The Characteristics and Importance of Japanese Disaster Sociology: Perspectives from Regional and Community Studies in Japan

Rinpei Miura

Summary This article aims to establish the position of disaster sociology in Japan—primarily conducted by sociologists in the field of regional and community studies—as a significant reference for disaster research, worldwide. The literature on resilience, which is an important thematic component of disaster research, is a significant area of contribution within Japanese disaster sociology. This article provides an overview of the research on resilience within disaster sociology, followed by a discussion of four related dimensions: (1) economic development, (2) information and communication, (3) community competence, and (4) social capital. Subsequently, the article focuses on two characteristics of Japanese disaster sociology—a heuristic approach and a social vision—that are typically applied in resilience research. Both of these characteristics provide clues for bridging the discontinuity between the broader discipline of sociology and disaster sociology.

１．Introduction

As a seismic country, Japan has weathered severe earthquakes during the last 20 years. The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that occurred in 1995 was one of the strongest earthquakes to hit an urban area within a developed country. In 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake, which was the most powerful quake recorded in Japan, and one of the four most powerful in the world, devastated an even larger area and claimed more lives. This was because of the meltdowns resulting from the earthquake and tsunami-compromised reactor cooling systems, and subsequent hydrogen explosions in Fukushima.

As a subject of study, disasters in Japan carry wider global implications for all other countries (Kingston 2012). It is likely that no other country has the level of experience and preparedness for dealing with such disasters as Japan does. Thus, acquiring an understanding of how the Japanese, ranging from individuals to communities and local governments, have dealt with these disasters is an important area of inquiry within disaster research.

Disaster research has tended to focus mainly on the US, Thus, it is important to understand how Japan's disaster responses differ from those of the US, given variations in the geographical areas, economies, risk management practices, and institutions of the

two countries. Considering the experiences of other nations will be beneficial for building disaster theory.

Indeed, Japanese disaster research per se should be recognized as an important body of literature. In particular, disaster research in which Japanese sociologists working in the field of regional and community studies have played a key role, will provide valuable insights for disaster sociology. The reason is that disaster research in Japan not only shares a number of common themes with foreign research, but it also provides clues for solving problems raised by researchers in other countries.

Focusing on recovery, which is a central theme within disaster research, this article clarifies the important contribution of regional and community studies in Japan.[1] The second section discusses how current studies can be positioned to contribute to the new resilience paradigm. The third section of the article focuses in detail on two characteristic approaches applied in Japanese disaster sociology that typically feature in research on resilience. These are: a heuristic approach and a social vision. The first aims to unravel institutional issues through an analysis of the problem. The second highlights the agency of movements that attempt to find solutions to this issue in the process of shaping a desirable society.

These characteristic approaches offer us clues regarding appropriate solutions for addressing the problem of discontinuity between the broader discipline of sociology and disaster sociology. As the fourth section emphasizes, resolving this issue has been deemed an important research task. Japanese sociologists in the field of regional and community studies have reexamined sociological theses relating to civil society and the concept of publicness by focusing on an issue that was not fully explored within previous sociological theses. These studies will provide valuable perspectives for sociology in general.

2. How has Recovery been Discussed?

2.1 A Sociological Definition of Recovery: Processes toward Developing a New Society

Within disaster research, recovery is the least-understood phase of the disaster cycle (Rubin et al. 1985; Berke, Kartez, and Wenger 1993; Berke and Beatley 1997; Mileti 1999). However, a number of researchers have attempted to share insights on post-disaster issues, mainly in the US (Haas, Kates, and Bowden 1977; Drabek and Key 1984; Oliver-Smith 1986; Bates and Peacock 1993; Chang 2010; Jordan and Javernick-Will

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[1] Japanese disaster sociology includes various studies conducted on pre-disaster issues and emergency management (Iwasaki et al. 1999). However, the present work focuses only on post-disaster research.

2014; Richardson, Siebeneck, and Shaunfield 2014; Johnson 2014).

My review of this body of literature indicates a need to revise the concept of recovery employed within previous research. In particular, the perspective that equates "recovery" with post-disaster reconstruction of the physical environment is becoming problematic (Tierney and Oliver-Smith 2012:125).

A number of researchers have attempted to develop a definition that frames recovery as a set of processes toward fostering a new society. Recovery may thus be viewed as an adaptive process that negotiates the tension between the re-establishment of pre-disaster systems and significant post-disaster alterations of those same systems (Tierney and Oliver-Smith 2012).

