

## **Fukushima Is Burning: 3.11 and the Anti-Nuclear Movement in Japan**

Yuko Tonohira

Fukushima Medical University said on Wednesday February 13, 2013 that among those who were 18 and younger at the time of the nuclear crisis at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, two people have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer, bringing the total cases to three. The announcement was made at the Fukushima Health Management Committee's press conference.

The Committee will continue to exam the cases as additional 7 people have been diagnosed with possible malignant tumor on thyroid. Among the total of ten people, three are male, and seven female. The average size of tumors is 15mm. Professor Shinnichi Suzuki of Fukushima Medical University said “according to researches conducted in Chernobyl, thyroid cancer increased at 4 to 5 years after the accident. Our understanding that at this moment (1.5 to 2 years since the accident) we are finding the cases of cancer that had already been present.” He denied a link to the effects of Fukushima Nuclear Disaster.

*Fukushima Mimpo, Thursday February 14, 2013<sup>1</sup>*

*3.11 (Three-Eleven)* is the day the massive earthquake and tsunami hit Tohoku region of Japan in 2011. It is also remembered as the day that changed the lives of many and shifted the political landscape in Japanese society. While dialogues on '3.11' are disappearing outside of Japan as if mimicking the invisibility of radioactive particles, it continues to create deep fissures in the

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" *Two Additional Cases of Cancer According to Fukushima Health Risk Management (in Japanese)*  
<http://www.minpo.jp/news/detail/201302146637>

human relations, affecting the politics, beliefs and everyday life of the people. Two years have passed since the devastating disaster – today the signs of change are everywhere, weaving new human connections within and without Japan, crawling out of the those ruptures.

### **In the Beginning - No Immediate Danger**

The Fukushima struggle emerged in the wake of the nuclear crisis at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant (Fukushima Daiichi), located on the Pacific coast in Fukushima Prefecture. On the afternoon of March 11th 2011, a massive earthquake and tsunami struck the Tohoku region of eastern Japan. It is still fresh in our memory the repetition of footage after footage, in which dark water of the tsunami was mercilessly swallowing the entire town. The Fukushima Daiichi sits on the coast, surrounded by a few small towns, where many of their populations are workers at the power plant. Today, innumerable nuclear workers are still working to contain the crippled reactors, and continue to be exposed to radiation. As the radioactive releases continue, the vast region in Tohoku (north-east) and Kanto (central-east including Tokyo metropolis) have been contaminated with radiation, and the people have become *hibakusha*.<sup>2</sup>

On Friday the 11th, the nuclear reactors lost cooling capability during the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and the subsequent tsunami. The nuclear fuel inside the reactors were severely damaged, leading to the release of large amounts of radioactive particles into the environment. Within hours later, the levels of radiation at the power plant started to rise. On Saturday, Unit 1 had an explosion, whereby the local residents were en route to the designated evacuation center. Two more hydrogen explosions occurred on Monday (Unit 3) and Tuesday (Unit 2). The surrounding towns have been evacuated and a 20km lines were drawn to establish the 'exclusion zone' where no one can enter without an official permission. The fields, forests and the towns – once the proud hosts of the 'bright

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<sup>2</sup> The term *hibakusha* identifies the people who suffer the effects of radiation from atomic bombs and nuclear testing. Originates in a Japanese word emerged after Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in 1945.

atomic future' - will be uninhabitable for decades.

TEPCO, the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi, did not inform the development of the nuclear meltdown promptly. The correspondence by the Japanese government, namely the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency was a similar one. Instead of informing the public the status of the reactors, they strove to minimize the magnitude of the accident, for the fear of 'causing a panic'. They did not fully inform as to how much radiation had been released, and what the nearby residents were supposed to do - resulting in a significant delay in evacuation, leaving many people exposed to unnecessary amount of radiation. The public outrage began to boil, raising distrust and frustrations with the government. It was reported, in December 2011, that the data on the government-owned radiation prediction system (SPEEDI<sup>3</sup>) had been given out to the US Military stationed in Japan instead of the Japanese public during the first week after 3/11. Because of this cover-up, some of the local residents only found out months later that they had ended up evacuating into the cloud of radiation, instead of running away from it. During the first three days the evacuation order was issued for 3km radius, then expanded to 10km, and 20km within the next week.

The confusion was reinforced by the media outlets constantly feeding the public with mostly image after image of the tsunami swallowing the coastal towns, destroying houses, cars, rice paddles - the horrific apocalyptic footage left the entire public helplessly hooked onto TV for days. Every once in a while, news anchors read a few lines of status about the nuclear power plant, ending the line with the phrase: 'it is not a degree to cause immediate danger'. 'Unprecedented' became the keyword, and it functioned as a tranquilizer to shift the discourse from criticizing the man-made nuclear disaster to accepting it as something divine as if no human technology could prevent this nightmare.

