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Murakami, the No-Nuclear Principles, Nuclear Power and the Bomb

Roger Pulvers

Murakami Haruki's brilliant speech on June 9 in Barcelona, Spain, delivered in acceptance of the International Catalunya Prize, has contributed to the resetting of the anti-nuclear agenda in Japan.

In January 2009, in his acceptance speech for the Jerusalem Prize in Israel, the author had used his podium time to deliver a keenly aimed attack on the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In Barcelona, by turning his sights to "peaceful uses" of atoms, he again gave voice to the Japanese conscience of our era.

Murakami Haruki

"The recent earthquake came as a tremendous shock for almost all Japanese," he told his audience in Barcelona. "Even we Japanese who are so accustomed to earthquakes were completely overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the damage. Gripped by a sense of powerlessness, we feel uncertainty about the future of our country."

Murakami spoke of the depth and breadth of trauma caused by the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and the loss of life and damage to landscape and property caused by the tsunami and the nuclear accident that followed. He went on to criticize the government for having failed to strictly monitor the nuclear industry for safety.

But it was when he turned to Japan's earlier experience with nuclear disaster — the U.S. attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atom bombs in August 1945 — that Murakami's speech took a radical turn.

"What I want to talk about," he said, "is not only the deaths of those two hundred thousand people who died immediately after the bombing, but also the deaths over a period of time of the many who survived the bombings, those who suffered from illnesses caused by exposure to radiation. We have learned from the sacrifices of those people how destructive a nuclear weapon can be, and how deep the scars are that radiation leaves behind in this world, in the bodies of people."

Murakami went on to link the radiation released in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with that released in Fukushima.

"And now, today, sixty-six years after the dropping of the atomic bombs, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has been spewing out radiation continuously for three months, polluting the ground, the ocean and the atmosphere around the plant. And no one knows when and how this spewing of radiation will be stopped. This is a historic experience for us Japanese: our second massive nuclear disaster. But this time no one dropped a bomb on us. We set the stage, we committed the crime with our own hands, we are destroying our own lands, and we are destroying our own lives."

The speech took me back to 1969, when futurologist and Cold War military strategist Herman Kahn visited Japan. I was, for this visit, his occasional interpreter and guide. "The Japanese will someday outgrow their nuclear allergy," he told me, adding that he believed Japan would possess nuclear weapons by the mid-1980s. The American author of the bestsellers "On Thermonuclear War" (1960) and "Thinking about the Unthinkable" (1962), Kahn believed that nuclear war was both probable and winnable.

He explained to me that "tolerable" levels of victims would be in the "ballpark" of the tens of millions. He crunched his numbers, according to the game theory that he helped to refine, and found the United States coming out on top. The term "escalation" is attributed to Kahn; and in a Cold War era plagued by fear stemming from the nuclear powers' deterrence strategy of mutually assured destruction (MAD), it was comforting to refer to his message: that, scientifically analyzed, America's future was secure, if somewhat blistered by the death fires of internecine war.

In fact, Kahn — one of the prototypes that Stanley Kubrick used to create the crazed character Dr. Strangelove (played by Peter Sellers) in his 1964 antiwar film, "Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb" — was urged on during that 1969 visit, and subsequently, by elements in the government here who would have liked nothing more than to see Japan armed with nuclear weapons.

Kahn's visit was welcomed by those in the highest echelons of the Liberal Democratic Party. Prime Minister Sato Eisaku was facing a difficult election in the coming January, and Kahn's rosy predictions about the rise of a Japanese superstate gave comfort to the ruling party. Kahn praised Japan and its leadership to the hilt. Japanese people's opinions are vulnerable to influence from the outside. An eminent American who feeds Japanese nationalism can have more sway than a mere Japanese politician in power.

At the time, two things struck me about Kahn's pithy comment concerning a Japan with atomic weapons: the words "allergy" and "outgrow."