Japanese recovery-focused disaster sociology can provide a substantial reference for disaster research that is guided by this new definition of recovery. This is because recovery has been conceptualized by Japanese sociologists not as a return to the status quo ante, but as a series of processes toward fostering a new society (Ooyane 2007).

This approach is influenced by the difficult experiences relating to the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Whereas many victims hoped for a return to a normal life after the disaster, "developmentalism" or the use of money to restore infrastructure actually led to the dissolution of several communities. Many victims had to leave the disaster-affected areas. This kind of recovery-related issue was again observed after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

The issue here is the prevailing assumption that the first priority is restoration of infrastructure, whereas the foremost post-disaster concern of victims is rehabilitation of their lives. Moreover, Japanese disaster sociologists recognize that recovery is something that each victim and community should independently discuss with respect to forging a desirable consensus-based society. There is a wealth of literature in Japan that considers recovery as a process toward building a new society, thus contributing to resilience theory.

2.2. Resilience as a Series of Processes

Contemporary disaster research has yielded an extensive body of literature on resilience, which has emerged as a new paradigm in relation to recovery. This entails an increasing focus on what affected communities can do for themselves and how best to strengthen them (Manyena 2006).

Unlike the concept of "vulnerability," which is applied to identify weak points and problems hidden within a social structure, the concept of resilience has entailed focusing, assessing, and promoting latent possibilities that exist within the social structure. Regional and community research in Japan is compatible with the concept of resilience

for assessing community competence, given its coverage of independent anti-disaster organizations.

Nonetheless, resilience remains an ambiguous concept that can be misunderstood to mean a return to the pre-disaster status quo. It would, therefore, be productive for sociological research on recovery to consider resilience as a process that entails adapting to changes in the environment and shaping a "desirable" society (Urano et al. 2007; Urano 2010; Izumi 2015). Such a perception is aligned with the recent trend in disaster research of shifting from a predominantly outcome-oriented approach to a more process-oriented approach, in relation to disaster resilience (Manyena 2006). Consequently, this article considers resilience as a process of gathering and integrating various resources for fostering a desirable society.

Many scholars have put forward different opinions on what resources constitute resilience. Norris et al. (2008) have developed an excellent classification system comprising four dimensions of resilience: economic development, information and communication, community competence, and social capital.[2]

Each dimension has been examined within Japanese disaster sociology. This includes, for example, how individuals have moved forward in concert with their communities and local governments toward developing a resilient society, and identifying problems and possibilities, albeit without explicitly applying the concept of resilience. The following subsections provide an overview of research on the above four dimensions within regional and community studies.

2.2.1 Economic Development: Objectification of the Moral Economy

The capacity to distribute post-disaster resources to those most in need of them is a crucial aspect of community resilience. However, there are few empirical studies available as references. A large number of researchers lack a complete understanding of the roles played by private capital, professional groups, and nonprofit organizations (NPOs), as well as of the means of distributing resources to meet local needs. These gaps have been described as "zones of uncertainty" (Smith and Birkland 2012:152). Moreover, a study conducted by Klein (2007) to clarify the important role of private capital has not been corroborated within the literature. The contribution of these networks of private capital and nonprofit organizations to recovery levels in the US has not been examined.

In the context of Japan, Nitagai (2015) has noted how civil society distributes private

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[2] Norris (2008) considered these four dimensions to be overlapping and interrelated rather than exclusive. He also described them as culturally specific to the US. Therefore, observing whether these resources exist within other cultures would be an important research task.

capital and nonprofit derived funds to vulnerable victims based on the concept of a "moral economy." However, his definition of a moral economy contradicts pre-capitalistic morals.

> [The moral economy comprises] economic activities and practices motivated by norms and principles, that entail a perception of social support for releasing people from pathos as a natural thing [for] human beings and a natural duty as a member of society when people find it difficult to become independent, as in the case of disasters. (Nitagai 2015: 5, translation mine)

For Nitagai, it is necessary for a local community to have access to various forms of "economy" to achieve independence. He subsequently classified the following types of economy during times of disaster: a public economy, a market economy, and a moral economy. He found that a civil society produced and supported a moral economy for vulnerable victims.