While the government and TEPCO continued to neglect informing the public for weeks and

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<sup>3</sup> 'System for Prediction of Environment Emergency Dose Information' – the simulation data on concentration and spread of radiation

months after the meltdown, the foreign media were applauding Japanese people for not panicking, but tirelessly coping with the situation, or for their "selflessness, stoicism and discipline."<sup>4</sup> These views, while they might attribute to the Japanese government's effort in minimizing the devastation of radiological damages, did not address the presence of the invisible radiation which many people were facing in utter confusion. On top of it, while the majority in Japan was glued to their televisions looping tsunami footage for days, people in the most devastating area did not have electricity, cellphone network or news paper for days after the quake. Once electricity resumed, they turned on their TV only to find a message from Tokyo that 'there was nothing to worry about.' Takako Shishido, a resident at 50 km away from the Fukushima Daiichi at the time of the earthquake, states:

We found absolutely no information at first. Newspapers weren't delivered for several days. We couldn't watch TV or surf the Internet because of the blackout. Once the infrastructure was restored and the electricity was back, all we saw and heard in the media was that there was no immediate danger and everything was fine.<sup>5</sup>

'No immediate Danger' is a textbook phrase used by nuclear industry and regulators. whenever something goes wrong at nuclear facilities, this phrase is used against the surrounding communities. It was also repeatedly used after Chernobyl accident by governments especially those in Europe, in order to downplay the seriousness of the radiation releases and to tame the population.<sup>6</sup> The experience of Chernobyl was long forgotten in Japan where, by the late 1990's, its industrial success was well fed by the presence of 54 nuclear reactors.

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<sup>4</sup> *Nicholas Kristoff*, The Japanese Could teach Us a Thing or Two  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/opinion/20kristof.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/opinion/20kristof.html?_r=0)

<sup>5</sup> Shishido testified at [http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/shingi/chousa/kaihatu/016/gijiroku/1313194.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/kaihatu/016/gijiroku/1313194.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Beyond Nuclear, *Russian Chernobyl Expert Warns of Dire Consequences for Health Around Fukushima*  
<http://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2011/03/25-4>

## **Radiation Safety Propaganda**

Radiation, however, was steadily carried through the air, soil and water supply into the lives of millions in eastern Japan. On March 24th, the news reported that radioactive iodine was detected in tap water in several municipalities including Katsushika ward in Tokyo, more than 200km away from Fukushima Daiichi. Radioactive materials were also found in milk, and other food products, showing levels of radiation nobody had seen before. Farmers were forced to dump milk, and fishery was restricted. The government, however, continued to supply safety propaganda to the public with the help of the media.

Immediately following the explosions and meltdown, several experts in radiology traveled to Fukushima and gave lectures to the residents. Among such experts was Shunichi Yamashita, professor at Atomic Bomb Research Institute in Nagasaki University. In March 2011, by the request of Fukushima Prefecture, Yamashita toured several cities in Fukushima and told to the public that there was nothing to worry about radiation. He has been directly quoted saying: "the effects of radiation do not come to people that are happy and laughing. They come to people that are weak-spirited."<sup>7</sup> The purpose of his tour was to brainwash the people that it was safe to live outside the no-go zone, and they need not worry and should continue to live as usual. Many of the audience had little to no previous knowledge about the effects of radiation, let alone the knowledge of the actual contamination in Fukushima. The audience, mainly parents of small children, eagerly listened to Yamashita - for an urgent necessity to cling to any knowledge they could get about the unknown substances called radiation. Any advise from 'experts' in such an early stage of the disaster would have a tremendous influence on residents in Fukushima and how they live their everyday life thereafter. One month later in April, the new school year began at most schools outside of exclusion

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<sup>7</sup> *"Radiation doesn't affect people who are smiling"*

[http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Fukushima\\_One#.22Radiation\\_doesn.27t\\_affect\\_people\\_who\\_are\\_smiling.22](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Fukushima_One#.22Radiation_doesn.27t_affect_people_who_are_smiling.22)

zone. The children were brought back to schools despite the oppositions by parents. Many schools have banned any outdoor activities due to the high levels of contamination and even today, children are not permitted or given limited hours to play outdoors.

In September 2011, children in Fukushima Prefecture were provided with small radiation dosimeters called 'glass-badges'. The glass badges read external exposure to radiation and accumulate data, and are worn around the necks of the children. The project was initiated by the National Cancer Center of Japan, in corporation with the government and Fukushima Prefecture. The accumulation data is collected every three months to be sent to the Cancer Center's laboratories. Writer Tomoe Nagano describes the glass badge project as a 'research without treatment,' making a comparison to the research of the same nature conducted on Hibakusha under the rule of the US occupation:

*...the residents of Fukushima today are made into the subjects of human experiments by the Japanese government, research institutions as well as mass-media that support their stance. In a TV report by WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk) in Germany, a school teacher, who hands out the glass badges to his pupils, says: "I'm not happy with these dosimeters. They are going to turn our students into study subjects. The dosimeters only accumulate data in them, instead of displaying the levels of radiation. I wish they were radiation alarms which warn you when you have to get out of the area."<sup>8</sup>*

According to the official statement, the purpose of the glass badges was 'to calm anxiety of parents regarding the health of their children.' It is clear to anyone's logic that for the health of the children, a proper evacuation and relocation logistics is of far more urgent necessity.

