



## The Role of Literary Artists in Environmental Movements: Minamata Disease and Michiko Ishimure

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### Abstract

By offering new fantasies, perspectives and representations, artists have the power to make people aware of social issues and inspire them to action. This paper describes how artists can offer a vision of environmental resistance by employing fantasy and using tools of poetic expression for communities affected by environmental destruction. This paper employs a case study methodology to examine the Minamata disease victims' movement in Japan through the lens of environmental justice. As part of this movement, writer Michiko Ishimure created a fantasy called *Mouhitotsu-no-konoyo*, based in a mythical world and featuring the moral relationships that the people of Minamata, Kumamoto Prefecture, had embraced before modernisation. I will show the importance of this fantasy for the movement, analysing it from two perspectives: those of *ningenteki-dori* (the human principle) and the invisible fantasy about the mythical world. Ishimure's fantasy offers a moral message to prevent further environmental harm.

### Keywords

Art; community; Minamata; spirituality; fantasy; Michiko Ishimure.

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Is the fundamental nature of every environmental problem a conflict between economic development and environmentalism? In Japan, a series of severe pollution problems began in the 1960s, and many people took part in social movements against them. This destruction of the environment was brought about by rapid industrial development after World War II and was considered a tendency that emphasised economic development over human life and nature.

Green criminologists have focused on the relationship between humans and non-humans and have researched environmental destruction. Green criminology was first proposed by Lynch (1990) and became established as a field of study covering a wide range of environmental issues from the local to the global level. According to Brisman and South (2012: 116), 'green criminology most clearly arises from within the tradition(s) of critical criminology, while actively embracing science-based, arts and culture-oriented or social science-rooted approaches and eagerly seeking inter-and multidisciplinary engagement'. Because of its diverse and collective nature, it is difficult to define green criminology, but Goyes (2019: 4) observed that 'green criminology is not merely theoretical but rather an orientation that directs the study of the actors, drivers and consequences of detrimental human interactions with their natural surroundings'.

Of particular importance for this article is green criminologists' accumulation of works on green cultural criminology. Brisman and South (2012: 129–130) argued that 'green criminologists should seek to imagine new ways of confronting critically the intersection of culture, crime, justice, and the environment'. In addition, Brisman and South (2017: 40) focused on environmental drama, environmental (science) fiction, reality television, documentary-reality programming and mockumentaries in green criminology:

Since the beginning of humankind, humans have endeavored to survive the dangers of nature, overcome its constraints, and harness it for human needs ... While nature does not present a daily threat to our existence ... and while many people feel that human ingenuity can or will be able to overcome environmental destruction—we still revel in tales of man-versus-nature battles.

Brisman and South (2017) pointed out that through fictional or docu-fictional works, we enjoy and consume fearful depictions of the destruction of nature. Meanwhile, it has been shown that traditional green criminology is biased towards anglophone literature:

The problem perhaps has been that in the absence of translations, the western English-language literature does not 'see' or 'hear'; in addition, there is a failure of intellectual curiosity and willingness to search and learn from 'elsewhere' (Goyes and South 2017: 172).

Brisman and South (2020: 629) responded that '[t]here are many other directions and connections to pursue once we start to see how a green cultural criminology of the South can learn to explore art, film, literature and other media that intertwine 'nature', the spiritual and portrayals of human endeavour and human folly'. Moreover, Brisman and South (2020) highlighted legends from Latin America that conveyed messages of conservation and eco-activism. In other words, there is environmental fiction that portrays nature as the enemy of humans and provides entertainment through the process of overthrowing it, but such fiction also has the power to stimulate environmental awareness.

Further, Brisman (2019: 57) argued that 'moral messages about human-environment relations' could be extracted from fictional stories. Brisman's (2019: 60) analysis of children's fables showed that:

We can see visions of our ecocidal tendencies and an array of our potential responses to distributional differences—allowing us to decide who we want to be and what we want to do.

Brisman's work implies that we can find potential counter-narratives to environmental destruction in our already existing fictional stories and send moral messages to communities at risk of environmental destruction. From this point of view, we can place in the fictional story a counter-narrative to the destruction of the environment, emerging from the local community. Thus, artists can powerfully convey a moral message through a fictional story.

In this paper, I explore the possible development of a model of artists' struggle at the forefront of the environmental movement, at the level of an ideological struggle. To this end, I examine the work of writer-activist Michiko Ishimure (1927–2018) in the people's movement around what came to be known as Minamata disease (MD) in Japan, caused by the discharge of sewage containing methyl mercury into Minamata Bay by a factory run by the chemical company Chisso Co., Ltd. (Chisso). The damage caused by MD is enormous: by 2018, a total of 2,282 patients had been identified as having MD and had received financial compensation from Chisso (Ministry of the Environment 2018). In addition, under administrative measures, more than 30,000 people have received some form of compensation for MD, but even now, there is no end to the number of local residents applying for new compensation for MD (Ministry of the Environment 2018).

