Second, Grandjean et al. (2010) mentioned the “diagnostic difficulties” of methylmercury poisoning cases. Lack of investigation of the Minamata disease incident as food poisoning resulted in unnecessary diagnostic difficulties; such difficulties do not usually arise in food-poisoning incidents in Japan. In the case of Minamata disease, in 1977 the Japanese Ministry of Environment (JME) established the criteria for diagnosis, which required combinations of signs that were advocated by the JME to be medically correct. However, the truth is that the JME recognized a lack of medical evidence on the criteria [Committee on Research on Human Rights/Japanese Society and Psychiatry and Neurology (CRHR-JSPN) 2003].

Third, Grandjean et al. (2010) stated that, “Only in 2009 was a law enacted to provide compensation to most of the remaining group of victims.” However, it was not compensation. For Minamata disease, unless the affected persons are diagnosed by the above-mentioned criteria, they are not counted as patients and are thus not properly compensated. About 2,200 patients have been diagnosed with Minamata disease and have been compensated, whereas at least several tens of thousands of victims who have neurological signs characteristic of methylmercury poisoning have not been recognized as patients and have not been properly compensated (McCurry 2006).

Fourth, Grandjean et al. (2010) described the “scientific account” of the cat experiment in 1959, which was published after a 40-year delay (Eto et al. 2001). However, the report provided only pathological findings, and the detailed explanation of the cat experiment had already been published in 1965 (Tomita 1965). The latter would be enough for prevention and control.

Finally, because the JME and local governments have been defendants in Minamata disease lawsuits, research funds from JME and the local governments may affect researchers’ attitudes, possibly causing conflicts of interest. T.T. and M.H. have provided expert testimony on Minamata disease. The other author declares he has no actual or potential competing financial interests.

Philippe Grandjean
Department of Environmental Epidemiology
Okayama University Graduate School of Environmental Science
Okayama, Japan
E-Mail: pgrand@hsph.harvard.edu