### **Sharing the Radiation**

"We must share the pain of Fukushima." Those were the actual words of Hosono Minister of

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<sup>8</sup> Tomoe Nagano, *The Occupation and Glass Badges* <http://www.jfissures.org/2012/03/21/the-occupation-and-glass-badges/>

Environment, who visited numerous cities across Japan since the fall 2011. His purpose was to find candidate cities for the disposal of the disaster debris from Tohoku. The role of the Ministry of Environment's role in the radiation safety campaign was to inspire the sense of guilt into the public that the piles of debris remain in the way for Tohoku's recovery, if nobody volunteers to dispose of it. The other purpose, though unannounced, was to distribute the radiation equally to the rest of Japan through incineration and reclamation of the debris - so that the health effects of radiation will not be concentrated in Tohoku. In other words, it would be difficult to point out that Fukushima disaster caused a growing number of cancer cases in Tohoku. The cities in Japan were encouraged to accept the Ministry's request, and ones that accept would benefit from subsidies and various waste management businesses to roll in. As of today, a handful of cities have accepted the project and some already began incineration, like Osaka, the second-largest city in Japan. Despite strong oppositions by local residents, Osaka city forced its way through the protesters line. "Osaka Moms", a community group of young mothers who oppose the city for incineration of debris, have been reporting several health symptoms since the day incineration began in December 2012.<sup>9</sup> The smoke of radioactivity - with possibly other toxins - have made a way through the parts of Japan where the air was clean and the land produced healthy vegetables.

### **Eat & Support**

Another force of radiation safety propaganda was integrated into the patriotic mood arisen after the disaster. The Fukushima crisis caused a tremendous damage in primary industry, and to the government, it was the duty for the entire Japan to support the recovery of Tohoku by consuming produce that may be potentially contaminated with radiation. *Friendship, Ties, Our Hearts Are One, Hang Tough Japan...* those are the phrases used to reinforce consumption of food. TV commercials,

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<sup>9</sup> Osaka Okan no Kai (in Japanese) <http://ameblo.jp/osakaokan2012/>

government officials and popular celebrities enthusiastically appeared in media stating that the danger of radiation was just a rumor, and we shall eat and support the food producers in Tohoku who were devastated by such 'harmful rumors.' Restaurant franchises openly advertise that their ingredients directly come from farmers in Tohoku, while media columnists criticize those who avoid the food as unpatriotic. The notions of guilt was used again for this project – as the Japanese, the pain caused by the radioactive damage must be spared. Do these celebrities, who take bites on tomatoes with big smiles, know that their smile was one of the biggest projects paid for by the electric company that released the poisonous substances into those tomatoes?

The *Eat and Support* campaign also shatters the farmers' lives, considering that farmers' work always involves intimate contacts with the soil - therefore their bodies are constantly exposed to radiation as long as the production continues. Yet they are encouraged to keep producing, living outside the compensation line drawn by the officials in suits. Farmers would know the most that *Eat and Support* aren't supporting them – but taking their spirits away from them, now that their vegetables, which used to nurture human bodies, are potentially harming them.

(Image 1: cows wander in abandoned rice paddles, Namie-machi, Fukushima. Photo courtesy of Takumi Sakamoto)



Many farmers were also forced to abandon their land that they fertilized for generations. In the summer 2011, we were devastated by the news of a farmer's suicide, and soon we learned that several others took their own lives, also following the nuclear disaster. On June 10th, Shigekiyo Kanno, a dairy farmer from Soma, hanged himself in his own shed. He was on a temporarily return from his evacuation home in the Philippines where his wife's hometown was. His wife and two children were awaiting Mr. Kanno's return from Soma – but he never came back. He left a suicide note on the shed's plywood walls:

*Only if there were no nuclear power plants...*

*To my fellow farmers, please hang tough; do not be defeated by the nuclear power.*

*I have lost my spirit to continue my work.<sup>10</sup>*

On the first anniversary of the disaster, Shunichi Yamashita stated that there had been no one who died because of the health effects associated with the radiation from Fukushima Daiichi.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Kanno would have been living with his family today, if his pasture wasn't so irradiated. Yamashita has since been appointed as the Radiation Risk and Health Management Advisors for Fukushima Prefecture, then as the vice president of the Fukushima Medical College. Thanks to the fully orchestrated 'radiation safety' campaign, today, many residents continue to live in contaminated areas including 'hotspots' that are randomly scattered with higher levels of radiation. Living alongside the invisible threats has become a new norm to those who remain. Yet they are making every choice for survival, asking themselves agonizing questions of life and death.

