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Discourse analysis of the Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant accident: theoretical considerations 14 years after the disaster

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ABSTRACT

The Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant accident on 11 March 2011 caused massive environmental contamination by radioactive materials. It has had significant impact on the lives of people. It is said no one was exposed to doses high enough to cause acute health damage by radiation exposure. However, there are concerns about late effects of low-dose exposure. Many cases of childhood thyroid cancer, which was said to be extremely rare before the accident, have been reported by health surveys of people in Fukushima Prefecture. Government authorities and mainstream scientists state that this is an overdiagnosis due to the screening effect and that the number of childhood thyroid cancer patients is not actually increasing. It is difficult for non-experts to know ‘the truth’ on highly specialized scientific issues such as this on their own. It is especially difficult when the information needed to make a judgement is limited under severe power relations. Discourse analysis of texts describing these issues opens the possibility to scrutinize what is being done in the texts, by whom and how, and to whom and what the reality constituted therein bring about to who reads them. Now, geopolitical factors such as the war in Ukraine and political-military tensions in East Asia, as well as the need to combat global warming, tend to revitalize nuclear power generation, and to neglect the lessons learned from the accident. Fourteen years after the disaster, the theoretical significance of examining this issue by discourse analysis will be discussed.

Keywords: nuclear accident; radiation damage; discourse analysis; social construction of reality; critical psychology