Goods, specifically *fukko* (recovery) goods, or the outputs of victims engaged in activities that help them to reach definite goals in their lives, have constituted a concrete research subject. Such goods include hand-made stuffed dolls, woodworks, and ornaments. Unlike market goods, *fukko* goods are priced for charity. Consumers buy them to support victims striving to achieve "independence". Nitagai explored the possibilities and tasks relating to the moral economy by investigating how this enterprise was sustained.[3]

2.2.2 Information and Communication

According to Norris (Norris et al. 2008), information and communication are vital for fostering community resilience. Communication, in this context, refers to the creation of common meanings and understandings, as well as the provision of opportunities for members to articulate their needs, views, and attitudes.[4]

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[3] In the field of economics, similar activities entailed in the concept of a "gift economy" have been studied (Nagamatsu 2006, 2008). However, a gift economy is conceptualized as simply having complementary role that help usher a return to the previously established market economy. By contrast, activities entailed in a moral economy are viewed not as temporary, but as starting points of the process toward building a new society that encompasses vulnerable groups.

[4] Although Norris did not refer to cultural aspects as resources for developing community resilience, culture can be located in the information and communication arena. Japanese disaster sociology has revealed the importance of culture for fostering a resilient society. For example, Mugikura and Yoshino (2014) highlighted the importance of symbols for looking forward to a common future and for sustaining hope. Kanabishi

The most effective means of communicating risks and recommendations to the public have also been the focus of a number of previous studies. Much of our understanding of human responses to warnings stems from older research that has been based primarily on theories of persuasive communication. This linear model, which assumes a top-down flow of information to the public, now needs to be revised (Dash and Hugh 2007; Solensen and Solensen 2007).

In particular, the function of information and communication as resources cannot be attributed solely to governmental management. Indeed, information assumes a bidirectional flow: how the government and professionals understand the situation, how the media reports the situation, and how victims receive and grasp information.

There has been less discussion on this theme within Japanese regional and community studies. However, after analyzing evacuation procedures during the Great East Japan Earthquake, Tanaka (2013) clarified that the methods applied within a government-centric, top-down system in which warnings are issued from a centralized authority and communicated to civilians, are not sufficiently effective. Instead, evacuation procedures that rely on the competence of groups, such as schools and communities, are actually more effective. Thus, whereas recipients within the previous communication model were considered as "individuals in a social vacuum in reality, they were located within social networks. Disaster-planning paradigms should consequently be revised to account for social networks in relation to the flow of information. This finding applies not only during times of emergency, but also in the aftermath of disasters.

However, the nuclear accident in Fukushima presents complications in this respect. At the time, information concerning the nuclear accident had had the quality of being not well known. Its flow, as well as understanding regarding Fukushima, led to a difficult situation. Yamashita (2013) has clearly described this complicated situation. The first problem is one of trust, as the government did not provide sufficient information at the outset. Yamashita has described the center-periphery system that prevailed during the disaster in terms of a *kouiki* (expanded) system. He has further highlighted the following issues concerning information and communication at that time.

・Important decision making and the information flow were centrally executed.
・Although the government implemented a recovery plan in the stricken areas, the needs of the victims (livelihood rehabilitation, regional revitalization, and health) were not considered.

(2014) noted that mourning the deceased within a community, instead of grieving within the bereaved family, results in congregative experiences and feelings. It also prevents the bereaved family from being isolated. Such a culture, formed within the community, plays a vital role in fostering community resilience.

・Victims were forced to determine whether to go back to the affected areas without being provided with sufficient information.
・Victims were divided by generation, profession, and their evacuation situations. In this regard, summarizing options should have been a priority task.

Second, Yamashita has insisted that the understanding of victims was in fact "non-understanding," which entails "believing in the understanding [at face value]" as opposed to misunderstanding. As this type of understanding has prevailed among those professionals and Japanese people located outside of the stricken areas, their communication with victims consequently suffered (Yamashita et al. 2013).

Accordingly, Yamashita and Sato analyzed discussions that took place at the town meeting held to facilitate communication among victims within their community (Sato 2014). The victims grasped the fact that this activity constituted a vital step toward recovery.[5] The characteristics of this town meeting differed from those of meetings held in the US in the following ways. First, membership was limited to residents, and second, grouping was done according to generation or attributes. The aim of the Japanese town meeting was to promote conversations among victims who shared the same circumstances, while also indicating how they were divided, situated, and incapable of communicating. Indeed, town meetings need to be examined in terms of their function of building community resilience.