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10 Takashi Morizumi, *'Only If There Were No Nuclear Power...'* *The Suicide Note of a Dairy Farmer* (in Japanese) <http://mphoto.sblo.jp/article/46168089.html>

11 Shunichi Yamashita, *There Are No Deaths, It's Different from Chernobyl* (in Japanese) <http://www.fmu.ac.jp/univ/dbook/index.html#page=233>

## **The Mobilization**

The struggles in the post-Fukushima Japan have proven to be extremely multifaceted and many new forms of resistance have been taking place. Beginning with the opposition to the nuclear industry; the government that subsidizes the industry; academia and media as well are being funded by the same industry, tainted with their interests. Slowly but surely, the distrust with the so-called Nuclear Village<sup>12</sup> is spreading not only among anti-nuclear activists but also amongst the wider public, especially among parents whose concern for the health of the children became a focal point in everyday carework. Any parents would know that playing outdoors with the rain, mud, plants and the sun is an essential process for children to grow up with, yet the children, being most susceptible to radiation effects, are at danger of radiation effects. Parents are now suddenly burdened with extra labor for reproduction to avoid radiation; choosing safe food, buying bottled water, wearing masks, restricting playground activities... since such care work has been abandoned by the state. On May 23rd, hundreds of Fukushima parents came on busloads to Tokyo, to meet with the Ministry of Education regarding their newly set radiation guideline as an 'emergency measure'. The new 'safety measure' suggested that maximum limit of radiation exposure dose be increased to twenty-fold of the international recommendations, from 1 mSv (milisievert) / year, to 20 mSv/ year. This decision completely ignored potential effects to the children but was aimed for minimizing the cost it takes to evacuate the larger areas. The parents encircled the Ministry building, demanding the revisions of the guidelines. The Ministry did not back off from their 20mSv standard at the time, and it is still incorporated to the basis to determine evacuation zone in Fukushima. This was one of the first protests organized by parents groups in Fukushima.

The anti-nuclear demonstrations drastically shifted its political landscape of Japan, which had not experienced large-scale protests since 1970s, in the exception of the protests in Okinawa opposing the

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<sup>12</sup> *Genshiryoku Mura* (or Nuclear Village): the pro-nuclear alliance of government and industry supported by sponsored media and politicians.

US military bases. One month after the disaster on April 10<sup>th</sup> in Koenji, Tokyo, the first large-scale protest since the earthquake took place. It drew 15,000 people, a far larger number than the organizers had anticipated. The Koenji park was overflowed with people, many of who had never participated in street protests before. Nearly half of the participants were wearing masks while they marched in the streets, since considerable levels of radiation had been detected in Tokyo, too. Since the April 10th the scale of demonstration rapidly grew, and the culture of the street demo spread outside the big cities into small towns throughout Japan. Each city opposed nuclear power plants often in their own region with its own style and agenda.

Aside from music-driven protests in urban space, many forms of resistance are also shaping in Fukushima's own locality. In Iwaki City in Fukushima, the first anti-nuclear demo since the disaster was organized by a local group of mothers. In Iwaki, the largest city in Fukushima prefecture, the coastal area was devastated by the tsunami, and the northern area, merely 40-50km away from the nuclear power plant, was designated as a zone where people are required to take shelter indoors. The local economy, mainly on tourism, was suffering, while the communities were torn apart by the new reality which suddenly forced them to live under radiation. At the same time, Iwaki was hosting many temporary shelters for evacuees who fled the 20km-exclusion zone, as well as those who lost their homes by the tsunami. It was under such circumstances this demonstration took place on May 15, 2011. Some 500 marchers walked in the city center, many of them wearing masks and other protective attire, carrying flags and signs with an urgent call to de-nuclearize and protect life. One participant from Tokyo blogged about the demonstration along with his photographs; an unforgettable sight he saw from the street when the march was passing by a temporary shelter: the evacuees inside the building came by the windows, waved and sent welcoming smiles to the marchers walking by.<sup>13</sup>

Fukushima's voices have become the starting point of the Japanese anti-nuclear movement – at the

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<sup>13</sup> Masa, *NO NUKES! PEACE DEMO in Iwaki, FUKUSHIMA* (in Japanese) <http://kai-wai.jp/2011/05/no-nukes-peace-demo-in-iwaki-fukushima.html>

same time, the marchers perhaps saw the light of determination in the faces of Fukushima; that there was no turning back to the life before 3.11, only way forward to end the nuclear age.

Image2: anti-nuclear demonstration passes by a temporary shelter in Iwaki City, May 15, 2011. Photo Courtesy of Kawai Sansaku)



### **A Cow Appears in Tokyo**

“Bring back our life! What have we done to deserve this?” On April 26, 2011, a group of Fukushima farmers protested in front of TEPCO headquarters, demanding an acknowledgement of their losses and prompt compensations. In their hands they carried signs along with the spinach and cabbages - the vegetables they could not sell.<sup>14</sup> An unusual protestor - an actual cow that traveled with the farmers all the way from Fukushima, also accompanied the demonstration. Mooing occasionally, she

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14 Yoshihiko Ikegami, *Soil and Farmers* <http://www.jfissues.org/2011/08/29/soil-and-farmers/>

certainly left a strong impact in the Tokyo urban space surrounded by concrete buildings.

Sachiko Sato, an organic farmer and a mother of five from Fukushima, states that the people in Fukushima are still agonized as they are not able to accept what happened to them on March 11, 2011:

*Most of our good friends who used to farm in our neighborhood are all gone, dispersed across the country. We helped each other, lived modestly and thriftily, but this happy life was taken away from us by the nuclear power, which merely produced electricity. We lost everything because of nuclear power.<sup>15</sup>*

Sato delivered the statement to the US public in the fall 2011. Along with three other activists Kaori Izumi, Yukio Anzai and Aileen Mioko Smith, she traveled to New York City and Washington DC. The decision to come to the US was prompted by the yearly convening of the General Assembly of the United Nations which then-Prime Minister of Japan Yoshihiko Noda was attending. The women knew that he would come to reassure the world that everything was fine in Japan and decided to come too, to tell their stories and bring their demands for evacuation and reliable information to a broader stage.

