

# **An Island of Garbage in the Eco-Utopian Euphony viewed from the History of Japanese Environmental Policy**

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## **Introduction**

This paper tries to give a political and historical interpretation about the formation of Japanese environmental policy since 1950s. My historical study attempts to provide a case study of illegal industrial waste dumping problem. Through my case study, from the view point of recent Science and Technology studies on the social and political analysis of environmental policy, I would like to show the fact that recent "eco" project is not a positive change of Japanese environmental policy, but it is rather just a result of compromise among Japanese bureaucratic divisions.

## **The Industrial Waste Dumping Problems on the Teshima Island**

There is a small remote island called Teshima, in the Setouchi inland sea of West Japan. The island is known as the island of garbage, because a huge quantity of industrial waste was illegally dumped there from 1977 to 1990, and the island's environment was badly contaminated. And total amount of the dump became 500,000 ton. Among contaminated chemicals, we find heavy metals such as lead, mercury and cadmium, and there are also high concentration of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl), dioxin and arsenic as a result of combustion of wastes. In the period, the industrial waste dumper acquired local government's permission to deal with industrial and chemically contaminated waste, and they acquired an authorized right to dump it on the island. But this local government's permission was turned out to be a wrong decision, and the dumper was finally found guilty of illegal handling of waste in 1991.

The problem was that his company had already bankrupted by the time, and they were not able to take any responsibility at all. The inhabitants of the island then claimed the local government should be responsible for long ignorance and wrong decision, but they didn't have enough money and social skills to take the issue into any effective way, such as a court trial. Soil and sea there were being contaminated chemically day by day. And the people's health and life were menaced. Income of the people who lived on agriculture and fishery was most seriously damaged because the products around the island were not accepted at the market.

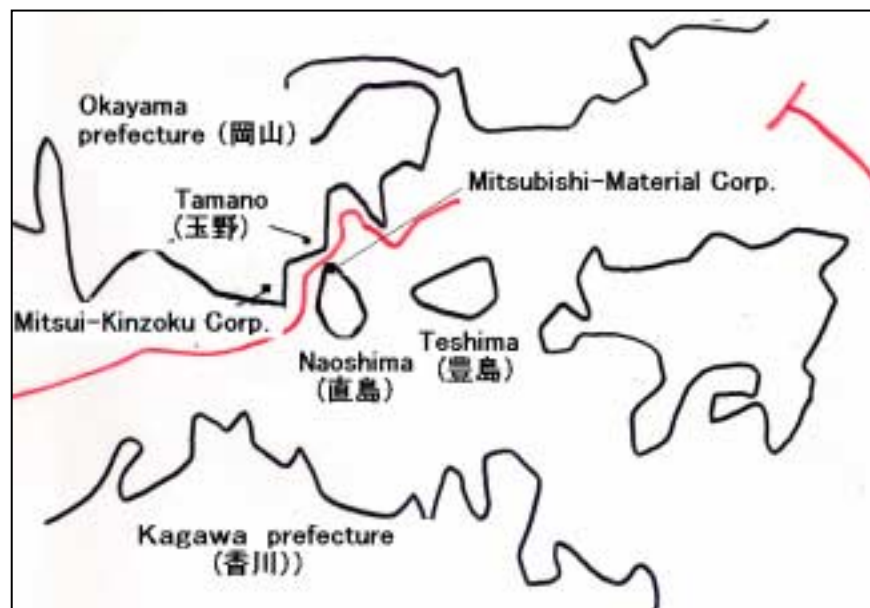
Finally, through Environmental Dispute Coordination Commission was organized to arbitrate the issue in 1993 under the leadership of Kohei Nakabo, known as "the Lawyer for the Citizen's Justice". After the dramatic citizen's petition, the bureaucrats of the local government expressed their apology, and this case was known as the most exceptional case that public authority admitted their mishandling. Then mediation between the inhabitants and the local government took place in 2000 at last.

To our surprise, however, the people of the island were obliged to take a strategy to exclude any economic compensation. So this mediation did not include any economic compensation for the people of the island at all. But instead, it expressed the symbolic apology of a local government, and the clean-up plan of the island.

The clean-up plan is by means of the transfer of the waste to the near island, Naoshima. On this Naoshima island, a refinery of Mitsubishi Material Corporation was established in 1917, and it enriched the island for a long time. But recently, its industry of dealing with copper has been in decline. So this plan was an opportunity to recover recent less profit. Moreover, it combined to build a public project of recycling "Eco-Town", with the huge public work budget to construct the high-temperature furnace to process the harmful wastes into harmless.

