

# Constructing Civil Society in Japan

Voices of Environmental Movements



Koichi Hasegawa

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Koichi Hasegawa



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To the late Professor Nobuko Iijima (1938–2001),  
a true pioneer and the  
'Mother of Environmental Sociology'

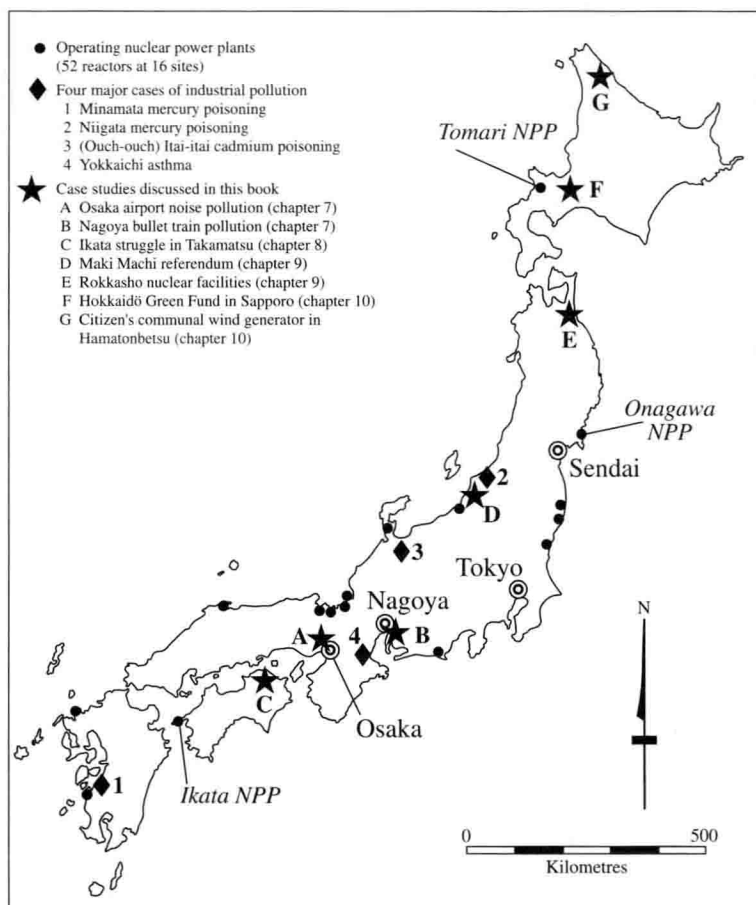


Figure 0.1: Environmental issues in Japan discussed in this book

## Preface to the English edition

To date, the Japanese social sciences have generally demonstrated strong tendencies to debate earlier theories and to introduce the latest theoretical developments from the West. Efforts to face and tackle the concrete social problems and policy issues confronting Japanese society and to develop theories based on primary research remain weak. In this situation environmental sociology is a field of study that strongly emphasizes original contributions. The term 'environmental sociology' was born in the USA in the mid 1970s. In Japan, Nobuko Iijima, who later became the first president of the Japanese Association for Environmental Sociology, began conducting sociological studies of environmental pollution issues in the late 1960s. Her paper, 'Industrial pollution and the local residents' movements (Sangyō kōgai to jūmin undō)', published in 1970 (Iijima, 1970b), compared the Minamata mercury poisoning disease to the Niigata Minamata disease. As well as revealing the multiplicity and multi-layered nature of the damage, the paper analyzes how the damage and the response from general residents are defined by the local community. Internationally, this can be regarded as the first paper in authentic environmental social science research.

Hiroyuki Torigoe and others wrote 'Environmental history of water and people (*Mizu to hito no kankyō-shi*)' (1984), a distinguished study unique to Japan, utilizing folklore to reveal how the local culture of the people around Lake Biwa was intertwined with their relationship to the water and water management system. They called their theoretical and methodological paradigm 'life-environmentalism'.

The joint research of Harutoshi Funabashi and myself, published as 'Bullet train pollution (Shinkansen Kōgai)' (1985), was the world's first dedicated sociological study of traffic pollution. It revealed social factors that contributed to the noise and vibration pollution arising in the shadow of Japan's world-class bullet train, the social mechanisms that made the issues difficult to resolve, and the social forces that carried forward the measures to rectify the bullet train noise and vibrations (see chapter 7).