Image 3: The anti-nuclear delegates from Japan visit Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant in Buchanan, NY. September, 2011.

Photo Courtesy of David M. Grossman



They have come to denounce the government and TEPCO, and that they are trapped, and are exposed to very high levels of radiation. Following the presentation, the mothers also held a demonstration in front of the UN, to protest the International Atomic Energy Agency for their pro-nuclear stance, and to alert the public to the dangers of nuclear power. In the late afternoon, the protesters encountered Prime Minister Noda, who was headed to an evening reception after the UN General Assembly where he announced that Japan “hopes to share its acquired knowledge and experience in the field of nuclear safety.”<sup>16</sup> As he got out of his limousine, Sato cried at the top of her lungs: “Prime Minister! You are such a coward to promote the nuclear power to the world, when you can't even save the children of Fukushima!” All the women and the local antinuclear protesters joined in Sato's voice. Noda did not turn his head to look at the protesters.

Upon their return to Japan, the four women organized with others to form the “Fukushima Women Against Nuclear Power” and began the unlimited sit-in protest in front of the Ministry of Economy

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16 ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. YOSHIHIKO NODA PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN AT THE SIXTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
[http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/noda/statement/201109/23enzetu\\_e.html](http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/noda/statement/201109/23enzetu_e.html)

and Industry, which is responsible for the country's nuclear operations. The occupation tents still stand at the site today, welcoming activists and visitors alike.

### **From The Nuclear-Free Summer to Restarting Reactors**

After the long and agonizing first winter, however, there was a sign of hope; the 54 nuclear reactors in Japan were going offline one by one, and they remained shut. Tokyo-based writer Yoshihiko Ikegami wrote in “Waiting for the Day”:

*Now only two among fifty-four reactors are operating in Japan. That is, after eleven months have passed since the nuclear accident, most of the reactors (aside from those suffered the accident) have stopped for periodical inspection. And none among them has resumed their operation so far. If this state continues, all nuclear power plants will stop by the end of the spring. Who on earth could envision this situation a year ago, or even right after the accident?*<sup>17</sup>

The day indeed arrived on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2012, coinciding with the Children's Day (Japanese national holiday). A perfect gift for the children and for all who once were children. Although periodical checkups are mandatory procedure for every nuclear reactor, it was the people's opposition that kept the reactor from resuming – the people in Japan have realized that they no longer needed nuclear power; they have never needed it, and the threat of ‘electric insufficiency’ posed by the pro-nuclear force was merely a fabrication. It was a drastic shift of mindset that could decompose the nuclear myths; *we cannot live without nuclear energy*. By this time, anti-nuclear protests have become a part of daily routine for many people; every weekend somewhere in Japan, rallies and marches were taking place. However, the government, electric companies and financial circles were all employing by any possible means to resume the reactors.

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<sup>17</sup> Yoshihiko Ikegami, *Waiting for the Day* <http://www.jfissures.org/2012/03/07/waiting-for-the-day/>

The non-stop swirls of demonstration climaxed in June 2012 when the government gave a final approval to resume two of the reactors at Ooi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture. After merely two months of the summer without nuclear energy, the people were brought back to face the hostile political interests still acting in favor of the nuclear industry.

The weekly protest in front of Prime Minister's Residential office, which began in March, rapidly grew in June, and the week before the scheduled date of the restart, 200,000 people gathered. Around the same time, a large-scale blockade was staged in front of the restarting Ooi Nuclear Power Plant in rural road of Fukui. The two reactors in Ooi, however, were turned back on in the evening of July 5<sup>th</sup>. Although the demand was not met, the largest demonstrations in decades created a new possibilities - certainly shifted discourses of political protests in Japan.

### **Resisting by Monitoring Radiation**

The only way to know the presence of radiation is through readings on machines, and the most effective solution to radiation is to stay away from it. Even those who march in the streets of Tokyo are more or less exposed to radiation. Due to the lack of information by the authorities and wary of the safety propaganda, many people began monitoring radioactivity on their own, taking Geiger counters in hand. Parents and grandparents, doubtful of the government's 'safety measures', formed community groups to learn together about radioactivity. Whether as a group or individual, the people autonomously organized to monitor in their neighborhood; parks, playgrounds, sidewalks and home gardens. They would upload the readings data on blogs and their twitter accounts and share with others across the country and the globe, exchanging their knowledge. The semi-anonymous exchange on the web created a decentralized network that anyone could participate as long as they had a Geiger counter and some knowledge in radiation and the internet. This way, very quickly the people discovered radioactivity that would not be otherwise publicized in mainstream media. In some occasions, extremely high levels of radiation were monitored in areas far outside Fukushima. The data

