

Introduction

These articles explore public opinion on nuclear power from a variety of perspectives, emphasizing the change in attitudes among Japanese following the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, the subsequent tsunami, and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

Only Japan has experienced four major nuclear disasters, giving the society a unique perspective. The first two were the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then, in 1954, a U.S. Hydrogen Bomb test near Bikini Atoll accidentally contaminated fishermen aboard the Japanese ship *Lucky Dragon 5*, resulting in injuries and one death. Although the number of people directly affected by the Bikini bombing was small, their plight had a major impact on public opinion at the time. In the 1940s and 50s, then, Japanese public opinion was predominantly anti-nuclear.

The most recent nuclear disaster occurred when the March 11 earthquake severely damaged the Fukushima nuclear power plant; three of the six reactors melted down and huge amounts of radiation were released into the environment. One significant difference between Fukushima and the previous disasters is that the atomic power at Fukushima was generated for peaceful purposes, while the first events were intentionally destructive. Yet the scale of the disaster was huge; the Fukushima accident is only the second in history, after Chernobyl, to be rated a 7 on the International Nuclear Event Scale, the highest rating possible.

This set of articles traces the changes over time of public opinion about nuclear power, particularly since the Fukushima disaster. For decades, most Japanese were comfortable with using nuclear power for electricity, although Japan has been firmly anti-nuclear weapons since 1945. After a slow start in the 1950s, Japan became one of the most nuclear-energy-dependent nations in the world, and was one of the few places to step up its nuclear energy investment after the Chernobyl meltdown in the Soviet Union. The Fukushima disaster, however, has now forced a new reassessment of nuclear power.

There is a significant conflict in Japan between public opinion and government policy regarding atomic power. In 2011 and 2012, surveys showed huge margins (often close to 80%) opposing nuclear power.¹ However, the “nuclear village”—a term used to denote the combination of forces that support nuclear power—is still a very potent force in Japan, promoting pro-nuclear policies; to this day, the national government, the pro-nuclear business elite, local governments, major media outlets, and some scholars continue to work together to support atomic energy.

In contrast to the Japanese pro-nuclear establishment, the writers of these articles are almost all opponents of nuclear power, some long-standing and some who have recently changed their minds. Each author asks whether the world should continue to use this source of energy; they offer a variety of reasons and justifications for their positions, ranging from humanitarian to economic, but the consensus is that nuclear power should be phased out. The articles provide examples of people changing their minds about nuclear power and throwing their support to alternative energy policies, usually deriving power

¹ For one example, see the *Asahi Shimbun* Regular Public Opinion Poll from 3/13/2012: <http://mansfieldfdn.org/program/research-education-and-communication/asian-opinion-poll-database/listofpolls/2012-polls/asahi-newspaper-public-opinion-poll-march-poll/>

from renewable sources. The one exception is Paul Scalise, who continues to support nuclear power even after the Fukushima disaster; he sees it as a reliable and economically efficient source of energy.

This course reader begins with a short history of Japan's decision to adopt nuclear power by Ran Zwigenberg. He describes the international enthusiasm, particularly in the United States and Japan, for what was seen as a futuristic source of energy in the 1950s. Next, Gavan McCormack, who represents the voice of anti-nuclear scholars, introduces the huge swing in public opinion away from nuclear power following the Fukushima catastrophe. The articles that follow explore the sweeping changes in opinion among various groups of Japanese and further develop McCormack's arguments. ANZAI Ikuro writes from the perspective of a nuclear specialist and ex-government employee. Aileen Mioko Smith represents both long-time anti-nuclear activists and victims of the Fukushima disaster. David Slater discusses the authority that women can mobilize from their roles as mothers and caretakers. Makiko SEGAWA interviews local residents one year after the Fukushima disaster, and HIROSE Takashi represents the informed layperson who uses common sense to see the dangers of nuclear power. Justin Aukema's analysis of HAYASHI Kyoko's writing reveals the thoughts of one of the *hibakusha*, survivors of the atomic bombings. Finally, SON Masayoshi comes from a corporate perspective; he speaks with particular force because he is a former member of the "nuclear village" whose business interests lie in access to abundant cheap energy.

The reader concludes with an article from the opposing viewpoint; Paul Scalise provides an argument in support of nuclear power. He believes the economic benefits of nuclear power outweigh its risks. He analyzes the current political situation in Japan, and outlines the challenges facing Japan's future energy policy, many of which are inevitable whether Japan maintains its reliance on nuclear power or not.