Three notes on Fukushima: humanities after/in crisis

Andy Chih-ming Wang, 26 May 2012

In an extended (5,000-word) overview drawing on cultural and philosophical studies, the author urges us to reflect on how Fukushima may change our view of the world from one of assured progress and prosperity for some, to that of vulnerability to catastrophe for all.

We gather here to discuss the cultural and political implications of the Fukushima crisis, a compounded crisis that has opened my eyes to the fragility of our lives, our world, and the illusion of our assumed safety in isolation.

Fukushima is a compounded crisis, in the sense that it was not merely triggered by natural disasters, the earthquake and the ensuing tsunami, but also a man-made catastrophe brought about by our hubris in technology, our drive to conquer the world, and by our relentless pursuit of happiness, even at the cost of dispatching our own kind to the embrace of the nuclear reactor. It is moreover a crisis that threatens our economic and political stability, has significant impacts beyond the borders, and challenges our faith in science, modernity, and the humanities. The Fukushima crisis is literally a wake-up call to what Ulrich Beck calls the “world risk society”\(^1\)” to which we are subjected and for which we are responsible. Threatening an apocalypse to come, the crisis, or more accurately the catastrophe, asks us to reflect on the meanings of modernity, on our relationship to nature, to other forms of life, and to one another, and the migration of humans and disasters in the shadows of nuclear power.

Witnessing the crisis (as it continues to evolve) leaves us no choice but to confront the scientific imagination and invention which have both nurtured us and taken a toll on our existence. But I also want to acknowledge the fact that speaking about the crisis is in and of itself a survivor’s privilege, because it suggests that we are safely distant from the affected zone and those victims whose lives are irreparably damaged by it, and that the discussion is for us, and not for them. But I hope that even though our discussion can do little to soothe those aching hearts, restore what they have lost, and put their lives back in order, it allows us to bear witness to their sorrows, to remind ourselves of our indebtedness to them, and to act, with what little means we have, to prevent the tragedy from occurring again.

It is in this spirit that I write these notes on Fukushima: to remember the losses and their costs and to speak about the humanities as the narrative of relations couched in our will to survive and ability to change. To quote from the cenotaph at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial: “Please rest in peace, for we shall not repeat the mistake.”\(^[1]\)

There is a sign with slogan at the empty street of Futaba, within the 20km Fukushima nuclear exclusion zone, Japan. It says: Nuclear energy for a bright future . Demotix/Osakabe Yasuo. All rights reserved
The Fukushima crisis began with a global media frenzy: first we met the traumatic images of the tsunami devouring farms and townships in seconds and of the Fukushima nuclear power plant going up in smoke. Against the backdrop of this unprecedented catastrophe were reports of 50 valiant workers risking their lives to halt the crisis and the Japanese practice of jisuku — self-restraint in the face of any breakdown in the order of things, and even refusal to express emotion and fear. Immediately following on from this national exercise of self-restraint was the concern with radioactive contamination in neighbouring countries where salt, iodine, and oxygen masks became hot commodities overnight. Within a week after March 11, the whole eastern part of Honshu was presented in the media as a disaster zone, where food was in short supply, with people evacuated, life derailed, and foreigners flying out of the country. These scenes of uncertainty and chaos are alien to the contemporary image of Japan, but they hark back to the memory of Japan’s postwar disarray, profoundly disquieting in the deadly shadows of the mushroom cloud.

Fearing an impending nuclear crisis with a scale of impact that seemed to emulate, if not supersede, the ones in Chernobyl and Three Miles Island, the entire world was watching attentively with little certainty about its safety. After declaring a nuclear emergency on March 11, the Japanese government kept on extending the zone of evacuation - from 10 kilometer radius to 20 kilometer radius on March 12, and then to 30 kilometer radius on March 15. The rapid extensions of the evacuation zone not only suggested that the situation in Fukushima was getting worse, but also created confusion and pain in the public mind about radioactive fallout, a mobile threat that could devour Japan and move across the ocean to Taiwan, China, Korea, and even the American west coast. At a time when Japanese citizens still had faith that the government possessed sufficient technology and ability to handle the catastrophe, on March 16, the US embassy suddenly advised Americans in Japan to move out of the area within an 80 kilometer (50 mile) radius and they initiated an evacuation plan. Gregory Jaczko, chairman of US Nuclear Regulation Commission, expressed distrust in the Japanese government: it was his belief that they were not telling the full story. All of a sudden, the international media was in commotion, and the governments of Spain, German, and Korea all advised their citizens in Japan to leave the area and put at least as much distance between them as the Americans had been advised to do - if possible, leaving Japan right away. The Taiwanese government also issued a travel alert to Japan. International travel to Japan dropped drastically, but the airports were crowded with people wanting to leave the country.

