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Collecting Materials for the Study of Contemporary History of Earth Science in Japan

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More than sixty years having passed since the end of World War II, it is noteworthy that the study of history of geoscience has increasingly attracted scientists and historians these days (Editorial Committee of History of Geosciences in Japan 2008-2010, One Hundred Years of the Researches of Geophysics in Kyoto University 2010-2011, Working Group of Japanese INHIGEO Members 2011). Unfortunately, however, we have much concern about the lack of systematic attempts to collect and store the memories and records for historical researches, which otherwise in many cases may be scattered or seriously damaged.

In order to advance the study, we have started collecting the historical data such as official documents, conference reports, private notes at various meetings and lectures, written messages, manuscripts and oral histories of geoscientists. These are temporarily classified into two: the one is about the history of universities and institutions, for example the department of Earth Sciences of Nagoya University; and the other is about individual scientists such as the late professor Akiho Miyashiro (1920-2008).

Nagoya University established the Department of ”Earth Sciences” in 1949, which naming was the first case in the old educational system of the national universities in Japan. Basic idea of ”earth sciences” had been discussed among the professors of the School of Science during and after WWII. The educational program was entirely invented, which included not only geology but also geochemistry and geophysics. After half a century later, however, new trend of science forced the department to be changed into more advanced form of investigation and education in 1996, now called as the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Thus we suppose the collecting historical materials of the department would contribute to establish the institutional history of the science in post-war Japan.

As for the history of earth science itself, we should pay attention to the works of Miyashiro, who gave the most significant influence upon Japanese geologists not only in the field of metamorphic petrology but also in the global geology covering plate tectonics. The materials we have collected include a) private letters communicated by Miyashiro in Albany with his Japanese friends, b) unpublished drafts on the history of geology in Japan, and c) books in his own library concerning philosophy of science, history of geology and so on. These are grouped as information from four stages: 1) around 1980 when he worked for editing and publishing the IWANAMI KOZA for Earth Sciences in 16 volumes, 2) 1994-96 when he wrote a series of the essays entitled ”What is Geology?” in Japanese magazine for science, 3) around 1998 when he published his book KAGAKU KAKUMEI TOWA NANIKA [What is Scientific Revolutions?] and 4) the latest stage when he wrote the history of geological societies in Japan. We believe this small step would contribute to understand the life and work of the famous erudite geologist, avoiding triumphalism, in the contemporary history.

Based on these materials, we will be able to clarify the contemporary history of earth science in Japan. As is reported at the last meeting of the JpGU (Aoki and Kuramoto 2011), our research group named ’CHES (Contemporary History of Earth Science)’ consisting of geologists, geochemists, geophysicists, philosophers and historians would cultivate the future programs of the science not only in its academic form but in the educational system and ultimately render some service to our society in general.

Keywords: history of earth science, Showa post-war period, Nagoya University, Akiho Miyashiro, collecting materials