



Katsutaka Idogawa and Local Intergenerational Ethics

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Nuclear catastrophe has raised the question of the survival of communities. At the time of the Fukushima disaster, Katsutaka Idogawa was the mayor of Futaba Town where the nuclear power plant was located, one of the municipalities ordered to evacuate under the law. He was sufficiently distrustful of the government's and Fukushima Prefecture's response to evacuate to Saitama Prefecture with quite a few of his townspeople on his own initiative. The principal reason he kept them in Saitama for more than two years was because he was planning to move the entire town of Futaba out of Fukushima. The grand plan was to keep the community together until the radiation level was low enough, and then the descendants would return. This plan never came to fruition, and the residents of Futaba and other municipalities near the nuclear power plant are now living scattered throughout Fukushima and beyond. While intergenerational ethics questioned the survival of the human race against the backdrop of the energy crisis, Katsutaka Idogawa's project posed the survival of communities as a new problem of intergenerational ethics even for residents outside the affected municipalities.



On March 11, 2021, exactly ten years have passed since the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident caused by a massive earthquake and tsunami. Katsutaka Idogawa, the former mayor of Futaba Town in Fukushima Prefecture, was leading the evacuation of residents in Futaba on 12 March 2011, one day after the earthquake and tsunami. In accordance with the Act on Special Measures Concerning Nuclear Emergency Preparedness, all residents had to be evacuated from the town. However, the government had decided in the early morning of March 12 to vent the No. 1 reactor of the Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, and the vent was carried out at around 2:30 p.m. on 12 March after a long delay. As a result, the mayor Idogawa, the remaining residents of the town, and the police and Self-Defense Force personnel who were engaged in the rescue efforts were severely exposed to radiation.

In Japan today, no one is supposed to have been exposed to more than 100m-mSv of thyroid equivalent dose due to this nuclear accident. In other words, no one is supposed to have been exposed to radioactive materials released by the 12 March venting and subsequent Unit 1 explosion etc. (everyone is supposed to have been evacuated before the venting and explosion). Idogawa later found out about this, but when he visited the Fukushima prefectural office on 14 March, he saw that the prefectural office was in chaos and decided that he was the only one who could be relied upon to protect the people of the town from the danger of radiation exposure. Negotiating with governors of municipalities, he decided to leave Fukushima Prefecture and evacuate the entire town to Saitama Super Arena in Saitama Prefecture. Futaba Town is the municipality where the No. 5 and No. 6 reactors are located, but Okuma Town, the other municipality where the reactors are located, and other municipalities around the plant all sought refuge in Fukushima Prefecture.

As a result of Idogawa's negotiations with the then governor of Saitama Prefecture, it was decided that a high school building that had been closed in 2008 could be used as an evacuation center, and as a result, Futaba used the former Kisai High School as an evacuation center for two years and nine months from the end of March 2011. In the beginning,

about 1,200 to 1,400 of the town's 7,000 residents took refuge in this school building. Unlike housing complexes and apartments, the school building was not equipped for daily living, which put the evacuees under great stress. In addition, the Fukushima prefectural government did not support the evacuation of the town as an administrative unit to the outside of the prefecture, and many townspeople stayed within the prefecture, which caused conflicts between the people of Futaba who evacuated to the prefecture and the town administration who evacuated to the outside of the prefecture. However, it was not until October 2012 that Idogawa decided to move the town hall from the former Kisai High School, which was also an evacuation center, to the current location in Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture, and it was not until 17 June 2013, after Idogawa left office, that the town hall was actually moved.

In January 2012, the Japanese government began a decontamination project for areas inside and outside of Fukushima Prefecture that had been contaminated by radioactive materials. Where should we take the huge amount of decontaminated waste from Fukushima Prefecture? The government wanted to build an interim storage facility for the decontaminated waste in the towns of Futaba and Okuma, but Idogawa did not accept it, citing the lack of a formal apology from the government for ruining the town and the lack of clarity in the decision-making process within the government for the construction of the facility. This action led to criticism from the mayors of other towns and villages in Futaba County and the Futaba Town Assembly that Idogawa was disturbing the alignment eight other towns and villages in the County including Futaba and Okuma town. And the town assembly also criticized the Mayor for continuing to strand many of its residents in Saitama Prefecture. Considering that he was not responding to these criticisms, the town council voted not to trust him. As a result, he resigned.

