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People's movement under the radioactive rain

Yoshihiko IKEGAMI

ABSTRACT *March 11th in 2011, mega earthquake attacked North-Eastern Japan. It damaged the nuclear power plant located in Fukushima and the reactors went to meltdown. It is the biggest nuclear disaster next to the tragedy of Chernobyl. People living under the radioactive rain have stood up to confront this catastrophe in a peculiar way. People have rushed to the street to make a protest against the electric company and the government for their safety. Furthermore, people have begun to learn about radiation through books and also from the experience of A-bomb victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and to measure the radiation. People have become scientists for their survival. This people's movement of measuring have got wider and wider.*

KEYWORDS: tsunami; nuclear accident; radioactive; people's movement; inner exposure; atomic bomb; Fukushima

Beginning

On the afternoon of March 11th, a mega earthquake occurred in the Pacific Ocean near Japan. And a gigantic tsunami followed, attacking the North-Eastern coast. We saw on television that many people were swallowed up by waves. We heard that the tsunami also caused serious accidents at nuclear power plants in Fukushima. The next day, on the 12th, the first nuclear plant exploded, and on the 14th, so did the second power plant, and soon after the third exploded. The reactors began to melt down. Many of us felt that this is the end of the world. We felt fear, regret, humiliation, despair and anger. These feelings and emotions have been the basis of our way of thinking and deed until today.

In the explosions, an incredible amount of radioactive material was released into the air, flying with the wind and spreading out, not only over Fukushima but also over the vast area of the Eastern Japan. In consequence, the air was polluted, and vegetables and water were all contaminated by radioactivity. We lost our food.

We were thrown out into the middle of radioactivity. At that moment, none of us,

however, knew what radioactivity really is and what would happen if we were to be contaminated. No one could explain it explicitly. We got all confused.

Our government immediately let Fukushima residents who lived within 20 km from the damaged plants escape. But the government and mass media announced it over and over again, that this situation was not an emergency, no need to worry, and no need to escape. Furthermore, they underlined that food was almost safe, and they repeated that nothing bad would happen to our health, if we ate the food. They mobilized a number of nuclear physics specialists, emphasizing the normality of the situation by using technical jargon. Few of us could understand what they were talking about; nevertheless, our bodies told us it was dangerous. From the beginning of contamination, we had to convince ourselves that we needed to tackle what was really going on.

Demonstration

This is a story of how we fathomed out the situation and how we dealt with it. A nuclear disaster is a strange calamity.

Compared with an earthquake and a tsunami, which caused about 20,000 deaths, the nuclear disaster has officially caused no deaths up to today. In this sense, this disaster is still in its beginnings. In the case of Chernobyl, the first patients with thyroid carcinoma, most of whom were children, appeared 5 or 10 years later, and the peak of bladder cancer came 20 years after the accident. Cancer, leukemia, malfunction, do not mean immediate death. We will just live in permanent fear as to when we will become ill or our loved ones will catch a disease, for a long time to come. In Japan today, many 'specialists' say that developing nuclear illness is a matter of probability. In fact, the number of those who do not get ill amounts to more than those who do. This fact makes matters far more complicated. Some do not fear nuclear contamination, and many try not to fear it. But each existence of our beloveds is the one and only. This fear lies in the basis of our feelings and activities.

Right after the accident, the government evacuated the residents around the nuclear power plant, but they did nothing else. Radioactivity had been carried by the wind; however, the government intentionally neglected to announce accurate information regarding the weather, for fear of panic. People who were ignorant of weather conditions escaped, along the route of radioactive flow-out—and people in such kinds of situation were not just a few. They were heavily exposed to radiation because of the false or no accurate information. From March 11th to the end of the month was an important period: it was the time people started to learn. They became proficient in the structure of a nuclear reactor and learned the nature of all kinds of nuclear substances and their effects upon us, in an attempt to understand what was really going on: cesium, iodine, strontium, plutonium etc, and the units of radioactive doses: becquerel, sievert. The first thing we had to understand was what the government and its proxy scholars were really saying. It was the most essential matter for us to judge it all by ourselves and to distinguish

true from false information. Misjudgment means death. One day we engaged a nuclear specialist and held a workshop to study radiation. We expected that about 50 people would show up, but in reality more than 300 people came. His lecture seemed too specific, and yet a mother holding her baby in her arms asked very detailed question, concerning the difference between α , β and γ rays. The level of her knowledge was that of a university classroom.

Of course, in Japan, there have been anti-nuke movements for over 40 years. Although they could not stop the working reactors, in some cases they succeeded in stopping the construction of new ones. Confronting the present accident, some scholars and engineers shared with us useful messages and truthful information about the accident, through internet sources, radio, and weekly magazines. Amount of people read the words of those specialists. Within a few weeks after the accident, many of us had learned and mastered such kinds of information, and gradually became aware that the government, the electric companies (including TEPCO) were lying to us. We carried out this process of learning as individuals or group activities.