In 1969, Ishimure published *Kugai Jodo: Waga-Minamatabyo*<sup>2</sup> (*Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease*) (*Part 1*), in which she tried to depict the harsh conditions and lives of MD victims and their subjective worlds (Ishimure 2004c). *Kugai Jodo (Part 1)* became a sensation after its publication (Watanabe 2013), bringing MD to the attention of people all over Japan. In addition, Ishimure organised a support group for MD victims, Minamatabyo-o-Kokuhatsusuru-kai (Association for the Accusation of MD), around 1968, with literary members such as Keikichi Honda and Kyoji Watanabe. The association supported MD victims who pursued a case against Chisso from 1969 to 1973. They took part in direct actions such as sit-ins in front of Chisso's factories and break-ins at the company's headquarters and literary activities in the press, including their newsletter *Kokuhatsu* (Accusation).

It should be noted that Ishimure was a local artist, born and raised in Minamata. In an interview with a German critic in 1982, Ishimure pointed out that Japanese literature was Tokyo-centred and that all literary figures had to escape the countryside and go to the cities to make a name (Hijiya-Kirschner 2018). Further, she described her experience in Minamata, where she characterised how she was viewed as 'that wife, she reads' (Hijiya-Kirschner 2018: 99) because it was not considered necessary for a woman to read then. According to her, women in Minamata were only valued as workers, not as agents of academic and literary life (Hijiya-Kirschner 2018). She called herself 'the last indigenous person' (Yonemoto 2017: 154)<sup>3</sup> and viewed MD issues as issues faced by 'village humans' rather than 'citizens'—a concept of modern society (Yonemoto 2017). Ishimure wrote a poetic essay on *Kokuhatsu* and a record of her court hearings (Tokyo Minamatabyo-o-Kokuhatsusuru-kai 1971).

The most important concept Ishimure has created is *Mouhitotsu-no-konoyo* (MNK), a word that evokes images of the afterlife and paradise. The sociologist Kazuko Tsurumi (2002) translated MNK as 'the world in this world'. Tsurumi's translation implies a different world whose existence is like a gaping hole in the world we inhabit. In one famous example, in the first volume of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* series, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when the children open the door of the wardrobe, they are plunged into another world. 'The world in this world' can be understood as a fantasy within this kind of otherworldly story. As such, MNK is a place that is connected to this world, and we can visit. Kyoji Watanabe (2019), who supported MD victims along with Ishimure, explained that otherworldly fantasies are a way of escaping the painful reality one faces. Ishimure (2004a) stated that MNK is a world dreamed up because the reality in which MD victims live is so painful. Based on his research, the social anthropologist Hirai (2021: 595) analysed MNK as follows:

Rather than a world crystallised in a single image, it seems better to think of it as a symbol of the search for an alternative world. It is inevitably elusive, a possibility that is only vaguely apparent when it is placed against the existing oppressive social structure, leaving the

individual conditions of existence unresolved. It is likely that Ishimure intended to use these symbols to express the dream world that each of them freely imagined, and to consciously appeal to and mobilise a wider public.

Thus, MNK engenders an activist *dosho imu* [sleeping in the same bed but dreaming different dreams]. In other words, what united the participants of each MD movement was not a clear vision of society but their dream of a utopian fantasy.

I argue that MNK created by Ishimure has been the greatest weapon of the MD movement in its ideological struggle.<sup>4</sup> Before entering into a discussion of this idea, I outline aspects of the history of post-war Japan to make it clear that the MD case was a result of pollution owing to Japan's rapid industrial development. For the people of defeated Japan, economic enrichment was a longed-for goal. I then explain that it was a dream to live in a big city for the people of the Minamata area, and Chisso was a symbol of new technology and economic development. On this basis, I identify the inner workings of MNK as an alternative social ideal to modernisation and urbanisation. MNK has two main aspects: traditional village community norms and mythical worlds. I analyse Ishimure's literary work *Kugai Jodo: Kamigami no Mura (Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: The Village of Gods) (Part 2)*<sup>5</sup> (Ishimure 2004d) from the perspective of MNK and show how she depicted MD victims in her work during the movement in 1970. Through my analysis of MNK, I will illustrate that Ishimure was offering a new vision of the environmental movement with her literary work.

### MD and Modernisation

Before modernisation, Minamata was a typical village in Japan, where agriculture and fishing were practised on a small scale (Goto 1995), with the former being the main industry. The community in Minamata changed dramatically with the establishment of the Chisso fertiliser factory in 1908 by Shitagau Noguchi. He developed chemical technologies, and his factories produced fertiliser at low cost, as well as nitric acid and gunpowder. Further, in 1926, he built a hydroelectric power plant on the Korean peninsula, then a Japanese colony. Goto (1995: 22) documented the evolution of Chisso as follows:

Since the Meiji era [1868–1912], Japan has been leveraging the development of secondary industries in a desperate attempt to be at par with and overtake the West, with a war breaking out every ten years. Achieving industrialisation on the scale of Western Europe has been an obsession of the state, entrepreneurs, and the entire nation. Many entrepreneurs have devoted themselves to the ambition of corporate expansion with a sense of unity with the state. The founder of Chisso, Shitagau Noguchi, was a typical example of this from the Taisho [1912–1926] to the Showa [1926–1989] period.

