

Fukushima: “Everything has to be done again for us to stay in the contaminated areas” 汚染地域に残るには、すべてやり直さないと

Asia-Pacific Journal Feature, Nadine Ribault, Thierry Ribault

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 12 Number 30 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

An interview with Iwata Wataru by Nadine and Thierry Ribault

Translation by Francis Guerin

Introduction

We have known Iwata Wataru for more than two years, and when he decided to depart to Fukushima from Kyoto, he asked us to locate Geiger counters in France because at that time there were none available for his use in Japan. Despite active searching we found none. However, we contacted the independent radioactivity measuring laboratory [CRIIRAD](#), which was created in France following the Chernobyl accident. The CRIIRAD people decided to send counters and other measurement accessories free to Wataru's recently created "Project 47". In May 2011, we

joined the CRIIRAD measurement mission to Fukushima and witnessed the first steps in "Project 47" and their collaboration with CRIIRAD. The link was made and the idea to create a Japanese version of CRIIRAD came to mind and Iwata took the lead: in July 2011 [CRMS](#) was born. Iwata became the founder and technical director, with the technical support of CRIIRAD and of the Umweltinstitut in Munich, with the financial support of Days Japan and other donors. Iwata's experience engagement and commitment is the topic of the new book by Nadine and Thierry Ribault :

Les Sanctuaires de l'abîme - Chronique du désastre de Fukushima - aux Editions de l'Encyclopédie des Nuisances, Paris, 2012. (provisional English title: **Snatched Away to Darkness - The Story of the Fukushima Disaster**)

Composer Iwata Wataru poses many difficult questions regarding the long-term health risks faced by the victims of the Fukushima nuclear meltdown. He presents a compelling call to action framed in terms of what he calls an "auto-evacuation". In contrast to the state's directive to evacuate specific areas, the nature of auto-evacuation is that "people themselves decide to evacuate the affected zone."

On March 13 2011, two days after the Tōhoku

Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster at Fukushima, the composer Iwata Wataru left his studio in the suburbs of Tokyo to take refuge in Kyoto. He was acutely aware, as the entire population now is, that an unprecedented catastrophe – even larger than Chernobyl – had occurred. After sleepless nights, Iwata, who never engaged in activism before, either humanitarian or political, decided to go to Fukushima prefecture on March 20, propelled by a zeal even he cannot fully explain.

During the following three months, Iwata created “Project 47”, named after the 47 prefectures of Japan. Funds were raised both to organize the evacuation of victims and to buy radiation measurement equipment to gather data that would subsequently be published. He explains:

“The situation in Japan looks more and more like that in wartime: television, print and Internet outlets are being called upon to impose a voluntary gag order on themselves.”

“Project 47” observers go to farms, schools and homes with radiometers and Geiger counters to measure radiation levels and publish them on their association website. They want to create the basis for what they call “auto-evacuation”: a system whereby people can autonomously decide to evacuate those affected zones in which the state does not oblige them to evacuate.

Iwata Wataru: “stubborn and an agitator”

Facing the impossible nature of official oversight with regard to the disaster, “we need

infinite noncompliance,” says Iwata. In June 2011, he canceled his Tokyo lease and rented a Fukushima City studio apartment where he lives surrounded by radiation measurement tools – thereby creating the first autonomous radiation measurement station in Japan, which went into effect on July 1st 2011.

Project 47’s “Citizen’s Radioactivity Measuring Station” (CRMS)

“The day we launched the Whole Body Counter [WBC, a machine used to measure radioactivity in the human body],” says Iwata, “we received on hundred orders within five minutes. We had to close down.” Little by little, other centers opened in Kōriyama, Fukagawa, Nihonmatsu, and Tamura. On December 14, 2011, the CRMS network’s first People’s Station for the Measurement of Radioactivity opened in Tokyo.

Iwata belongs to no hierarchical organization and depends on no one. It is his personal motivation in the wake of the Fukushima disaster that drives him. He is stubborn and an agitator.

