeting which was held at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka (Yamashita 2012). In 2014, I gave a special lecture on public anthropology at the Open University of Japan, which was broadcast on April 20, and in July I published the edited book, Kōkyō Jinruigaku (Public Anthropology). It covers contemporary public issues such as multiculturalism, multicultural education, development, medicine, elderly care, people with disabilities, public policy, disaster, and human security (Yamashita 2014).

Among pioneer works of public anthropology in Japan, Hiromu Shimizu’s work, Funka no Kodama (Echo of Eruption), deserves special attention (Shimizu 2003). This book studies the Pinatubo Aeta of the Philippines, a people affected by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991. He wrote this book while engaging in support activities for the affected Aeta people who left their mountain homeland and became domestic refugees in metropolitan Manila and other places. He did not use the term “public anthropology,” but the book, published in 2003, should be regarded as the pioneer work of public anthropology in Japan. The first book in Japan with the term “public anthropology” in its title is Shinsai no Kōkyō Jinruigaku (The Public Anthropology of Earthquakes) written by Shūhei Kimura (2013). This is a book that analyzes earthquakes in Turkey. Interestingly, both Shimizu and Kimura pursue their public anthropology through the angle of disaster, a great public concern of the contemporary world.

In establishing public anthropology in Japan, we should pay attention to the notion of the “new public” (atarashii kōkyō). This term originated from the events of the 1995 Kobe Earthquake, when 1.3 million volunteer activists came to Kobe to assist the affected people. It marked the advent of a new age of civil society activities in Japan, which is termed the “new public.” It is called “new” to distinguish it from the “old” public sphere that was dominated by the state. As for the East Japan Disaster, 1.2 million volunteers from all over the nation had come to support the affected people by March 2013. In these two disasters there emerged a convergence of the public and the private which challenges us to connect this new public sphere and anthropology to establish public anthropology in Japan. However, as Akihiko Ogawa (2004: 93) warned, it might be said that volunteerism, institutionalized through the NPO act in 1998, which legalized the new public, serves the state, especially the neoliberal state that promulgates the market principles and a small government. The relationship between the state and the private in the “new public” needs to be carefully investigated.
A Public Anthropology of the East Japan Disaster

As stated earlier, the pioneer works of public anthropology in Japan focus on disaster. Disaster has increasingly become a great public concern in recent years. Particularly in Japan, a country known for vulnerability to earthquakes, tsunami and other natural disasters, public concern is very high.

In an early response to the East Japan Disaster, Jumpei Ichinosawa and others (2011) presented their self-image of anthropologists as passive and reflexive observers rather than active practitioners. Certainly anthropologists may not be as useful as disaster engineering specialists who can contribute to the devastated community in immediate ways. What anthropologists can do is a long-term involvement with the affected communities. As Ichiro Numazaki (2012) put it, anthropology is a slow science. However, we have some urgent anthropological works on the East Japan Disaster as well. Tom Gill and others have published a book on the disaster both in Japanese and in English (Gill, Steger, and Slater 2013ab). We also have seen works by Shōichirō Takezawa (2013) and Hiroki Takakura and others (2013). These can be regarded as public anthropological works of great importance on the East Japan Disaster.

We also act as members of civil society, whether as NGO/NPO activists or as individual volunteers. As for myself, I have been engaged in supporting the affected people since April 2011, not as an anthropologist, but as a member of an NPO, the Human Security Forum.² The forum organized “volunteer tours” which were designed as part of the support effort for the devastated communities. They were organized with special attention to kizuna or “social ties” between the affected communities and the outside world. At the early stage of the reconstruction process in 2011, the tours were conducted as “Weekend Volunteer Tours” to Miyagi Prefecture for the purpose of cleaning up rubble and shoveling mud. Then, in 2012, 2013 and 2014, they were developed into Manabi-tabi or “Study Tours” to Miyagi and Fukushima. In Miyagi, tour participants helped organize the summer festival for tsunami refugees from Minami-Sanriku Town, who were residing in temporary housing. The Fukushima tour involved attending a seminar on problems caused by the nuclear plant accident and watching the revived traditional horse race festival (Noumaoi) in Minami-Sōma City.

While producing these volunteer tours, I, as an anthropologist, have also attempted to practice a public anthropology that could meaningfully contribute to the post-disaster reconstruction. By doing so, we can facilitate the recovery process while involving various parties concerned: tourists, local communities, government sectors, travel agents, activists, and anthropologists (Yamashita in press). In this way we have a chance to go beyond the usual domains of both tourism and anthropology and give new meanings to anthropological theory and the practice of tourism. This is my own kind of public anthropology.

² On Human Security Forum, see the website: http://www.hsf.jp
The Papers of the Special Issue

Based on the papers presented in the panel, "Practicing a Public Anthropology in Communities Devastated by the East Japan Disaster," at the IUAES conference held on May 15-18, 2014, in Chiba, Japan, this special issue has five papers including mine. After this introductory paper, David Slater (Sophia University) and Maja Veselić (Sophia University) report on their Voices from Tohoku project, collecting and sharing digital archives of 3.11 oral narratives. Shūhei Kimura (Tsukuba University) discusses a collaborative approach to public anthropology after March 11. Kohei Inose (Meiji Gakuin University) analyzes agriculture and research under the influence of radioactive contamination. Finally, Tom Gill (Meiji Gakuin University) asks what is the right thing for an anthropologist to do in Fukushima.

So far there has been no established way to produce public anthropology. Examining experiences of the East Japan Disaster, each paper attempts to practice a public anthropology in its own way. I hope that this special issue of public anthropology of the East Japan Disaster contributes to establishing a public anthropology in Japan.

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Taichi Uchio (Bunkyo University), Hiroki Takakura (Tohoku University), and Yūichi Sekiya (the University of Tokyo) also presented papers at the panel but unfortunately were not able to contribute to this special issue. At the panel, James Roberson (Tokyo Jogakkan College) as a discussant gave his comments to all the papers presented at the panel. Here we acknowledge his important contribution to enhancing the papers.

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