During his tenure, he finally didn't close the Kisai High School evacuation center, and he seemed to be determined to gather the townspeople outside the prefecture as much as possible. Why is that?

He stated that it was unacceptable for Futaba to disappear from Japan. I think he agrees with other mayors and residents of Futaba County on this point. The current policy in Japan is to return to one's hometown. In Japan, evacuation orders will be lifted even if the radiation levels in Ukraine and other countries' Chernobyl laws make them obligatory to move (from 5 to 20 mSv/yr additional exposure dose). But he did not aim to have the residents return to their town as soon as possible, but rather to build a "temporary town" on land uncontaminated by radioactive materials from the accident, wait for the radiation levels to decay over a period of 100 years, and then return when the radiation levels in their hometown dropped to a level that would not interfere with their normal lives. In short, they were trying to rally as many of the townspeople as possible outside the town and eventually move them all to a temporary town'. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25.1-14) once prophesied that the Babylonian Captivity would last for 70 years (in

reality, it took about 60 years from the first captivity until King Cyrus issued an edict allowing the return). Idogawa's vision is based on a sense of time that is comparable to this prophecy, in addition to his unflinching awareness of the dispersed radioactive materials. To put it another way, the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant was as much or more of a civilizational shock than the event that caused the Old Testament to be compiled.

The “temporary town” is a combination of work and residence, similar to the “Roppongi Hills” and “Omotesando Hills” redevelopment projects undertaken by Mori Building in Tokyo. According to a statement submitted by Idogawa, who is currently fighting a civil lawsuit against the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company, he was planning to build a new town in Tsukuba City, Ibaraki Prefecture. The cost of building Roppongi Hills was 270 billion yen, excluding the cost of land acquisition. The president of Mori Building told him that the project, including land acquisition, is feasible. From fiscal 2012 to the end of March 2017, the Japanese government had been conducting wide-area decontamination with a target of 20mSv, for which budgetary measures had been taken at the scale of several trillion yen every year. In terms of the scale of funds, I believe, “temporary town” would be a feasible plan.

Until around 2012, a few people in other towns and villages also had made plans for “temporary town”. There were also some reports that the government was considering the creation of “temporary towns” until around 2012. But the government was supposed to build it in Fukushima Prefecture. Now, 10 years later, the idea of a “temporary town” was not heeded by the mayor who succeeded him, and it fizzled out along with the plans of other towns and villages. The affected and neighboring municipalities all seem to be providing limited support to the residents scattered all over Japan.

What can be gleaned from Idogawa’s thoughts and actions, including the “temporary town” concept, is that the nuclear accident has clearly dictated a new phase of so-called intergenerational ethics. The first philosophical and ethical discussion on intergenerational ethics is M.P. Golding’s “Obligations to future generations” (1972). (1) The philosophical debate on intergenerational ethics that began in the 1970s was an attempt to reexamine the ethics of humanity today, which has led to the energy crisis and environmental destruction, using the future generations that will be exposed to these crises as a mirror.

However, if you think about it calmly for a moment, it is clear that when a nuclear power plant explodes, it does not contaminate the whole of Japan or the entire earth with radioactive materials evenly, but rather it contaminates the area near the plant to an extraordinary degree, thus endangering the survival of certain communities that have been handed down from generation to generation. That is, the survival of a particular community is at stake. In other words, a new “local intergenerational ethics” has arisen, which questions the obligation of a particular

community to survive, or the propriety of the survival of other communities at the expense of a particular community. This may mean that the theory of environmental justice, which questions the injustice of imposing environmental risks on a particular region, entails in fact essentially a theory of intergenerational justice.

What does it mean for a community to disappear? Idogawa cites the loss of the occasion of children to sing the “school song” as a symbolic example. He said Futaba people often sing the school song even in old age together. But since it has already been ten years since the accident, many of the children in the disaster-stricken areas would not know the school song of the elementary or junior high school they were supposed to attend, and many of them would recognize the school song of the school they have evacuated to (or have already moved to) as their own school song. What the symbol of the school song represents is the cultural bond that is necessary for each person to identify as a member of the community. The extraordinary radiation emitted by the accident not only breaks the DNA, but also the cultural bonds that have been passed down from the past. No matter what community you belong to, you have the right not to be subjected to such unilateral violence.