During the first month, the oppressive ambience was carried over. The electric company repeated that the accident at the nuclear power plant would bring a lack of electric power. Tokyo was dark and gloomy. Then, on April 11th, a demonstration broke down this gloomy feeling. This demonstration was propelled neither by the established organizations nor by anti-nuclear groups, but by the young people, those who are forced to be flexible workers or non-regular employees. About 150,000 people gathered. People in such a social class could keep up with the impetus of the mass movement after March 11th. I think this is very important element to remember.

Since then, people began to raise a cry. There was anger against the government that kept on telling lies, and also the electric company that caused the accident. That was

also the will to share their fear in common. That was also regret at ourselves—we had let nuclear power be introduced into our lives. All these feelings and emotions were common, and they didn't go against the times but go towards the future. In other words, this regret had driven us forward. Of course, we also understand that there are a lot of things to be done ahead us.

Movement of measuring

As you know well, radioactive materials cannot be seen, smelled or sensed. We cannot perceive it. There is only one method to detect it. A Geiger counter (or dosimeter) to measure the radiation dose. We have begun to use one. To buy a Geiger counter is not easy, and it is not cheap. But people managed to get one and began to measure everything. They measured nearby parks and schoolyards where their children play. We can find radioactive material everywhere. We can find radioactive material scattered in a mosaic way. This movement of measuring immediately grew wider among us.

In the case of Chernobyl, the personal use of dosimeter was banned. To measure the dose of radioactivity and judge the actions they can take for themselves was what the government feared the most. Now, in Japan, the central and local governments often criticized people for measuring radioactivity by themselves. Bureaucrats say that an amateur is not reliable. For them, reliability belongs only to the officials and specialists. They want to mean it is all safe. Thus, we not only learnt the scientific knowledge regarding nuclear power but also initiated the movement of measuring. That was the moment when people's science, or science of and for the people, started. We had decided to judge everything by ourselves. It was thoroughly a spontaneous act and one taught by no one; we ourselves invented it. The central and local governments gradually and hesitantly admitted the act of the people, but it is far from sufficient. They never stop denying the judgment of the people for and by themselves.

In Fukushima, people are forced to live under incredibly high level of radiation. Parents, especially mothers, had a desperate sense of an impending crisis regarding their children. In May, they marched to the Department of Education and Science. Surrounded and, backed up by some 2000 supporters, they negotiated with the officials of the Department using specific terms with specific numbers. This is a kind of science war, a battle for a new hygiene in the post-nuclear disaster society. We have a confidence that we could fight this war until the end.

Inner exposure

There are two kinds of exposure to radiation. One is external exposure. Radiation comes from the outside and goes through our body or cells. It destroys the DNA inside the cell. But it takes place only once, just like an X-ray. The other is internal exposure. When we breathe contaminated air, eat contaminated food, or drink contaminated water, we take radioactive materials into our body, which are accumulated in our internal organs. The radioactive materials stay in our body and emit radiation for a long time. They gradually destroy surrounding cells. In the end, this causes cancer or a malfunction of our bodies. What we fear the most is this internal exposure.

Japan is the nation that has been bombed twice by nuclear weapons, by the United States, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Why on earth are there as many as 54 reactors now in such a country? This question is often asked, even we ask by ourselves. To answer this, we must look back to the Cold War. Eisenhower's declaration of 'Atoms for Peace' in 1953 created the global picture, and the US intended to make Japan a wedge against the USSR, China and their allies in Asia. For this purpose, Japan should become an affluent country in the region. That is why nuclear energy was introduced into Japan. Japan willingly accepted it. Nuclear power is the symbol of the Japan-US alliance. At the same time, we are convinced that it is also a symbol of occupation,

embodied by the presence of huge US military bases, which still remain in Japan, especially in Okinawa.

In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, hundreds of thousands of people died in the atomic bombing, within a few seconds. We know it. But, one thing that we Japanese refuse to realize is that survivors are still suffering from atomic bomb-related illnesses. More than 200,000 people are suffering from internal radiation exposure, even today. They were not directly exposed to the atomic bomb. Ironically, many Japanese are convinced that this will happen due to the current nuclear accident.

After the accident, we soon found out that there's hideous history in which some Japanese proxy scholars have strong ties and alliances with the United States and share their Cold War narrative. To approach the truth and information about the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was strictly banned by the US military until 1952. Right after the bomb explosion in Hiroshima, in the early occupation period after the end of the war, many US military officers and scholars went into Hiroshima city to investigate how damaged was the city itself and how were the people. This was entirely for the coming atomic war. They had no intention to offer remedies or support medical treatment for the victims. The United States had established the ABCC (Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission) in both cities, to widely research the A-bombed victims. ABCC was the target of loathing of the Hiroshima people. In 1975, this institute was reorganized into a new one. This is the Radiation Effects Research Foundation, with half funded by the US and half funded by Japan. But the nature of the tasks was the same. The United States government has strong connections with this institute. Many proxy scholars say that radiation is not dangerous, completely safe, and there is no need to escape. Their lies, which we hate uppermost today, have such a dark history.

