

Striving to Disseminate Research from the Stricken Regions: The Tohoku Sociological Association's Message to the World

**Tohoku Sociological Association
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Introduction: The Damage from the Earthquake and Tsunami and the Tohoku Region

On March 11, 2011 the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred with its hypocenter off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture. Afterwards, a massive tsunami surged headed mainly towards the Pacific Coast of the Tohoku Region, inflicting enormous damage that reached up to several kilometers inland. The following day on March 12, radioactive substances produced by the nuclear fission of uranium fuel were detected in the vicinity around TEPCO's Fukushima Dai-Ichi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukushima Prefecture, which had gone into an automatic shutdown on account of the massive earthquake. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry expressed the opinion that a core meltdown had occurred in which some of the reactor's fuel had melted. With respect to the number of victims of the earthquake, as of September 6, 2012 the 2011 Vital Statistics (Final Data) by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare said that there were 18,877 casualties. Elderly people aged 60 years and older, who could be described as being vulnerable to disasters, accounted for 64% of the disaster victims. Furthermore, according to the National Police Agency the remains of 226 unidentified people had been discovered as of the end of August 2012.

The Tohoku Region of Japan has been widely known as an area prone to frequent damage from earthquakes and tsunamis since time immemorial. Tremors of an enormous earthquake and damage from a massive tsunami were recorded in the year 869 (Jogan 11 in the Japanese calendar). It has come to light that sediment from the tsunami in the Jogan Earthquake was widely deposited everywhere from the coast of Miyagi Prefecture to that of Fukushima Prefecture. Furthermore, according to IGARASHI Yukio (1998), in the modern age the Tohoku Coast has also experienced the Meiji Sanriku Tsunami in 1896 and the Showa Sanriku Tsunami in 1933. In the post-war period, the earthquake that occurred off the coast of Chile in 1960 caused extensive damage in Sanriku, which is 18,000 kilometers away. In addition, an earthquake occurred off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture in 1978 that left 27 people dead and 10,181 people injured.

Igarashi (1998) has been conducting a careful study through fieldwork on the "cultures of tsunami disasters" in the Sanriku Region, which has repeatedly suffered damage from tsunamis. According to Igarashi (1998: 4-5), these "cultures of tsunami disasters" signify the concepts and behavioral patterns regarding tsunamis that have commonly taken shape and been passed down among the people who live in certain regions. He claims that these differ according to the regions' social structures, cultural traditions, and geographical conditions. Igarashi says that since time immemorial the fishermen of the Sanriku Region have believed in sea gods, and so they accepted

tsunamis by believing that they were the wrath of the gods, which was beyond human comprehension. Yet on the other hand, since they considered the sea to be the source that blessed them with bountiful hauls of fish they refused to distance themselves from the coastal areas despite the tsunamis. Moreover, from a comparison with the coast of the Sea of Japan he stated that during the Sea of Japan Earthquake from 1983 there were lots of children who had come on a field trip who were stuck on the beach, and therefore suffered injuries from the tsunami. This is said to be because the received wisdom was that while there are earthquakes along the Sea of Japan coastline the tsunamis from these are small, and since there are landslides due to its geographical features it is best to not escape to higher ground. Moreover, the conventional wisdom along the coastline of the Sea of Japan is that it is preferable to evacuate in groups, whereas along the Sanriku Coast, which has experienced massive tsunamis, the received wisdom is that it is better for individuals to take action by evacuating to higher ground when earthquakes strike. Then once each individual has finished evacuating, the conventional practice is for the community to band together to engage in the post-disaster recovery.

During the recent Great East Japan Earthquake the overseas media reported that the survivors acted in a composed manner without causing a panic. It is not hard to imagine that the “cultures of tsunami disasters” that the regions had accumulated were behind this. Furthermore, not only did residents of the stricken regions work on rebuilding their regions, but so too did volunteers and rescue teams from Japan and other countries. Crisis situations such as earthquakes and tsunamis spontaneously give rise to solidarity between people—and in fact this point was deeply entwined with the creation of the Tohoku Sociological Association.

1. History of the Tohoku Sociological Association

The Tohoku Sociological Association has a unique history in that it was established by the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Arts and Letters, Tohoku University amidst the hazardous conditions facing it in the post-war period. The Department of Sociology was established in 1903, and at first it was jointly run with professors of religious studies. Afterwards, in 1926, Professor SHINMEI Masamichi from Kwansei Gakuin University was appointed to the department, and finally began taking the first steps towards the formation of the association. Shinmei was a sociologist who had been a driving force behind research on the history of sociology in Japan. However, following the determination by GHQ in the post-war period in 1946 that he was unfit for public office, he was prohibited from giving university lectures until his reinstatement in 1951. Yet even while he was banned from public office, Shinmei would gather students at his house to give lectures, which led to the formation of the Tohoku Sociological Association as a private association. Afterwards, the association, still in its nascent stage, published the first issue of the publication *The Study of Sociology* in 1950. Given the risky situation regarding Shinmei’s ban from public office and house arrest, as it were, *The Study of Sociology* was issued by a coterie of sympathizers.

