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## Niigata Minamata Disease Revisited: New Evidence Refuting Organic Mercury Poisoning as the Cause

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The 1960s mass outbreak of neuroticism in Niigata Prefecture, Japan, was labeled an incidence of Niigata Minamata disease. The Japanese government issued special certificates to 702 persons who displayed symptoms similar to those of Minamata disease, which was believed to have been caused by organic mercury poisoning from consuming contaminated fish in or near Minamata Bay in Kumamoto Prefecture. Many of the Niigata Minamata patients resided in farming and fishing villages near Agano River. In particular, Showa Denko Corporation's Kanose factory has been accused of contaminating the fish by dumping untreated organic mercury into Agano River. Worldwide, Niigata Minamata disease and Minamata disease, the cause of which is generally recognized to be organic mercury contamination. However, Kiyomatsu Tanaka, a Niigata-based journalist, has recently revealed information that contradicts this widely accepted explanation. Tanaka implies the possibility that a significant portion of Niigata Minamata disease patients are suffering instead from poisoning by pesticide and specifically agricultural chemicals that do not contain organic mercury. If correct, a completely new investigation must be made on the incidents of Niigata Minamata disease. However, Japanese society has so far said little (including both academicians and the mass media), likely because Tanaka's article is politically sensitive. This study marks the first presentation of this information in the international arena in English.

### Biography

Prof. Yoshihisa Godo received his PhD degree from the University of Kyoto in 1992. His areas of research include development economics and agricultural economics. Professor Godo's *Development Economics* (3rd edition), co-authored with Yujiro Hayami and published by the Oxford University Press in 2005, is especially well known. His book written in Japanese, *Nihon no Shoku to Nou* (Food and Agriculture in Japan), received the 28th Suntory Book Prize in 2006, one of the most prestigious academic book prizes in Japan. He is also engaged in various social activities such as the Special Councillor to the Osaka City Government.