“Eco - Town” is a concept for systematic local industrial development plan based on so-called “recycling” industry. The drive force to promote this plan is “eco” boom amidst prolonged Japanese economic recession, and behind this, there are strong advocators of this plan from the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry. Such declining industries related to iron and coal were supposed to be rescued through restructuring them into recycle industry. Kita-Kyushu area is one of the model cases. This plan provides us with pretty idealistic feature, of Eco-Recycle Utopian view of industrial society. In fact, at Naoshima plan, by the high temperature combustion of the wastes, dioxin and other harmful substances are said to have been emitted, and such useful metals as gold and silver can be extracted from the heap of garbage. So far, this seemed to have ended in the creation of the harmonious utopia by the techno-scientific recycling system, with the recovery of environment. Teshima’s problem is made-up into a beautiful story of self-sacrifice of the people in the island for defending the cleanness of the island, not any money involved at all.

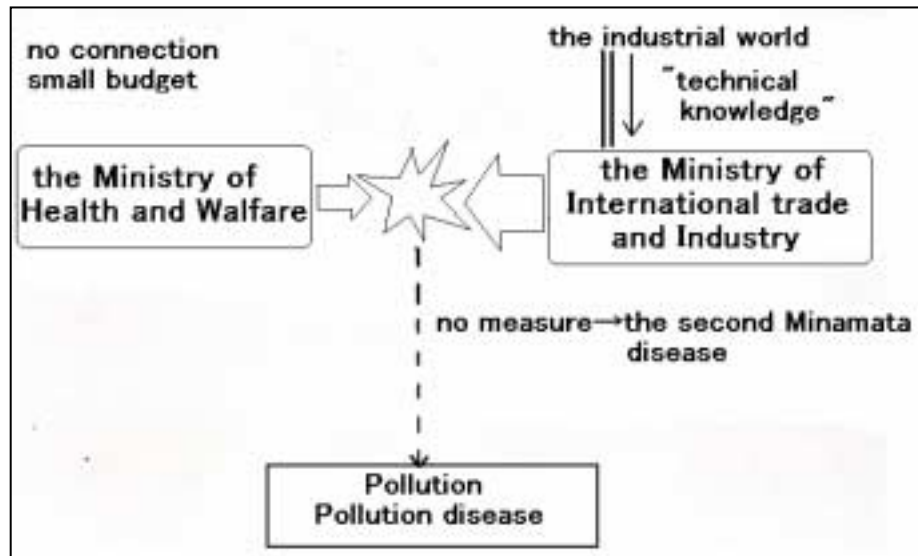
In our eyes, the concept of “Eco-Town” is very doubtful. The reality is far from utopian or harmonious. It is just a compromise among the bureaucratic divisions reflects arbitral character of Japanese environmental policy. This is also a case completely entangled in the Japanese bureaucratic system



of local governing bodies. The entanglement is like this: This is the border of Prefectures of Okayama and Kagawa. This is Tamano city, Okayama. Tamano is only 2km from Naoshima, so they might likely be polluted by Naoshima factory. But the local government of Tamano can not interfere in this project, mainly because of the division of local government border. Another reason why Tamano did not directly meddle into this problem is that there is also a furnace of Mitsui Corporation, here, and this factory made exhaustion gas and water which had also contaminated the other side. Both local governments did not interfere business of these companies because they were heavily depended their financial bases on the taxes from these companies. Even there were some health and environmental damages already known, local governing bodies did not claim nor defend for people’s right for life. So there is no official intervention in company’s activity among them beyond governing borders.

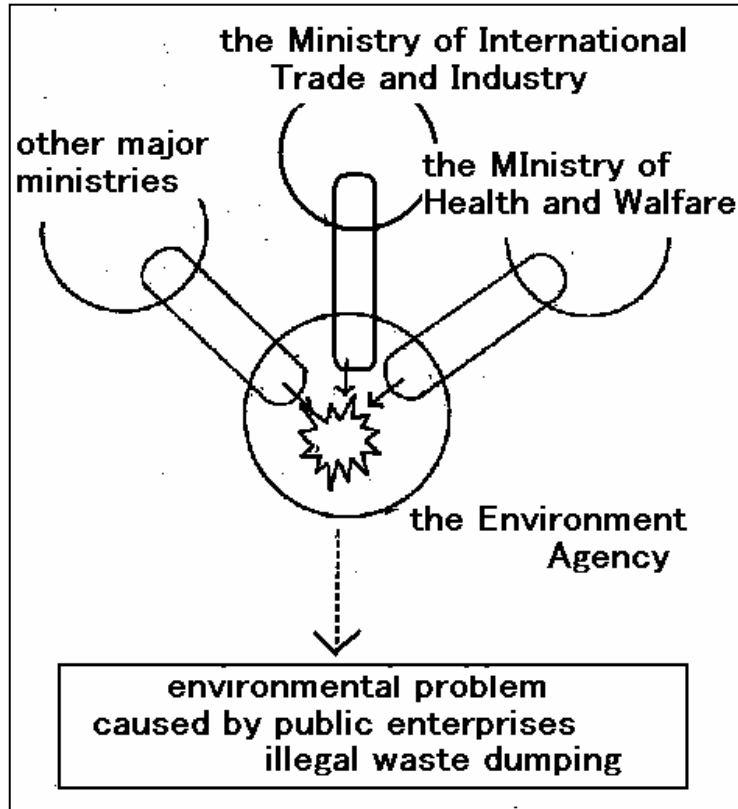
### History of Japanese Environmental Policy