2. Steps towards the Formation of the Tohoku Sociological Association and Its Present Status

2.1. Passing Down Theory-based Research

Shinmei had vigorously worked to introduce Western sociology to Japan since the pre-war days. As can be seen from the fact that Shinmei's private association formed the seed that would grow into the Tohoku Sociological Association, research on the history of sociological theories from overseas formed a major pillar of the association on the basis of his influence. A look at the special feature themes from the journal's early stages also reveals that the ninth edition in 1955 dealt with "Structural and Functional Analyses," while TANOSAKI Akio took up Talcott PARSONS' theory and TAHARA Otoyori performed a functional analysis of Émile DURKHEIM. Even Shinmei himself contributed papers entitled "On American Sociology" (fourth edition, 1952) and "Durkheimian Sociologism Parts 1 and 2" (fifth and sixth editions, 1952). In addition, in the 36th edition (1968) a special feature entitled "Striving for New Insights into Research on Parsons" was put together, and other papers such as "Communication Theory and Media" and "New Insights in Parsons on the Theory of Social Stratification" were also published.

2.2. Research on Agricultural Villages and Fishing Villages

Conversely, while the journal incorporated the empirical research that could be said to be one of the trends in post-war Japanese sociology, the focus of the research in the Tohoku Region was turned to agricultural villages and fishing villages as a reflection of the area's regional characteristics. Special feature themes on this from *The Study of Sociology* included "An Investigative Study on Fishing Villages" (tenth edition, 1955), "Municipal Mergers and Local Communities" (11th edition, 1956), and "An Investigative Study on Village Communities" (16th edition, 1959). With the special feature edition on municipal mergers in the 11th edition in particular, case examples of municipal mergers from all over Tohoku during the Great Showa Consolidation period were introduced. In addition, "'Village Restructuring' and Resident Responses" (31st/32nd combined edition, 1972) introduced research on settlement relocations and the restructuring of local regions that accompanied these that had been carried out by a research team led by SAITO Yoshio.

At the same time, research was also carried out on an industrial city (Kamaishi), which was rare for Tohoku sociology in this time period, and the results of this were reported through a special feature entitled "An Urban Investigative Study" (17th edition, 1959). Furthermore, in this period interest towards "theories of mass society" could be seen, and in the 12th edition from 1956 a special feature was put together that was called "The Masses and Mass Society." Other studies that were published included Shinmei's "The Masses and the General Public" and SUZUKI Yukitoshi's "The Masses—An Introductory Investigation."

2.3. Research related to the 1978 Miyagi Earthquake

An earthquake occurred in 1978 in Miyagi, causing considerable damage. With regards to the damage from this earthquake, the Tohoku Sociological Association wasted no time in performing

research on the Miyagi Earthquake and the lives of the local residents. The results from this research were published as “The ’78 Miyagi Earthquake and the Lives of the Local Residents” in the 38th edition of *The Study of Sociology* from the following year. In the outset of this special feature HOSOYA Takashi (1979) stated that the damage from the earthquake was characterized by four factors. These were: (1) dramatic regional disparities in the damage, with particularly large discrepancies in the damage arising in new housing developments in the suburbs due to the soil embankments and cut soil; (2) buildings not only suffered structural damage, but also extensive damage to facilities, equipment, furniture, and so on; (3) there was minimal secondary damage from fire and similar factors, but there was extensive damage to lifelines; and (4) the fact that there was minimal damage in the downtown areas and accurate information could be sent out via radio and other means meant that a panic was avoided. In addition, of the three studies that were contained within the special feature, Hosoya (1979) positioned studies on “soft” aspects in response to the study on the “hard” aspects via civil engineering and architectural studies.