On March 18, the foreign governments’ evacuation started, and the US consulate in Taipei suspended its regular business to accommodate the staff and their families evacuated there. The American advice undermined the Japanese government’s credibility, setting off an “information bomb” in the international media. Moreover, the 50 kilometer difference unwittingly pointed up a difference between Japanese and foreigners in a time of crisis: on the one hand we have the self-restraining Japanese who stay despite imminent dangers and on the other end of the spectrum are the frightened foreigners who flee for their dear lives. Whereas victims in the affected area had to be evacuated for immediate reasons of survival, becoming internal refugees, foreigners left Japan out of worry that they would become radioactively contaminated, too, if they did not leave when they could. This comparison is not intended as a moral judgment, but rather to underline that mobility and migration create complicated relations in a moment of crisis.
When the situation in Fukushima became clearer in late March and the Kansai area and Tokyo seemed to be safe for now, despite the reduced electricity supply, foreign expats began to return to where they work and live in Japan. But the fact that they had left at a time of crisis caused unease in the Japanese community. *The Wall Street Journal* published a report on March 23, indicating that a foreigner who is fluent in Japanese and works in a large Japanese company in Tokyo found that his Japanese colleagues and superiors were “furious” about his leaving without proper notice. The report argued that such a disapproval of foreigners’ reactions became so widespread among the Japanese that they coined a new term “fly-jin” to designate those foreigners who had fled Japan at the wake of the Fukushima crisis. The term is a tongue in cheek pun, criticizing foreigners for leaving behind their work and friends in Japan. Though the reporter emphasizes that such emotional tension was only a passing phenomenon, and many Japanese were sympathetic towards those expats that left, the term “fly-jin” did not disappear after foreigners had returned to Japan and in fact became a topic of heated debate online with people calling each other names. The Japanese contributors to the debate thought that those expats were irresponsible people caring about nothing besides themselves, and the expats argued that their decision to find refuge elsewhere was well-informed and thought through and should not be morally condemned. On the same day, *Time Out Tokyo*, a consumer guide for foreigners in Tokyo, published an article named “Don’t Call me ‘Fly-Jin’,” signalling the expats’ discontent. It argued that not just foreigners, but also many Japanese also left the country; moreover, the Japanese government and the TEPCO authorities had interfered in the timely release of accurate information and misinformed the public about the seriousness of the crisis.

But not all foreigners think the same. Darek Gondor, an expat working in the academic sector in Japan, published his opinions in *The Japan Times*, an English-language newspaper. He argues that foreign companies and embassies overreacted in the early days of the crisis and that this crisis presented an opportunity for the expat community to reexamine their loyalties: “Where is our home? How much do we feel a part of Japanese society, and should we too take up the responsibilities of contributing to it and living within its norms?” While these questions were self-critical, Gondor also had a message for Japanese society, urging people to reflect on how accepting Japan is of foreigners who have, “perhaps unbeknown to them, become a little Japanese.” Other responses to this debate filled various blog posts, one of which comments humorously: “it’s very difficult to divide foreigners here into merely two categories: Fly-jin and Stay-jin. I think there are probably a few more like my boy who was definitely a broke-jin (wanted to fly but couldn’t afford to leave).”

I was fascinated with this discussion over the “fly-jin” not only because I too have transnational connections that made it difficult for me to advise friends there whether to leave or stay, but also because the question to leave or stay has everything to do with complex articulations of race, gender, and class, and with my relationship to those people at stake. I can’t help but wonder: are loyalty and belonging good enough reasons to stay, knowing that the nuclear fallout may drop and have an unknown effect on our bodies? Doesn’t the decision to leave also have something to do with the ability to leave, as the joke about “broke-jin” implies? Voluntary and involuntary migrations are not the same thing, even though the danger they face is one and the same. And Ulrich Beck has already reminded us that while the environmental risk we face is global, pollution always follows the poor (1995: 5). If I may put it more bluntly, aren’t the expats better equipped to leave both in terms of ability and motivation? Might it be the case that talk of loyalty and belonging are pretexts for the “broke-jin” to stay, or the result of blind allegiance and national disciplining? If the
victims wanted to leave, where could they go and where would they be accepted with open arms? Can I offer my Japanese friends a place to stay and if so - for how long can I do this?