2.2.3 Community Competence
A turning point in the development of community resilience occurs when at-risk communities, after learning about the threats they face, along with their options, enjoin members to work together flexibly and creatively to resolve problems. Studies in countries such as the US and Europe have shed light on community efforts to reduce risks and resource inequities, engage locals in planning, create organizational linkages, and boost and maintain social support (Ganor 2003; Perez-Sales 2005).[6]

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[5]   According to a report, victims did not engage in a collective behavior during the Chernobyl incident, because they did not have access to the appropriate resources (Abbott et al. 2006). In the case of Fukushima, supporters promoted collective behavior and communication among victims by providing resources from the outside.
[6] In the same way, Japanese research on disaster sociology has led to the expansion of a body of literature on community competence. Researchers have clarified why such efforts are needed, what problems confront communities, and what outcomes communities can expect. Special attention has been given to community planning for recovery within research. Moreover, efforts to forge a community of diverse people—for example, foreigners, the disenfranchised, and people with disabilities—following the Kobe Earthquake have been analyzed in detail (Moon 2000; Itou 2000; Shimizu 1998, 2002, 2004).

However, there has been a lack of discussion on the underlying conditions of an altruistic community in the field of disaster research (Richardson et al. 2014). Within Japanese regional and community studies, this research has been characterized by a hesitation to presuppose the existence of an altruistic community.

An ideal community cannot be presupposed to exist within contemporary society, which continues to experience fast-paced urbanization and privatization (Shimizu 2008; Yoshihara 2015). Japanese disaster sociologists have instead focused on the social processes that define a community's character and the norms, logics, and practices that affect communities. Contrasting with international research, problem setting in Japanese research centers on an examination of the functions and significance of communities within contemporary society through the study of disaster cases.

For example, a study by Ryo Shimizu (1998) that investigated community planning for promoting recovery in Kobe City revealed that community organizations tended to adhere to "a logic of residence." This entailed the goal of ensuring that local residents could return to their community, that is, of making communities as "returnable" as possible. The study further showed that a "logic of ownership," applying rhetoric and events, was used to persuade land owners to readjust land for renters and tenants.

Institutional problems that constrain the development of an altruistic community have also been clarified. It has been found that a uniform institutional framework does not account for local variety, and that partnerships do not delegate authority to local governments or victims (Miwa and Sato 1999; Kimura and Urano 1999; Urano 1999). Mugikura and Yoshino (2014) concluded that determining a common land use is the most important element within community planning. These problems and tasks would be shared by many communities within disaster-affected areas.

2.2.4 Social Capital, Community Bonds, and Social Support

Social capital is a highly relevant theme relating to the development of a theory of community resilience (Aldrich 2012). However, it has not been broadly discussed within Japanese disaster studies. Rather, the focus has been on community bonds and social support, both of which are components of social capital (Norris et al. 2008).

Japanese regional and community studies have tended not to presuppose the existence of community bonds. As in the case of community competence, the literature has tended to focus on a detailed analysis of the background context and functions of community bonding For example, Matsui (2011) found that bonding engendered mutual support for aiding recovery when the concept was reassessed with disaster as a turning point.

Yoshihara (2013) has insisted on making a distinction between the discourse of

community bonds and actual communities. Specifically, Yoshihara has critiqued the creation of "self-government[s] in line with national policy" (Yoshihara 2013:103) in relation to community bonds, as this discourse does not adequately respond to the needs of victims and may even delay recovery. He then assessed communities' efforts to create "another community-government" and establish networks involving various subjects for responding to the needs of victims in a positive light. In a subsequent paper, referring to Delanty (2003), Yoshihara (2015) concluded that during the recovery phase, a "spatially fixed community" could not respond to the diversifying needs of victims. He highlighted the importance of creating "community as belonging" through the interactions of various individuals.

Turning now to social, support, as previously mentioned, Norris used the term "social support" to refer to social interactions that provide individuals with practical assistance and embed them within a web of social relationships perceived to be loving, caring, and readily available in times of need (Norris et al. 2008).

Various researchers have explored volunteerism in Japan, focusing on volunteers to clarify their roles and achievements following the Kobe Earthquake. However, in the US context, although the importance of volunteers during disasters has been recognized (Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001), discussion on them has been limited. The disaster volunteer is considered solely as a subset of volunteerism in general. Consequently no special attention has been paid to disaster volunteers within the wider body of research on volunteers (Atsumi and Goltz 2014).