The first of these papers was “The Recognition of Earthquake Damage and Reactions” (Horike and Oura, 1979), which spelled out the psychological effects brought about by the earthquake on the residents from a social psychological standpoint. Regarding the residents’ perceptions of the earthquake, it lists reasons for why panic did not break out as because the time the earthquake occurred was around 5:00 PM in June and so a minimal response could be mounted before it got dark, there were no fires or tsunamis, and accurate information was relayed. The second paper, entitled “The Behaviors of Injured Persons in the Earthquake Emergency” (Fujiyama, Sato, and Kobayashi, 1979), performed a study based on a register of injured people that was created by NHK with the cooperation of police stations in Miyagi Prefecture. Based on this, it pointed out that the injured people were concentrated in new residential developments in the suburbs located on alluvial formations with a weak foundation, and also that there were more injured people at home than in workplaces or schools. Conversely, the third paper entitled “The Problems of Building Estates, Houses, and the Recovery Process” (Yasuda and Sato, 1979) analyzed data from interview surveys on the relations between the victims, government, building contractors, and earthquake insurance. The reasons that it focuses on for the divergence in the victims’ awareness are differences between (1) “integrated damage to both the residential lot and house” and “damage to just the home” for the degree of damage, (2) damage “attributable to other people” and “caused by the natural disaster” for the cause of damage and responsibility, and (3) “artificially constructed hills” and “rural districts” in terms of the region.

This special feature issue had more than 170 pages of space assigned to it without any free submissions, which was an exceptionally large volume for the special features at the time. Moreover, three studies were carried out in the one year and four months following the earthquake, which were then compiled into a special feature paper. A look at the method by which this was tabulated reveals a labor-intensive process whereby responses were transcribed from the questionnaires to computer-scored answer sheets, which were then cross tabulated by being read by an all-purpose computer at a large computer center. Yet at the same time, the fact that the recovery rate for the interview surveys was 80-90% seems to speak to the strong interest of the residents and their high

expectations in the social survey.

2.4. The Genesis of New Research Trends

In the 1980s the special feature themes in *The Study of Sociology* demonstrated new developments even as they were taking up the mantle of the conventional theory-based research. “Theory of the Self” (1982) in the 41st edition took up George Herbert MEAD’s theory of the self, while “Developments in Contemporary Sociology” (42nd/43rd combined edition, 1983) published a study on ethnomethodology. At the same time, during this time period special features were also compiled relating to contemporary interpretations of classic works. Other special features included “Modern-day Challenges in Studying Max WEBER” (1982) in the 44th edition, “Fundamental Viewpoints on Karl MARX’s Class Theory” (1992) in the 59th edition, “Contemporary Possibilities for Weberian Theory” (2004) in the 75th edition, “Parsons’ Intellectual Legacy” (2006) in the 79th edition, and “Resurrecting Simmelian Theory in the 21st Century” (2010) in the 87th edition.

At the same time, with the individual themes as well a broadening of themes was seen from the 1980s onwards over and above the research on agricultural and fishing villages. A look at the special feature themes reveals features that were put together on contemporary problems. These include “Contemporary Challenges in Political Sociology” (50th edition, 1986), “Sociology of Culture and Education” (51st edition, 1987), “Family and Gender” (54th edition, 1989), “Regional Informatization” (64th edition, 1997), “Problems surrounding Democracy in the 21st Century” (70th edition, 2000), “Social Theory and Social Movements” (76th edition, 2004), “Politics and Religion in the Age of Globalization” (89th edition, 2011), and “A Quantitative Approach to Women and Family in Contemporary Society” (90th edition, 2012).

Moreover, special features related to quantitative and mathematical sociology began to appear during this time. The Division of Behavioral Science was established in the Faculty of Arts and Letters, Tohoku University in 1983, with Professor NISHIDA Haruhiko being newly appointed there from the School of Human Sciences, Osaka University. The next year Associate Professor UMINO Michio took up a position there from the School of Sociology at Kwansei Gakuin University. To date there have been few researchers in quantitative and mathematical sociology among the sociologists in Tohoku, but the arrival of quantitative and mathematical sociologists representative of Japan led to the genesis of new trends in sociology in Tohoku. The special feature from the 52nd edition of the journal in 1988 was “Topics in Mathematical and Quantitative Analysis,” which was followed one after another by special features like “Quantitative Approaches to Social Consciousness Theory” (72nd edition, 2002), “Diverse Approaches to Social Stratification and Inequality” (77th edition, 2005), and “Quantitative Sociology for Social Dilemmas” (80th edition, 2006). What is more, a 2005 SSM survey (“Nationwide Survey on Social Stratification and Social Mobility”) was carried out based around Tohoku University, with a special feature entitled “The Increasingly Fluid State of Class Stratification in East Asia” (86th edition, 2009) compiled based on the results of this.