from the autonomous monitoring groups powerfully contributed to force some of the local governments to take the danger of radiation into account; some cities finally began providing official readings, restricted entry to certain hotspots, and sometimes removed contaminated soil. Also, through the discoveries of high-level readings, the local residents are making decisions for evacuation. Although in a small percentage, many people have relocated to areas far from Tohoku and Kanto, sometimes overseas. The evacuation still continues, despite the lack of financial or logistical support by the state - which I will discuss later on. Learning and detecting radiation is not only the method to know and understand the contamination, but also a powerful statement to reject the safety myth imposed by the government, let alone their negligence to protect children. While the radiological science had long been in the hands of the pro-nuclear scientists and experts, today, the radioactive information network from below has become a powerful part of the anti-nuclear movement - it is a new and unique form of resistance arisen in the Fukushima struggle. Yoshihiko Ikegami writes the current state of learning and re-learning the science that has long been lost to the people:

*In fact, during the two months, we have studied desperately and come to understand everything about nuclear power, beginning from the structure of nuclear reactors to the meaning of the figures such as 'becquerel' and 'sievert' that indicate the levels of radiation. This is a study neither for a mere desire to learn nor a self-improvement, but for survival through and through. Without understanding these numbers, we will risk our lives – the precise sense of crisis has motivated us.<sup>18</sup>*

The learning also involves unfamiliar terms like 'external' and 'internal' exposure and the complexity of radioactive contamination since there aren't adequate studies done. However at the same time we find a lot of guidance from the past efforts of scholars who are critical of nuclear energy and

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<sup>18</sup> Yoshihiko Ikegami, *A New Movement of the People* <http://www.jfissures.org/2011/06/07/a-new-movement-of-the-people/>

physicians from Hiroshima/Nagasaki period. The social situation and struggles after Chernobyl accident in 1986 had been reexamined and studied widely in Japan during the past two years. Online videos and documents from the Chernobyl experience reappeared, and people are observing the details of everyday life, in comparison to the current situation in Japan.

Image 4: Mushrooms sold in Tokyo supermarket are labeled: *radioactivity information available. Visit our website and enter the serial number to see how much radiation has been detected in this particular product.* Photo courtesy of the author.



## Monitoring the Food

In December 2011, a radiation-monitoring group in Fukushima had detected cesium in baby formula. The Tokyo-based producer Meiji recalled 40 million cans of their formula immediately. It was a shocking reminder of the nature of radiation – that it is cumulative in many forms while atmospheric levels seemed to decline in some areas at the time. The food monitoring has become very crucial also due to the government’s lax standard for radiation in food, just like their twenty-fold standard in the

wake of the disaster.<sup>19</sup> As long as it is below government standard, any vegetables, meat and seafood with radioactive materials are being sold to super markets, restaurants and school lunches across Japan.

The methods for food monitoring is more complicated than atmospheric monitoring using Geiger counters. It requires larger machines, a lab facility, and trained personnel, as it is time-consuming; monitoring one sample takes over an hour. Today the radiation monitoring projects have expanded across Japan from Hokkaido to Okinawa, accepting samples from the community. Such stations are called Citizen's Radiation Monitoring Stations, usually every CRMS has a website, blog, and twitter account where the staff publish the readings and share news regarding the radiatioactive contamination. Aside from monitoring stations, there are restaurants and markets that monitor their own ingredients they use and products they sell. Eating at restaurants have been a major concern for many because the source of ingredients are usually unknown, unless they publicly state that the ingredients they use have been monitored or are from places far from contamination, or like the restaurants that publicly participate in *Eat and Support* projects. One of such emerging food businesses is in Kyoto; a small restaurant named "Non Becquerel Shokudo (Eatery)" opened its doors in the fall of 2012. The eatery only uses ingredients that have not detected radioactive materials using their own monitoring facility. The restaurant is actively promoting safe food and at the same time the space is functioning as a place for networking, as well as an outpost to distribute non-detected vegetables to the community.<sup>20</sup>

## **Reproductive Work and Evacuation**

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<sup>19</sup> Japan's provisional regulation value, under which products distributed to the public including foods and water are deemed 'safe'. [http://www.mhlw.go.jp/shinsai\\_jouhou/dl/shokuhin.pdf](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/shinsai_jouhou/dl/shokuhin.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Non-Becquerel Shokudo <http://non-bq-shokudou.com/>

One of the remarkable aspects in the struggles after Fukushima is that the parents across Japan, many among them mothers, have been autonomously organizing and leading the resistance. The parents were the first to put their fingers on the state's negligence to protect children, and they were the first to communicate the fact the children are most susceptible to the effects of radiation. However, those who 'worry' often found themselves isolated from the rest of their communities and were called 'hysterical', 'too anxious' and 'caring only about their own children.' Such divisions have emerged not only in communities but within a family, or between nursing mothers and working women, child bearers and non-bearers. A Tokyo-based writer Mari Matsumoto expresses how the disaster has drastically changed her ideas as a feminist thinker. She emphasizes the need for the feminism in Japan to embrace the current situation of post-nuclear disaster, particularly concerning the social division based on existing ideas and theories:

