



The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus

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Complicity and Victimhood: Director Kamanaka Hitomi's Nuclear Warnings

Introduced and translated by Norma Field

"They keep saying on television that it's safe, there's nothing to worry about. I regard this as criminal." So Kamanaka Hitomi stated on a recent talk show. ["The harm caused by trace amounts of radiation will show up ten years later ... Director Kamanaka Hitomi appeals to her fellow citizens to awaken to the threats posed by radiation: 'Tokyo is now a contaminated area, too.' *Cinema Today*, April 17, 2011, [link](#).]



Kamanaka Hitomi

Kamanaka's pursuit of the issue of nuclear power over a dozen years has resulted in three films to date. The first, *Hibakusha at the End of the World* (2003), followed the ravages of radiation from Iraq (depleted uranium contamination following the Persian Gulf War) to Hanford (downwinders of the plutonium factory) to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The second, *Rokkasho Rhapsody* (2006), explored both the health effects of radiation and the social rifts created by the siting of a nuclear reprocessing plant in northern Japan. Her most recent work, *Ashes to Honey: Toward a Sustainable Future* (2010), depicts the nearly three-decades' long struggle by fishermen on an island in western Japan to block the construction of a nuclear power plant, juxtaposed with a look at communities successfully converting to renewables in Sweden.

In the interview translated below, Kamanaka criticizes the government for its less than forthcoming reporting and its tendency to minimize, and acknowledges as well the difficulty of mounting a challenge. Examples of these problems continue to abound. The government has just refused Greenpeace a permit to allow *Rainbow Warrior* to monitor marine radiation within its territorial waters ([link](#)).

On April 19, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) notified the Fukushima Board of Education that the radiation safety standard for schools would have as its upper limit 20 millisieverts/year, or the equivalent of 3.8 microsieverts/hour outdoors. ("Save the Children: Radiation Exposure of Fukushima Students".) MEXT explained its decision as accommodating both the need for safety and society's interest in the maintenance of education. As critics have pointed out, however, the Labor Standards Act prohibits those under 18 from working in conditions in which they will be exposed to 3.8 microsieverts/hr [[links 1, 2](#). See also [Save the Children: Radiation Exposure of Fukushima Students](#)].

On April 29, Kosako Toshiso, a University of Tokyo Graduate School Professor specializing in radiation safety, resigned his post as a nuclear advisor to the Cabinet, criticizing the government's handling of the crisis as "haphazard." Of particular concern was the setting of the 20 millisievert maximum. In an emotional press conference, Professor Kosako stated, "Were I to accept this standard, that would spell the end of my career as a researcher. I would not want my own children to be subjected to such conditions." [[link](#), translation modified.]



Kosako Toshiso at press conference announcing his resignation

Before Fukushima, Kamanaka's films were usually shown in screenings organized by interested groups. Now that the catastrophe she and her fellow activists worked so hard to warn their fellow citizens about has happened, her films are reaching a new audience, and she is in great demand for reasons she could never have wished. Kamanaka's films are consistently sensitive to the economic needs behind communities' acceptance of nuclear reactors: there are no simple enemies. At the same time, they urge us—urban beneficiaries of the conveniences relying on electricity generated in modest rural communities—to become aware of our own complicity in the structure of risk. In the interview quoted at the beginning of this article, she pointedly observes: "People living in Tokyo had too little concern for the Fukushima power plants. Victimizers in a sense, we, too, are now victims."

Nuclear Reactors, Radiation, and Ourselves

Interview with Director Kamanaka Hitomi, *Tokyo Shimbun* April 19, 2011

Following upon the accident at Fukushima's Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, the documentary *Ashes to Honey: Toward a Sustainable Future* (ミツバチの羽音と地球の回転) by Director Kamanaka Hitomi is enjoying a rerun at Auditorium Shibuya (Eurospace) in Shibuya, Tokyo through April 26. Kamanaka has been researching nuclear power plants and related facilities for some time now. We've asked the director about her thoughts on the current reactor accident. (Koide Katsuya)

You've taken up the problem of internal contamination in earlier films such as Hibakusha at the End of the World and Rokkasho Rhapsody, but is this something we need to be worrying about now?

We see multiple forms of internal radioactive contamination taking place right now. Radioactive materials enter the body through various routes, including breathing, drinking water, eating, and exposure to rain. And we know this will go on. Given that degree of contamination is calculated by multiplying the amount of radioactivity by length of

exposure, the cumulative amount will increase. That the increase in risk is invisible, that illness does not appear immediately, lulls people into a sense of security. Children in particular are a source of concern.

Are the reports on radiation release issued by such bodies as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology reliable?

Internal contamination occurs when radioactive particles enter the body and continue to release radiation. The reports from the Ministry refer to levels of radioactivity in the air, and only gamma rays are measured. Cesium and iodine, which emit both gamma and beta rays, have already reached the ground, where they continue to emit radiation. Properly speaking, filters should be used to capture the amounts and kinds of radioactive materials as they descend, but there are few research facilities with this capability, and so these measurements have not been made public.

So you think it's inadequate.

Yes. You need fixed-point observation, too. With internal contamination, it's important to always be aware of the amounts of exposure. Strontium, which is water soluble and associated with bone cancer, has been found in the soil and in plants.

What about the safety levels?

The government keeps raising the permissible levels. They're just fooling around with the units of measure, trying to keep the eyes of the public from what's actually going on. They're afraid that things would get out of hand if people grasped the severity of the situation. It's the same thing as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Isn't it possible they want to minimize the situation in order to avoid a big compensation issue?

Hasn't this sort of thing happened throughout the history of nuclear power plants?

This certainly isn't the first time that the promoters of nuclear energy, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), have minimized the damages. I've been meeting with people who have suffered from the effects of radiation but have been told that their problems cannot be attributed to radiation exposure. The data put out by the government, the IAEA, and the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) do not reflect the damages inflicted on the ground.

What should we be doing?

There's the information provided by the government and the mass media, but I'd like mothers of young children to actively seek out information on the internet and from books. We see both minimization and exaggeration, but you have to look at both and develop the capacity to evaluate. It's a matter of life and death.

What about nuclear policy?

Given that we have been told aftershocks will continue, reactors need to be stopped for thorough inspection to make sure they can withstand large earthquakes. Another instance like the current situation will spell the end of Japan. The reactors should not be allowed to restart until very strict standards are set. Other countries are doing this.

What about the reports of the mass media?

They have not adequately pursued the government and TEPCO's practice of doling out information. They shouldn't collude in overlooking TEPCO's accountability and their obligation to compensate. You don't come across too many challenges to the government's position. There's a long history of people getting thrown out or demoted if they criticize nuclear power. The fact that we've had an environment where it's difficult to criticize nuclear policy has led to this misfortune.

Kamanaka will be present for the US premiere of Ashes to Honey: Toward a Sustainable Future on May 21 as part of a symposium at the University of Chicago, "The Atomic Age from Hiroshima to the Present" ([link](#)). She will also be present for subsequent screenings in Redlands, CA and Montreal (for details on the latter as they become available, please refer to [this source](#))

Kamanaka has previously appeared on the pages of Japan Focus [here](#).



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