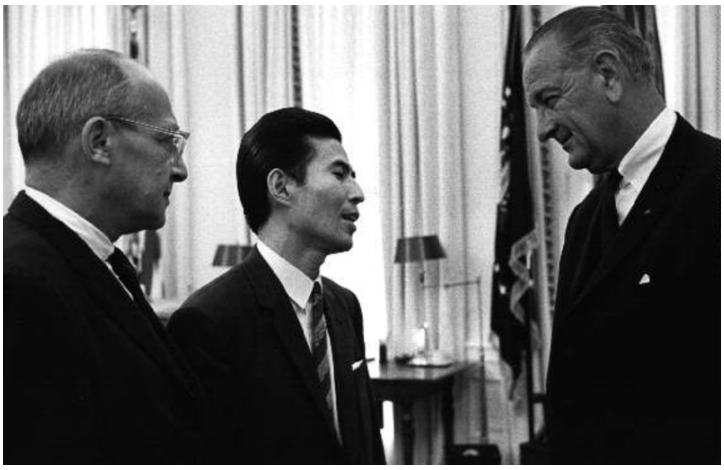
By labeling Japan's staunch stance against possessing such weapons or even allowing them to enter its territorial waters as an "allergy," the inference was that, with some testing and remedial care, this condition could be cured. By using the word "outgrow," Kahn was explicitly calling Japanese convictions "immature."

Of course, we now know that the "allergy" was a highly selective one. In fact, its rash was only maintained on the outside for public consumption. Deep down, the ruling circles of Japan had bargained away the three "no nuclear policies." There was no allergy in the body polity as seen by influential sectors of the ruling elite.

It happens that I have a personal connection with a man who played a key role in the secret agreement allowing the possible

Herman Kahn

Dr. Strangelove



Wakaizumi with Walt Rostow and Lyndon Johnson

presence of nuclear weapons in Okinawa. Wakaizumi Kei was my mentor during my early years in Japan. I met him the very next day after I first arrived in September 1967. Still in his late 30s then, softly spoken and very kind, he was a professor at Kyoto Sangyo University, which had been set up with funds from conservative groups to counter the left-leaning activities of many Japanese universities in the polemical 1960s.

Wakaizumi's link with the secret pact came about at the urging of Henry Kissinger, U.S. President Richard Nixon's national security adviser. Wakaizumi, then a special envoy to Prime Minister Sato, accompanied the prime minister to Washington and, on November 21, 1969, the two of them went to the White House, where they were called by Nixon into a private room. There, the prime minister and the president signed a secret document, witnessed by Wakaizumi, that granted the U.S. the right, with consultation, to bring nuclear weapons in an emergency into Okinawa after its reversion to Japan. (Only four people knew of the existence of this pact violating Japan's non-nuclear principles, the fourth being Kissinger.)

In 1994, Bungeishunju published his book, "Tasaku Nakarishi o Shinzemuto Hossu" — which in English means "I Had No Recourse." In that 19-chapter, 600-page work he pours out his heart not only about the secret pact but also his vision for the future of Japan.

The no-nuclear principles, adopted as a parliamentary resolution in 1971, but never enshrined in law, forbid Japan from possessing or producing nuclear weapons or permitting them to be on its territory. The two main secret pacts in contravention of those principles are a 1960 one allowing nuclear-armed U.S. planes and ships to enter Japan, and one from 1969 regarding the reversion of Okinawa to Japan and the possible presence of such weapons there.

Despite the blatant transgressions of Japan's no-nuclear principles, Japanese leaders — all members of the then-ruling Liberal Democratic Party — consistently denied the existence of the agreements, in effect pulling the wool tightly over the public's eyes.

Murakami Haruki's speech, linking the radiation released in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with that released in Fukushima, effectively renders the three issues of the bomb, the no-nuclear principles and nuclear power as one. For decades, the Japanese government has maintained the façade of the no-nuclear principles, thereby leading the people to believe that they have rejected the belligerent uses of atoms in war for the peaceful uses of atoms as a domestic power source. But in effect, they are two sides of the same coin.