In the context of nuclear crisis, leaving is an act not just of will but of judgment. In this latter sense, it is a subliminal act of stigmatization – of a place, a region, even a nation. If the expats decided not to return to Tokyo, this once glamorous metropolis would be imprinted with the same dark mark of Fukushima, Iwate, and Miyagi where everything - from food, and water, to the air itself - is suspected of radioactive contamination. In fact, the agricultural products of Fukushima and Miyagi are already stigmatized as “nuclear contaminated goods” which must be either destroyed or strictly examined before being sent to market. Even in Tokyo, people have started buying various pieces of equipment - water purifying systems, survival guides, gamma ray speculators, oxygen masks, etc. at a handsome price - to detect radiation and to help them fend for themselves.[2] The challenge and cost of being a “stay-jin” is high, to say the least.

Grimmer stories were up ahead. On June 15, Tokyo TV covered a heartbreaking story: in a city called Minamisoma, about 25 kilometers from Fukushima Daiichi, a dairy farmer committed suicide and left nothing except one line written on the wall: “I wish there were no nuclear power plant. Surviving dairy farmers, please don’t be defeated by it: but with the recent disaster, I lost the will to work.”[3] Like the crisis, this tragedy is compounded: the nuclear fallout contaminated the area rendering his dairy products unsellable. Moreover, his wife, realizing that her marriage prospects in Japan had been blighted, returned to the Philippines, leaving the farmer by himself to pick up the debris of his life. This dairy farmer is literally made a “broke-jin” by the nuclear disaster. Unable to stay, he chose a radical way to leave.

Like it or not, the area within 20 kilometer radius of Fukushima Daiichi has been declared a “no entry zone” and the cost for decontamination is enormous. In addition, the attempt to store radioactive wastes in other parts of Japan has caused grave concern. Who would like to store radioactive waste in their backyard? If no place will take them, they will most likely be dumped in the ocean or on some remote island, and we have seen this too many times. In the migration triggered by catastrophe, refugees and radioactive waste are complications that can take different forms. Katsuya Soda contends in his paper on “internalized refugeeism” that the discourses on safety and reconstruction are prone to stigmatize “disaster refugees” as radioactively contaminated, compelling them to conceal the fact of their contamination. The result is what Ulrich Beck calls the irony of a world risk society: “the more emphatically the existence of world risk society is denied, the more easily it can become a reality” (2006: 330). The refugees’ deliberate attempt to conceal their traumatic past and to live a “normal life” can only increase and complicate the risk. Soda intends the concept of “internalized refugeeism” as a way to “bring people together, [to promote] ties with the fragile existence of everyone being a possible refugee,” because the refugee problem and the nuclear disaster are “my problem,” too. The refugees’ wish to hide their stigmas must be understood with compassion.

But Soda’s attempt to place domestic forced migration in the broader context of refugee studies, also alerts us to the specific process of stigmatization associated with refugee and disaster which is implied in the Japanese term “nanmin.” The word “nanmin” denotes complex relations, relations between refugees and their home and past, between them and other migrants, and between them and the existing social order that seeks to either exclude or normalize them. In this same spirit, we should connect Fukushima with Hiroshima and other
islands that are affected by nuclear power. It is hence particularly touching to hear that people in Shiga Prefecture (near Kyoto) sent a public letter to the residents of Fukushima inviting them to move to Shiga and rebuild their lives there. How the story of this empathetic embrace may turn out remains open-ended, but such an act, with all the challenges it could bring, is an important starting point for our reflection on Fukushima and the humanities.

An ostrich roaming in front of the empty of JR Tomioka station. Tomioka, Fukushima prefecture has been washed away by the tsunami, March 11, 2011. Demotix/Osakabe Yasuo. All rights reserved

note two: tremors on the islands

As a symbolic case-study of our modern apocalypse, Fukushima has geopolitical implications, too. At a conference in Shanghai, last year, Okinawan thinker Isao Nakazato flagged up the discovery that after the Fukushima crisis, the Japanese government upgraded its Self-Defense Force in Okinawa by jointly conducting rescue exercises with US battleships, and that such joint exercises reinforced the US-Japanese military alliance in a protracted Cold War context, further subjecting Okinawa to the burden of US military occupation. The Fukushima crisis unwittingly added to this burden, even though it is thousands of miles away. Yet, uncannily, this helps us to see the links between the nuclear power plant, US military bases, and the threat of war, and to consider the connections between islands and nuclear power. A report in Ryukyu Shimpō on the “9.11 Anger in Fukushima March”, duly notes that the rally calls on the Japanese government to “decommission nuclear power plants” and “give us Fukushima back”. The protesters make the link between Fukushima and Okinawa:
“Just as the Japanese government locates 75% of the United States military forces in Japan in Okinawa, the Government forces less wealthy prefectures to accept military bases and nuclear power plants that could cause trouble for the local people. We don’t want military bases or nuclear power plants. They put our lives in danger.”[4]