*This situation is something I have never experienced before. Women and mothers are standing up without reasoning, theories, or feminist ideas. However in Japanese society, the term 'mothers' tend to be associated only with love and emotional connection to children. Media is eager to depict "desperate mothers fighting to protect their children" occasionally with a little bit of ridicule. But the point I would like to emphasize is that the parents are the laborers of reproduction for raising their children and running the housework.<sup>21</sup>*

## **Evacuation**

As local monitoring groups discover high levels of radiation, people are moving out the contaminated areas for good. As of February 2013, almost 60,000 people have evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture.<sup>22</sup> There are a large number of people evacuated the other prefectures, and the number is

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<sup>21</sup> Mari Matsumoto, *Nuclear Energy and the Reproductive Labor – The Task of Feminism*  
<http://www.jfissures.org/2011/11/28/nuclear-energy-and-reproductive-labor---the-task-of-feminism/>

<sup>22</sup> Fukushima Prefecture, *The Current Status of Evacuees from Fukushima to Other Prefectures*

increasing.

There is a tendency among families that choose voluntary evacuation: only the mother and children (or the wife) evacuate while the father (or the husband) remains because of his job, or the mother and father do not reach an agreement on the evacuation. Families are being torn apart due to the administrative lines drawn by the authorities. Mari Matsumoto continues:

*Furthermore, after some years of neoliberalism, now reproductive and care works are becoming tougher than ever on the people. Economic gaps among women are widening too. We must note that it was under such circumstances we experienced the nuclear accident.*

While many evacuees, often single-parented and with young children, face financial difficulties, they can also be left isolated unable to cope with their new life. Some rely on personal connections to settle down in new communities, and others find help from evacuee support groups in many major cities in Japan, which are organized to meet the needs for evacuees. Takako Shishido, who moved to Sapporo from Fukushima with her two children and husband, has been working with an evacuation support group (or neighborhood council) in Sapporo City. The neighborhood council is to bridge between evacuees and city officials regarding issues and needs that arise in the new life, says Shishido. Six months after her relocation, she testified as an evacuee at the governmental committee regarding a new bill for supporting evacuation<sup>23</sup>. It was the first committee meeting to address the voices of the people who evacuated, including Shishido:

*I have started the evacuees neighborhood council since I learned so many people had left Fukushima with injured hearts. You have no idea how the communities in Fukushima are torn apart between leaving and staying. People would tell us: “what on earth are you thinking?”*

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<http://wwwcms.pref.fukushima.jp/download/1/kengaihinanuchiwake250218.pdf>

23 Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation: a committee as a part of the Reconstruction Agency

*Have you gone mad?" We have been preached down like this. Even our own friends, acquaintances, relatives, parents and husbands criticize us for 'acting against the government.' Some call us 'unpatriotic'. So many of us evacuees have been treated this way, yet we are determined to protect life. Please understand this.<sup>24</sup>*

At this session in December 2011, the Dispute Reconciliation Committee concluded with an agreement that there should be a governmental support for voluntary evacuation, as well as for those who remain in Fukushima. Shishido spoke in New York a half year after she gave the testimony at the Committee session. She described that she was "both shocked and pleased" with the outcome of the Committee's positive reaction to her testimony. She describes yet complex state of the evacuation:

*Some people think what they do is the only way out. But the matter is not simple. So I say: let's try to acknowledge the people who want to evacuate but cannot. Not that all of them think radiation is okay. Some people decided to stay even fully recognizing the danger of radiation. (...) Right as I say this though, I must admit that I am betraying my true belief: I want everybody to evacuate. But would it bring any solution by pushing my idea onto those people who cannot evacuate? I doubt it would. So as I said, each of us should do what we can do and say what we can say. Yet again, if some health effects become apparent, I am sure that I will regret my tolerance.<sup>25</sup>*

Aside from organizing evacuees community groups, newly relocated residents are involved in distributing food and anti-nuclear activities to close down nuclear reactors close to their new home.

## **Who Has Caused All This?**

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24 Testimony by Takako Shishido [http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/shingi/chousa/kaihatu/016/attach/1313182.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/kaihatu/016/attach/1313182.htm)

25 Takako Shishido & Todos Somos Japon, *Voluntary Evacuation – A New Form of Struggle* <http://www.jfissures.org/2013/01/14/voluntary-evacuation-a-new-form-of-struggle-a-conversation-with-takako-shishido-1/> (translation edited)

I have described in the first segments what happened to the people and who was the actor for this nuclear disaster that still continues and will continue for generations. The devastation is not measurable in the percentage for cancer in children's thyroids or numbers of dead cattle in abandoned farm shed; the true devastation may be that their own government has abandoned them, and there are forces that continue to seek benefit from the sacrifice of the population and the environment. Even if the evacuation becomes more widely acknowledged and movement for the nuclear-free life is galvanized, the roots of the cause need to be continuously examined and reexamined; that even since before the three-eleven, TEPCO has neglected the population in its nuclear operations, and the Japanese government have mismanaged the radioactive contamination for the sake of sustaining the nuclear industry. As the dairy farmer in Soma city wrote in his shed wall 'only if there were no nuclear power plants,' our struggle is to expose, question, and denounce the system of the capitalist nuclear regime itself. Accusing the irresponsibility of these forces remain as the common ground for all types of actions that people are taking in their own communities.