Japanese disaster research has contributed significantly in this respect. Various researchers have discussed the roles of volunteers related to disasters and recovery outcomes (Asano and Aragaki 2000; Yamashita and Suga 2002; Suga, Yamashita, and Atsumi 2008; Nishiyama 2005; Nitagai 2008). Studies have elucidated the factors that influence the responses of disaster volunteers, on behalf of responsible institutions, to the various needs of victims.

Although volunteers' activities tend to be considered as synonymous with emergency responses, Japanese studies have revealed their post-disaster significance, especially for aiding community recovery. In particular, volunteerism has the social effect of fostering relationships between volunteers and vulnerable victims. Such social relationships have been theoretically conceptualized as indicators of civil society supporting the lives of individuals.

A typical argument relates to the "subsistence" thesis propounded by Nishiyama (2005), who provided the following definition.

[Subsistence refers to the] fundamental activities concerning human existence [that] adhere to each person's individuality [by] thoroughly involving other people. (Nishiyama 2005: 38)

For Nishiyama, social support is not unidirectional; rather, it fosters a mutually supportive relationship. Such a relationship affirms the mutual existence of individuals and transcends a relationship entailing general support. Through mutual affirmation, victims come to conceive of a mutual relationship as one that entails independence.[7] Nishiyama found that volunteers' activities in support of such independence were influential in shaping a desirable civil society.

As stated above, Japanese research on disaster volunteers has focused on the possibility of volunteers who do not presuppose the need for institutions in their volunteerism. In other words, they view institutions as a problem, because these institutions cannot respond to individuals' needs. Thus, vulnerable groups cannot be helped solely by institutions (Shimizu 2002; Mitsui 2014).

Nonetheless, the literature does not totally negate the role of institutions and institutionalization. The fact that networks of volunteers have been institutionalized to promote civil activities since the enactment of the NPO law (1998) merits some appreciation.

However, in the process of institutionalization, a number of NPOs have become dependent on government subsidies, seemingly unable to survive without them. Consequently, after the Great East Japan Earthquake, a number of NPOs prioritized the procurement and consumption of subsidies, as mandated by the institutional framework, rather than supporting vulnerable groups who tend to be excluded from institutionalized support. Indeed, a number of researchers identified the problem of insufficient support provided by institutionalized NPOs after the Great East Japan Earthquake (e.g., Suga 2014; Yamashita 2014).

Hence, Japanese disaster researchers have explored how disaster volunteers have covered areas that seem to be beyond the reach of institutions. Such efforts are considered a crucial form of social support for building community resilience.

3. Perspectives from Disaster Sociology within Japan

As discussed above, regional and community studies in Japan have examined resources that are important elements for fostering resilience. These elements are:

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[7] This aspect relates to the problematic assumption of independence relating to a "single active subject who can do anything" within the social sciences.

economic development, information and communication, community competence, and social capital.

However, there are two perspectives that enable transcendence over the resilience thesis in problem setting. The first is a perspective for problematizing institutions in relation to the pathos of victims who are not accommodated by these institutions. The second is a perspective for anticipating the possibilities of social movements within the non-institutional domain. These perspectives are characteristic of disaster sociology in Japan, and offer clues for connecting disaster sociology with the broader discipline of sociology.

3.1 The Perspective on Institutional Problematizing

Using survey data, Japanese sociologists engaged in regional and community studies have tended to focus on the problem of emerging gaps in institutional disaster responses.[8]

The focus on institutional problems has not been limited to the recovery phase, but has also extended to other disaster response phases.

For example, studies have revealed that the institutional problem of moving victims into temporary housing, thereby separating them from their established social networks results in *kodokushi* (dying alone). Studies have also addressed the issue of urban planning that prioritizes redevelopment for disaster recovery (Itou 1998; Ooyane 1999; Urano 1999; Oohori 2012), as well as that of institutional subsidies, which entail prioritization of formal equality rather than correction of disparities (Tsuji 2001).

After the Great East Japan Earthquake, more than the absence of a fundamental law relating to comprehensive recovery of the affected areas, the most serious problem resulted from the fact that institutions were not created from the victims' standpoints, thereby producing disparities between them (Kuroda 2014). Asano (2015) has critiqued the national recovery plan for its assumption of "selection and concentration" from the perspective of national interests and capital accumulation, as well as for ignoring affected areas that happened to be farming and fishing villages. The policy entailed partial choices ("go back prepared for exposure to radiation" or "immigrate by oneself," as it was based on a "hurry back and realize recovery" goal. Thus, the policy itself was an obstructive factor for the recovery of communities.