Japan’s postwar economic prosperity was in large part made possible by the sacrifices of Fukushima and Okinawa - one bearing a nuclear reactor to provide energy and the other enduring US military bases to ensure security. Articulated in this way, the anti-nuclear movement not only forms a united front against the Japanese government but also brings to the fore the entangled history of postwar Japan, haunted by atomic bombing and US occupation. As Mikio Haruna argues, Fukushima is linked to Hiroshima and Nagasaki because the postwar development of “atoms for peace” is in fact a mutation of the military-industrial complex created by the Manhattan Project that produced “Little Boy” and “Fat Man.”↑ This historical hindsight allows us to see the twisted postwar history of Japan in which the threat of radioactive fallout was internalized along with the US military which once defeated and occupied the nation, where Fukushima and Okinawa became the two places that bear the brunt of that threat.

Before the crisis, a young researcher named Hiroshi Kainuma wrote a prophetic thesis called “On Fukushima” (now published as Fukushima ron [Tokyo: Seido, 2011]) in which he contends that the Japanese government, in the quest for economic prosperity and energy security, imposed nuclear power plants on poor prefectures like Fukushima. The attempt to identify and develop a backward country within the nation by forcing it to accept a nuclear power plant as a path to prosperity, Kainuma argues, is in essence “colonialist.” In this way, the island perspective of Okinawa enables us to recapture Fukushima in a larger historical and geopolitical context in which the people’s demands for clean sky, sea, and arable land have a different register of significance.[5]

The tremors of Fukushima are also felt in Taiwan, another island nation that lives with the threats of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster. However, as a former colony still engaged with Japan in a territorial dispute, Taiwan responded to the crisis with rather more ambivalence. 2011 happened to mark the fortieth anniversary of the territorial dispute of Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands. On the one hand, Taiwanese people responded to Fukushima with a huge relief donation; on the other hand, the nationalists believed that humanitarian concerns should not interfere with claims of territorial sovereignty. Some suggested that the Fukushima crisis might be an opportunity for Taiwan to retake the disputed islands.
U.S military bases on Okinawa.

While the nationalists only represent a small group of people, tending to share their stronger identification with China, their views confirm Cold War sentiments harking back to the Sino-Japanese wars of the past, and reinforcing the desire in Japanese and US governments to keep Okinawa as a cornerstone of Pacific defense. The geopolitical conflict between Taiwan/China and Japan thus becomes another reason for Okinawa to host US military bases. In fact, the modern history of the Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands is bound up with the US military presence and the interest in energy resources. The sad thing is that the islands that hold these resources in their seabed will never benefit from them; the resources will be exploited and sent elsewhere, leaving little behind except waste and pollution.

Such nationalist, militarist, and developmentalist views continue to regard the Fukushima crisis as the “crisis of the other”. They allow issues of territorial sovereignty to take over the sovereignty of life and the islands’ rights to existence. Despite the menace of the spreading
radioactive fallout that stops at no borders, they refuse to see that any further expansion of a nuclear catastrophe would soon render any claims of territory null and void, and that militarization could only lead to the demise of the islands and all forms of life.

Reflecting further on the links between nuclear power and the islands, we might notice that the “islands”—from Hiroshima and Bikini Atoll, through Orchid Island off the east coast of Taiwan to Fukushima—have always borne the deadly burden of technological advancement and economic prosperity, either as nuclear testing sites or as nuclear dumping sites. With our risks becoming global, these capitalist and militarist logics could transform our whole world into an island, leaving us nowhere to go.