Noguchi died in 1944, and after the defeat of Japan in 1945, Chisso concentrated on the production of fertiliser to improve agricultural productivity and end food shortages (Isogai 2015). During the 1950s, Chisso began to synthesise octanol, a plasticiser for vinyl chloride, and increased acetaldehyde production, the raw material from which octanol is made. As a result, there was an increase in the amount of wastewater discharged into the sea containing methyl mercury: the cause of MD (Goto 1995).

Chisso's sales increased steadily from the 1950s to the 1970s (Isogai 2015). This period coincided with a rise in MD cases and court cases for victims seeking compensation. In 1956, a survey team from Kumamoto University's Faculty of Medicine showed that MD was caused by wastewater from the Chisso factory. In 1959, the doctor working in a hospital run by Chisso identified acetaldehyde wastewater as the cause of MD in animal tests. Chisso received the hospital's report but did not respond to it; that is, even knowing these scientific findings, Chisso continued to dump this wastewater. The Japanese Government looked away because stopping the factory's production activities to address MD would have threatened the livelihoods of people without MD and resulted in economic losses (Goto 1995). As a result, the damage caused by MD spread at a tremendous rate for about 10 years. MD victims were sacrificed as part of both Chisso's expansion and the broader process of Japanese industrial development. In other words, priority was given to economic development, resulting in the destruction of human life and nature.

### Economic Development Versus Traditional Village Communities (Mura)

Some residents of the Minamata area criticised MD victims for denouncing the damage done to their environment.<sup>6</sup> Residents were emotional in defending Chisso and prioritised the economic benefits Chisso brought to the region, because ‘people in the local village love Chisso’ (Ishimure 1973: 344). Ishimure described their views as follows:

People in Minamata had a taste for this modernisation when the Minamata Factory was established. ‘Minamata was growing’, or ‘Minamata was very developed’. The area was becoming a city with a heart-warming atmosphere. I mean, when they saw that kind of company prosper, they thought, ‘Oh, there’s going to be a company’, ‘There’s going to be a city’. Therefore, they were already admiring this fantasy that they had created. Even if you were not a *kaisha* [company], the whole community was unilaterally in love with the company at heart (Ishimure 1973: 345).

According to Ishimure (1973: 345), ‘Chisso creates that [very sweet] desire’. In reality, however, labourers at Chisso’s factory were forced to toil in dangerous conditions. For example, Iwao Onitsuka, from Minamata, had been fascinated by the Chisso factory workers since he was a child. When he was able to join the company at age 14, he thought he would work there forever (Onitsuka 1986). However, there were frequent explosions at the factory that resulted in injuries and deaths. Many workers were burned or injured by chemicals (Onitsuka 1986). After the war, the labour movement became very active at Chisso. In 1962, the union held intense negotiations with management, including a 183-days strike over wages caused by the wage and status gap between factory and office workers (Tomita 2015). This action suggests that most of the Minamata natives who worked at the Chisso factory were unable to raise their status, indicating that the people of Minamata were not liberated by Chisso and modernisation; that is, the story of self-liberation through these means was more fantasy than fact. However, many Minamata people continued to believe in the fantasy of economic development.

Ishimure attempted to create an alternative fantasy in opposition to the fantasy of economic development and closely connected to the region of Minamata. The movement of MD victims from 1969 to 1973 was supported by the Social Democratic Party of Japan and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP); however, political scientist Norito Nakata (2018) classified it as a local residents’ movement rather than part of the left-wing movement that was quite strong in Japan until the beginning of the 1970s. According to Nakata, in the leftist movement, the leaders of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party stood at the top to guide the revolution and keep it correctly orientated. In contrast, in a local residents’ movement, participants were linked by geographical and blood ties, and their goals were limited to the local community’s interests (Nakata 2018). Thus, the fantasy of the large-scale establishment of a communist society (the aim of the left movement) did not work for the MD movement. Instead, the MD movement needed a fantasy of a new ideal society as a driving force, rooted in the life of the local community.