In reality, those who tell us the horror of internal exposure are the doctors who have

long taken care of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The ICRP (International Commission on Radiological Protection) has long been the international authority of regulating radioactive protection. A fatal defect of their judgment is that they ignore the internal exposure. Why isn't the internal exposure considered by them?

A peculiarity of the internal exposure is that one gets ill irrespective of the amount of exposure. A very small amount of radioactive material can cause illness. This tells us that the use of nuclear technology—whether it is for war or for peace—must be prohibited. The international nuclear capital fears this most. The ICRP is closely related to the IEAE (International Atomic Energy Agency), which is also a nuclear keeper. These international organizations cooperate together to keep nuclear power, and seek containment of the Fukushima accident. They want to say this is a problem for Japan, and not of other countries.

The people's science movement has a long perspective. Nuclear power has had ties with and regulated our lives and politics. It controls our daily lives as well as international politics. It consists of many lies and blackmailings. People's science is beginning to reveal this in front of our eyes. Walking the scientific path, we are realizing this.

Everyday life under the radioactive rain

There are 54 reactors in Japan. But now only 11 are at work. The others are stopped for now. They are under periodic inspection. If there are no problems, they are supposed to resume operation, but none of them, after inspection, have so far been put back to work. Which means that we have stopped them. The people's will is keeping them inactive. A public poll shows that 70% of the people are against nuclear power (Asahi Shinbun, 11/6/2011). They even think that the inconvenience of life due to lack of electricity is quite OK. But 30% are anxious, worrying that if the situation goes on, all the reactors will stop operation in the near future. It is clear who wants energy more,

and who wants nuclear energy. The situation begins to take a form of class struggle.

The electric company seeks to economize electric power, giving the consumers an excuse of lack of energy supply. They blackmailed us: when the hot summer was approaching, they warned that many people would suffer. We have already gotten over the hot summer this year. Now we are living in the world without nuclear energy. Shocked by the Fukushima accident, Germany and Italy have decided to abolish all the nuclear power plants. In comparison, we have not decided to abolish nuclear energy yet, but we have already begun to live a world without nuclear power. This is a fact.

However, radioactive materials remain for a long, long time. Our most serious concern is the critical and wider contamination, which has been revealed as around us day by day. Yesterday all the tea-leaves were found contaminated, and today we find some parks in Tokyo being seriously contaminated. The gravest contamination is of soil and food. What we most want now is the equipment that can better detect soil and food contamination. The equipment is expensive, but we want it nonetheless. Currently, the government has begun to remove soil from the most contaminated area in Fukushima. They say that if it is removed, people can live in safety in that area. This is another lie. To remove soil has little effect on the area, and there is nowhere to take it.

The disaster in Japan is a double disaster. One was caused by the tsunami, the other caused by radiation. These two disasters are quite different. We can reconstruct and live again in a place damaged by a tsunami. But in the case of radiation, the only thing we can do is escape. The north-eastern area of Japan is facing a dilemma. People there are damaged by both disasters. If the government says we must reconstruct, the fact of contamination is suppressed, and if they say we must escape, it is impossible to reconstruct. In fact, the local government chose the former. In this area, it is quite

difficult to cry for escape. Why does the local government prefer not to have people escaping? It is a difficult question. One thing is to prevent a form of regional collapse, while another reason is a kind of shock doctrine. There are people who plot to earn money, by taking advantage of the disaster. We see many American enterprises and American personnel wandering around this area. Americans and Japanese capital cooperates for making a profit.

Current situation

Recently, the Japanese government decided to let the rubble that was scattered over the damaged area be spread all over Japan, because they cannot settle them in that area. But there is highly contaminated rubble amongst this debris. Hence, the government is going to spread radioactive matter all over Japan. This is incredible! We are amazed and angry. They even threaten that if we don't accept this rubble, then we are showing a lack of sympathy with Fukushima. Is this a new type of patriotism?

A few weeks ago, the government lifted the evacuation zone in some areas near the damaged power plants. We do not know why they lifted it, despite the fact that the area is still highly contaminated. Actually, the number of people who returned home was only 1% of the number of original residents in that area. Most of the people fear radiation. Of course, it is a proper judgment not to come home. Overcoming our long time indulging cynicism, we have turned out to the street. People's science tells them that there is no way but to escape. A new situation will begin in Japan in the near future.

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Author's biography

Yoshihiko Ikegami 池上善彦 (1956–), joined the editorial office of *Gendai-Shiso* in 1991. From 1994 onwards, he served as the chief editor until 2010. Recent publications (in Japanese) include 'Circular movements in the post-war Japan: tasks to open a

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