There have been many other pioneering studies in Japanese environmental sociology (chapters 1 and 5). However, most of these

were written in Japanese, and very few English editions have yet been published. Thus, except for those few environmental sociologists who have personal contacts abroad, the significance of this research has not been sufficiently recognized by the international academic community.

This book is written in the tradition of Japanese environmental sociology, with an emphasis on fieldwork and case studies. It also focuses on the new social movements and trends in Japan after the late 1980s.

In the 1950s, '60s, and '70s Japan enjoyed levels of economic prosperity that were referred to as the 'Japanese miracle', the 'dark-side' of which included widespread and serious pollution problems, such as the four major industrial pollution cases (beginning with the Minamata disease mentioned above). The vigor of Japan's independent environmental research is a reflection of the severity of the pollution, as well as the political and social pressures from industry and government for large-scale industrial development.

The so-called economic miracle came to an end, followed by a deadlock in political and economic reform that has been referred to as the 'lost 10 years'. Since the late 1980s, however, there have been new movements to vitalize Japan's civil society (see chapters 8, 9, 10, 13 and the Conclusion). Especially since the mid '90s, this can be seen in the sudden increase of certified incorporated NPOs, the increasing number of actions seeking the disclosure of public information, local referendums and policy-oriented social movements.

The policy-making process for Japanese environmental policies remains relatively closed by international standards. With opportunities such as the 1992 Earth Summit, a 'new public sphere' concerned with environmental issues and policies was also born in Japan, and gradually opened to its citizens. This book is a sociological review of the environmental movements in contemporary Japan, as well as the 'new public sphere', the vibrant civil society that the movement supports.

The 'public sphere' is a place for the formation of public opinion and social agreement. This is where people with public interests gather, to discuss what the 'public interest' is, to carry out social practices, to realize 'publicness' and 'communality', and to carry out political education. As Bellah et al. explain: 'Here citizens develop new hopes through the practice of public conversation and joint action' (Bellah et al, 1991:269). This normative public sphere that

is slowly replacing the traditional, closed Japanese public sphere, is called the 'new public sphere' in this book.

The stereotypical image of the obedient Japanese who silently follows the traditional order is still strong internationally, but the voices of people interested in environmental movements and environmental NGOs in the new public sphere are loud and diverse. The voice of the environmental movement calls for a new wind, and this wind in turn offers a powerful, sound energy to civil society, just as electricity is produced by power-generating windmills.

In contrast to environmental economics or environmental law, the unique perspective of environmental sociology lies in its analysis of environmental movements. In many countries around the world, including Japan, the USA, and European nations, the environmental movement is the 'father' of environmental sociology. This book, using the perspective of environmental sociology, analyzes the structure, the dynamics and the task of the Japanese environmental movement, which started as an anti-pollution movement and local residents' movement.

This book also aims to be a portrait of modern society, focusing on the dynamics of the environmental movement and the public sphere. The environmental movement is a realm of 'exemplary action', as well as a 'trail-blazer'. It has shone new light on the needs of the citizens and, through collaboration with the government and industry, has delivered numerous pioneering efforts. If the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the century of economic growth and industrial capital, countless people around the world hope that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of the environment and the citizens. To this end, the environmental movement and the new public sphere it involves may become a compass for modern society.

The possibilities for the civil societies of East Asia have received much international attention with the progress of democracy in South Korea and Taiwan in the 1990s, and the boom in NGOs. The possibility of a new civil society developing in China, especially, will have a major impact on regional and global politics in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The voice of Japan's civil society may strengthen similar voices in East Asia and generate a new wind for the environmental and citizens' movements.

This book was originally published under the title *Kankyō undō to atarashii kōkyōken—kankyō shakaigaku no pāsuekuchibu* (Environmental movements and the new public sphere—the perspective of environmental sociology), by Yūhikaku, in April 2003.



It is a great pleasure that the English edition has been produced in such a short time (just over one year). This is largely due to the care and encouragement of Professor Yoshio Sugimoto, School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University and Director of Trans Pacific Press, who understood the significance of this volume. I thank him sincerely. I must also thank the team of English translators: David Askew, Anna Dobrovolskaia, Jun Nakagawa, Esther Rockett, Ania Siwicki and Rick Tanaka. My conversation with the TPP editor, Karl Smith, who provided detailed comments on each chapter, was a most stimulating contribution to the preparation of this English edition.

