Dam Construction and Community Displacement in the Late 1950s

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This paper performs an ethnographic analysis based on the assumption that there were certain patterns in the resettlement of communities displaced by dam construction in the late 1950s, just before the rapid economic growth period started in Japan. The community of Tarutoko, submerged by the Tarutoko Dam on the upper Ōta River in Hiroshima Prefecture (displaced in 1956–1957), and the community of Tagokura, submerged by the Tagokura Dam on the upper Tadami River in Fukushima Prefecture (displaced in 1956; analyzed in a previous paper), were both agriculture-oriented villages and characterized by the tendency to maintain ties with the homeland. They collected folk implements for conservation purposes and wrote the histories of their villages at the time of displacement and maintained associations of fellow villagers after resettlement. This solidarity was built around Azuma Goto-, a founder of Hōkusha of Tarutoko, and the 13 old-established families of Tagokura as they provided attentive support to their fellow villagers when the villages were on the verge of extinction. There were large disparities between the rich and poor in the villages, but a world where rich people take care of poor people, as seen in a leader-follower relationship of the early modern period, seem to have survived in those communities. On the other hand, when a fluid community inhabited not only by farmers but also by many miners was submerged by the Yuda Dam in Iwate Prefecture (displaced in 1959–1960), villagers did not ask for alternative agricultural land. After the Act on Special Measures concerning Measures Related to Water Resources Areas was established in 1973, a community displaced by the Nukui Dam on the upper Ōta River in 1987 witnessed the villagers rebuilding their lives actively rather than passively. Thus, there were differences between communities, depending on the time of displacement or the type of community (whether renewed or sedentary). An analysis of the behavior of those who needed to restore their livelihoods after they lost their hometowns reveals two different patterns of livelihood rebuilding: renewed livelihoods (renewal and capacity) and sedentary livelihoods (memories and capacity). Those who did not feel attached to land and resettled in cities explored new lives while those who had engaged in farming and felt attached to their land preserved the memories of their hometowns and rebuilt their lives while paying tribute to these memories. Another insight from the analysis is related to a change of generation. The experiences of people displaced by the Tarutoko, Tagokura, and Yuda Dams were not passed down to their children. Discontinuation between parents and children was one thing displaced communities shared in common.

Key words: Tarutoko Dam, Tagokura Dam, Yuda Dam, submerged and displaced community, renewal and capacity / memories and capacity