Ishimure depicted this new MNK fantasy using *kikigaki* (listening and writing) in the Minamata area. *Kikigaki* is a style of interview created by social movements in Japan to record the words of ordinary people. The interviewer tries to record dialogue in the interview as it is spoken, in dialect, without interpreting the writer’s words (Takezawa 2018). Ishimure (2004d) learned *kikigaki* as a methodology beginning in 1958 at *Saakuru Mura* (Circle Village).<sup>7</sup> After she became aware of the outbreak of MD in the 1950s, she visited a screening venue for MD and met MD victims and their families. She also heard from many (mostly) female MD victims and their mothers, who held *idobata kaigi* (meetings by the well), recalling that Japanese women have an old tradition of chatting while drawing water from the communal well (Yonemoto 2017). She used her experiences of talking with MD victims to write ‘Minamatawan Gyomin no Roporutaju: Kibyō’ (‘Documentary of Fishermen in Minamata Bay: Mysterious Disease’) in *Saakuru Mura*,<sup>8</sup> which was published in 1960 (Chaen 2013). This work was later reworked into a short story called ‘Yukijo Kikigaki’ (‘*Kikigaki* with a Woman Called Yuki’), which became a section of *Kugai Jodo (Part 1)* (Yonemoto 2017).

It should be noted that Ishimure continued to develop her creative method using fictional *kikigaki*. She made an observation in 1972 about *Kugai Jodo (Part 1)*: 'that's what happens when I put into writing what they say in their heart' (Watanabe 2013: 15). Ishimure herself described fictional *kikigaki* in which the author transforms herself into a MD victim and tells her story through the victim's mouth as if she were acting out a play (Ishimure 2004b). Watanabe (2013) observed that Ishimure seemed to be possessed by the spirit of a MD victim in *Kugai Jodo (Part 1)*, where Ishimure (2004c: 108), upon seeing the dying victim, wrote, '[His] sad goat-like, fish-like eyes, driftwood-like figure, and spirit that can never pass away have all moved into me from this day on'.<sup>9</sup> Watanabe (2013: 23) said that Ishimure listened to the heart of the MD victim as a shaman listens to the voices of gods or spirits, and observed that Ishimure was 'not a documentary writer but one of the fantastic poets'. Thus, Ishimure's work was a mixture of facts from her interviews with MD victims and the surreal world she had been inspired to create, like a shaman.

Ishimure (2004b) also had a political intention in her creative work, which meant creating a situation in which MD victims could organise and raise their voices against Chisso. According to Arai (1986), Ishimure's work strategically contrasted Chisso as a symbol of the *toshi* (city) with the local community as a symbol of the *mura* (village) in Minamata. In her works, while *toshi* was dominated by modern science and materialism, *mura* was controlled by spirituality and ethics (Arai 1986). Based on this finding, Ishimure tried to depict the reconstruction of a good *mura* in the MNK fantasy as an antithesis to modernisation or urbanisation. Thus, Ishimure created a powerful fantasy to counteract reality, possessed by MD victims like a shaman, with magical powers of expression. Thus, through poetic inspiration, artists can create new fantasies to change reality and offer them as a driving force for environmental movements.

### The MD Social Movement and Ishimure's MNK Fantasy

In this section, I identify the driving force behind the MNK fantasy's involvement in the movement of MD victims. The analysis is from two aspects: those of movement theory and the mythical world.<sup>10</sup> First, Kyoji Watanabe contributed to the analysis that clarified the principle of action within the MNK fantasy. Watanabe (2019) became a member of the JCP at age 17, but despite being steeped in communism and dreaming of an ideal society, he was disappointed by intra-party strife. He was a critic and editor of the small literary magazine *Kumamoto Fudoki* (A tale of the land in Kumamoto), and during 1965–1966 he edited Ishimure's work 'Sora-to-Umi-no-Aida-ni (Between Sky and Sea)', which became the basis for Ishimure's *Kugai Jodo (Part 1)* (Yonemoto 2017). Ishimure invited him to join the MD movement, and as he became personally acquainted with her, he began to share her fantasies about MNK and began to support MD victims<sup>11</sup> (Yonemoto 2020). Watanabe (2017) extracted from Ishimure's MNK a movement theory different from that of the left movement and was enthusiastic about the idea of a movement in which the masses would stand up for themselves without the leadership of a political party.

The logic of *ningenteki-dori* (the human principle) was extracted from Ishimure's MNK fantasy. According to Watanabe (1972), *ningenteki-dori* was a village norm of reciprocal justice that existed in traditional village communities before modernisation in Japan. For example, if one's son injured a neighbour's son, one should first and foremost visit the neighbour and apologise for the injury (Watanabe 1972). In the idealised *mura* of the MNK fantasy, under *ningenteki-dori*, community interests were protected by mutual aid, and those who created misfortune were punished. Therefore, following this principle, MD victims who attended the trial believed that Chisso, which caused the disaster in their community, should be punished within the community and compensate them to make amends<sup>12</sup> (Watanabe 1972). Thus, the MD victims wanted more than money; they also wanted to restore the moral order of the community.