Idogawa’s concept of a “temporary town” was not only to ensure the physical and mental safety of the townspeople, but also to protect the cultural bonds that form the basis of each individual’s identity. However, if this plan were to be realized, the population of Futaba in 2011 was about 7,000, so a new town of at least a few thousand people would suddenly appear in a certain place, which would not necessarily be welcomed by its neighbors. If we recall the conflicts with the residents of the evacuation centers, to which many evacuees as well as Idogawa have testified, it is not hard to imagine that there would be conflicts between the “temporary town” and the surrounding communities. In order to overcome such conflicts, keeping in mind Charles Taylor’s multiculturalism, a “fusion of horizons” would need to occur between the residents of the “temporary town” and the residents of the surrounding communities.

Taylor believed that identity is inherently dialogically constructed. This is true for the uniqueness of the individual as well as for the uniqueness of the community that is distinguished from certain others. I am different from everyone else, and the community to which I belong is a community different from any other, but both my identity and the identity on the community are shaped by the recognition of others and other communities. If there is no recognition, or if the recognition is distorted, for example, recognition as inferior in character, identity itself is distorted. (2) When I met Idogawa in 2016, he said that Futaba residents have been told by other towns and villages, mainly in Fukushima Prefecture, that “because of you, our lives have been ruined by radiation”. In addition, during being evacuated to Kisai High School, when the evacuees went to eat at an eel restaurant outside the high school, they were criticized by the residents of the original area, saying that they were being extravagant even though they were evacuees. At present, many

people, not only residents of Futaba but also people from towns and villages near the nuclear power plant, are living as evacuees. With their ancestral relationships and livelihoods cut off, many are living among people who are not necessarily friendly and who they had no connection with before the accident. Under these circumstances, the “temporary town” concept, which aims to secure the original community in a permanent form rather than a virtual one or a temporal one that gathers only on festive occasions, is thought to contribute to the protection and cultivation of identity at the individual level. However, how can we construct recognition between the aforementioned “temporary town” and other communities without mutually distorting each other?

Using the case of Quebec as a clue, Taylor believed that it was necessary for the “fusion of horizons” to finally acknowledge that there are certain aspects of the culture that have continued to the present that should be respected, even if there are parts of it that one does not like. (3) In this nuclear accident, there are serious frictions between communities, even within the same country, even in the same mother tongue, that is not apparent. What is the foundation of respect for the people of an affected community that has a different culture and customs from our own in the event of a nuclear accident? The medical exposure of Japanese people is outstandingly the highest in the world. Our awareness and interest in low-dose exposure are lower than them of people in other countries. Therefore, the necessity and urgency of evacuation should not be recognized by the original residents in evacuation areas. So that such conflicts cause. Generally speaking, making people outside of the affected areas aware of the health risks involved in even medical exposure may help foster tolerance toward those who are evacuated because of fear of radiation risks or because of the state’s orders to evacuate due to high radiation levels. In order for the “temporary town” concept to succeed, it is necessary for the entire nation to share an interest in the risks of low-dose radiation exposure, including medical exposure.

The former mayor of the town, Mr. Idogawa, was planning to be able to sell the “temporary town” to use the money for rebuilding their life and infrastructure once posterity would have returned to Futaba and the radiation had sufficiently decayed. That is why it is a ‘temporary’ town. In order to succeed in selling it, it would have been necessary to prepare durable and attractive town that would be inferior to other urban redevelopment projects after decades. Ten years have passed since the nuclear accident, and the evacuees, not only Futaba residents, have long since scattered in and out of Fukushima Prefecture and started their new lives. I’m afraid that the plan of building a “temporary town” and reforming their community to live in it will probably not be feasible in the future. Nevertheless, once the reactor explodes, the “temporary town” concept, which sought to avoid the irreversible destruction of the original community in the future, teaches us that intergenerational ethics becomes an issue for environmental ethics not only at the level of humanity as a whole, but also at the level of a particular community.

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NOTES

1. Cf. M. P. Golding, "Obligations to future generations", *The Monist*, Volume 56, Issue 1, 1 January 1972, pp. 85–99.
2. Cf. Charles Taylor, Amy Gutmann, *Multiculturalism*, expanded paperback edition, Princeton, 1994, p. 26.
3. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 67.