

Three Years from the Great East Japan Earthquake, What Have TV Programs Conveyed

- Affected People and Areas Depicted in TV Documentaries -

Yumiko HARA

(Summary)

More than three years have past since the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11th, 2011. In order to study what types of TV programs have been broadcast during these years, and how often, the author analyzed the transition and trends of the 3/11-related TV content, focusing on documentary programs.

As a general trend of documentaries on the Great East Japan Earthquake, broadcasters keep providing such programs at anniversaries and on relevant days, but the number of broadcasts at other times of year are decreasing, especially among commercial broadcasters. The number of programs that deal with “energy issues” plunged after 2012. Both documentaries summarizing the date of the disaster and programs depicting the menacing power of the earthquake and the tsunami earned relatively high ratings, but ratings of other types of related programs were not very high across the board.

The author also examined the trend of programs featuring affected people and areas. Areas covered most frequently were Ishinomaki City and Kesennuma City of Miyagi Prefecture, and a strong correlation was observed between the frequency of TV coverage and the volume of victims (the number of missing and dead). Nevertheless, some areas were rarely featured despite the enormous size of damage they suffered. On another front, among documentaries dealing with the nuclear accident, Minamisoma City was most frequently featured.

The author further looked into the trend of topics and people covered in documentaries on Ishinomaki and Minamisoma cities, respectively. Among documentaries featuring Ishinomaki, NHK dealt with relatively diverse themes such as medical care, temporary housing, unemployment, and support for survivors. Meanwhile, many of the programs aired on commercial stations followed the lives of the bereaved. Among documentaries featuring Minamisoma, many programs dealt with evacuations caused by radiation contamination and decontamination.

In this study, the author narrowed down the target to documentaries, but in the future it will be necessary to expand the scope including regular news, discussion programs, and news commentary programs to observe the trends. To do so, utilization of metadata and text-mining tools shall be needed for effectively analyzing vast amount of TV programs, which also requires the exploration and development of the methodology.