Japanese sociologists engaged in regional and community studies have focused on

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[8] Evidently, a heuristic approach, per se, is not an original perspective. Many researchers share this perspective. For example, Berke and his colleagues (1993: 98) attempted to elucidate the recovery process, to uncover ways of improving recovery outcomes, and to define the factors that influence outcomes.

institutional problems, offering practical insights that are not limited to disaster research. They have studied individual social problems that are caused by institutions. Consequently, an important perspective entails anticipation of the possibilities of social movements that problematize institutions and complement gaps in the non-institutional domain.

3.2 A Social Vision Perspective for Anticipating Possibilities of Movements within the Non-Institutional Domain

Japanese sociologists have turned their attention to possible movements that problematize institutions and support victims who have been excluded in the disaster responses of institutions. Such movements are deemed an important catalyst for building a desirable society.

This perspective considers a social movement to be an agent involved in solving current institutional problems. It is anchored in an accumulated body of research on social movements (resident movements) that has critiqued state-led urban development. Since the 1970s, studies on resident movements have problematized the social structure that causes upheaval the lives of residents. Such movements have been conceived as a starting point for changing the social structure. Researchers have endeavored to shed light on the opportunities and tasks related to this change.

This perspective has influenced disaster research in Japan. Above all, with the Kobe Earthquake as a benchmark, the distance between the movement and the researcher has decreased. They have come to deepen mutual understanding and to share the problems.

This change has been influenced by the practical question that was raised after the Kobe Earthquake, namely: What can sociologists do for victims? Thus far, sociologists have clarified institutional problems, as well as discussed the effects of movements within the non-institutional domain, consequently insisting on their theoretical importance. However, the role of sociologists themselves requires a reexamination in the current context.

Various sociologists have attempted to contribute by rejecting the established notion that researchers expect movements to be initiated, one-sidedly, from the outside. As reported by Ooyane and Atsumi (2007), disaster-related surveys differ from those conducted within general social research. Victims and volunteers tend not to accept temporal relationships with researchers, resulting in a one-sided understanding of researchers. To establish a rapport with research subjects, the researcher has to interpret the problems and tasks of research subjects, thereby going beyond the

established mechanics of a researcher–research subject relationship.

Nitagai's (2008) concept of "common act" is relevant to this discussion. Specifically, Nitagai has asserted that observing and recording a victim's "unsetting action" for hope and then discovering opportunities to realize this "unsetting action," commonly through interactive communication, provide a role for sociologists to support victims[9]. Shimizu (2014: 64–65) understood this approach to entail not "just listening to [the] research subject" but also "sharing the task of movements by sharing time and space with [the] research subject, and deepening mutual understanding."

This type of survey, which can be compared to an "active interview" (Holstein and Gubrium 1995), offers researchers an opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding of the thoughts of the research subject and the tasks that they face. More importantly, the researcher can consequently revise his or her concepts and thesis. Yamashita (2013: 291) further noted that by thinking with the research subject, the researcher has the opportunity to share and rethink his or her own knowledge.

To deepen such mutual understanding, Japanese sociologists have begun to support the practices of research subjects.[10] For example, after the Great East Japan Earthquake, Nitagai and Shimizu (2015) supported organizations that listened to victims through "footbath" activities or *fukko* goods. Yamashita and Sato (2013) also supported town meetings held to facilitate communication on resettlement and other more general future-related issues. Further, various researchers and professionals have established networks for addressing various tasks. These have included institutionalization preferences that entail linking research outputs with policies (Kuroda 2015).

Such plans and practices serve to critique previous perspectives that considered victims as simply passive subject[s]. This critique also applies to the broader discipline of sociology.

Above all, these contemporary perspectives highlight a crucial difference between Japanese disaster sociology and international disaster research. Stallings (2007) insisted that the researcher should not be involved with the research subjects to ensure

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[9] The victim's "unsetting action" means the action aimed at overcoming hopeless situation. It is not sure whether the action would bring hope, but it is worth to do such activity.