On November 27, 2011, during an event organized by the CRMS in Tokyo to provide information to the population at large, he stated that he is wary of the WBC, since it can be used to exonerate people who decide not to move. People from Fukushima who fled to Kyoto ask: how can we prove anything, if we come down with a disease later on? Wataru advises them to keep their children’s teeth and hair. After the meeting, he confesses considering a change in direction, to lead a more direct struggle against the authorities and against apathy in the ranks of the

populace.

We met Wataru Iwata on February 12, 2012, in Fukushima, during the “Protect Life from Radiation” symposium.

Interview

Nadine and Thierry Ribault: Seven months after the creation of the CRMS, how have things turned out?

Wataru Iwata: Fukushima residents approached us when we first arrived with radiation measurement equipment. Our objective was not to push people to flee, but to give them information so they could decide for themselves.

People could not talk about radiation, they could not mention the nuclear power plant. The central and local authorities made no proposal to combat contamination. Instead, they raised annual “tolerable” levels of radiation.

The watchword was “Hang in there Fukushima!” (Fukushima Ganbare!) And people, including children in schools, were being urged to consume food from Fukushima. People worried about the risks of radiation soon understood that they had to protect themselves from internal irradiation as much as external irradiation. Mothers, worried about their children’s nutritional health, sounded the alarm.

Mothers, then, lacked confidence in the authorities?

Yes, which was legitimate. Government officials worried little about the health and security of the people. There was a lack of precise information. Authorities confessed to me that, for example, they would select three rice paddy (soil) samples and then if the contamination level was below 5000Bq/kg on its soil, then they would let all the rice paddy of the whole city or town or village to be cultivated. They refer to a coefficient of migration of Cesium of 1/10, the tentative amount limit of food stuffs were 500Bq/kg, so that’s why they let them to be cultivated at the value of 5000Bq/kg in last April. However, that is too hasty a conclusion, since contamination levels change every 100 meters.

There was an enormous disconnect between reality and how reality was portrayed by the authorities. When we opened the first station at Fukushima, we were supposed to start at 13:00 and people were already lining up at 11:00. I told them that we could not measure water, though many brought water to us anyway.

They wanted to understand and know what was happening, even the farmers. At the beginning, many people from the organic farming world were asking if they could cultivate and sell their crops. Precise measurements are necessary to make such decisions.

What kind of relationship do you have with the authorities?

After receiving the WBC data, we developed

relationships with the sanitary authorities who came to see what we were doing. People had told them the results we obtained. They were friendly, offering cynical apologies that they could not conduct such activities themselves.

People do not trust them any more, but within their ranks are some who desire to protect the people. They just don't have the equipment to do so. They were not trying to hide things, but people did not believe them. At Fukushima Medical University, for example, the WBC was contaminated from the start. Some residents asked to be measured but the authorities refused.

People then turned to us and we ended up creating relationships with some of them, since they felt that they could no longer depend on the authorities ... but this means that now they depend on the CRMS. Some people no longer have autonomy. Nevertheless, we are doing everything we can for those who do not leave the contaminated areas. It is not realistic to think that everyone will leave. The people who stay need protection and medical follow-up.

From that point of view, we are attempting to work with the authorities. We have to do more than just complain. We have to act according to what the residents need. However, only 3% of them are left, and 10% of these are children. These are leftover people.

What kind of relationship do you have with scientists?

Medical examinations given as part of the public health survey supervised by Professor

Yamashita Shinichi's team are free.^[1] Fukushima prefecture asked the central government to ensure that the entirety of the medical care for those under 18 year-old would be free of charge. But this request was shelved as of January 28 by Hirano Tatsu, Minister for Reconstruction.

Therefore, some scientists have a somehow strange attitude. Conflicts arise: vice-president Yamashita, from Nagasaki, and vice-president Kamiya, from Hiroshima, are publicly at odds concerning the investigation. According to Hiroshima doctors, the failure to distribute iodine tablets on the first days of the disaster was a mistake, while others do not see it that way.

It is difficult for doctors to work independently due to the power of the medical associations that prohibit them from warning people about radiation, and some pediatricians even resent mothers who express worries about their children's health; however, many doctors, especially those from Fukushima, sincerely want to provide protection and assistance. We are therefore establishing working connections with some of them, as well as with some researchers.