2.5. The Focus of Research Seen at the Tohoku Sociological Association’s Meeting Symposia

In recent years the association has held meetings once a year in addition to publishing *The*

Study of Sociology. People from outside the association are also invited to give reports so that active exchanges of research are carried out, while at the same time their reports are made into special features for *The Study of Sociology*. In FY2008 a report by HASEGAWA Koichi (member), TAKEGAWA Shogo (University of Tokyo), and SHIMOEBISU Miyuki (member) on “The Risk Society and Cohesion” was used as the special feature for the 85th edition of *The Study of Sociology*. In addition, in FY2010 a symposium that would become the special feature for the 89th edition of *The Study of Sociology* was held based on a report by SAKUMA Kosei (Rikkyo University), MIYAJIMA Takashi (Hosei University), and TAKAGI Kazuyoshi (member) on the theme of “Politics and Religion in the Age of Globalization.” Moreover, in FY2011 a symposium called “Public Intellectuals in the Sociological History of the United States” was held via the planning of a young member whereby reports were given by SHIMIZU Shinsaku (member), INA Masato (Tokyo Woman’s Christian University), and UYEDA Kosuke (member).

3. Message to the World: Challenges since 3.11

3.1. Initiatives to Date

Thus far, this paper has introduced the history of the association and the changes in the contents of its research activities. To date, emphasis has been placed on questions regarding the synchronicity and modernity of social theories. Actual experiential issues have been approached from a variety of different angles, such as theory and doctrine to be sure, but also case studies and large-scale quantitative investigations. At the same time, the results of minutely detailed fieldwork that focuses on the diachronicity of agricultural villages and fishing villages also has value as historical data regarding the coastal areas that were damaged by the tsunami. In light of such conventions, this paper will once again present the member’s research tendencies concerning the unique characteristics of 3.11 and its challenges.

To begin with, the accident at the Fukushima Dai-Ichi Nuclear Power Plant made “3.11” (as it is called) well-known around the world. In truth, different regions were affected in a variety of ways, including regions with high readings of radiation (even within the provincial cities where the association’s members work), regions that proactively accepted people who had been forced to evacuate from Fukushima, and regions that for the time being are striving to respond to and recover from the tsunami damage more so than that from the nuclear accident. Research by Hasegawa regarding the connection between nuclear power and these sorts of diverse “regions” is exceptionally well detailed. A member himself, Hasegawa specializes in theories of social movements, environmental sociology, and political sociology. Six months after 3.11, Hasegawa published *Toward a Post-Nuclear Society: Greening of Electricity* (Hasegawa, 2011a). *A Choice for Post-Nuclear Society: The Age of New Energy Revolution* (Expanded edition; Hasegawa, 2011b), which shares a deep connection with this work in terms of subject matter, was published in July of the following year after the earthquake. These works are based upon exhaustive and meticulously detailed survey results on local referendum mechanisms and nuclear power policies in various

different regions in which nuclear power plants are located both in Japan and overseas. They suggest that the potential for residents to intervene in the policy process for nuclear power varies in a number of different ways not only at the national level, but also according to the region. As the author points out, "... shocking accidents and problems that have shaken the safety management structures for nuclear power right down to their core" have occurred one after another within Japan over these past 15 years. When these occurred the regions where the nuclear power plants were situated were exposed to the hazards (risk factors) of technology. Whereas the damage from the tsunami was a natural hazard, the nuclear power problems from 3.11 were most certainly the hazards of technology. Concealing these and cutting off transmissions of information about them has caused trust in Japan to decline among the international community. The government is working out a new energy policy to have "zero operating nuclear power stations by the 2030s," and it appears as if having zero operating nuclear power stations was selected as a "social choice." However, it will be necessary to involve residents in debates concerning decisions on regions in which to situate nuclear power plants and the decommissioning of nuclear reactors. At the same time, the will of residents will also have to be reflected in matters such as the selection of the disposal methods and disposal sites for the spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste, as well as decisions on replacement energy sources. Right now even the extent of the damage from the accident at the Fukushima Dai-Ichi Nuclear Power Plant still remains unclear, and so there have been civil activities seeking transparency of information and petitions requesting compensation for disaster damage. In response to these, it will be important for researchers to actively provide beneficial data, while conversely also bringing these to people's attention through surveys. International interest is already shifting towards the notion of a post-"zero operating nuclear power station" society. In light of the trends from both overseas and within Japan regarding the notion of a post-"zero operating nuclear power station" society, it will be important to hold debates that are grounded in civic rationality. If nothing else, it is the social responsibility of this association, which is the closest of its kind to Fukushima, to empower such activities however much it can.

