

Response to Michael M. J. Fischer’s Review of *Healing Fukushima*, Part 1

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When I started my research project on Fukushima nuclear disaster back in 2013, I knew that a documentary film was something I would like to produce. But I had no idea then what the focus of the documentary film would be. In mid-2015, Ryuma Shineha, a colleague at Seijo University, introduced me to Dr. Arifumi Hasegawa via email. I was doing fieldwork in Fukushima when I received an email from Ryuma that Dr. Hasegawa would like to meet me. The next morning I was on a train that brought me from Fukushima station to Kanayagawa station, where Hasegawa came to pick me up, still wearing a doctor suit. He took me to his office at Fukushima Medical University’s Radiation Emergency Medical Center. During one hour of conversation, Hasegawa told me his story of how he built the facility as a response to radiation hazard in the aftermath of the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi. A deep impression of what Hasegawa experienced during and after the nuclear crisis drew me into thinking of making a documentary film about his story. Two months later I emailed Hasegawa asking whether he would be interested in collaborating with me on a documentary film project focusing on radiation emergency medicine in Fukushima. Before long, he responded with a yes, and the rest is history.

Healing Fukushima is my third documentary film. Out of numerous documentary films on the Fukushima nuclear disaster, none of them exposes the role of medical experts in dealing with the radiation hazard. This is a unique point of view I would like to share with the audiences. Most documentary films on Fukushima revolve around either the dreadful experiences of the victims and local communities affected by radiation, or the controversy surrounding nuclear energy that caused the disaster. These are, of course, extremely important issues for us to look at in order to understand the severity of the impact the nuclear disaster has had on the Japanese society. My original

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intention was quite different. As an STS scholar, I am more interested in the process of knowledge production, and *Healing Fukushima* is a glimpse into how knowledge is produced in moments of crisis. Thus, the stories and experiences of medical doctors interviewed in the film who were directly involved in mitigating radiation catastrophe are the core message the film aims to convey. But the film shows that knowledge production in such critical moments did not emerge in a predictably linear fashion. Contingencies and uncertainties characterize how these medical experts went through a series of unprepared responses because the crisis was unprecedented and the nature of radiation hazard appeared to be different from what was anticipated. The ending is not necessarily a happy one, but perhaps it is hopeful. Here I concur with Mike Fischer's note that the title comes with an implicit question mark. The healing is still ongoing and whether and when it will be completed remains to be seen.

Shi Lin Loh

After 3.11 occurred, medical and scientific experts who worked on Japanese government committees responding to the disasters were frequently vilified in the court of public opinion. They were, critics said, a faction of the “nuclear village”—the complex of government, industrial, and academic interests that has been vilified for their simultaneous promotion, development, and regulation of Japan's nuclear energy infrastructure. Much of what the critics say is valid. Yet the public anger hurled at experts often fails to account for the plurality of experiences and motivations that informed their work. The locally based medical professionals who were on the frontlines of disaster response, and who are the focus of *Healing Fukushima*, provide a locus of opportunity to reevaluate our understanding of disaster expertise. As Fischer notes in his review, the people we portray occupy the dual status of victims and experts; the work they continue to do in the wake of the disaster is grounded in the lives they continue to lead in Fukushima.

I thought it important to put a human face on what we call expertise—to ground a disembodied abstraction in concrete, physical terms. A few viewers questioned the doctors' decisions to continue living and working in Fukushima, especially that of Dr. Reiko Okubo, who was pregnant at the time of filming. Differing risk perceptions create a gulf between professional and lay understandings of the disaster that are hard to bridge. Our interviewees implicitly endorsed a “deficit model” of educating concerned members of the public about radiation, a model that has been usefully critiqued by Brian Wynne and others. At the same time, many of them used that same framework to educate themselves, encountering much difficulty and emotional frustration. Knowledge production for them has been a weary, anxiety-inducing process. 3.11 is still so sensitive a topic in Japan, eight years on, that Sulfikar and I have been asked by Japanese viewers how we got access to our interviewees at all, and to what extent they were able to open up to us. Our positionality as foreign scholars, as well as Sulfikar's rapport with Dr. Hasegawa, were critical factors that facilitated this project. As primary interviewer and interpreter, I sensed a strong desire in several of our subjects, particularly Dr. Hasegawa and Dr. Atsushi Kumagai, to tell their stories. We only had to ask, and to listen.

Coproducing *Healing Fukushima* strongly reminded me of how disasters can never be understood in purely rational terms. The film addresses this issue by incorporating dimensions of feeling that lie outside the purview of written analysis, and Fischer's review observes the numerous visual tactics by which Sulfikar's directorial choices evoke melancholy or wistfulness. Whether healing can really take place is an open question, but the film conveys hope amid uncertainty. Students go to school, medical students study to serve their community, and former outsiders choose to stay in Fukushima. Regardless of outcomes, these residents of Fukushima are working for a future. In this way, the perspectives presented in *Healing Fukushima* form a thought-provoking complement to those from other actor networks around 3.11.

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