Is the CRMS a place of truth?

The CRMS has to establish a form of trust. This is done step by step. People have been highly exposed, and we do not know what will happen in the following years. Stories spread: dead fetuses in mothers' stomachs, malformations... but we cannot say for sure at present what is caused by radiation and what is not.

The head of the radio station in Koriyama recently had a baby born with a heart malformation similar to the ones children in Chernobyl had. Journalists spread fear with these stories, but no conclusion can yet be made.

What is certain is that people need follow-ups. They need to have examinations and be treated as soon as we find something. We need to look carefully for abnormalities, because the possibility of developing disease has increased. However, as I said, the government refuses to remove the medical fees for those under 18 in the Fukushima prefecture; only “sanitary control” examinations conducted as part of the health surveys are free. The medical fees should be removed, but we also have to be aware that if such a law were passed, people would no longer be able to keep their personal information private from authorities. People would be examined in Fukushima and those examination results would remain “stuck” to their identities like criminal records.

Only 20% of the population answered the survey conducted by Fukushima Medical University. For many, Fukushima Medical University has become Dracula’s Castle. Nevertheless, the role of this university is to care for people, and in order to do that correctly, those in charge need to change their policy. They have to discuss issues with residents and citizens and consider their opinions and requests while determining how the survey is conducted, for example. We need to be close to people. We need to consider the precise situation and act accordingly.

This is an edited transcript of an interview with

Iwata Wataru that appeared at Rue89.

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Biographies of authors

Thierry Ribault received a Phd in applied economics in 1991. He has been a fulltime researcher position at CNRS (National Scientific Research Center) since 1994. A former fellow of the Japan Society for Promotion of Science, he has been a visiting professor and researcher at Tokyo University, Nagoya University, and Kwansei University. He is co-director with A. Saulière of the documentary film *Dissonances* (2010), on dissonant voices in contemporary Japan, and co-author with Nadine Ribault of *Les Sanctuaires de l’abîme - Chronique du désastre de Fukushima*, published by les Editions de l’Encyclopédie des Nuisances, Paris, 2012. His current research concerns [human protection and vulnerability](#) in the Fukushima disaster.

Nadine Ribault is the author of novels and short stories published in France by Actes Sud and Gallimard. Her *Points d’appui* discusses entre-deux creativity and presents poems and essays. All of Nadine Ribault work is directed toward the novel, which she conceives of as a poetic creation. She recently published *Carnets des Cévennes* (Ed. *Le mot et le reste*, Marseille, 2012) and chronicles of the disaster of Fukushima, written with Thierry Ribault (*Les Sanctuaires de l’abîme - Chronique du désastre de Fukushima*). She began work on *collages* in

2010 and will exhibit in France and Japan in 2012.

Below is the Abstract (in English, Japanese, and French) for the new book on Fukushima by Nadine and Theirry Ribault:

Les Sanctuaires de l'abîme - Chronique du désastre de Fukushima - aux Editions de l'Encyclopédie des Nuisances, Paris, 2012.
(provisional English title: **Snatched Away to Darkness - The Story of the Fukushima Disaster**)

RIBAULT, Nadine and Thierry

Snatched Away to Darkness

- The Story of the Fukushima Disaster -

Who could forget the earthquake, the tsunami and the nuclear incident that struck the Fukushima area in Japan in March 2011? Following the example of Wataru Iwata, co-founder of "Project 47", an association that aims to make it possible "for people to have access to accurate and appropriate information and to be aware of what is really going on", the authors retrace the events that followed the accident at Fukushima nuclear power station - notably the evasiveness on the part of company and government officials, and the misinformation passed on to the public, repeatedly told there was no danger. They also remind us of the way the "peaceful" nuclear industry was promoted by the Japanese, along with the United States, from the end of World War II, in an attempt to make the technology rendered infamous by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki not just acceptable but desirable.