What is more, in September 2012 UYEDA Kyoko (Tohoku Gakuin University) was invited to the research study meeting where she gave a report entitled "Acceptance of Natural Disasters and Disaster Paternalism: From the Practices of a Village in a Tsunami-prone Region." Uyeda had carried out scrupulous fieldwork in sections of Kesenuma prior to the major earthquake, and since the earthquake struck she has been studying the reconstruction process by making use of her network from that time. According to Uyeda, at present, when a year and a half has passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, multiple reconstruction plans have been set up for the stricken regions along the coast, and the local communities are going back and forth over their respective merits and demerits. For example, these include a plan that would attempt to partition off the seashore from people with a tidal embankment ten meters tall or higher, as well as a plan that would designate coastal areas (which should by rights be private property) as disaster danger zones and make it so that people can never again live on this land. Governmental authorities have taken the opportunity presented by this disaster, which wrought enormous destruction, to increase their say and augment their interventions in the private property and decision-making of local

communities and individual people. She gives the name “disaster paternalism” to this sort of meddlesome behavior that involves policies to varying degrees that are grounded in “beneficence”—such as telling people that they cannot live somewhere because it is dangerous, or preventing them from returning home—based on the criteria of the extent of the damage from the most recent disaster. She attempts to decipher the “rationality of accepting tsunamis,” so to speak, employed by a village in a tsunami-prone area that stands in opposition to this disaster paternalism from the logic and practices of its people.

3.2. Future Challenges

Ever since the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred a large number of initiatives related to earthquakes have been carried out. Researchers in natural science fields, primarily architecture and civil engineering, began working to address the restoration and reconstruction of the stricken regions from the early stages. Yet as Hosoya (1979) formerly pointed out, the restoration and reconstruction of stricken regions is not merely a challenge for the architectural or civil engineering disciplines. The question this has raised is what sorts of local communities should be created in each of the stricken regions. Sociological wisdom—what Hosoya (1979) once called “soft” wisdom—will be needed in order to resolve such problems. This recent earthquake has posed at least three challenges for sociology.

The first of these is determining the circumstances in the stricken regions and the opinions and needs of the victims through social surveys. Not only did the damage from this recent earthquake cover an extensive area, but it also involved an accident at a nuclear power plant. As such, this made it difficult to determine the state of the progress made after the disaster occurred, including the residents’ mobilization for evacuation. Accurately determining the circumstances that the disaster victims have been placed in and their needs through social surveys conducted by sociologists leads to the provision of basic information for restoration and reconstruction. Second, the majority of the regions that were damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake were fishing and agricultural villages, and so the unique characteristics of these fishing and agricultural villages must be taken into consideration when rebuilding their local communities. Currently, a plan of relocating to higher ground in order to ensure safety is being promoted in regions that were hit by the tsunami, but relocating to higher ground does not constitute an ultimate solution to this problem for people who make their living by fishing. In order to rebuild these local communities it will be necessary to perceive the social life of the stricken regions from an all-encompassing viewpoint based upon the unique characteristics found there. Third, among the problems produced by the Great East Japan Earthquake are some challenges that necessitate analyses of Japanese society and contemporary society, such as the accident at the nuclear power plant. A contemporary society that has spurred on the development of science and technology as well as Japanese society, which had adopted a unique risk management style, formed the backdrop against which the accident at the nuclear plant occurred. The Great East Japan Earthquake simply served to expose problems that had been lying hidden in society since prior to the earthquake’s occurrence. These sorts of societal initiatives must be subjected to a theoretical analysis in order to overcome the accident at the nuclear power plant.

The Tohoku Sociological Association has focused its efforts on theoretical studies based mainly on theory-based research, regional sociological research focused on agricultural villages and fishing villages, as well as qualitative and quantitative social surveys. These correspond to each of the three challenges for post-earthquake reconstruction. Since the earthquake, many of the association's members have been working to address issues from the earthquake by bringing their own specialties to bear on them. The mission of the Tohoku Sociological Association, which is based out of the stricken regions, is to further expand upon these activities of its members by organizing them. In addition, the challenges that have been presented to sociology by the Great East Japan Earthquake are not limited solely to offering assistance for the restoration and reconstruction of the stricken regions. As the Great East Japan Earthquake was an occurrence that completely overturned social life at its roots it goes above and beyond the rubric of a "disaster" as understood in the customary sense. This is especially true in the regions surrounding the nuclear power plant where the residents evacuated out from their communities, and must start from scratch in rebuilding their communities.

The formation of social order thus far has been handled as a "Hobbesian problem of order," but this notion explained in the Thomas HOBBS' *Leviathan* was a Euro-centric idea based on the experiences from its latest religious wars. The Great East Japan Earthquake has produced an enormous testing ground pertaining to the question of how society should be structured that is on par with that produced by wars. It would appear as if questions are now being raised about just how sociology will respond to this query.

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