Professor Jeffrey Broadbent of the University of Minnesota has given me support since 1988, and invited me into the international academic network of environmental sociologists and social movement researchers. It is due to his assistance that I am able to stay in the Netherlands and the USA during 2004–5, as an Abe Fellow of the US Social Science Research Council and as a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota. Without his enduring encouragement and friendship, the publication of this book would not have been possible.

I am very happy and honored to have the chance to publish this book as part of the CSSI (Center for the Study of Social Stratification and Inequality, Tōhoku University) series by Trans Pacific Press. This is the third volume of the series and the result of the CSSI's research in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Center of Excellence Program formed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology.

Koichi Hasegawa  
May 2004

Bara no me ya, kōsei oeshi eibunkō

Rosebuds opening.  
Just finished proofing  
English manuscript

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## **Part I:**

# **The principles and issues of environmental sociology**



# 1 Perspectives of environmental sociology: The issues of the second stage

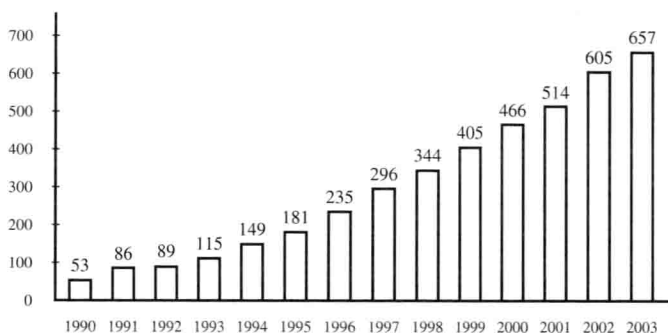
## From systemization to the second stage

### The systemization of environmental sociology

Environmental issues, the state of the environment and civilization, and the relationship between the environment and human beings have become important issues for research in the social sciences in recent decades. Interest in environmental issues is increasing in the field of sociology. During the last decade of the twentieth century, environmental sociology was established in Japan as a concept and a field of deliberate research analysis. Environmental sociology has become socially recognized and institutionalized, at least academically. Alongside specializations such as gender studies, historical sociology and ethnic studies, environmental sociology has in recent years been one of the most active fields of sociological research, both in Japan and overseas.

The level of research activity is evident in the number of new academic organizations, their growing membership and increasing numbers of publications. The JAES (Japanese Association for Environmental Sociology) began on 19 May 1990 as a small group of environmental sociologists with 53 members. It changed its title to JAES and formally organized in October 1992. As of 28 June 2003 it had 657 members. Figure 1.1 charts the membership increase. In twelve years the membership has increased eleven-fold, with a net increase of more than fifty new members per year, and the JAES has begun nurturing young researchers. The JAES is the largest organization specializing in environmental sociology in the world. It is also one of the largest academic associations in the field of sociology in Japan, alongside the Japanese Association for Family Sociology.

In September 1995, the annual official *Journal of environmental sociology* (*Kankyō shakaigaku kenkyū*) was founded. It is the world's oldest specialist journal in the field of environmental



*Figure 1.1: Membership of the Japanese Association for Environmental Sociology (1990–2003)*

sociology, followed by the Korean Association for Environmental Sociology's journal *ECO*, founded in 2001. The Korean Association for Environmental Sociology was founded in 2000, growing out of an informal group set up in 1995. Its organizational structure and activities are modeled on the JAES.

One key characteristic of environmental sociology is that many researchers in the field are from areas outside a narrowly defined field of sociology, and some are practitioners of environmental movements, government administrations and private firms. Only a third or so of the members are also members of the Japan Sociological Society, the professional association of academics and post-graduate students specializing in sociology. The other 70% are from the natural sciences (such as agriculture) or other social sciences (such as economics, management and law), and non-researchers such as NGO activists.<sup>1</sup> In comparison, specialist organizations in sociology, such as the Japan Association for Urban Sociology and the Japan Association of Regional and Community Studies typically have about 300 members. The JAES's membership continues to attract members from activists and other research areas, although it did not intentionally aim to expand its membership from these areas. Environmental issues are inherently interdisciplinary in character, and therefore the expectations of environmental sociology from 'outside' of sociology were high.

