

Gendered maritime tensions between South Korea and Japan:

Anti-Fukushima nuclear wastewater activism by Jeju women divers (Haenyeo)

호사나 (Sana Ho), Soochow University

This paper examines the marine disputes between South Korea and Japan, especially the gendered dimensions in Jeju Island by women divers (Haenyeo). Since 2013, Fukushima nuclear incident has become one of the major sources for territorial disputes. Japan's decision to release Fukushima wastewater in April 2021 has emerged as a new source of tensions between these two countries. Right after Japan announced its plans, the South Korean government strongly condemned the decision and summoned the Japanese ambassador to reveal its disagreement. Civil protests have ensued across the country. The South Korean government and civil groups has been considering legal action against Japan. South Korea is also seeking the cooperation of other countries to support on the issue. The dispute escalated in June 2021 as the South Korean parliament passed a resolution condemning Japan's wastewater discharge plan. Sea salt prices climbed sharply due to panic-buying ahead of the release.

Among all the anti-activism in South Korea, this paper especially focuses on the case study of women divers in Jeju Island, South Korea. Jeju women divers (Haenyeo) culture is a unique mode of production, emphasizing environmental sustainability while empowering local women. Jeju women divers culture is inscribed as UNESCO intangible culture heritage yet endangered by various environmental challenges. This paper analyzes the gendered aspect of the related environmental protection activism.

In this case study of Jeju Haenyeo, I would like to examine a) how this unique mode of production confronts and deals with the potential threats caused by released Fukushima nuclear wastewater; b) what kind of impacts have the released nuclear wastewater brought to Jeju Haenyeo culture both ecologically and economically since 24 August 2023? c) Maritime spaces are apparently borderless places but have been subject to a process of territorialization. How do we perceive the idea of fluidity, wastewater across the national borderlines as example, along with the constructed maritime territories? d) how the maritim

e territories become symbolic and gendered through social representations in t
he case of Jeju Haenyeo?

Keywords: South Korea, Fukushima nuclear wastewater, Jeju women divers (Ha
enyeo), environmental activism, intangible culture heritage