confirmed in 1961 that the organic mercury was created inside the factory in the production process for acetaldehyde, but only after Chisso stopped using mercury in 1968 did the government officially conclude that Chisso's mercury caused the disease.

Victims' demands for compensation have resulted in three so-called 'final and complete' solutions to the Minamata disease issue. In 1939, Chisso agreed to make 'sympathy payments' to patients in return for a ban on further demands, even if the company's waste was proven to be the cause. Prior to this, Chisso's own secret experiments had proven that its mercury was the cause. Chisso also installed waste treatment equipment, but did not announce that it did not remove mercury.

In the late 1960s, activist citizens' groups appeared nationwide and another outbreak of Minamata disease occurred near a factory in Nagata Prefecture. Minamata came to national attention. In 1973, after victims won their lawsuit, Chisso accepted legal responsibility and began paying reasonable compensation to those certified by the government as Minamata disease victims. By 1999, 2,292 victims had been certified. Court cases continued after 1973 over certification and government responsibility, while government loans kept Chisso alive and able to continue making compensation payments. A government-brokered agreement implemented in 1993 had compensated 11,152 uncertified victims by 1999, but only in return for promises never to appeal for certification or sue the government. Nevertheless, this was likely to be the last 'solution' to the Minamata disease issue, since the average age of patients was in the late seventies.

The most heavily polluted areas of Minamata Bay were dredged in the 1980s, largely at Chisso's expense. In 1997, Kumamoto's governor declared the fish in the bay safe, and the net that had surrounded the bay since 1977 was removed.

Further reading

Minamata Series, the
Director Tsuchimoto Noriaki started his career making educational and industrial films for the high-growth economy at Iwanami Productions. When he quit to make films independently, he ended up at Minamata where the dimensions of the mercury poisoning by Chisso Corporation were only beginning to be understood. In a series of powerful films Tsuchimoto carefully documented how mercury entered the food chain and affected the human body, this in the face of corporate and governmental denials. As a whole, his series of thirteen films charts the depth of the tragedy while sensitively following the victims as they make sense of their lives.

ABE MARK NORNES

mingei
Mingei refers both to articles produced by traditional craftsmen for everyday use and to the movement to protect and promote such crafts, which began in the 1920s and still continues today. The term itself was coined in 1926 by Yanagi Soetsu (Muneyoshi) (1890–1961) as an abbreviation of minshu no kogei (crafts of the common people). Both 'folk art' and 'folk craft' have been used as English equivalents, but Yanagi himself preferred the latter in order to distinguish mingei from works of 'high art'. Typical mingei include: pottery, lacquerware, textiles, baskets, furniture and other household items, and Japanese paper (washi). Yanagi...