The book sheds light on the role played by Mafia-style organisations such as the Nippon Foundation also known as Sasakawa Foundation in denying the impact of the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters on people's health, and on the involvement of the Yakuza in assisting affected populations immediately after the disaster, standing in for national and local "authorities" completely overwhelmed by events. The authors also question a number of clichés concerning what are commonly referred to as Japanese cultural values, that supposedly make the people particularly inclined to accept things with a kind of fatalistic resignation. The reality is in fact quite different, as is clearly shown by the looting that happened after the disaster, as well as the feelings of despair and panic that are widespread among the population.

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ナディーヌ & ティエリー・リボー著、

『深淵の聖域』 フクシマ災害記録

2011年3月に福島県地域を襲った地震と津波、そして原発事故は人々の記憶に生々しい。「人々が正確で公正な情報にアクセスし、実際に起こっていることを自覚できる」ことを目指して発足した団体「プロジェクト47」の創設者、岩田渉氏の提案に基づいて、本書の著者たちはフクシマの原発事故が引き起こした数々の出来事—政府と責任会社である東電の言い逃れ、「何の危険もない」と繰り返し告げられる住民たちに対する情報拒否—についての記録を書き綴り、ヒロシマとナガサキに投下された原爆によって汚辱の刻印を押されたはずのテクノロジーを単に許すだけにとどまらず、それをさらに望ましいものに変えるために、第二次大戦以降アメリカの協力を得て日本政府が推進してきた原発のいわゆる「平和的利用」のあり方についても語る。

本書は、チェルノブイリやフクシマの災害による住民の健康状態への影響を否定する日本財団（旧笹川財団）のようなマフィアあるいは半ばマフィア的な諸機構が演じた役割や、災害直後から被災者たちに入り交じって暗躍していたヤクザたちが担った役割を明らかにし、それらが災害に凌駕されてしまった国や地方による「公権力」に取って代わっていた事実を明らかにする。さらに本書では、日本人は運命を堪え忍ぶ能力にとりわけ長けている民族である、といったような日本文化にたいするいくつかの偏見についても再検討している。事実は全く異なっている。このことは、たとえば災害後に指摘された横領や略奪、そして今も多くの人々が感じている絶望とパニックの感情によって、とりわけ証明されるのである。

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RIBAUT Nadine et Thierry - LES SANCTUAIRES DE L'ABIME

Chronique du désastre de Fukushima

Comme chacun s'en souvient, un tremblement de terre, un raz-de-marée et un accident nucléaire ont frappé la région de Fukushima, au Japon, en mars 2011. En suivant les initiatives de Wataru Iwata, fondateur d'une association appelée "Projet 47", visant à faire en sorte "que les gens accèdent à l'information juste et exacte et prennent conscience de ce qui est véritablement en train de se passer", les auteurs retracent la chronique des événements qui ont suivi le déclenchement de l'accident à la centrale de Fukushima - tergiversations du gouvernement et de l'entreprise responsable de la centrale, désinformation de la population, à qui l'on ne cesse de répéter qu'il n'y a aucun danger -, et rappellent la manière dont l'industrie du nucléaire "pacifique" a été promue par le gouvernement japonais depuis la fin de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, en collaboration avec les Etats-Unis, afin de rendre non seulement acceptable mais désirable une technologie que les bombardements d'Hiroshima et de Nagasaki avaient marquée du sceau de l'infamie.

L'ouvrage met en lumière le rôle joué par des organisations mafieuses ou semi-mafieuses telles que la Fondation Sasakawa dans la négation des conséquences des catastrophes de Tchernobyl et de Fukushima sur la santé des populations, ainsi que le rôle joué par les yakuza dans l'assistance aux populations immédiatement après la catastrophe, se substituant à des "pouvoirs publics" étatiques et locaux totalement dépassés par les événements. Sont également remis en question un certain nombre de clichés concernant ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler la culture japonaise, qui rendrait la population particulièrement apte à se résigner à une sorte de fatalité. La réalité est fort différente, comme l'attestent notamment les pillages constatés après la catastrophe, ainsi que les sentiments de désespoir et de panique qui animent de larges couches de la population.

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[1] Yamashita has been criticized for downplaying the dangers of radiation. See, for example, his May 6, 2011 NHK interview: http://cbbstoday.org/images/nolletprs/nhkinterview06may2011_eng.pdf