Luckily, those nationalist, militarist views did not get much support in Taiwan. Many young Taiwanese have taken the Fukushima crisis as an opportunity to wage anti-nuclear campaigns and demand land and environmental justice. Their campaigns, whether they champion anti-development on the east coast, protest against petrochemical pollution in central Taiwan, or against land grabs by state capitalism, all try to articulate a different view of land and humanity for which the real disaster is not a natural one but our modern way of life.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands controversy to date is to have kept them from development. But this militarized space, like Okinawa, remains a touchy issue not only for our region. In the light of these tremors felt on the islands, “Fukushima” articulates what Nakazato calls “living on the edge”—a state of extremity that requires a radical re-examination of our modernity.[7] Japanese philosopher Kojin Karatani has written on a hopeful note: “What the earthquake brought about is not the destruction, but rather the regeneration, of Japan. Perhaps only when dwelling in ruins do people find courage to live life anew” (my translation from Chinese).

**note three: taking/living the risk**

Karatani’s image of ruins, invoking memories of war and the debris of nuclear damage and waste, brings us full circle to Beck’s vision of “world risk society.” Beck’s argument is that we now live in a world where the risks have become delocalized, incalculable, uninsurable, and hence uncompensatable. The risk society is “an inescapable structural condition of advanced industrialization” which depends on the “mathematicallyized morality” of expert thinking and public discourse. He views risk as “a socially constructed phenomenon in which some people have a greater capacity to define risks than others.” And since risk definition is essentially a “power game,” “risk exposure is replacing class as the principal inequality of modern society” (2006: 333). Beck’s discussion of risk aims to expose us to the fatal irony of modernity: that is, our dependence on and pride in science and technology to transform the world and provide a better life has created a monster that threatens to end mankind. In his own words:

Radicalization of modernity produces this fundamental irony of risk: science, the state and the military are becoming part of the problem they are supposed to solve. This is what “reflexive modernization” means: we are not living in a post-modern world, but in a *more-* modern world. It is not the crisis, but the victory of modernity, which, through the logics of unintended and unknown side-effects, undermines the basic institutions of first modernity. (2006: 338)
It is not difficult to follow Beck’s argument and to see where and how we are betrayed by our own modernity, especially when the costs of that betrayal are unevenly shared. In a sense, Beck’s vision is the more intense version of what Marx once described as “all that is solid melts into air;” the difference is that our lives are now liquidated by the financial tsunami and technological explosion we created and our air is becoming toxic.

But the bleaker picture is that the expert knowledge and government efficiency that we depended on have gone bankrupt: people are left to fend for themselves by chewing over conflicted information, detecting scientific unawareness, defining and managing risk, and obtaining (un)necessary equipment at their own expenses. Beck thinks that the exposure to risk and reflexivity of modernization will bring about conscientious citizens and a cosmopolitan society where public discourses will grow out of the “dissent over the consequences of decisions” and provide the basis for a better democracy. He believes that catastrophes have “an enlightenment function”; they can “destabilize the existing order” and function as “a vital step towards the building of new institutions. Global risk has the power to tear away the facades of organized irresponsibility” (2006: 339).

But can people fend for themselves, when the disaster is so comprehensive and planetary? Do we all have the means to be “fly-jin” and avoid the destiny of becoming a “broke-jin”? We need to ask ourselves: when disaster comes, will we open our arms to refugees like people in Shiga, or are we already complicit in the consumer game of stocking up salt, iodine, and oxygen masks? The real question therefore is how to live in this bleak world of risk and how to prevent risks from becoming “real.” Beck himself does not have an answer to it, except to confess with crude honesty that “knowledge of the irony of risk suggests that the omnipresence of risk in everyday life should also be treated with skeptical irony” (2006: 345). Yet honesty and irony alone cannot fend off danger for us; they only reveal our helplessness and the uneven sharing of risk in our world.

Therefore, I would venture to suggest an emphasis on “world” rather than “risk” in his thesis, and to urge us to reflect on how Fukushima may change our view of the world from one of assured progress and prosperity for some, to that of vulnerability to catastrophe for all. This shift of emphasis would change our perspective on modernity from the pinnacle of technology and elitism to its base of sheer survival, from the glory of conquest to the tremors of islands, and from a world of partition to worldly relations and conviviality. More importantly, it seeks to arrive at an understanding that in a world of imminent risks, anyone can easily slide from an immigrant to a migrant (or a gypsy without the romantic connotation), and any land can be reduced by disaster to an island, floating in a sea of pollution. I think this is where cultural studies and philosophy can really help us.