Despite the increasing difficulty in publishing academic work in Japan, a systematic five volume monograph series entitled *Environmental sociology in Japan (Kōza kankyō shakaigaku)* was published by Yūhikaku in 2001. This series had 44 contributors,

of whom 43 were members of the Association of Environmental Sociology. A more introductory six volume set entitled *Environmental sociology: A series* (*Shirīzu kankyō shakaigaku*) was published by Shinyōsha between 2001 and 2003.

Nobuko Iijima, who passed away in 2001, was a true pioneer in this field at an international standard and was honored with the name 'Mother of environmental sociology'. She began her sociological research on environmental issues in the late 1960s, researching the victims' life structures caused by Minamata and Niigata mercury poisoning—two of the four major environmental problems (Iijima 1970b). With the exception of residents' movements that arose in the face of problems with large-scale development,<sup>2</sup> she struggled alone in Japan until the 1980s. In the past ten to fifteen years, however, there has been a dramatic change in the research environment for environmental sociology in Japan.

The USA does not have an independent academic association like Japan's Association for Environmental Sociology, although there is a section of the American Sociological Association which is focused on 'Environment and Technology' (it was originally called Environmental Sociology, but changed its name in 1988). Established in 1976, over the past decade its membership has remained stable at around 400.<sup>3</sup> Researchers from other areas only rarely participate, and almost all of its members are sociologists. During the Reagan administration (1980s), the membership gradually declined and the section stagnated. However, it began to revive around 1990 and its membership recovered, with a growing interest in global environmental issues.

At the global level, a Research Committee (RC 24) entitled 'Environment and Society' exists within the International Sociological Association (ISA). In its early days, most of its members were European researchers, but since the 1990s, participation by researchers from the USA has been increasing. It was founded as a Working Group with about 40 participants in 1990, and was promoted with unprecedented speed (for the ISA) to a Research Committee in 1994.<sup>4</sup> In 1998 there were about 150 members, and in 2002 there were about 200.<sup>5</sup> The first president of this committee was R. Dunlap (1994–98), an early proponent of 'environmental sociology'. He was followed by F. Buttel (1998–2002), perhaps best known for his debate with Dunlap (see below). Both Dunlap and Buttel were from the USA, but the third president, A. Mol (2002–), is from the Netherlands. Mol is a proponent of 'ecological modernization'. In short, although a



relatively new field, the numbers of researchers with interests in environmental sociology are increasing in both Japan and elsewhere, and new organizations are still being founded.

Until the early 1990s environmental research around the world was primarily conducted in the natural sciences. However, from the second half of the 1990s, environmental research has received increasing attention in the social sciences. In Japan, the Society for Environmental Economics and Policy Studies was founded in 1995, mainly dominated by economists. Beginning with a membership of 866, by September 2002 it had 1,339 members. The Japan Association for Environmental Law and Policy was founded in 1997. Dominated by legal scholars, it had 415 members as of May 2002. Both associations are active in conference activities as well as academic research. Together with the Association of Environmental Sociology, these two associations form the core membership of a multi-disciplinary symposium called the Frontiers of Environmental Policy Research, which has been held annually since 2000 (Awaji et al. 2001). Unfortunately, there are very few researchers in the fields of psychology, politics or administration studies who have an interest in environmental issues or environmental research, and there are no indications that associations of environmental research are being organized in these fields.

### **The social background to the emergence of environmental studies**

The growing (global) public interest in environmental issues has come in two waves, both culminating in environmental conferences organized by the UN. The first wave was evident at about the time of the 1972 UN Human Environmental Conference held in Stockholm, while the second wave became apparent at about the time of the 1992 UN Environment and Development Conference (the Earth Summit) held in Rio de Janeiro.

The first wave is closely related to the Apollo moon landing in July 1969, the Earth Day of April 1970, and the publication of *The Limits of Growth* by the Rome Club in 1972 (Meadows et al. 1972). As the Apollo project unfolded to reveal the barrenness of the moon, there was a heightened global consciousness that the Earth is irreplaceable. At the same time an increasingly critical attitude towards advanced scientific technology developed around the world, driven by concerns about the high rates of economic growth and the corresponding waste of resources. The growth of environmental sociology in the