However, Watanabe (1972) did not praise the norms of a village community in pre-modern times because Watanabe recognised that in Minamata, MD victims were not eligible for mutual aid by *ningenteki-dori*. In the *mura* of Minamata, inhabitants excluded MD victims for fear of their own economic losses. As such, *ningenteki-dori* did not exist in the *mura* of Minamata at that time but was only depicted in the MNK fantasy. Therefore, Watanabe (1972) argued that the realisation of it in the real world was what MD victims

wanted to achieve by their actions. By extracting principles of MD victims' behaviour from the MNK fantasy and verbalising them, Watanabe has tried to bring their logic into the social movement. Watanabe has set for the MD movement the goal of building a new community based on *ningenteki-dori*, which, however, has not yet been realised.

Second is the mythical aspect of MNK. In 1973, Ishimure conversed with activist and documentary writer Eishin Ueno about literature and the movement. Ueno observed that the origins of the environmental movement in Japan lay in the passive idea that 'we were entertained by nature' (Ishimure 2004b: 522). It is important to note that Ueno used the passive voice, 'being entertained'. Ishimure agreed with Ueno and said that MD victims were also empowered by the experience of 'being entertained' by nature (Ishimure 2004b). In the dialogue between Ueno and Ishimure, they discussed the idea in Japan that humans are not subjects who 'enjoy' nature, but objects who 'are entertained' by nature. Ishimure also told Ueno that for the people of Minamata, especially the fishers, non-human creatures such as fish, birds, cats, foxes and raccoons existed as avatars of the gods. Ishimure (2004b: 523) gave as an example that the people of Minamata referred to non-human beings with honorifics: 'would you please do this', in honorific language, instead of 'do this'; not 'fish' but 'Mr/Ms Fish'. In other words, they did not regard non-human beings as usable goods but as spiritual beings of a higher order. Therefore, according to Ishimure, the people of Minamata did not use natural resources actively but passively received the gifts of nature and were entertained by nature.

In this light, moreover, Ishimure (2004a) observed that the environmental damage had not only harmed the health of MD victims but also deprived them of a rich life alongside non-human beings. Ishimure (2004a: 566) stated that what MD victims truly dreamed of may be 'to think of a life where there are no restrictions on mind or body, where they can come in and go to it [paradise], where they can rebuild each other's worlds'. In this context, the word 'it', meaning paradise, is interpreted as referring exactly to MNK, the 'world in this world'. Further, the phrases 'come and go' and 'can rebuild' suggest that MNK is not a static afterlife but a dynamic otherworld capable of interacting with the living and always being generated in relation to non-human beings.

In addition, in a 1973 conversation with Ueno, Ishimure cited an episode of a woman MD victim who made offerings to non-human beings:

She [the victim] had been grieving for human beings and practically making memorial services for them ... but her mind was not clear, and her illness was not cured. She realised that the cats had died, foxes, pine trees, and fish had died ... so she started to make a memorial service for non-human beings. She thought that it was not enough and said that 'she had to make offerings, even to living beings' (Ishimure 2004b: 523).

In the story of this female victim, as told by Ishimure, the term 'memorial service' is directed not only to the dead but also to the living. Her argument entailed that humans must make amends for all that has been damaged by environmental destruction by performing appropriate spiritual rituals with requisite respect. According to this interpretation, MD victims were seeking to regenerate their lost MNK by making offerings to victims of toxic pollution, including non-human beings.

### **Ishimure's Portrayal of the MNK Fantasy**

In this section, I show how Ishimure depicted MNK. To do so, I selected *Kugai Jodo (Part 2)* (Ishimure 2004d). This work is based on the Hitokabu Undo (One-Share Movement) from 1970, in which MD victims and their supporters each bought a share in Chisso and participated in the shareholders' meeting. Takanori Goto, a lawyer, positioned Hitokabu Undo as an ideological movement aimed at expressing the ideas of MD victims rather than material or economic interests (Komatsubara 2019). Minamatabyo-o-Kokuhatsusuru-kai supported and promoted this movement, collecting donations to buy shares and recruiting supporters. In the Hitokabu Undo, the fantasy of the MD victims' MNK was expressed, and Ishimure recorded it in

*Kugai Jodo (Part 2)*. In addition, *Kugai Jodo (Part 2)* was published later in Ishimure's life, and the concept of MNK was well developed in this work, and the *ningenteki-dori* and the mythical world were portrayed in parallel form with skilful brushwork.

First, I focus on the section on the day of the shareholders' meeting during Hitokabu Undo, where *ningenteki-dori* was represented. In the climax of *Kugai Jodo (Part 2)*, on the day of the shareholders' meeting, the MD victims produced a performance in which they were all dressed in the same white costumes and sang a requiem for the dead MD victims. They then moved up to the president of Chisso on the stage to express their feelings of anger and sadness. In *Kugai Jodo (Part 2)*, Ishimure (2004d) noted that a female MD victim, Fumiyo Hamamoto, shouted because her parents had died from MD. Ishimure (2004d: 588–589) described her as follows:

I heard a small scream in front of me on my left and saw a person struggling. I thought, 'Someone has gone into convulsions'. To my surprise, Fumiyo Hamamoto struggled up against the railing, stood up, and for a moment confronted me. Her voice sounded as if it had been ripped from her throat. One hand, wearing a white glove, was wagging and trying to grasp the air. The men behind her, from the *shimin kaigi* [the victim support group] and Kokuhatso [Minamatabyo-o-Kokuhatsusuru-kai], were astonished and hugged her around the waist, and almost pulled her back. It was an instantaneous event. A voice ripped from her throat and echoed back and forth between her and the ceiling.