Then, I would like to analyze this case from the view point of history of Japanese environmental policy. From 1950s to 1960s, many serious pollution-caused diseases occurred in Japan. The Minamata-disease caused by organic mercury compound from Japan Nitrogen in Kumamoto was one of the most well-known cases. Then the pollution problem became a big socio-political issue. The pollution issue was intensely discussed at the general assembly of the members of Diet, and the debate on the issue was extensive and 13 acts were issued. Now retrospectively, the 1970 General Assembly of the Diet is called “Diet of Pollution Issue”(公害国会). Petitions for victimized people and social movements to relief them were culminated to court cases now known to Four



Pollution-caused Disease Suits in the beginnings of 1970s. The governmental policy-making on pollution issues was not effective at this stage, because in those days, the handling of these issues were divided in bureaucratic orders. Both the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the ministry of International Trade and Industry had their departments which had dealt with pollution issues. The former was likely to take a side of victims and concerned with health issues. But the latter had more connections in the industrial world, so they could utilize, so-called “technical knowledge”, to reject requests from the former, and their priority was on promotion of the industrial activities. The government was criticized for such decision, and this matter was in the spotlight. As a result of long debate, in 1971, the Environment Agency was finally established. From 1971 to 1973, all four big court cases of pollution diseases have got judgments favorable to the plaintiffs. It seemed that Japanese environmental policy has started. Even after that, however, as we found through Teshima’s case, beautiful mountains and sea have been destroyed by public enterprises or illegal dumping wastes in fact. So we can raise a question that: Is the Environmental Agency properly functioning?

From the beginning, the Agency was composed of temporary transferred bureaucrats from other major ministries. There was bureaucratic division in it. And divided interests of those Ministries led less attention to people, but the dominant initiative was taken by the bureaucrats from the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, so the



policy-making has been almost always supporting the industrial interests. This tendency of the government affects environmental policies of local governments.

From late 1970s to 1990s, it is the period of major set-back. According to a report of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1976, they said at the period, there was no more pollution. They began to use the word, "environment" instead of "pollution", and their job was switched to regulate the limit of exhaustion gas and so on. But in fact, there are still invisible pollutions, and regulations of NOx and etc. have not been effective yet.

And since the late 1990s onward, "eco" businesses have been growing rapidly. It is said that they make it possible to realize both economic growth and environmental protection at one time.

Seeing the major changes in policy making discussed above, we can argue that interests of the industries were gradually getting higher priorities in the environmental policy. This tendency is becoming more and more obvious since the major economic recession started in Japan in the 1990s.

We can summarize the transition of focal point of Japanese pollution and environmental policy.

Key words are:

From 1950s to 60s	Outbreak of pollutions and victims.
In the beginning of 1970s	Environmental policy for the relief of the victims, but in fact, bureaucratic division and high priority to industry.
From the late 1970s to 1990s	From "Pollution" to "Environmental management", and making regulation for acceptable contamination for industry and people.
From late 1990s onward	Eco-Recycle Boom.

### **Summary -Teshima's case viewed from the History of Japanese Environmental Policy**

I would like to reflect this transition to our issue of Teshima-Naoshima industrial waste management.

In fact, in order to make this costly project profitable, the eco-town project required more industrial waste to process. So they decided to take more waste from the big cities like Osaka, Kobe. Techno-scientific treatment of piles of the waste at the high-tech furnace has justified more industrial waste to come to the area. Also the cleanness of the new furnace has been still dubious. No one can tell about the quality of the furnace so far. Only a change is that once it was crude dumping of the waste, but now, it is chemical and high-tech procession of the dumps in the same area.

We would like to examine the conception of Eco-Town itself. This conception is argued by Ministry of International Trade and Industry, that Eco-town is aiming at forming a society which has an economic system in harmony with the environment. This actually presupposed a society of mass consumption, and aims at promoting the economic development of the area where the industry is in decline. It is our argument to examine the so-called "eco-businesses", which are growing rapidly, and the names of "recycle" or "eco" have favorable images.

As we have demonstrated our case study of Teshima problem, and examination of that case through the historical account of the Japanese environmental policy, we discussed growing tendency of eco and recycle utopian view, and complicated bureaucratic structure of both central and local governing systems.

All in all, Japanese environmental policy-making is dominated by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. And actual waste dumping problem happened at Teshima was not properly handled because of such entangled bureaucratic system. The final decision for "Eco-town" plan was also in line with MITI initiative. People's life and beautiful sea and island are always getting lower priority in the Japanese environmental policy.