Japan's government, virtually synonymous in those days with the Liberal Democratic Party (which held nearly unbroken power for more than half a century until 2009), had forged ahead with the nuclearization of the power industry in the decades of growth after the war without any national debate on the multifarious issues of safety related to it. This railroading through of lax laws and permissive regulations indicated that the sleepers had been laid; and all that was then needed was to lay the tracks toward nuclear weaponry — and Japan would have come of age.

Now that the Fukushima disaster has demonstrated the dangers of "peaceful uses" of the atom, the bomb and the power plant, with their inherent threats to human life, are linked in the mind of the people.

Eloquent and spoken from the heart without artifice in his Barcelona speech, Murakami came down hard not only on Tepco (Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the nuclear power plant) and on the governments that gave them a virtually unfettered hand in nuclear power development, but also on the entire populace of Japan who, over decades, allowed this situation to fester in their name.

Murakami's use of the word "kaku" (nucleus, or nuclear) in reference to the power plant is telling. As a strict rule, Japan's nuclear power industry has avoided this word, preferring "genshiryoku," meaning "atomic power." Kaku in Japanese brings to mind the very same power that fueled the bombs; and the power industry has painstakingly steered clear of any such association, knowing that the Japanese people's conviction to refuse either the possession or introduction of nuclear weapons in their country is steadfast, although clearly elements in the government had a different agenda, that is, to redirect weapons' grade plutonium for use in a bomb.

Murakami has persuasively rejected "atoms for peace."

"We Japanese should have continued to shout 'no' to the atom," he said with vehemence. "That is my personal opinion. We should have combined all our technological expertise, massed all our wisdom and know-how, and invested all our social capital to develop effective energy sources to replace nuclear power, pursuing that effort at the national level."

His speech was given major coverage in the national media, including in prime-time reports on television and radio. It is no accident that he chose to make this provocative speech on a foreign platform, as he did with his speech critical of Israeli policies in the Middle East. This helps silence the opposition in Japan to these propositions, especially when they are delivered at such prestigious forums.

In addition, by speaking from abroad, Murakami equates Japan's problems with those of countries around the world, making clear that the problem is global. This means that ultimately it can't be solved by Japan alone. It also suggests that Japan's decisions can be judged in light of the responses of other nations to the crisis. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany was able to announce her momentous decision to shut down all of her country's nuclear power plants within the coming decade, while Japan's seized-up government seems perpetually ensconced in a sarcophagus dropped over their heads by a profit-at-any-cost industry, an uncreative and captive bureaucracy and an apathetic, meek citizenry fed on a broadly apathetic and meek media diet.

The sarcophagus burst open on March 11, 2011. The media swiftly opened its doors to anti-nuclear journalists and activists; the government, at the very highest levels, rushed out rough blueprints for alternative forms of energy; and prominent business people, Softbank's Son Masayoshi notably among them, offered to develop environmental-friendly forms of energy if the government would give them a nod, a wink and a helping hand.

Thanks to Murakami Haruki, the anti-nuclear movement is now a common front, bolstered by anger at government-industry collusion and hope that, finally, something may be done to wind down nuclear power and replace it with sources that do not destroy life and defile land, water and air.

I thought Herman Kahn wrong then and I think him wrong now. The Japanese people are, more than ever, committed to maintain their deep-rooted aversion to things nuclear, and this now may extend, once and for all, to non-belligerent forms of atomic energy.

The three principles of Japanese apathy, when it comes to things nuclear—"don't ask, don't tell and don't do"—are things of the past. We are now all unrealistic dreamers … but unrealistic dreamers who are beginning to accept responsibility for our welfare.

Roger Pulvers is an American-born Australian author, playwright, theatre director and translator living in Japan. He has published 40 books in Japanese and English and, in 2008, was the recipient of the Miyazawa Kenji Prize. In 2009 he was awarded Best Script Prize at the Teheran International Film Festival for "Ashita e no Yuigon." He is the translator of Kenji Miyazawa, Strong in the Rain: Selected Poems. The Dream of Lafcadio Hearn *is his most recent book.He will talk, sponsored by The Japan Society, London, on October 24 on "The Dream of Lafcadio Hearn: How did this Greek-Irishman conquer Japan?"*

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