'My parents! Both of my parents!'

Ishimure (2004d: 597) also recorded the woman shouting at the president of Chisso as she pressed two tablets to his chest, unable to contain her feelings: 'How do you think they died? My brother, my brother, is a cripple. I want my parents! Do you know how children who want their parents feel? Do you understand?'. The president, who was shocked by Fumiyo's spirited outburst, sat up straight and nodded his head mechanically. He said, 'I know. I know well. I feel responsible. So. ...' (Ishimure 2004d: 597). Describing the president's reaction, Ishimure (2004d: 598) asked 'What else could have been said in this atmosphere and situation?' and noted that 'the students [victims' supporters], who had been in a frenzy, held each other's shoulders and began to cry in agony'. The poetic description of the scene through Ishimure's eyes brings us closer to the detailed histories of each of the MD victims with great emotion. This scene is an outpouring of *ningenteki-dori*, one of the core elements of MNK; the MD victims were not looking for reparations through the modern legal system but for a sincere apology and atonement from the offender.

Second, I will focus on a scene in *Kugai Jodo (Part 2)*, the day after the shareholders' meeting. According to Ishimure (2004d), the women climbed Koyasan (a famous Japanese sacred mountain) and saw that there was a *negaibumi* (letter of request to God or Buddha). Ishimure (2004d: 606) described a story told by a woman MD victim:

I say, last night, I dreamed that butterflies guided the ship in the front and in the rear, like flower petals. On *hikari nagi* [the surface of the sea, calm and shining like a mirror], Oshura-sama [a fox spirit] was rowing, but I looked only at a shadow picture ... from Myojinmisaki, he was the Oshura-sama of Shurikamiyama. Where did he go? Yesterday, because Fumiyo-san cried and said 'I want my parents. I want my parents', I also cried in sympathy. I did not say anything about Kiyoko [her daughter]; I dreamed this because of regret.

The characters in the story are Oshura-sama and Kiyoko. Oshura-sama is a fox god who lives in Shurikamiyama, Minamata. Kiyoko, the daughter of the storyteller (the female MD victim), died of MD. In the female MD victim's dream, Oshura-sama left Minamata's Cape Myojinmisaki on a boat because of the pollution; that is, in the narrative, the loss of Oshura-sama is interpreted as superimposed on the loss of Kiyoko. In Ishimure's work, Minamata, the home of MD victims, and the mythical world of the dead and



spirits were connected by dreams. In this part, Ishimure represented MNK as a place where spiritual non-human beings live and indicated the loss of this mythical world due to environmental destruction. Further, Ishimure (2004d: 607) described the female victim's narrative:

In the dream, the petals of the cherry blossoms, no, the butterflies were Kiyoko. I have a favour, too. Can you write to anybody in Chisso? No. If only my letter could be received by anyone out there ... only one word. That's enough. Ah, in the season when the flowers are blooming, will you pick up flower petals instead of my daughter's eye because her time to die has come. Every year, only one petal. That's enough. My daughter who did not complain was wishing for only one petal. A flower is pitiful for it is trampled upon the earth. I wish that someone would pick up a petal and pray for the flowers. That petals would flutter to the sea in *hikari nagi*. Please say so.

The emphasis in this part is on the memorial service. The MD victim initially told someone at Chisso that she wanted him to write a letter to her daughter Kiyoko. The sentence is interpreted in the context of the episode at the shareholders' meeting the day before, as indicating her desire for a sincere apology from the person in charge at Chisso. However, in her narrative, Kiyoko lost her human form and transformed into a flower petal or a butterfly, and in the end, she only wanted to pray to Kiyoko. Thus, Ishimure depicted what the MD victim wanted as a memorial service in the mythical world. Ishimure, speaking through the mouths of MD victims, said that MNK could only be revitalised through spiritual rituals and called on all people, including Chisso's workers, to help.

## Discussion

In the above analysis, I have shown that Ishimure conceived of MNK as a fantasy for the MD movement and depicted it in her work. In the MD movement, victims took issue with the pollution of the natural world and the human toll caused by these economic pursuits and participated in court cases to redress it, but their reasons for joining the movement were rooted in a fantasy that emerged from within their community. Ishimure gave form to their fantasy and expressed it as a fictional story. How can we evaluate Ishimure's story?

