

“The Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy” and Hiroshima

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Japan, the Atomic Bomb, and the “Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Power”: two articles from Yuki Tanaka and Peter Kuznick.

In this two part article Yuki Tanaka and Peter Kuznick explore the relationship between the atomic bombing of Japan and that nation’s embrace of nuclear power, a relationship that may be entering a new phase with the 3.11 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear catastrophe at Fukushima.

Fro the second article, see: [Japan’s nuclear history in perspective: Eisenhower and atoms for war and peace](#)

The ongoing grave situation at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, which continues to contaminate vast areas of surrounding land and sea with high levels of radiation, forces us to reconsider the devastating impact of the so-called “peaceful use of nuclear energy” upon all forms of life, including human beings and nature. The scale of damage to human beings and the environment caused by a major accident at a nuclear power plant, where radiation is emitted either from the nuclear vessel or spent fuel rods, may be comparable to that resulting from nuclear weapons. In this sense, a nuclear power accident can be seen as an “act of indiscriminate mass destruction,” and thus “an unintentionally committed crime against humanity.”

It is well known that the origin of “the peaceful use of nuclear energy” was part of “Atoms for Peace,” a policy that U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower launched at the U.N. General Assembly in December 1953.

As Peter Kuznick concisely explains in the following article [[1](#)], what the U.S. Government aimed at above all through this policy was to contain the power of the Soviet Union, the nation which carried out the world’s first hydrogen bomb test in August that year. Atoms for Peace was devised to assure that Western nations accepted plans by the U.S. government and American capital for the provision of nuclear fuel and technology. Japan was among the most important of these targeted nations, as U.S. government officials recognized that it would be symbolically advantageous to promote “the peaceful use of nuclear energy” in the nation that had been the victim of the world’s first atomic bombing. Yet, at the very moment that the U.S. was preparing to introduce this program into Japan, a Japanese fishing boat, the Lucky Dragon #5, was showered with radioactive fallout caused by the U.S. hydrogen bomb test at Bikini Atoll in March 1954.

This incident stirred Japanese anti-nuclear sentiment, and a campaign against nuclear tests spread throughout Japan. Among the 32 million signers of the anti-nuclear petition were one million from Hiroshima Prefecture. This movement gave rise to the first World Congress Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs held in Hiroshima in August in 1955.

At a time of rapidly rising anti-nuclear sentiment in Japan, Shoriki Matsutaro, president of the

Yomiuri Newspaper and Japan TV Corporation, emerged to promote the benefits of “the peaceful use of nuclear energy.” Shoriki was elected as a member of the Lower House in the Diet in February 1955, and became the Minister in charge of Nuclear Energy in the Hatoyama cabinet in November. The following year he became the founding Director of the newly established Science and Technology Agency, and vigorously promoted nuclear energy in Japan, collaborating with other pro-nuclear politicians including Nakasone Yasuhiro, then chair of the Nuclear Energy Committee of the Lower House.

Hiroshima was a particular target for promoting nuclear energy, as Peter Kuznick clearly explains. In the eyes of American officials such as AEC Commissioner, Thomas Murray, this could help counter the negative and gloomy images of atomic power. In January 1955, Congressman Sidney Yates proposed building Japan’s first nuclear power plant in Hiroshima. Shoriki, with U.S. government support, organized the traveling exhibition on “The Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy” in Tokyo in November, and Hiroshima was selected as one of several host cities. For three weeks from the end of May 1956, the exhibition in Hiroshima city attracted 110,000 people from Hiroshima and neighboring prefectures, many of them children on school excursions.

Although in other cities the exhibition was sponsored exclusively by the *Yomiuri* with the assistance of the U.S. Information Service, in Hiroshima co-sponsors also included the Hiroshima City Council, Hiroshima Prefectural Government, Hiroshima University, and the *Chugoku* Newspaper. Twenty local influential persons, including the Mayor of Hiroshima City, the Governor of Hiroshima Prefecture, the President of Hiroshima University and the President of the Chugoku Newspaper, were on the preparatory committee. All praised the promotion and application of this new powerful energy. By contrast, many A-bomb survivors were skeptical and cautious about this non-military application of nuclear power, claiming that there was still no solution to the problem of managing radioactive materials produced by operating nuclear power reactors.

Yet, by the time the 2nd World Congress Against A & H Bombs was held in Nagasaki in August in 1956, just two months after the exhibition ended, the A-bomb survivors, too, had been heavily influenced by this nation-wide barrage of “Atoms for Peace.” Even intellectual leaders of the A-bomb victims, such as Moritaki Ichiro, a well-know philosopher and ardent campaigner for the total abolition of nuclear weapons, became supporters of nuclear energy. In his speech at the inaugural meeting of Nippon Hidankyo (the Japan A-bomb Victims Association) during the above-mentioned 2nd World Congress Against A & H Bombs in Nagasaki, Moritaki stated ‘it is our sole wish to direct the use of nuclear energy - an energy source that could bring destruction and annihilation - for the purpose of happiness and prosperity of human beings.’

Two years later, the same exhibition was again presented in Hiroshima by the city council, as part of the Grand Exhibition of the Reconstruction of Hiroshima to celebrate the rebirth of this city that had been totally destroyed by the atomic bombing thirteen years before. This exhibition, which lasted 50 days from April 1, 1958, comprised 31 pavilions including those for Electric Science and Space Exploration. This time, the A-bomb Museum building, completed in August 1955, was used as the pavilion for the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy. Thus, in the same building, exhibits related to the devastation caused by the atomic bombing were displayed together with various dream-like applications of nuclear energy. Such things as nuclear powered planes, ships and trains, as well as medical, agricultural and industrial uses of radioactive materials were displayed. In the Electric Science pavilion, the benefits and advantages of electricity generated by nuclear reactors was also propagated. In all, 917,000 people visited the exhibition, and the pavilion of the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy was the second most popular after that of Space Exploration.

It appears that most people in Hiroshima, including many A-bomb survivors, now held two implicitly contradictory views: that the campaign against the use of nuclear weapons must continue; but

nuclear energy for non-military purposes should be welcomed and promoted. Likewise, at least until recently, many anti-nuclear weapon campaigners in other parts of Japan have shared these views. This explains why A-bomb victim organizations, such as Nippon Hidankyo, still maintain silence concerning the fatal accident at the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant, and why none of the post-war mayors of Hiroshima has ever publicly criticized nuclear power. Indeed, some former mayors are widely known as strong supporters of Chugoku Electric Power Company's plan to build a nuclear power plant at Kaminoseki, about 80 kilometers from Hiroshima City.

It is now time to critically and honestly review the history of the anti-nuclear movement in Hiroshima and to explore ways to unite hitherto divided anti-nuclear and anti-nuclear weapons and energy campaigns.

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P.S.

* From Focus Japan:

<http://japanfocus.org/-Yuki-TANAKA/3521>

* Peter Kuznick wrote this article for The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, April 13, 2011.

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Footnotes

[1] [Japan's nuclear history in perspective: Eisenhower and atoms for war and peace](#)