[10] This stance has been critiqued by a number of sociologists. For example, Asano (2015) has expressed misgivings regarding research conducted on social support in which the researcher assumes a position of equality with the other parties. Both the researcher and the other parties inevitably experience a gap. Thus the one planning the "common act" is presupposing that sustainers and not parties are equal subjects. At any rate, the relationship between sustainers and research subjects is an important avenue of query.

objectivity regarding the information gathered on the disaster. This view seems to have been the basic stance employed in disaster research so far. Although not necessarily misguided, the "one-sidedly discussing from [the] outside" stance would not be useful for solving the problem relating to disaster research, which is discontinuity between the broader discipline of sociology and disaster sociology.

4. Conclusion: Toward Connection with the Broader Discipline of Sociology

In recent years, an identified problem within disaster research is indifference to sociological theses (Quarantelli 2005: 330). For example, Tierney concluded as follows:

Disaster researchers must stop organizing their inquiries around problems that are meaningful primarily to the institutions charged with managing disasters and instead concentrate on problems that are meaningful to the discipline. They must integrate the study of disasters with core sociological concerns, such as social inequality, social diversity, and social change. (Tierney 2007: 520)

Numerous sociologists engaged in regional and community studies have examined disasters with the intention of connecting disaster research with sociological theses. They have conceptualized disasters as typical events that reflect the various problems entailed in the social structure. These include: loss of bonding, economic decline, depopulation, and disparity.

The two perspectives, discussed above, are aimed at forging a connection between disaster sociology and sociological theses. First, the heuristic approach brings opportunities for reframing problems arising in disaster situations as societal problems relating to the social order, social structure, social relations, and civil society. When a problem emerges that cannot be explained in terms of established theses, then the earlier theses need to be improved or modified.

For example, the institutional issue relating to residents' cards (Watado 2014)[11] and the problem of "self-government in line with national policy" (Yoshihara 2013) have compelled a rethinking of the "principle of settling" that is implicitly entailed in the concept of community. Thus, by attending to the fluidity that characterizes a modern city, a viewpoint that contextualizes the previous community thesis emerges. Such a

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[11] In Fukushima, victims suffered various disadvantages if they did not change the addresses on their resident cards to that of the place of refuge. However if they did change their address, they were not entitled to receive compensation for medical expenses provided to those under 18 years old.

perspective would innovate urban sociology. Indeed, disaster research would benefit from a perspective that enables the discovery of problems on site, extraction of themes, and subsequent innovation of the previous thesis.

Second, the perspective that positively assesses new practices and movements as an important step toward a desirable society would bring about a much-needed reexamination of theses relating to civil society and publicness. This raises important questions such as: In what situations do such new practices emerge? How could such practices be assessed from the perspective of the previously established theses on publicness and civil society? Such queries would facilitate a conceptual re-examination of earlier theses.

As an example, a study by Nitagai et al. (2008) considered the practices of volunteers as a fundamental indicator of publicness. Volunteers supported those victims who could not be reached through standard institutional responses. In doing so, they supported each individual's life, recognizing his or her uniqueness. Such activities were expected to contribute toward the victim's independence and the community's recovery. Referring to Arendt's "space of appearance," Nitagai concluded that: "The relationships and activities which emerge on each occasion, concretely, temporarily, topically to support [the] individuality of life are the root of publicness."(Nitagai et al 2008: xx) He insisted on modifying the earlier thesis on publicness. Thus, a concept of publicness that presupposes a diversity of lives serves as an alternative to the Habermasian concept of publicness in which civil publicness is constructed by specifying commensurable elements.[12]

However, there is also a differing conceptualization of publicness. Yamashita (2008: 4757) identified a form of publicness that was unique to Japan. He conceived of publicness as being shared by the public. A movement aimed at sharing the burden of resolving an emerging problem though collective cooperation would play an important role in fostering publicness.

In other words, the difference derives from the area of focus. Nitagai focused on the importance of variability in the non-institutional domain, whereas Yamashita focused on the importance of uniformity in the institutional domain. In either case, it is important to recognize that regional and community studies in Japan offer a wealth of insights for linking disaster studies with sociological theses. The existing body of research within this field would provide valuable perspectives for disaster sociologists in other nations

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[12] Consequently, Nitagai (2012b) has argued that it is the task of contemporary civil society to expand such activities and networks among various professionals, to mutually support those who are vulnerable. The role of professionals and researchers should be reexamined from the civil society thesis.

and for the field of sociology in general.

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