First, Ishimure's work records and preserves the emotional aspects of social movement history, whereas historians and researchers tend to discuss the ideals and organisational forms of social movement activity.<sup>13</sup> For example, the Hitokabu Undo depicted in *Kugai Jodo (Part 2)* has also been recorded in documentary films (Tsuchimoto 2006). In addition, Ishimure's poetic expression conveys the intensity of the MD victims' emotions so that the audience can understand the seriousness of environmental destruction. The MD victim's sense of morality, which demands an apology, will also serve as a moral message to the readers as a counter to the desire for economic gain that is so ingrained in our modern minds.

Second, simultaneously, Ishimure's works provided not only a spiritual pillar of support but also a financial one. Watanabe, who was the editor-in-chief of the newsletter *Kokuhatsu* (published by Minamatabyo-o-Kokuhatsusuru-kai), clearly stated that 'the ideas and principles of Michiko Ishimure became the ideas and principles of *Kokuhatsu*' (Yonemoto 2017: 157). Certainly, Ishimure's philosophy continued to drive fundraising for the MD movement; at its peak, 19,000 copies of *Kokuhatsu* were published, and in about four and a half years, over 100 million yen (8 million euros) were collected for victim support, not from sales of *Kokuhatsu* but as donations between 1969 and 1973 (Yonemoto 2017). Ishimure (2004b: 524) said in 1973 that 'the MD movement was a kind of fictional movement, held by a formless fiction'. According to Ishimure (2004b), the MD movement resulted from a group of dreamers getting together and chasing a fictional fantasy, which gave rise to a substantial movement. Paradoxically, by choosing a style that pursued fantasy rather than economic benefit, they had been able to raise money and build a financial base.

Third, Ishimure's works also recorded the spiritual dimension of the social movement's history. What I am proposing here is to use literary art as a medium to document social movements. Of course, the testimonies of the MD victims, in which Ishimure claims to have 'heard their hearts', are not the results of scientific interview research and, therefore, cannot be recorded in an empirical history book, but they can be included in a work of art. In fact, it is in the artworks that we can hear the voices of the MD victims in the environmental movement that have not been recorded. In this sense, in the environmental movement, the artist can create a space of social movement history. It is also a space where, in the future, after all MD victims have passed away, the subsequent generations of activists in the environmental movement can carry on their history and memories and imagine the spiritual world of the victims and activists who once lived there. The MNK (world in this world) proposed by Ishimure meant exactly this space—created in this world to record the spiritual world of MD victims.

Fourth, over a long period, Ishimure's work has conveyed to people outside the Minamata area the morality of the community and the mythical world of human beings and non-human beings that underpinned the MD movement. It has been observed that Ishimure's work has an aspect of reportage about MD (Chaen 2013) and has the political effect of encouraging solidarity with the victims (Kuroko 1992), but it has also been shown that the reason her works have sold so well up to the present day is that the aspect of spirituality in her works attracts readers (Yoneyama 2019). Through a fictional story, the reader will be able to perceive the fantasies of MD victims and develop a sensitivity to the need to stop the destruction of the environment.

Finally, Ishimure's works have become a bridge between social movements and generations. In the case of Minamata, the MNK fantasy persisted in the support activities of MD victims after they won their case in 1973. Usually, victim support activities are disbanded after such a verdict, but in Minamata, they continued to support the lives of victims under the slogan 'Building MNK in this world'. Some of the supporters who are close to the patients and their families are also inspired by the most human aspect of the patients and their families and want to work with them to build MNK.

The supporters bought a house in the mountains of Minamata and established a support centre called Soshisha (a group that cares for each other). The board of directors included Ishimure and MD victims who won their case in court. Young people and students became staff of the centre and worked to support victims and aid farming in the area. Koichi Yanagida, the first leader of Soshisha, was so moved by *Kugai Jodo (Part 1)* that he read it in one night (Koizumi 2020). Soshisha's work continues to this day. The centre also has a Koshokan (museum) where the staff tell the MD history to visitors from outside the Minamata area. In addition, the centre publishes a newspaper, *Gonzui* (striped eel catfish), which informs supporters all over the country about the people who still suffer from MD and the government's efforts. More than 60 years after the outbreak of MD, Soshisha still has staff in their twenties working and actively involved in this issue, but the starting point was the MNK fantasy.

## Conclusion

By examining the case of MD, I have presented the possibility for literary artists to create fantasies that become the driving force of social movements. The inspired artist has the role of capturing and representing images that the victims of environmental destruction have yet to verbalise. The artist also has the role of documenting the world of MD victims' images in their work and passing them on to the next generation of environmental activists. In conclusion, the fantasies offered by artists can provide local people with a basis for an ideological struggle against the environmental destruction of capitalism without having to resort to external, less locally resonant traditions of environmentalism.

This study has focused on Minamata MNK fantasies during the legal battles between 1969 and 1973. Surprisingly, the MD victims who fought this court case became leaders of a Minamata community revival in the 1990s. MD victims spoke of the spiritual world in their own words, and one female MD victim argued that it is necessary to conduct memorial services for non-human beings:

I am sorry for the killing of the fish because they were killed by human wrongdoing. My wish is that their *Tamashii* [soul] would be at peace (Yoshii, 2017: 29).