Fukushima Nuclear Disaster Plaintiffs is a group focused on taking a legal action against those responsible for the nuclear disaster; 33 TEPCO executives and government officials.<sup>26</sup> Since the initial group of 1,324 plaintiffs in Fukushima filed a criminal complaint in June 2012 pressing charges against them, their efforts were followed by supports across the country; at the end of 2012 more than 14,000 people joined the plaintiffs to jointly file the case. The group states:

*It has required great courage on our part to take this step to press criminal charges. To accuse someone of wrongdoing makes us reflect on the way we live our lives too. This action will have an enormous significance.*<sup>27</sup>

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26 Fukushima Nuclear Disaster Plaintiffs, *The list of accused* (in Japanese) [http://kokuso-fukusimagenpatu.blogspot.com/2012/06/blog-post\\_12.html](http://kokuso-fukusimagenpatu.blogspot.com/2012/06/blog-post_12.html)

27 Fukushima Nuclear Disaster Plaintiffs <http://www.save-children-from-radiation.org/news/legal-actions/>

To search for the fundamental root of the current nuclear disaster is also a reminder of the past struggles of similar courses, particularly, the Minamata disease in a small fishing village in southern Japan. The well-known disease in Japan, the neurological syndrome was caused by mercury poisoning in the waste water of a chemical factory owned by Chisso. The disease began to appear first in 1953, and the government officially recognized it in 1956. On the Chisso's side, however, no one has acknowledged the cause for years. As the court struggles continued for decades, the agony of the victims' family and patients continued, while Chisso's business flourished. Even today, some 50 years later, the patient advocacy groups continue to fight for recognition and compensation. Aileen Mioko Smith, is one of the leading anti-nuclear activists in Japan, had once began her work with Minamata struggle. Smith finds commonalities between Minamata and Fukushima:

The Minamata victims also broke down into several factions, and were pushed into corners where they couldn't help hurting each other. The scars remain even today, some 50 years later. (...) To flee or not to flee. Whether one is even able to flee or not. Clashes are taking place in cities, places of work, and even families. But stop and think. It was the state and (Fukushima plant operator) Tokyo Electric Power Co. that pulled us apart. Who is going to gain from clashes among the victims?<sup>28</sup>

Too exhausted to face with hostility and bureaucracy of the industry, Fukushima people are also attacking each other; between those who fled and who remain, between who wear masks and who don't, those who speak out and who shut their mouths. We have learned that the presence of nuclear power plant has an ability to decompose the entire society, and those who benefit from nuclear energy are the same people who determine what the risks are. In Michiko Ishimure's 1968 essay documenting the Minamata disease, a Minamata patient appeals to the government officials:

*You guys just try to look at our symptoms all the time in order to create different degrees of*

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28 Ayako Oguni, *Anti-nuclear activist sees commonalities between Minamata and Fukushima*  
<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20120304p2a00m0na005000c.html>

*compensation, but, you know what, the symptoms are only a small part of the damage.*<sup>29</sup>

One of the plaintiffs filing the case for criminal charges is Ruiko Muto, a long-time antinuclear activist from Fukushima. Her quiet life in a mountain was also taken away by the invisible radiation. She came to Tokyo and delivered a powerful message to the 60,000 participants at Goodbye Nuclear Plants Rally in September 2011:

*“Don’t you dare treat us like fools!”. “Don’t snatch away our lives!” In the midst of our anger and grief, we, the citizens of Fukushima prefecture, are quietly rising up: Mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, wanting to protect their children... The young generation, fighting to stop their future from being stolen... Workers trying to help those cleaning up the stricken nuclear plant, exposed to huge doses of radiation in the process... Farmers filled with despair at the contamination of their land... People with disabilities, determined that the radiation should not give rise to a new discrimination and separation... One by one, each of us citizens is asking questions about the responsibility of the state, and of TEPCO. And we are raising our voices to say “No more nuclear reactors!” We have become the demons of Tohoku, quietly burning with fury.*<sup>30</sup>

Muto adds a reference to her use of the 'demons' as the people of Tohoku were first called 'demons' by an eighth-century general of the Yamato Dynasty who invaded and ruled the region, because of their resistance to the officials. Today, after experiencing the violence of inequality and sacrifice, they have become 'demons' again, shaking the entire country - evacuees in their new home, new school, and new work places, and in the battle field Fukushima, people are raising voices, creating the first

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<sup>29</sup> Michiko Ishimure, *Kukai Jodo (Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease)* Kawade Shobo, 2011 (Translation by the author)

<sup>30</sup> Ruiko Muto's speech at the Goodbye Nuclear Plants rally [http://hairoaction.com/?page\\_id=1280](http://hairoaction.com/?page_id=1280) (translation modified)

fire for all of us to burn with fury. 'Fukushima is a beautiful place' – we hear the same phrase every time people from Fukushima speak about their struggles. Fukushima is a place where first and foremost people are experiencing what the separation of human beings from the nature means, with burning minds. The mountains and oceans have been poisoned, and those who intoxicated the green mountains and blue ocean are yet to swallow the poison themselves.