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Nuclear Irresponsibility: Koide Hiroaki Interviewed by Le Monde 核の責任不在––小出裕章「ル・モンド」インタヴュー

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Last summer, the Asia-Pacific Journal highlighted the views of Hiroaki Koide, one of the leading critics of nuclear power from within Japan's scientific establishment and an important voice on Japan's current nuclear crisis. Koide, with four decades of experience as a nuclear engineer, is an Assistant Professor at Kyoto University's Research Reactor Institute. He has long been mired in that low academic rank because of his shift from support of nuclear power early in his career, to consistent criticism. Since the March 11 disasters, he has been especially prolific, publishing a series of books including *Genpatsu no Uso* (Nuclear lies), *Shiritakunai keredo, Shitteokanebanaranai Genpatsu no Shinjitsu* (What we don't want to know, what we must learn: Nuclear truths), and *Kodomo-tachi ni tsutaetai: Genpatsu ga yurusarenai riyu* (I want to tell the children: The reasons why nuclear power is unforgivable).

Below is a full translation of the interview that he gave recently to Philippe Pons, the permanent correspondent of *Le Monde* in Japan. This interview offers further insights into the situation on the ground.

"In the nuclear industry, no one would ever be responsible for anything. Too many interests are involved"

Koide Hiroaki's interview by Philippe Pons, *Le Monde,* December 7th, 2011.

Nine months after Fukushima, what lessons should be learned?

The reactors are machines handled by humans, so they are not infallible. After I graduated, I aimed to devote my life to atomic research. I was a rather conservative student. Then, in the early 1970s, I attended demonstrations against the construction of the plant in Onagawa. I did not understand what was going on. Little by little, over the course of my research, I became aware of the dangers of nuclear power. Not only in Japan because of earthquakes and tsunamis, but in the current state of science, nuclear power is dangerous everywhere.

What do you think of the attitude of the Japanese government?

I feel ashamed of it. Its reaction to the disaster should be condemned for many reasons: for underestimating the risks, withholding information and delaying the evacuation of the population. At the beginning, they just invited the people who were within 3 km to be ready to leave "just in case". Then the areas to be evacuated were expanded in concentric circles, while the radioactive plumes move with the wind.

What should the government do?

Stop immediately all the nuclear plants. If there was another accident of that level, Japan would not survive. The fear of lacking enough electricity is nothing but a lure. If we use the hydraulic and thermal plants that are stopped now, there would be enough.

For many years, the majority of scholars agreed with the pro-nuclear policies. Why?

The promotion of nuclear energy was a state policy. Scholars and the mass media just followed. Scientists were confined in their own little world, neglecting their social responsibilities. State and nuclear plant managers wanted to believe—or they took the risk to believe—that an accident would not happen.

But as the first country to suffer nuclear bombs attacks, the Japanese did know the atomic risks...

For many Japanese, there was a difference between the atomic bomb and nuclear energy. And there were political and economic interests. Nuclear energy was very profitable for electricity companies. Industrial giants like Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Toshiba, and Hitachi, which were involved in the construction of these plants only cared about earnings, and the state just let them alone. And there was politics. Despite the Constitution of Japan rejecting war, the nuclear industry implied that Japan has enough fissile materials to make bombs quickly if necessary. Another element was that local groups in remote areas left behind [by growth] thought that nuclear plants would bring them prosperity, without really considering the risks.

You have stressed that the nuclear industry has implied various forms of discrimination...

The production of this energy is based on the sacrifice of certain social groups. We do not build power plants near the cities consuming much of this electricity, but in backward regions whose populations do not know how to defend themselves. The risks of radiation are taken not by the regular employees, who are mostly unionized, but by the employees of subcontractors: 86% of radiation absorbed by workers harms the "nuclear Gypsies", these temporary workers who work near the reactors.

The government wants to move forward with the motto “reconstruction” and “decontamination”

What we call the “nuclear village” is far from dead. For this nuclear lobby, the decontamination is a new source of profit, and the reconstruction, another windfall for the construction companies. If we want to decontaminate, then the entire Fukushima prefecture has to be decontaminated. But where should we carry the irradiated earth?

To “move forward” also means to erase responsibility?
Well, for previous accidents of much lower magnitude, nobody had to bear responsibility. Too many interests were involved.

After the accident, there have been anti-nuclear demonstrations, but no strong shift in opinion. Why such apathy?

Yes, I also wonder why. The Japanese tend to respect hierarchy and bureaucracy. And they don’t know who to believe. There are no real political leaders concerned with this. There was a shift of power to the Democratic Party in 2009, but many of its Parliament members are also attached to the nuclear lobby through the support they receive from the unions in the electricity sector and heavy industries.

Yet the workers' struggles of the 1950s and citizen protests against industrial pollution have shown that the Japanese are not always passive...
Yes, there used to be strong unions, but they were defeated. Concerning industrial pollution, we saw indeed its tragic effects like the birth of children with physical and mental disabilities. And public opinion awoke. In the case of Fukushima, there is no doubt that there will be many victims. But the disease spreads slowly and awareness may follow the same path...

Translated from French by Paul Jobin

Original article: http://franceneko.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2011/12/128-f40d.html

Parts of this interview have also been translated in Japanese: http://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2011/12/07/pour-le-nucleaire-il-n-y-a-jamais-de-responsables-trop-d-interets-sont-meles_1614282_3244.html

See also a previous interview with Koide Hiroaki in Japan Focus : http://japanfocus.org/-Koide-Hiroaki/3582

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