She read out a requiem poem to the people of Minamata at a citizens' volunteer event in 1994, calling on them to mourn the loss of fish to MD (Fujisaki 2013). What she said was almost identical to episodes in the mythical world of Ishimure's MNK, and Ishimure acted together with her. Considering the longevity of MNK, there is a need to study MNK and MD victims over a wider number of years, which will be the subject of an upcoming study. In future, these studies will reveal a path to stop environmental destruction through environmental awareness verbalised by local people.

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<sup>1</sup> The author cites many Japanese references. All quotations from the Japanese literature have been translated by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviated as *Kugai Jodo (Part 1)*.

<sup>3</sup> Although Ishimure positioned herself as an 'indigenous person', in policy terms the people of the Minamata region are not recognised by the Japanese Government as indigenous. However, in the process of modernisation in Japan, the local culture was often regarded as inferior. For example, in Japanese language education after World War II, children were taught *kyotsugo* [common language] and punished for speaking the dialect (Maeda 2013). Therefore, Ishimure called herself 'indigenous' in the sense of people with a marginalised culture. In addition, MD researchers have been investigating the 1975 mercury contamination in Ontario, Canada, and have found that many indigenous people were affected. Doctor Masazumi Harada, one of the leading activists in the MD movement, argued that although indigenous people once believed that 'they lived with nature, that there was a *tamashii* [soul] in every living thing, that they were the reincarnation of their ancestors' (Harada, Hanada and Tajiri 2011: 25), after white colonialism it became easy to massacre creatures for the sale of furs or for sport. Through this research, Harada Hanada and Tajiri argued that 'pollution does not cause discrimination, but where discrimination exists, pollution occurs' (Harada, Hanada and Tajiri 2011: 25). In view of Harada, Hanada and Tajiri's assertions, Ishimure intuitively understood at an early stage that there was continuity between the MD movement and the resistance movement opposing discrimination against marginalised people, including indigenous people.

<sup>4</sup> Ishimure herself thought that the MNK fantasy had not penetrated the participants of the MD movement (Ishimure 1974). However, sociologist Tsurumi (1983) gave the example of one of the victims speaking about MNK in Ishimure's words and observed that Ishimure's work served as a catalyst for the victims to realise what they really wanted. In her conversation with Tsurumi, Ishimure agreed that some of the victims used MNK fantasies (Tsurumi 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Abbreviated as *Kugai Jodo (Part 2)*.

<sup>6</sup> The dependence of the local residents on Chisso and the severe discrimination against MD victims in the Minamata area are discussed in detail in Ishida (1983).

<sup>7</sup> *Saakuru Mura* was a literary circle that practised *kikigaki* in the coal mines of Chikuho, near Minamata, and in which Ishimure was involved with Kazue Morisaki and other prominent *kikigaki* practitioners.

<sup>8</sup> The magazine is published by *Saakuru Mura*, a group in which Michiko Ishimure was a member.

<sup>9</sup> There is an excellent literary translation of *Kugai Jodo (Part 1)* in English (translated by Livia Monnet, *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease*, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1990), but here I have used the author's literal translation in Japanese to make clear the intention of the quotation.

<sup>10</sup> This classification was inspired by Hagiwara (2018), who classified MNK into Minamatabyo-o-Kokuhatsusuru-kai (the MD accusation group) and *genkyo* (the community including non-human beings). From the perspective of religious studies, Hagiwara (2018) argued that MNK was an invisible religious world, and that its embodied social movement was Minamatabyo-o-Kokuhatsusuru-kai.

<sup>11</sup> Yonemoto, who analysed the diaries of Ishimure and Watanabe, suggested that Watanabe's participation in the social movement may have been due to the romantic relationship between the two of them. However, the text of their diaries suggests that they were strongly linked by a literary sensibility and a romantic illusion of unity between subject and object, and that Watanabe joined the social movement because of a deepening sense of comradeship with Ishimure.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Eizo Watanabe, who represented the group MD victims filing a lawsuit, said in an interview with *Kokuhatsu* that the purpose of the trial was 'revenge'. He added: 'I am sure the company will come with money and power, but we will join

together and we will struggle no matter how many years it takes, even a hundred years' (Tokyo Minamatabyo-o-Kokuhatusuru-kai 1971: 21). In this context, the MD victims who joined the court battle did not participate in a modern framework of trying to obtain compensation in the judicial system, but in a moral framework based on a village community in permanent pursuit of Chisso and recognition/atonement.

<sup>13</sup> In Japan, the study of the MD movement had a major influence on the development of the foundations of social movement theory in environmental destruction. For example, through her analysis of the MD movement, Iijima (1970) showed that the environmental movement was mainly led by local residents, unlike the labour movement, which had been the centre of social movements in Japan. To date, there is a vast research on social movement theory in the MD movement in Japan.

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