

Women's Rights in Nuclear-Power Japan: A Study Inspired by Ecofeminism

Master's Thesis

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Introduction

The massive 2011 earthquake in Japan, which caused a tsunami and the globally reported disaster at the nuclear power plant of Fukushima, claimed the lives of a large number of people, aside from destroying nature. Ever since the disaster, radiation contamination has been putting the lives of all survivors in danger. Even now, many people in and around Fukushima are living with the anxiety that radiation could damage their health.

Immediately after the Fukushima disaster, one article on the Internet caught my eyes. It regarded the discrimination faced by women in Fukushima since rumours that they lost the chances to bear healthy babies had spread. Actually, several women opted for an abortion in the aftermath of the disaster, mostly due to the unreliable information provided to them in Fukushima. This tragic story reminded me of the film 'Black Rain'(1989), by Imamura Shohei (1926 – 2006), set in Hiroshima after the atomic bombing. In this film, the heroine, atom-bombed by the US forces, is repeatedly refused an engagement of marriage due to the rumour that 'She was irradiated'. This kind of abject, unreasonable discrimination occurs still today, over sixty years after the war, but it concerns in particular women, which shows clearly the women's position in contemporary Japan.

Simultaneously, I was shocked by the fact that following ongoing marginalisation of the victims, the Japanese government and above all, its people continued to sustain the peaceful use of nuclear energy. This is how I have formed a thesis: **'only an acquisition of their rights by Japanese women can push us to abandon nuclear energy'**. To validate the thesis, I have written this paper.

Along the above hypothesis, the purpose of this paper is to consider women's rights in Japan from the perspective of ecofeminism. I focus my attention on the period after the second world war purposely, because the idea of peaceful use of nuclear energy was diffused in the midst of post-war restoration. Similarly, women's representation changed greatly after the second world war in Japan. Furthermore, I report on the fieldwork I carried out in Fukushima, Japan.

Among the ecofeminist writers to whom I refer in this paper is Indian scholar Vandana Shiva (1952). According to her, Western economic development models and their 'patriarchal ideology' cause the untenable exploitation of the nature and exclusion of women. I shall try to transfer Shiva's criticism into a manifesto for Japanese women - especially women artists - of my generation.

The people of Fukushima are still struggling with the dangers of radiation contamination. Besides, they live in a rigid environment in which it is very difficult to talk about their anxiety over the Fukushima disaster. Thus, I wish to thank the women who agreed to be interviewed by me under such an unusual situation.