Let me return to the questions of migration and islands. Pacific scholar Teresia Teaiwa has written an essay called “Bikinis and Other S/pacific N/oceans” where she argues that the objectification of seminude bodies performed by bikinis “inverts the colonial dynamics that have occurred during nuclear testing in the Pacific” (2010: 15); so that ironically the exposure of female bodies makes invisible the horror of the bomb. The name Bikini Atoll invokes another tragedy of our nuclear age. In less than a year after nuclear fallout engulfed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the US military evacuated Bikinians to nearby islands to pave the way for nuclear testing code-named Operation Crossroads, subjecting the islanders to radiation and displacement. While our male gaze became fixated on the bikini suit and what it barely covered after the French fashion designer Louis Reard invented it in 1946, the stories of Bikinians and their islands faded out of our sight, out of our memory. Teiwa’s essay
enables us to see those missing bodies on the voluptuous bodies, to bear witness to their suffering in their invisibility, and to recognize their disappearance from memory, if not from history, as a result of our failure to see. Teiwa writes:

This is all about bodies—but vastly different ways of finding meaning in bodies. There are more bikinis being sold globally every summer than there are Bikinians receiving compensation for dislocation and exposure to radioactivity. While practically every slick nightclub in Waikiki holds a weekly bikini contest, the NFIP [Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific] movement organizes annual commemorative and educational events on March 1, which is designated Bikini Day. (2010: 26)

It is all about bodies and how we see them. Our ability to see them in relation instead of in separation entails our capacity for reflection and compassion: two essential features of being human.

Let me thus end the talk with migrant temporary workers whose bodies are central to our nuclear age and again hidden behind the sleek, clean, and modern look of the nuclear power plant. Japanese folk singer Kato Tokiko wrote a song called “Nuclear Gypsy” in 1981 calling our attention to the sorrows of migrant workers who ended up working in nuclear power plants for an uncertain future. The song goes like this:

"Nuclear Gipsy" (原発ジプシ)
by Kato Tokiko (加藤登紀子)

Invisible rays I bear until the red light buzzes
In the world of darkness, with a mask
Wandering Gipsy, Wandering Gipsy

No one knows my name, except as a worker there one day

I calculate the harm with my body exposed
Through the glass wall is a peek of hell
Wandering Gipsy, Wandering Gipsy

I stay at a tiny hotel at a town by the sea
I wandered here to find a job—Is it a good one,
Or one that takes my life?
Wandering Gipsy, Wandering Gipsy

The sunset is a red and the sea is sparkly
Long waves soothing the shore
The shadow of furnace is the gift from devil
Wandering Gipsy, Wandering Gipsy
(my translation)

Tokiko’s lament conveys the temp workers’ view of the nuclear power plant. Their bodies are marked by invisible rays, red alarms, and oxygen masks, and their prospect of life depends on their bodies’ endurance of radioactive exposure. This job, however well paid, is a gift from the devil, but temp workers have no choice but to take it and live in its shadows. This is an image of Fukushima that we ought to remember with those images of damage, fear, and suffering. Like the atomic bomb victims, these temp workers are hibakusha on whose
decaying bodies we built our modernity. We must remember them because they are the invisible sacrifice of our modern-day comforts; they are the Bikinians we have failed to see.

Chinese writer Han Shaogong wrote the following words in memory of 9/11, another catastrophe of our world risk society: “the power that will save us from catastrophe may have nothing to do with the economic and technological progress represented by our GDP, but has everything to do with the never-ceasing conscience and compassion that is embedded in a thousand years of history; it is the sudden shiver we feel when we read a poem or a novel” (2011: 128). Tokiko’s song, I believe, gives us precisely that power to survive in a world of risks and relationships, and to turn our knowledge into human accountability.

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Works Cited


[1] Though in the Japanese original, the subject “we” is omitted, I want to emphasize that it is imperative that “we” is put there, not only to make it grammatical in English, but also to assert the will to respond and bear responsibility.


[4] Recently, it is discovered that toxic defoliants used during the Vietnam War called “Agent Orange” are stored in the US bases in Okinawa and pose a threat to the health of residents. See Jon Mitchell, “*Agent Orange Revelations Raise Fetenma Stakes*”,” *The Japan Times*, 18 October 2011.

[5] In this view, we should also open eyes to the struggle against Lynas’s construction of rare earth plant in Kuantan, Malaysia. Though the rare earth plant is not a nuclear power plant, its operation contains the risk of radioactive leakage.

[6] The Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands were occupied by the US military after World War II and used as bomb testing sites; they were “returned” to Japan as part of the Ryukyus to the effect of the Ryukyu Reversion Agreement in 1972. These islands were literally forgotten by the world until the reported discovery of natural resources under their seabed in 1968 and in the early 1970s became the cause of a transpacific Chinese student movement called “baowei diaoyutai yundong.”
